

**Brian Williamson**

**CIT613050**

## **Experiential Group Work**

## **Reflective Journal and Report**

***Semester 2 2005***

**(Note: I have included some of my assessor's comments so that the reader might identify the reflective nature of the assignment.)**

**19/7/05**

**Experience**

This was the introductory session for the course. Perry used an “icebreaker” of asking the combined group to individually say three things about themselves, one of which was to be untrue. The group also discussed the learning outcomes for the course. During this discussion, group topics were mentioned and an example of industrial relations (IR) policy was given. This led to some people, including myself, being drawn into an emotional confrontation about the merits of the Government’s IR policy. A heated debate ensued for some time. The experience was then discussed by the group.

**Impact**

The “icebreaker” was an amusing game and I enjoyed watching people react to telling a lie.

The IR incident was most uncomfortable and brought up a number of old trigger issues for me. I felt attacked and misunderstood which caused me to feel a sense of isolation. I reacted by attacking my “aggressor” and also used manipulation tactics to score points. The whole episode left me drained and angry.

I was also surprised, at the time that Perry allowed the incident to take its course rather than redirect the group to what I thought was the main purpose of the discussion – to talk about the assessment profiles.

*[Assessor comments: Take on board your part in the incident – some saw you as the aggressor]*

**Learning Outcomes**

A number of things were reinforced for me:

- Body language is a telling factor in communication;
- Assumptions are dangerous;
- I need to manage my emotional reactions more closely;
- My opinions are my right, but no one else needs to accept them or consider them relevant and I don’t need to be hurt by other’s reactions;
- Control and manipulation tactics may hurt other people;
- Reacting to high emotion prevents me from hearing myself and others and from understanding the process of group communication.

**26/7/05**

**Experience**

Another “icebreaker” followed by breaking into small groups to examine overall group rules for the class.

**Impact**

I was generally frustrated except for the small-group process. I find the structure of the session very loose and that impacts on my preferred learning style.

**Learning Outcomes**

My major learning outcome was to recognise my frustration and to determine to relax more and allow the session to flow for me. If I can do that I think that the frustration will lessen and I will be more open to examining the group process as it unfolds.

**2/8/05**

**Experience**

An “icebreaker” (seems to be an ongoing event); finalising of group rules; small group session on the purpose and goals of the group.

**Impact**

I am finding that I am changing my attitude to the way the subject is taught. I have progressed from complete frustration to mild annoyance. I was thinking of trying to RPL the subject (I have extensive experience in group work) but I think that I need to challenge myself and question my feelings. I think that my experiences in the group will be very beneficial to my personal development and so I have decided to persist. I need to break some barriers, particularly in relation to “control” issues and in relation to my judgemental approach to things that don’t go “my way” and my expectations of other people.

I may not enjoy the experience, but it will be good for me.

*[Assessor comments: Your group-work experience is reflected in your approach to the group – therapeutic groups are much different to experiential groups]*

**Learning Outcomes**

- A closer examination of my feelings and the thoughts behind them;
- I need to examine, rather than judge, people’s agendas.

**9/8/05**

**Experience**

The icebreaker was to say something good about yourself. We then participated in a “photo-sensitive” exercise where each individual selected from a large number of photos one which had meaning for the person. We then broke into small groups to discuss the meaning of the photo and later had the opportunity to share that with the larger group.

**Impact**

I found both exercises quite moving. The first brought back my relationship with my father, who died some 15 years ago. In the second I related to a picture of intimacy between a man and a woman, which I associated, with my relationship with my wife.

The group discussion was very emotional for me. All those who shared did so at a deep level. It brought the group closer as individuals and as a group. We commented that it was so powerful because the group was small (thus intimacy could be achieved).

**Learning Outcomes**

The exercises reinforced for me the ability of group dynamics to bring out thoughts, emotions and reactions from the group members if the goals are accepted and the members are willing to participate in achieving the goals.

**16/8/05**

**Experience**

The icebreaker was about the “greatest compliment ever”. The group tended to bog down a bit. The exercise was to allow those who were absent last week to experience the photo exercise.

## **Impact**

I had a similar impact as last week during the exercise.

## **Learning Outcomes**

I learned that intimacy and connection could be made within a large group as well as a small group. I think success is measured by the willingness of individual members to cooperate with the group. There was one person who did not share and I thought that that person, while being legitimate in the group context, actually lost out, personally. If everyone had demurred, the exercise would not have worked.

*[Assessor comments: Don't forget about personal choice]*

**23/8/05**

## **Experience**

The icebreaker enabled us to talk about what we like to do in our spare time. After it we split into small groups, first to discuss our expectations and secondly our fears concerning the large group experience.

## **Impact**

I was able to voice my uncertainty about the learning experience I was having. I don't see that I am learning enough because I don't see myself learning about group process while I am giving/participating in the group process. I do see myself learning about myself, however.

## **Learning Outcomes**

I found that I could openly express my thoughts and feelings about the process and, although I couldn't see myself learning, the group told me that they had noticed a behavioural change in the way I interacted, which was positive. I learned that I need to relax and let the experience flow. I also learned that others had similar concerns and fears to me. I think that feedback is very important in allowing the group to move forward.

**30/8/05**

## **Experience**

The icebreaker turned into a discussion about some problems a couple of people in the group were having with another group member (who wasn't present at the time). The exercise allowed us to write statements about ourselves: "I am"; "I am not"; "I am OK with"; "I am not OK with".

## **Impact**

I have become amazed at the personal depth level that many people in the group are prepared to go to when talking about themselves. This shows a real level of trust that, in my experience, usually takes a lot more time – particularly when I consider that the homogeneity of the group would normally be only surface deep at this stage of its development. We are still virtual strangers to a great extent, yet there is a preparedness to be open in discussions. Not everyone is open, and some are quite closed, but the majority seem to have taken what I call "exposure" dynamics in their stride. Many people in the group have become friends outside the group context and this probably has helped build the trust level.

## **Learning Outcomes**

- Never under-estimate the power of the group on individuals.
- Be prepared to let people be where they want to be
- Don't try to control the outcome – let the group find its own level
- Let a person finish talking without interruption
- I need to look at my tendency to be impulsive

**6/9/05**

NO CLASS THIS WEEK

**13/9/05**

**Experience**

The icebreaker allowed us to decide what we best liked doing. Our answers were then used to help us in our roles in the exercise which, firstly, was to break up into small groups and decide on two things each that we would take on a deserted island, then, in the larger group, to agree on ten things from all the choices.

**Impact**

I found the icebreaker and small group exercise quite stimulating. The large group discussion got a bit bogged down in places and tended to be dominated by one person, designating himself as “the manager” and pushing his own agenda. The large group discussion became very frustrating for me.

**Learning Outcomes**

I learned that I (still) allow my emotions to get in the way of allowing me to learn actively from the group experience. Most people seemed to feel comfortable with the exercise and Perry thought that it was one of the best. However, I found I couldn't see the wood for the trees and I was pretty drained through my emotional reaction. I have promised myself in the past to allow things to flow, but I keep breaking my promises!! Maybe next week.

*[Assessor comments: Your presence in the group is welcome. You do set rigid standards for yourself, particularly (in) learning. Adult learning is no longer a teacher-focussed, pedagogical approach. It is about student focussed learning, based on constructivism, metacognitive and transformative learning, based on critical reflection. ... Release your shackles and start enjoying the “experience” of group work. This is not a rigid self-disciplinary type of group-work, based on strict regimes of self-reflection. This form of group-work will change your perceptions and bring enlightenment. ...]*