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ABSTRACT

In training facilitators for laboratory groups, also known as T-groups or encounter groups, the majority of group facilitators and therapists advocate an experiential apprenticeship in an ongoing group. However, the actions of an inexperienced facilitator trainee may have a negative effect upon the members of the group. The author experimented with training a person in group facilitation skills, by using him as a videotape camera operator whose task was to record his perceptions of a group in such a manner that the tape could be used to make an appropriate, though delayed, intervention. The trainee, "Jim," filmed each group meeting in a college-level laboratory class in interpersonal communication and then conferred with the supervising facilitator to compare perceptions of the meeting. Later, the tapes were screened and discussed in terms of Jim's insights and his techniques for illustrating them. The group saw five videotaped segments of their interactions during the semester. A comparison of tapes made during Jim's training period revealed his growing sensitivity to the group process and to the emotional states of the participants. These benefits to the trainee were obtained without hazard to the class members, who in fact benefited from the feedback provided by the tapes. (GW)

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VIDEOTAPING AS A MEANS FOR TRAINING GROUP FACILITATORS

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This paper considers a familiar educational device utilized in a familiar communication context, but for a new purpose.

The context is that of the unstructured "laboratory" group (also known as the "T group," "encounter group," "sensitivity group," etc.). On many American campuses these groups have become a common feature in courses concerned with interpersonal communication. Most of the groups evidence the following characteristics:

1) They do not consider the past history of individual participants nor even much past history of the group itself. Rather, they focus upon "here-and-now" events and interactions of the group as they occur.

2) They legitimatize the emotional life and experiences of participants, and invite and encourage their expression in the group.

3) They place high value on openness, honesty, and directness in communication, and eschew "game-playing," role behaviors, and cliche communication.

4) The instructor does not fill the role of the traditional teacher nor that of the group "leader." The instructor functions as a facilitator, and teaches through modeling effective interpersonal communication and through "interventions"[1] he/she makes in the group process.

[1]The facilitator "...cannot assume that each member has successfully 'tracked' all the subtle elements of the interaction... The trainer intervention helps members establish a common frame of reference for trying to understand the problem. In general, the trainer indicates common elements or themes in the here-and-now interactions of the participants and underlines them to suggest some of their effects. It is as though he stood just outside the boundaries of the interactions among the members and reflected to them what was happening within in words and with feelings they could recognize as their own." (Lakin, 1972; 110-111)

In general, the purpose(s) of these groups include increased self-awareness gained through personal feedback; improved interpersonal communication skills gained from experimentation with a variety of communication behaviors such as confronting, support-giving, empathic listening, non-defensive responding, etc.; and increased insight into interpersonal and group dynamics gained from the group member's simultaneous perspectives as a participant and as an observer of the interaction.

Videotaping is a familiar educational device in many classes across America (Mantell, 1974), including Speech Communication classes (Mulac, 1974). It has been used widely in laboratory groups to aid both in individual learning and in the dynamics and process of the group itself. Some facilitators, therapists, and researchers have employed videotaping to provide group participants with clear and direct feedback of their own behavior. (Robinson, 1970; Weiss and McKenzie, 1972; Stoller, 1972; Edelson and Seidman, 1975) Others have used videotaping to provide stimulation to a group by introducing videotaped simulations and role-plays to the group. (Kagan et al., 1972; Messner and Schmidt, 1974) In a similar manner, videotapes have been shown to groups in hope that the behavior illustrated will serve as a model for subsequent behavior in the group. (Walter, 1973)

While most reports of the use of videotaping in laboratory groups indicate that the taping was intended for the benefit of group members, some videotaping has been used with professional trainees (such as counselors and therapists) in the same manners listed above. (Wodarski, 1975; Santiesteban, 1975; Katz, 1975) Tapes are made and the professional trainees view them for the purposes of receiving feedback about their facilitative behaviors, observing model facilitative behaviors, and/or reacting to a simulation or role-play.

In the creation of videotapes for use with both group participants and facilitator-trainees, an additional learner has been identified. Dr. Harry Wilmer of the University of California San Francisco Medical Center has used videotaping extensively in training and treatment. His elaborate studio facilities include "Two or three cameras, six technicians, and a director, all experienced over many years of television work." (Wilmer, 1967; p. 215) Wilmer notes that

> "Directors become so sensitive to the nonverbal gestures by which individuals reveal their intention to speak, that the closeup camera often has a person on the screen just before or at the moment he speaks. The dramatic impact of the final production often conveys the group drama almost as if the director had a prepared script." (Wilmer, 1967; p. 225)

While Wilmer attributes the director's sensitivity to his observation of nonverbals, Stoller feels that even a director who works under the immediate instructions of the facilitator about what to record and when needs an understanding of the group and its processes:

> "Ultimately, the director decides what will be recorded on the videotape and thus he must be attuned to what is significant in the group interaction at the moment. Not only must the director have some acquaintance with television equipment and programming, he must have considerable feeling for and knowledge of group processes." (Stoller, 1972; p. 236)

These researchers recognize how important it is for the eye of the camera to be guided by sensitivity to individuals and to group process. However, they miss the potentially powerful training tool provided by that camera itself.

This author experimented with the use of videotaping in the laboratory group context with a new format and purpose: the training of a person in group facilitation skills through using him as a director/cameraman in videotaping a laboratory group in an interpersonal communication course.

Methods of training facilitators have not been studied extensively. One major reason may be that the characteristics of an effective facilitator have not yet been clearly established (Lieberman et al., 1973), and so there is little certainty about how to train a person for specific skills not yet identified. Nevertheless, five methods of training facilitators appear in the literature:

1) Didactic lectures and readings in the theory and dynamics of groups and their processes; (Winder and Stieper, 1956; Berger, 1969)
2) The trainee serves as recorder and/or observer in an ongoing group; (Limentani et al., 1960)
3) The trainee observes and reacts to films, audio tapes, and videotapes of groups; (Berger, 1970; Berman et al., 1972)
4) The trainee participates as a member in an ongoing group; (Gauron et al., 1970; Woody, 1971)
5) The trainee serves as an apprentice or co-facilitator in an ongoing group. (Block, 1961)

The majority of group facilitators and therapists advocate an experiential "apprenticeship" component in the training of a facilitator, since "...conducting a group is a skill, to be learned through practice," (Lakin and Lieberman, 1964) and "Leader effectiveness results in large measure from experiential learning ... Intern or junior trainer roles ... constitute the beginning of the professionally responsible

relationship." (Massarik, 1972; p. 77)

However, one critical consideration can preclude the trainee's apprenticeship in an ongoing laboratory group of the sort employed in many interpersonal communication classes. The well-being and the positive learning experience of each student in the class group should be of primary importance in all decisions related to the content and conduct of the group. The potential negative effects of the facilitator-trainee upon the group must be carefully weighed against the potential benefit to the trainee.

Dr. Milton Berger lists a variety of anxiety-related problems the apprentice facilitator may experience which can be detrimental to his/her group:

1) A sense of "obligation" to change, cure, or otherwise help participants; this can lead to an overactive and overserious stance.

2) Lack of awareness of self as an instigator of events and creator of behavior and relationships in the group; this blindspot can result in inaccurate interpretations of group and individual behavior, and thus to inappropriate interventions.

3) Overemphasis on acting and verbalizing, which can lead to anxiety during silence and a lack of appreciation for nonverbal communication.

4) Feeling a need to assume strong leadership in the group, yet having difficulty in doing that while maintaining a balance of power in the group.

5) The need to impress group members (and the trainee's supervisor) with his/her skill and competence; this leads to the trainee's talking too much and tending to focus on the negative aspects of interaction. (Berger, 1963; pp. 555-557)

The apprentice model of facilitator training is also criticized by Berman:

> "The disadvantages of this approach lie in the dilution of the trainee's responsibility for group leadership, the potential inhibitory fear of exposure while in direct view of the 'expert,' and the group's playing off the trainee as junior to and less therapeutic than the senior ..." (Berman, 1975; p. 339)

Those potentially negative aspects of the apprentice or co-facilitation model of training should be considered most carefully in light of Martin Lakin's statement that "... the nature of the training experience depends more than anything else upon the particular translations and interventions the trainer makes." (Lakin, 1972; p. 165)

Every word and action of the trainer (facilitator) is imbued with special meaning by group members as a function of the role, and not his/her expertise. Thus

> "He /the facilitator/, more than any other person, is looked to to demonstrate desirable ways of relating in the group. What he does and the reasons ascribed to him for his actions point to an interpretation of what the training experience is all about. Moreover, each intervention by the trainer, because it has such attributed meanings, has the potential for serious consequences, some foreseen and intended, others altogether unanticipated or untoward." (Lakin, 1972; p. 98)

Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles' extensive study of group facilitation (1973) found that specific facilitator behavior, more than theoretical orientation, significantly correlated with the outcome of the group for individual participants, especially in regards to which participants became "psychological casualties." Thus while it might be important to train laboratory group facilitators in an experience-based context, it is also vital to not subject group members to an inexperienced facilitator whose ineffective interventions might have great impact in a negative direction.

Little has been done to resolve this dilemma, other than a suggestion to "bug" the trainee with a miniature receiver in his/her ear so that the supervising facilitator could immediately comment and critique. (Boyleston and Tuma, 1972). This author sought to solve the dilemma by introducing a facilitator-trainee into an ongoing classroom group as a silent-but-active facilitator -- a videotape cameraman whose task was to record his perceptions of the group in such a manner that they could be fed back to make an appropriate, though delayed, intervention. It was hoped that over the semester-long life of the class group he would develop a facilitator's experience-based sensitivity to a group, to its dynamics, and to his own potential influence upon it, without his beginning attempts at intervention posing a threat to the group process and class members.

The trainee was "Jim," a senior majoring in Speech Communication at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He had taken all theory courses available which related to small groups and interpersonal communication, and had been a participant in two semester-long laboratory group courses. During the semester prior to this training he had received instruction in the operation of the Sony Porta-Pak videotape camera, and had practiced taping in a laboratory group.

The group he taped was a standard section of the course "Basic Communication," a laboratory class in interpersonal communication which exhibited the characteristics and had the

purposes cited earlier (pp. 1-2). The class was composed of fifteen undergraduate students, having a variety of majors and representing all class levels. It met for 1½ hours twice weekly for a semester.

A generalized explanation of the purpose of the videotaping (i.e., an attempt to see what sorts of interventions could be made by using the videotape) was given to the class, and they had the option of deciding whether they would be taped. By unanimous vote they agreed to have all sessions videotaped. Jim was introduced to them as a graduating senior with advanced experience in groups who was undergoing the final stages of training in facilitation. While he would not have any grading responsibilities in the course, it was understood that he would be making interventions of the same nature as the "in-group" facilitator, only his interventions would be in the form of videotaped episodes from the group which would be fed back to them occasionally and processed.

Other researchers have reported minimal disruption of laboratory groups with the introduction of videotaping.

> "Contrary to what might be expected, it is entirely possible to conduct a group session in front of television cameras without forfeiting the . . . spontaneity and naturalness of group interaction. ... Group interaction quickly absorbs the attention of members and they can ignore the presence of the cameras, as well as crews, to a surprising extent." (Stoller, 1972; p. 235)

The responses of the class members confirmed this. Each member kept a daily journal in which he/she reported feelings experienced during the class period, and the following comments are representative of the first day of videotaping:

> "Another interesting highlight /of today/ was of course the TV camera. For some silly reason, I really got excited about it. I think the feedback will be great and that it's a good opportunity to get to know myself better and others."
>
> "Consciously, I was not upset by the video. I've worked with them before and am used to them. But, subconsciously it did bother me. I noticed when we played it back, that I sat in one position the whole time."
>
> "We had the experience of the videotape machine watching our moves and giving us a recording of how we reacted. The video machine, or the person running the machine, is in no way an obstruction to the class, as far as I can tell."

These three comments represent the range of positive, negative, and non-committal responses given in the journals of the first day videotaping occurred. There were no subsequent references to the camera in the journals. It was the supervising facilitator's observation that group members usually paid little attention to the camera; if they noticed it was focused on them they might smile nervously, but within seconds their attention would shift to the group interaction. Thus it was concluded that the presence of the camera and of Jim did not impede nor seriously affect the interaction of the group.

Jim filmed approximately 50 minutes of the 75 minute period, generally beginning about ten minutes into the class period. He conferred with the supervising facilitator immediately after the class to compare perceptions and to report what he had tried to capture on videotape. During the following week the tapes were screened and discussed in terms of Jim's observations, and his film technique for illustrating those insights so that they would be obvious to the class when the tape was played for them. The group saw videotaped segments of their interactions five times during the semester, when Jim and the supervising facilitator agreed that an episode would provide especially enlightening feedback.

The critical issue of Jim's development as a facilitator is addressed by the episodes shown in this program. Jim maintained his "silent" role, yet still functioned with the responsibilities of a facilitator, and developed increasing skills and sensitivities over the semester which enabled him to fill that role with mounting effectiveness.

Especially evident is his increasing skill in communicating his insight to the group in helpful ways. The first episode, taped in his second week, shows his uncertainty about what is actually happening in the group. He pans the group from right to left in search of some emphasis, and without any purpose maintains longshots of the person who happens to be speaking.

The second episode was taped in the middle of the semester and reveals Jim's improved awareness and self-confidence in his own sensitivity. Although one student is confronting another with strong and negative words, Jim notices the uncertainty the student expresses through his hands, which eventually reach out to the woman he is confronting. Jim catches her defensive response to the confrontation by focusing on her nonverbal communication also.

The final tape episode was shot two weeks before the end of the class. Members are scattered about the room in dyads, but two students (Jene and Angela) sit silent, having refused to pick anyone for the exercise. Jim ignores all the other interactions and focuses on those two people for an extended period, and in doing so reveals their isolation. Again he gives a close-up of hands, and reveals that Angela -- who

appears unmoving -- is actually nervously clenching and unclenching her fist. Finally, he drives home the point that these people are isolated by their own choices to not communicate. He reveals how physically close they are, separated by only a single straight chair, in a poignant shot centered on that chair with the shoulders of the two isolates framing it, eighteen inches apart.

That brief episode is an example of masterful intervention. Jim demonstrates his awareness of the group process, of the emotional states of the participants, and makes his visual statement of value and direction: that Jene and Angela had chosen to be isolated, and remained so because neither would reach out to the other.

This paper has reported only a single instance of using the videotaping process itself as a training device for facilitator-trainees, but the results seem to merit additional exploration of the technique. The tapes provide a concrete record of changes that occurred in the trainee in the directions of increased sensitivity to the process of the laboratory group and to the feelings of the participants, and in the direction of improved skill at making appropriate and helpful interventions. These benefits to the trainee were obtained without hazard to the class group. In fact, the tapes provided beneficial feedback to the class members.

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