

SPECIAL SECTION

This section has been added to encourage publications by individuals who are just beginning to write for journals. We hope that this will encourage some who are more hesitant to submit for publication to send materials. The section is primarily to encourage students and practitioners to submit their works.

The first two articles were the first experiences of students to investigate the phenomenon of the large community group. Their reports suggest some of the throes of attempting such an examination. The third article synthesizes some of the work in play therapy which is overall very similar to person-centered principles.

A PERSON-CENTERED JOURNEY TO WARM SPRINGS

D.B. Altschul & K.E. Steadman
The University of Georgia
Counseling Psychology Program

On the journey to Warm Springs, we deliberated about how the weekend would unfold. Having been to conferences before we knew to expect: structure; set times for didactic instruction; sprinkled moments of free time here and there; superficial interactions; question and answer sessions; handouts; fifteen minute coffee breaks; 1 1/2 hour lunches; stolen moments for developing professional contacts; semi-casual business attire; and total exhaustion at the end of the day which sends you happily to your room. Upon arriving we assumed to be given a program outlining the week's activities. Although familiar with the Person-Centered Approach on an intellectual level, we were ill prepared for the experiential group process.

As doctoral students under the supervision of Dr. Jerold Bozarth we had formulated a research proposal focusing on a quantitative study of the behavioral interactions present in the group process. We intended to evaluate questions regarding leadership through a self administered survey, in addition to systematically recording predetermined behavioral observations (e.g., silences, nonsensical utterances, directiveness). As the community meeting unfolded it became clear that this research proposal and the Person-Centered Approach were not congruent.

We began the conference hustling about the room in an effort to make the 9:00 a.m. community meeting. Much to our surprise, only a smattering of participants appeared at the designated time. The remainder sporadically floated in on their own schedules with a majority finally present by 10:30 a.m. The dilemma, however, began when we attempted to collect our quantitative behavioral observations. When exactly DID the meeting start? When the first person arrived at the preassigned 9:00 a.m. meeting time or when the majority of people were gathered? Should we collect behavioral observations when all are present or should we record the silences between the two people conferring at the coffee pot? These entanglements lead to one of the focal points of the ensuing community meeting discussion: What is community? Apparently, we were no more aware than many of our colleagues who moments later struggled with the same issue.

The conference brought together many individuals on the cutting edge of the Person-Centered Approach. People had traveled great distances to dialogue about issues directly and indirectly related to this therapeutic strategy. As newcomers, we were baffled by the debate between the "masters" regarding the basic definition of community. One individual, for instance, stated that, "The allowing of no expectations is the very essence of Person-Centeredness." Thus it began to resonate that what we were experiencing *was* the Person-Centered Approach impacting group dynamics. Our research methodology spontaneously changed from an attempt to capture predetermined observations quantitatively to a more qualitative approach. Ironically, though we as researchers sat on opposing sides of the room, we independently began to watch and record the unstructured ideas generated from the group process.

We were strongly impacted by the profundity of the ideas as well as their consistency with the Person-Centered Approach. The aforementioned discussion regarding "What is community?" led to other fertile topics such as structure versus nonstructure, responsibility of the self versus a leader, and tourism in the conference community. These topics were *not* part of the proposed agenda for the Person-Centered community meeting. It was only after leaving Warm Springs that we understood the relationship between these topics and the Person-Centered Approach. These discussions were not merely topics of debate for the community meeting, but opportunities to dispute individual interpretations regarding ideology and the basic foundations of the Person-Centered Approach.

The difficulty of beginning the community meeting in a timely fashion generated discussions focusing around the need for external structure versus the individual responsibility created by nonstructure. On the one hand, some participants felt compelled to provide a "template of structure" for the community meeting in order to accomplish an agenda. On the other hand, there were those whose perception of Rogerian technique deemed that no direct structure be provided, proposing that only in this manner may a group move forward. Was it, as one individual suggested, "Naive to think that freedom of structure is determined by Person-Centeredness?" or was the nonstructure really providing the participants with an environment in which to learn? As novices to the person-centered approach such questions have provided grist for the mill in recent months.

Another poignant topic for the group focused on the responsibility of the self versus the necessity of a group leader. Many felt that rather than forcing a leader to provide structure, it was an individual's responsibility to create his or her own parameters. As newcomers we noted that this approach incorporated the component of Person-Centeredness which suggests that the therapist create an unstructured environment where the client is free to pursue his or her own development. On the other hand, there were those who either vocalized a need for a group leader or seized the role of the group leader. Were people being true to themselves and the Approach or was this idea of "self-responsibility" merely a rationalization for a professional conference without an agenda? We continue to ponder this conundrum and wonder if a combination of these observations is possible.

Finally, a third issue that originated in the community meeting was the viewing of participants as tourists to the conference. The meeting began, in fact, with a discussion regarding individuals who availed themselves for only a small portion of the conference. Was there a worry that these participants would not fully experience the Person-Centered Approach? Must you be fully invested or immersed in the process in order to appreciate the ambiguity of the structure of lack thereof? Does briefness have to do with structure? Perhaps novices need structure while more experienced conference members do not? Some would argue that the experiential component was crucial to the development of a greater understanding of the approach. It is possible that only through experiencing the ambiguity in lack of structure of situations such as community meetings can one begin to empathize with one's clients as they embark upon the therapeutic process towards self-actualization. Once again we were provided food for thought regarding conflicting viewpoints about the Person-Centered Approach.

Clearly, a call to papers is in order. This essay is merely a window into our *own* cognitive experience. We are interested in gathering information on the reactions from the community, as well as observations and encounters of other conference attendees. We make this request for its seems reasonable that, as one individual eloquently stated, "The richness in this approach is to create such a space where confrontation is possible."

The aforementioned quotes are excerpts from participants at one of the community meeting sessions held at the Person-Centered Conference (Warm Springs, Georgia: February, 1996).

Policy Statement

The Person-Centered Journal is sponsored by the Association for Development of the Person-Centered Approach (ADPCA). The publication is intended to promote and disseminate scholarly thinking about person-centered principles, practices, and philosophy.

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