

**SUBJECT:**

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**Juan Campos Avillar on  
‘The experiential groups’ within group-analytic workshops and the function of this  
learning tool (the workshop) within the development of the group-analytic  
movement**

**Correspondence in Group Analysis XVII/2 August 1984 and  
Group Analysis XVII/3 December 1984**

# EDITORIAL

GROUP analysis is a long-term therapy whose course is measured in years, not weeks or months. It is therefore not very popular with the many who hanker after brief, focal or symptom-directed therapies. However, an interesting phenomenon has sneaked up on us alongside the slow model of group analysis. This is the group-analytic workshop, an event lasting for a weekend or a few days at most and containing as its central and most attractive feature anything from two to ten sessions billed as group-analytic 'experiences', or 'experiential groups'.

These group-analytic experiences tend to be enthusiastically reported upon by convenors and participants alike. We can therefore assume that they are meeting some need, but it is not at all clear what this is, or how such group-analytic experiences differ from sessions which take place in the context of a therapy which is supposed to unfold over several years. It would be absurd, for example, to imagine a workshop providing a taste of psychoanalysis or a 'psycho-analytic experience' over two or three sessions. Yet this is more or less what our group-analytic workshops claim to offer. The knowledge that 'groups are different' is unfortunately not sufficient to explain the anomaly.

The account in this issue of the journal by Terence Lear and Elizabeth Foulkes of their Mexican adventure with a group-analytic workshop underlines several issues which ought to be troubling convenors of group-analytic workshops. Against the backdrop of an International Congress our two intrepid heroes staged a two-session event which they frankly admit contravened some cherished group-analytic rules about the setting, the boundaries, selection and so on. But did it matter? The event staged in Mexico was for people steeped in a psychotherapeutic culture who could reasonably be expected to 'work' on the setting together with the convenors and come out of it none the worse. Moreover many group-analytic workshops are well seasoned with veteran group-analysts who welcome the opportunity to meet up with old friends in a secluded environment and undergo regeneration, like a convention of Dr Who's.

The problem arises as our workshops begin to edge more and more towards the public interface. Many of these workshops are now becoming the shop-front for group analysis; they provide an opportunity for would-be group analysts and group-analysands to look in on that mysterious, attractive but alarming entity known as a group. These workshops and the experiential groups which form their core therefore need to stimulate more thinking after the hugging is over.

HAROLD BEHR

# The Workshop Experiment: Don't Treat *Or* Teach! That is not Your Assignment!

The Editor  
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Dear Editor,

I am very glad you questioned in your last Editorial (GROUP ANALYSIS XV11/2 p. 89) 'experiential groups' within group-analytic workshops and the function of this learning tool (the workshop) within the development of the group-analytic movement — this community of professional scientists that has been defined lately in Zagreb as a 'training network in action'.

No doubt your interest in the topic has been aroused by the group-analytic experience in Mexico reported in the same issue by T. E. Lear and Elizabeth Foulkes (GROUP ANALYSIS XV11/2 pp. 160-164). My own interest in this question arises from similar 'transnational experiences', and mostly from the one in which I worked as a reporter for the 8th January European Workshop in London back in 1981 (GROUP ANALYSIS XIV/2 pp. 146-163). Let me share with you some of my thoughts about the question you raise and let us hope somebody else joins us in the discussion in subsequent issues.

S. H. Foulkes had pointed out that in any of the 'training groups' he conducted the phenomenon of polarity appeared. The group splits up between members who ask for more treatment and those who ask for more didactic teaching. The split between 'feelers' and 'thinkers' also appears in any large group session within group-analytic workshops. If I am to think, though, what the rôle of 'experiential groups' within such a gathering is, I must first clarify what the functions of workshops in group analysis are.

Webster's Dictionary defines workshop two ways: (1) a room or building where work such as home repairs or light manufacturing is done, and (2) a seminar or series of meetings for intensive study, work, discussion, and so on in some field, for example, a writers' workshop.

If we look at the workshop phenomenon developmentally, workshops in group analysis started as study groups, that is, as a 'group-analysts' workshop' (Webster's second meaning). Remember, for example, the workshop on

the concept of matrix convened by Foulkes in the 'sixties. Workshop was also used on a transnational level to designate the teaching-learning work done with people from other countries and other group therapeutic families interested in discussing group analysis with Foulkes and his followers, for example the Residential Workshop at Lago Maggiore after the Milan Congress in 1963, the Vienna Workshop of 1968, and particularly, the 'continuous workshop' or large study group initiated by him with the launching in 1967 of 'Group Analysis: International Panel and Correspondence', a group analysts' writers' workshop by correspondence to which we owe the present journal and the Group-Analytic Society (London) Bulletin.

As we understand group-analytic workshops at present, they are rather the child of the Symposia, an invention we owe to the initiative of our friends and colleagues from Lisbon. It was after the second of these Symposia, the one in London in 1971, that it was decided to hold 'intermediary workshops'. This is how the January European Workshop in Group Analysis was founded, its goal being, besides the one of teaching and learning, *to build up something*: the development of group analysis in theory and practice, as an experience, as a therapeutic method, as a tool of research and as a think-tank for theoretical constructs.

These are also the aims of the GAS (London), but at a European level; and, in this regard, Foulkes said that we are all in the rôle both of teachers and learners. That much for history. Little by little, though, the London European Workshop, instead of being staffed both by UK and Continental members, as was intended, became the London January Workshop, a property of the GAS. Just by reading the titles of the European Workshops we see that new functions were added, such as 'home repairs' for the GAS and light manufacturing group-analytic training.

Now you come and point out that there is a third meaning — the one of shop-front for group analysis, for this new product. I don't know what meaning you give to 'shop-front'. Do you mean the façade or the shop windows? Anyhow, that function is also very important. People window-shop in London, enter the store, have a taste, like the product, make it theirs and become addicted to group analysis. That is how the movement expands transnationally. We can even export group analysis. However, we have to be sure that what is bought and what we sell is true, genuine, group analysis.

Let us try to test the product. If we put a 'workshop' on a test bench, we will see that behind its beautiful shell there are many small and large interlocking wheels, cogs that make the machine work like a clock. There are many small wheels: experiential groups, plenty of them; application groups, not so many; large wheels: lecture meetings, seminars and large groups

proper; a lot of coffee breaks to oil the machinery and, in one hidden corner unseen to participants but always present, the regulator of the clock and its pendulum, that which gives the impulse to the group and keeps it smoothly swinging: the staff group.

If this mechanical metaphor is not to your liking, I can offer another inspired by Goldstein's 'Organismus'. That way we see a quite different picture. The Workshop is a group construction, an organism, part of a larger whole, the group-analytic movement, and each of its pieces is the off-spring of previous group-analytic inventions. I have already mentioned the Workshop's relation to Symposia. Its moment of birth was at the London Symposium, the second of its kind when these 'conferences' experienced a mutation: for the first time the large group was incorporated. When our English friends organized the First European Workshop the model they used was quite familiar to them. They adapted it to the well tried General Course in Group Work. So the Workshop became a concentrated and shorter version of what takes thirty weekly sessions in another setting. If we analyse these models educationally, the experiential part has as one of its main functions not to give a taste of group-analytic therapy, nor to cure anybody. Its functions are, in my opinion, to loosen up defences which stand in the way of learning through experience, to be able to hold a dialogue and to change group-analytically, as well as to depart from an experience which makes thinking possible.

Robin Skynner in his 'Institutes and How to Survive them' (GROUP ANALYSIS XVII/2 pp. 91-107) clarifies for us what the function of the GAS in group analysis is. I myself, in Zagreb, in my paper 'From the Politics of Teaching Down to the Pragmatics of Learning', examined this same issue from the point of view of group-analytic education. After that Symposium I wrote a note inviting interested people to discuss those questions further and continue the dialogue initiated there in the area of training. The invitation still stands, and anyone interested in the project can write to me and will receive the material at minimal cost. The first feedback on this correspondence will be given face-to-face at the next Spring meeting of the GAS in London, May 1985.

What I would like to clarify here, however, is the question of polarization. Experience without thinking is no good; thinking without experience, in group analysis, is impossible. What is important is that when we get submerged in one of these workshop experiences, we do so equipped with the diving suit of the researcher, being well aware that in this field as well as in therapy learning is research and research is learning. These activities, research and learning, may well have curative effects, but they were never intended as a cure. To forget about this may have serious consequences, not only for the partici-

pants — where we have had some casualties on several occasions — but also for the staff and for the very task of group analysis itself.

Terry Lear and Elizabeth Foulkes in their self-critical report (*GROUP ANALYSIS XVII/2* pp. 160-164) give us a good example of what has to be the spirit. They learned from their experiment and in scientific fashion share publicly with their colleagues their reflections on their experience. We can learn from them by thinking along with them about the group-analytic way of work done under 'impossible circumstances'. That is the way we can advance group-analytic thinking, and not just by giving lectures or curing people. It is a question of systematically applying group-analytic principles to the work we do.

Just to end I would like to share with you an experience of mine. I have been acting as supervisor for the staff group of the Bilbao General Course for two years. The first year, group conductors of the 'experiential groups' had acquired plenty of experience as group psychotherapists before starting the course, but had scant or no familiarity with group-analytic conducting or group-analytic theory. They tended to conduct groups as if they were psychotherapeutic groups. Also, this is what was expected of them by the student members. Just to give an idea of the strength of this attitude which I have called the 'patient complex': During one of the first supervisory sessions a conductor reported from his group that the patients had remained in silence for a whole hour and a quarter! Also, the staff group tended to refer to students as patients and to conductors as therapists.

Of course, these attitudes are related to the need of the group to depend on the conductor — from which it has to be weaned — as well as the tendency of group therapists to take refuge in their rôle of therapist when confronted with the task of leading an experiential small group for educational purposes. Both tendencies show themselves also on the level of the didactic part of the course when the teacher in charge gives lectures and the students take notes while not listening, with the result that the group discussion which follows either becomes an empty slot full of embarrassing silence or else a competitive game of wise guys showing off their feathers. Of course, this way there is no dialogue and no true learning.

My advice to group conductors is 'Don't treat', to lecturers 'Don't teach'. On various occasions I have made reference to the Confucius maxim Foulkes put on the first page of his *Introductory Book*: 'I do not expound my teaching to any who are not eager to learn; I do not help out anyone who is not anxious to explain himself; if, after being shown one corner of a subject, a man cannot go on to discover the other three, I do not repeat the lesson'. I am happy to see the use Martin Grotjahn (*GROUP ANALYSIS XVII/2* p. 165) makes of

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Foulkes' advice in his so-called supervisory groups: 'Don't treat; it's not your assignment!'; and how his 'supervision on demand' is turned into plain consultation. My own consulting work in clinical and teaching supervision I conceive of as 'group co-vision'. I would like to think about the future of Workshop learning in terms of 'non-compulsory group co-learning in regular sequential blocks'.

This is the sort of interchange I like from group analysis. This is the sort of dialogue I would like to maintain in our Workshops and Symposia. I feel that we have not taken this 'educational non-problem' seriously enough. We have not done enough 'research in actual operation'. We are still speaking of Group-Analytic Workshop experiences and not yet of the Workshop Experiment, an invention of group analysis destined to make history in analytical education by opening the road towards the 'Learning Community', another concept pending.

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