

T-Groups and R-Groups in Counselling Setting

*Transactional analysis groups are useful in counselling settings (educational, clinical, and organizational fields): T-Groups and R-Groups have been exploited by the Authors in their Institute experience. They describe methodological bases and focus T(raining) - Groups and R(elationship) - Groups in practice. **General Methodology***

Elsewhere (A. Miglionico, M. Novellino, 1993, 1996) we described the Therapist-Patient System with its factors (Fig. 1,2,3), with its levels of observation and of intervention (fig. 3): the Therapist-Patient System and treatment plan are determined and conditioned by methodology used, by set of intervention, by different settings (f.e. psychotherapy or counselling), by contract (of psychotherapy or counselling). A therapeutic system - according to a psychoanalytic or TA methodology - may seem correct because know-how, setting, contract have been built correctly and ethically but treatment plan fails because only the set is inadequate: the room is small or noisy, the chair uncomfortable, there is a red-colored painting in front of the client. We began to distinguish between "set" and "setting" during a supervision: a supervisee was able to build a valid setting but treatment was going bad; we realized there was a "physical dimension of setting" that interfered with treatment and together we found out that in the hospital room a door was frequently opened and coming in people disturbed the "system". Similarly a therapist/counsellor has a perfect set at his disposal and makes a setting mistake (f.e. to cure his old friend). It's possible that a kind of methodology is unsuitable for a certain client (f.e. Gestalt therapy for a psychotic patient) even if the other determinants are sufficient. Methodology, set-setting, strategies and techniques are good but contract is wrong, unacceptable (according to Gouldings). Factors and System levels. of Therapist (Counsellor) / Client System are interdependent.

THERAPIST (or COUNSELLOR) / CLIENT SYSTEM - factors METHODOLOGY : a body of methods, strategies, techniques. procedures, working concepts, rules, postulates employed in the helping profession (according to epistemology of G. Bateson: "tautology of reference") f.e. psychoanalytical m., cognitive m., bernian m.

SET : physical site where the helping profession is practised

SETTING : rules and structure of sessions

CONTRACT : mutual consent about treatment target

PLAN: final target of treatment

Fig. 1

METHODOLOGY: "which" choice of know-how?

SET : "Where...?"

SETTING: "How and When..?"

CONTRACT : "What..?" (target)

PLAN: final target

Fig.2

THERAPIST (or COUNSELLOR) / CLIENT SYSTEM - levels

1) Interpersonal level (outside)

TRANSACTION**

2) Intrapsychic level (inside)

2a) personal (conscious, preconscious, unconscious)

2b) transpersonal (unconscious)

** Transaction is the bridge between inside and outside, between personal and interpersonal Fig. 3*

The concept of Therapist / Client System refers to (1996): 1) the importance of transference and countertransference events and their relations with almighty dyadic "roles"; 2) a way to differentiate the transactional events (seen on the System "set"), which interfere with the formation of the Therapeutic Alliance, the first strategic phase, as well as a prerequisite to proceed to other treatment phases (Decontamination - Deconfusion - Reorientation). The Therapeutic Alliance is the evolution of Work Alliance (Berne, E., 1962).

Methodology and Counselling boundaries

And in counselling setting? What can we say about counselling System? The methodological overlapping between Therapist/Patient System and Counsellor/Client System is natural and logical. Elsewhere (A. Miglionico, P. Vinella, 2000) we described the methodology and treatment plan in counselling individual/group setting: the treatment is similar but the counselling strategies have to stop before the psychotherapeutic strategies, because of the different nature of setting and contract. F.e. in Counsellor/Client System (= counselling setting) strategic phases are only Work Alliance and Decontamination and counsellor uses only the bernian operations for decontamination (according to Berne's definition). It's very interesting to consider S. Van Beekum's position (1996, pers. comm.): in a workshop held in Rome, he underlined different parameters between psychotherapy and counselling (see Miglionico, A., et Al., (2000), *Manuale di Comunicazione e Counselling*, Centro Scientifico Editore, Turin).

Counselling: R - Group and T - Group R-Groups and T-Groups represent two models of counselling groups. *R(relationship)-Groups* are meant to let relationship styles come out in a given set (f.e. a class-room, a office, a community) and in response to a stimulating situation presented by the trainer without his intervention while the members of the group are interacting. He just observes what goes on and, at the end of the session, he outlines a vague definition of what has happened. Therefore these groups are just groups for observation and allow a diagnosis that is precocious (psychiatric prevention objective) or preliminary (organizational work). So the Relationship Groups (R-Groups) are not meant for training. They are often requested by schools, communities, or by any other profit or non profit organizations and they are useful in works with three hands contracts. These

type of contract are collective and explicit contracts. Case: An equipe of professional helpers may be asked to organize a R-Group. They are required to observe and to diagnosticate anomalous behaviours of some of the children attending the fifth year of elementary school. This is an example of a three hands contract with the school and the parents. The aim is that of singling out children who might develop a psychiatric disease. Social interaction in the "here and now" are the focus of R-Group so that the different modalities of communication can emerge. R-Groups have also two goals: favouring one's grouping attitude; gathering information and awareness so that if one requires it, he/she can enter a T-Group. Videotaping is very often a good instrument of R-Group evaluation: in *T-Groups (Training Groups)* the group can instead develop awareness of the communicative styles and experiment different transactional styles with videoprojection. R-Groups and T-Groups are not set-setting in which behaviors are randomly observed. The professional helpers do not observe behaviors through a "mirror" as in family-therapy happens: the professional helper is part of the group, he is in the same room and he proposes stimuli (one stimulus at a time). Any exercise can be a stimulus for the group that will behave following the favourite patterns. An example of such an exercise (one-hour exercise) can be the following one: "The members of the group are the crew of a ship which is sinking. They have to decide which tools they should take with them on the raft in order to survive". In R-Group the patterns of communication are not discussed whereas in T-Group setting they are. This is the main difference between R-Groups and T-Groups. *T-Group* is a training group meant to develop communication modalities centred in the "here and now" in which observation and confrontation promote the awareness of the available "transactional options". It is a collective contract not addressed to solve any of the members' personal problems but it is addressed to solve the problems in communication of the whole group in relation to the set and the setting. For example: A group of nurses aims at the understanding and at the modification of the different relationship styles carried out by the members of the staff, carried out when interacting with other staffs and with the customers, thus the contract with the hospital to which the group belongs is a three hands contract. Training to human relationship and to effective communicative styles in the "here and now" is the basis in Transactional Analysis T-Groups: the focus is on the interpersonal dimension rather than the intrapsychic dimension.

Technique and ethics When choosing and then presenting exercises for the T-Groups the professional helper should remind that the softer they are the better. Many bibliographies contain "exercises for counselling" and "exercises for the conduction of groups", etc. An attentive analysis is recommended as we could discover that many of the suggested "games" and exercises do not always respect the clients' needs and the contract. In fact many of these exercises may induce regression to one's past life experience and therefore they do not fit the contract because they could stimulate reactions that the professional helper can hardly manage. Group practice reveals that some exercises often might foster the arousal of regressive life experiences in any members of the group: this is the case of rubber-band in TA. In planning the activities we should always keep in mind some of the following questions: Which "respectful" objective can be sorted out for a group of students or for a group of teachers in a typical counselling context? What can we do in order to guarantee the trainer's management of the bursting out of any eventual regressive life experiences? Further more, when the members of the group go back home and are alone by themselves who is going to take care of the client's Child if any of the Gestalts is left "open"? In a correct set and setting, an effective technique is that of proposing exercises (structured experiences) that promotes cohesion in the group who is given the task of finding a solution to a shared problem. For example, applying the "problem solving" technique (A2 +

A1), the group is to find a possible solution for an hypothetical situation in the “ here and now”. Such an experience enables the displaying of the modalities of interaction and of collaboration among the members of the group and the role that each one tends to take. As we can infer this type of activity is pertaining to a collective contract centred on the “here and now” as it keeps the group anchored to reality and to the solution of problems related to the “here and now”. We believe that an advanced counselling group should neither be exposed to any hard or regressive experiences. Sometimes trainers propose difficult exercises to advanced groups: actually, once more, it is worthwhile underling that this type of choice is not advisable because it is not the level of grouping experience that determines the trainer’s choices but the established contract. In training courses for counsellors the trainee has to experience the methodology of T-Group. At the end of the course he is trained to manage alone a R- and T-Group: for example there are peers groups for simulations, furthermore the trainee is also asked to plan the setting, the exercises he intends to propose (what and how) and he is asked to outline possible contracts for given demands. Videotaping of the simulations is often useful for training as one the one hand it favours and allows individual supervision, on the other it favours discussion of the whole group that supervises the experience. Only after this preliminary phase of training, (intra moenia), the trainee is invited to put into practise what he\she has learned by leading external groups so that, afterwards, his\her work is carefully supervised. Thus, counselling group needs the acquisition of methodological and contractual skills, and a specific training course so that counsellors are finely trained and aware of the boundary lines regarding their task. The contexts in which counselling groups can be applied are so variegated that it is essential the specific training we have discussed of, so that the counsellor’s choices of techniques are always respectful of the clients’ needs and are well planned. Otherwise random and extempore techniques just aimed to support or display the trainer’s skill could not be tolerated from members of a given group.

Outlines on the management of transference and countertransference in counselling

In any helping profession any relationship has its transference and countertransference aspects. It is amazing however that discussion about it and its analysis is left aside (at the background)! Each communicative act either verbal or non- verbal is circular, therefore there is no transference without countertransference and no countertransference without transference. This theme has been treated in other works of big clinical interest: Moiso C.M. (1985), Novellino M. (1984, 1985, 1987, 1998), Clarkson P. (1992), and Woods K. (1995). Nevertheless in counselling the awareness of processes connected to tr. and ctr. must be known by the counsellor and so the trainer and the group do not work specifically on their contents. The awareness of contents connected to the above mentioned circularity results from the counsellor's individual analytic experience if he has undertaken individual psychotherapy . The analysis of countertransferential events is only the object of self-analysis and of supervision (Novellino M., 1984). Social diagnosis of ego states in action allows the counsellor recognition of the client's ego states and recognition of autochtonous or reactive material projected into transaction (Clarkson P., 1992; Miglionico A., 1996). In transactions the analysis of transferential events gives to the counsellor further information about the changing process and enriches the observation: it is however known that, in counselling setting, transferential events are not analysed relating them to memories of passed life, because that is the area of psychotherapy and script analysis (Berne E., 1972). The bernian operation of interpretation is pertinent to psychotherapy (deconfusive technique according to Novellino M., 1990; Novellino M., Moiso C.M., 1990).

Explanation of a bernian game is related to the here-and-now, and it is significantly less deep than the interpretation of transference phenomena. The latter interpretation is related to the "past", it goes beyond the actual relationship and so it connects the (intrapsychic) past to the (interpersonal) present. All this goes beyond the boundaries of counselling methodology.

Conclusions COUNSELLING focuses on 1. the relationship in the "here and now" , 2. what has happened in the setting at the present time (stroking, racketeering, transactional sequences such as games, etc.) 3. group activities (R- and T- Groups). As a result of our clinical and of our didactic practice we believe that counselling should not take place without countertransference analysis. Hence, differently from other organizations, we suggest that counsellors should have done personal analysis before practising their helping profession. (Achille Miglionico, et Al., 2003)

Methodological concepts were originally reported in Miglionico A., Manuale di Comunicazione e Counselling (Communication and Counselling Handbook), Centro Scientifico Editore, Turin, 2000, a Italian-language book (Contributors: Servaas Van Beekum,, Neus Lopez et Al.)

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