TRAINING

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The Bay Area Radical Psychiatry Collective's apprenticeship model of training reflects its practical, experiential, and cooperative approach to problem-solving groups. As trainees in Radical Psychiatry we gain skills in emotional literacy, a deeper understanding of the concept of Internalized Oppression, and an approach to relationships through an analysis of power. We are exposed to a point of view concerning relationships that is based on a system of cooperation, with no secrets and no Rescues. Through the course of our training we learn to sharpen our intuition, learn to give criticism without judgment, and discover the power that strokes and nurturing have in the healing process.

As apprentices we learn therapy skills in a unique way: by observing experienced group leaders as they practice. The apprenticeship model reflects the BARP Collective's point of view that people do their best work in the company of supportive co-workers and learn most effectively by direct observation. As apprentices we learn a craft, by watching the group leader, by listening to group members, and by experiencing the role of facilitator under supervision.

To become a Radical Psychiatry trainee an individual joins the training collective, apprentices to a practicing group leader, and observes her/his problem-solving groups and Mediations. The training collective consists of two experienced group leaders in a teaching role, and any number of Radical Psychiatry students (usually 5 or less).

APPLICATION TO TRAIN

Anyone interested in training is asked to write a letter of application to the BARP Collective, explaining their motivations, interests and goals regarding a Radical Psychiatry practice. Usually, applicants have been in a problem solving group with one of the trainers for some period of time, although this is not necessarily a prerequisite. Upon receipt of the application and a subsequent interview the trainers, in conjunction with the existing training collective, make a preliminary decision whether or not to train the applicant.

This decision is based on a number of factors: 1) the applicant's desire to work cooperatively as part of a peer collective (both as a trainee and as a practicing group leader); 2) the applicant's willingness and enthusiasm for becoming a student of Radical Psychiatry; 3) the nature of the applicant's previous experience in a variety of areas (group facilitation, contact with other communities, background in the arts, special interests, etc.); and 4) the personal connection that is felt between the trainers and the applicant.

Present day American culture sets a norm or standard for individuals that is predominantly white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied and financially independent. Deviations from this norm usually precipitate second-class opportunity and/or treatment, as well as feelings of loneliness and fear. As Radical Psychiatrists we are committed to struggling against this influence of the dominant culture, and feel that *all people* suffer as a result of the op-pression of any. Consequently, we have a special interest in bringing people of color, lesbians and gays, the disabled, and working class people into the BARP Collective. By developing a theory and practice based on the many varied experiences of all peoples, we are better able to effectively analyze and combat the oppressive effects of popular culture.

After all of the above factors are considered and weighed, the final decision to train an applicant is made by the entire BARP Collective.

THE TRAINEE MEETINGS

Once accepted an individual becomes a member of the training collective and will usually train for anywhere from three to five years. The trainee observes at least one problem-solving group per week as well as any Mediations that may become available. Twice a month the trainees meet together with the trainers, to discuss questions and comments that arise from observation.

These meetings are facilitated by a member of the training collective. An agenda is put together cooperatively, which includes time for: 1) asking specific questions derived from group observation; 2) discussions of Radical Psychiatry theory; and 3) taking care of collective business and scheduling. Personal work that pertains to training or which interferes with the business of the meeting can be taken up at this time also. Membership in the training collective is not exclusive of participation in a problem-solving group. Often it is beneficial to be in group while training since new aspects of old Pig messages are often elicited by the training role.

The bulk of the meeting is taken up with questions posed by the trainees. The fundamental skill to be learned in training is that of formulating and articulating questions. These questions fall into at least four major categories.

The first category of question is informational in nature. Answers to these questions should help to clarify specific transactions between the group leader and group members. Often, when a new trainee is confronted with a move or transaction on the part of the group leader that seems wrong, the first impulse is to think something critical. The trainee may think, "I wouldn't have done it that way, she/he should have said ..." This is not only critical, it implies greater knowledge on the part of the trainee. Rather than formulate a criticism for the therapist it is essential that the trainee assume a lack of full understanding and formulate an informational question. It is only by assuming that the trainee doesn't have all the answers that learning can take place[1]. An example of such a question might be: "I don't understand why you told Frank he was hard to work with. Can you tell me why you said that?"

The second category of question stems from a reaction the trainee has to a group member's work. These questions relate to a feeling-response or intuition the trainee is having. For example, "I felt a little irritated during Karen's work last week, and I think it has something to do with the way her Pig operates. What do you think is going on?" Another example might be, "I like Cindy, but I'm having trouble coming up with strokes for her. Why is it so hard for me to give her strokes?"

The process of starting with a feeling-response and formulating a question is excellent training for later work as a group leader. It helps the trainee develop skills in using feelings and intuitions to formulate criticisms, strokes, and identifying Pig messages.

The third category of questions is somewhat different from the previous two. The focus of these kinds of questions is inner-directed, and designed to help the trainee deepen her/his awareness of what is sometimes called an "inner dialogue." By this we mean the nearly constant flow of thoughts, experienced as words and conversations, in our heads.

The point of these questions is to find out what the trainee is thinking and feeling. This is important information because the natural responses a trainee feels when observing will indicate possible avenues for future Pig-fighting strategies as a group leader. For example, the trainee might feel a little irritated when a particular person is working. In the trainee role, it wouldn't be appropriate to bring this feeling up during the group. But as a group leader, it might be helpful feedback for the person working to know how others are being affected by the content of the work, or the manner in which it's being presented.

[1] We do not wish to imply here that it's never appropriate to be critical of the training leaders. It has been our experience that most often, when a new trainee is feeling critical of the group leader, it has to do with feeling one-down and competitive. It's unusual for an inexperienced trainee to catch a mistake by the group leader, but of course it happens.

New trainees learn the skill of watching various kinds of feeling responses and internal Pig messages by monitoring their thought flow. By focusing on the inner dialogue, listening to what it's saying, and using this information as feedback regarding the group, the prospective group leader monitors not only her/his own reactions, but those of the group as well.

Questions for the trainers in this category might be, “After I spoke I felt embarrassed and stupid. By the time I left group I was feeling really awful. Why do you think I felt so bad after talking?” Or, “When Sheila was working all I could think about was how hard it was for me to feel sympathetic toward her, and that I'll never be able to do this work. Is there something wrong with me? ”

As part of the group, a trainee is directly affected by and affects the transactions that take place. The experiential nature of the apprenticeship model provides the trainee with the raw materials (feelings, thoughts, reactions) which can be sorted out with the trainers during meetings. The trainee can then receive critical feedback, nurturing support, and the collective benefit of years of wisdom concerning group facilitation.

The fourth and final type of question to be discussed involves taking a specific transaction and formulating a theoretical question. This process encourages the trainee to notice that many transactions occur repeatedly and that general techniques can be applied to these exchanges. For example, “Jim seems to want to leave group whenever he is feeling really bad. What do you do when someone wants to leave group suddenly like that?” Another example is, “Jamie doesn't want to make a no-drinking contract. What do you do when someone doesn't want to make a contract that you think is essential to their work?” The trainer then has the opportunity to answer these questions both specifically and theoretically.

Once a month the training collective meets without the trainers. This provides an opportunity to do problem-solving for each other without the help of the teachers, and builds a sense of solidarity and support. The sense of community they develop as a group can directly influence the strength and power each feels personally.

PHASES OF TRAINING

The first phase of training is silent observation, and is begun with the trainee's introduction to the group. The group leader will explain that the observer (trainee) will simply watch the work and not speak. Group members may ask the observer questions or check out paranoias if necessary.

This silent part of training is very valuable. Because the observer has no responsibility to give feedback she/he is free to fully concentrate on the group leader and the work being done. It's also a time for the trainee to pay close attention to herself, to observe, feel, examine and formulate questions.

During this phase it's common to feel outside of the “stroke economy” of the group, and for good reason. The observer is neither group leader nor group member, and is therefore outside of the normal flow of strokes in the room. It is crucial during this phase to use the support of the training collective, and to ask for help in fighting the Pig messages that observing can sometimes bring on.

Even though almost no words will be spoken, a silent observer's presence is strongly felt by members of the group, and can provide a nurturing influence. On the other hand, this watching presence may make some people feel judged or competitive. The observer pays close attention to how people in group are responding, and treats this as another among many opportunities to learn.

This silent phase begins the trainee's first lesson in power. As a future Radical Psychiatrist she/he is beginning to view group members as “clients” for the first time. If the trainee has been a group member prior to training, this is a fundamentally different way to perceive people in group. In turn, she/he is seen by group members as having a

somewhat privileged position. The trainee usually requires time to adjust to this new role. This is a good opportunity to observe how a newfound position of power can affect the trainee's perception of group dynamics.

This silent phase of training also holds important lessons concerning the concept of Rescue. For instance, it's common for a trainee to feel that she/he has some crucial bit of feedback the group member should hear. By remaining silent in the face of this impulse, the trainee fights the urge to Rescue. The absence of the trainee's feedback leaves room for group members to figure things out for themselves, and offer feedback to one another at their own pace.

Part of a group leader's job is to resist the temptation to fall into Rescue by doing more than one's share of the work. Trainees are especially vulnerable to the danger of putting out more than 50%, and are encouraged to watch for a feeling of "urgency" when contemplating feedback. This is often a warning signal of an upcoming Rescue.

The second phase of training involves giving strokes to people in the group. By this time the trainee has come to know people's work, and can offer strokes that will be a welcome addition to the group's stroke economy.

As a result of the many injunctions stemming from the "stroke economy of scarcity," group members are often not used to giving or receiving stokes freely. The trainee has an opportunity to contribute strokes that can act as a model for group members. This will also encourage people to feel free about expressing the strokes they have, which often serves to increase the over-all stroke-giving in the group.

This phase marks another lesson in power. The fact that only strokes are given at this time is appropriate to the trainee's status and position in the group. As a new presence in group, a concrete relationship has yet to be defined. Giving strokes is a comfortable and safe way to begin speaking. It helps to establish the trainee as a nurturing force in group, and introduces whatever individual style she/he may possess. Giving strokes helps to develop a feeling of trust between the trainee and group members.

As a group member, the trainee was free to give feedback during the course of the group. Consequently, there is usually an inclination on the part of the new trainee to move back into that position. However, the role of trainee adds weight and impact not previously present in the feedback. For this reason, trainees are at first not permitted to speak, and later permitted only to give strokes. This allows the trainee plenty of time to observe the group leader closely, and to consider potential feedback without the pressure of having to be "right."
The third and longest phase of training can be broken down into sub-phases as well. It is here that the trainee begins to give critical feedback, at first by asking questions of group members during the work. These should be simple, direct questions which seek information and help to clarify the work being done. For example, "How do you earn money?" or "Where does your family live?" or "Had you been drinking before the fight with your girlfriend?" or "Does that co-worker have more power than you?"

Questions such as these are different from the leading questions that will be attempted later in the training process, which are intended to direct a person's thinking along a"therapeutic" line. For example, "What do you think would happen if you said no?" or "How are you feeling right now?" or "What would you like from us?" or "What's making you cry?"

Next a trainee will begin to give simple feedback that is short and easily heard. It can come in the form of reinforcing the leader's feedback or be in response to a question asked by a group member. It's best for the trainee to give feedback in the form of a feeling or an intuition, in contrast to giving a more formal analysis that may break down a transaction or form a conclusion.

Once the trainee begins to give more complex feedback and to ask directive kinds of questions she/he is moving into the final stages of the training process. At this point, the trainee begins "leading out" with group members.

At this point in the training, the group leader will explain the new role of the trainee in group and explain how her/his participation will change. The trainee asks a group member for permission to be in charge of the work for that evening. If for some reason the group member strongly objects, someone else is asked. When a trainee is leading out, the group leader usually remains silent and observes. The trainee is free to ask for help from the leader at any time. Sometimes the group leader will make a closing comment or fill in an aspect of the trainee's feedback.

The final step will be to co-lead a group with a practicing group leader, or a graduating trainee. At that time, the trainee is considered for membership in the larger Collective. While this may conclude the formal training engagement, it does not mean that learning has stopped. Graduated trainees are considered new group leaders, and usually continue asking for help and suggestions from the more experienced leaders for some time.

POWER

During the training process, which takes place over several years, one of the many objectives for trainees is maximizing opportunities for learning. This is done by asking questions, taking chances, making mistakes, hearing criticism and working on personal problems. The student role is fundamental in achieving this objective. It demands a willingness on the part of the trainee to understand and accept the inherent power inequities that go along with the trainer/trainee relationship.

One of the most difficult things to become accustomed to as a new trainee is the feeling of relative powerlessness. Usually new trainees have been accomplished group members, and as such have enjoyed a position of power and expertise. As a new trainee, however, it's back to square one, often with the former group leader as trainer. This shift from “expert” to “novice” can create a feeling of competitiveness. In this frame of mind, it's very difficult to ask questions.

It's also common at this time to feel a sense of loss, since the important, nurturing role of the group leader has been replaced with the critical, yet supportive role of the teacher. The resulting feelings can make it difficult to concentrate on the task of learning. It's an important juncture to talk about the difficulty of making such a transition, and to get support from the other trainees as well as helpful feedback from the trainers.

At this point, the group leader moves from a primarily nurturing and possibly parental role into a more direct, adult role with the trainee. Fortunately, as the trainee studies, learns, and gains experience she/he will begin to gain power and grow into someone the trainer will work with as a peer.

While it is clear the trainee benefits from this learning process, we wish to point out that the trainer(s) gain something as well. An observer provides a source of interest in group that is experienced as attention and strokes by the group leader/trainer. The trainee provides energy, enthusiasm, and new information in the training meetings that can be helpful to the group leader. There exists a give-and-take between them that serves as a kind of equality, nurtures their relationship, and makes the power imbalance of the student/teacher roles acceptable to them both. New trainees, by offering their interest in learning Radical Psychiatry, give the trainer(s), the Collective as a whole, and the community at large continuing input and energy, which helps to keep Radical Psychiatry theory and practice growing.

As with any craft, it is difficult to be a beginner, and training in Radical Psychiatry is no exception. Making mistakes, though painful, is essential to the learning process, and receiving critical and supportive feedback is vital to becoming a skilled group leader. We as trainees have found that developing friendships with each other helps to make training more comfortable.

The excitement of learning, working hard, and of being part of peoples' development feels good. The opportunity to apprentice with group leaders as they work, and later, to practice in their presence, prepares the trainee in a way that

cannot be matched or replaced. As members of BARP and its training collective we are part of a group effort, and benefit from the support, strength, and enjoyment that comes from membership in a working community.