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*This booklet is a thematic compilation of texts which were published at different places.*

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# Introduction

*Experiences in learning history affect current learning. Difficulties in concentrating, a lack of progress in learning, standstills in learning and high rates of absence can be the result of a negative learning history. As present conflicts also have an effect on the process of learning, it is often not easy to find the causes for the difficulties in learning. In literacy work and basic education with adolescents and adults those teaching are to a particular extent confronted with the learning problems of their participants.\* Both the experiences of failure during school and the negative experiences repeated over the course of the years with insufficient knowledge of reading and writing lead in this area to a definite negative self-image. "I can't do that", "I'll never learn that", "I'm just too stupid for that" are often statements participants make about themselves. The desired success in learning is here frequently not achieved by means of didactics or methodology. In literacy work with native speakers the question comes up very quickly of how the tutor can lead the participant from an attitude of "I can't" to "I can" from being discouraged to courage.*

*Proceeding from the learning requirements a concept of learning counselling was developed in the projects "Literacy" (1982-1985) and Basic Education (1985-1988) at the Educational Services Centre of the German Adult Education Association. The aim was to enable tutors to support and accompany their participants through counselling sessions in overcoming learning problems which were partly anchored in the participants' own life histories. This concept is presented and expanded on in the first two texts in this brochure.*

*As a result of the language difficulties of many participants in literacy and basic education courses counselling sessions are often questioned as an essential component of the work. It is true that it is not easy for many participants to express their demands, wishes, fears, and hopes in language. However these language difficulties do not mean that the participants do not express their needs and problems. Whereas the participants must practice coping with spoken and written language, tutors must learn to understand the way people who are not used to coping with language express themselves. "Counselling – on the Difficulties of Expressing Feelings, Impressions and Pictures in Words" is a piece on the non-verbal part of counselling work. Without saying it, we express rejection or openness, fear, hope, anger and disappointment. Conscious perception of non-verbal forms of expression must be learnt. Practical examples of how Putting-into-Words can be practised with participants allow an insight into the many possibilities open to language teaching.*

*The counselling session can also be employed as a methodological instrument to convey learning success. The question from which the fourth piece in the brochure proceeds is: What is learning success in literacy work? It would seem obvious to assume that success in learning had been achieved when the learners are in a position to write more or less perfectly as far as orthography and grammar are concerned. After a few years of literacy work it becomes clear however that this understanding of success is mistaken, that participants are often not literate but pseudo-literate. They have learnt written language in the protection of the course and have used it there but outside the course they behave as before, avoid demands, go on looking for help from others whom they trust or block unexpected demands made on their*

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\* In German students in adult education are called "Teilnehmer" = participants.

*ability to read and write. The problem is that learning to read and write at a later stage in life is connected with a great change in the way these people live. They must go from dependancy to self-reliance, from fear to self-confidence, from retreat to participation. Here several examples show how the individual steps of this process can be made visible to the learners with the aid of counselling sessions.*

*Counselling work is linked to tutor qualifications. The tutors generally have to gain these qualifications during the course of their work. During the two projects "Literacy" and "Basic Education" a person-related training concept for counselling tasks was developed. It is not only the participants' experiences in their learning history which have an effect on their current learning but the tutors' learning and teaching behaviour is also determined by these experiences. If tutors are to work with participants on a re-interpretation of their self-image they must not only be in a position to do this methodologically but must know from their own experience which uncertainties, hopes and fears are linked to a discussion of this nature. The text "Person-related Further Training for Counselling Tasks in the Field of Literacy Work" describes the coming about and development of this concept of further training and provides an insight into the training work through practical examples.*

*It is the objective of further training to enable tutors to build up a new learning ability with the participants which makes it possible for them to achieve a realistic self-assessment and independent learning. In order to clear the path for the participants and to accompany them along it, the tutors must also develop an awareness of their capabilities, ways of behaviour and attitudes. In the piece "Self-Awareness as a Prerequisite for Responsible Pedagogical Action" this becomes clear by means of examples from training work.*

*The carrying out of person-related further training has made clear how significant reflection is for the work. Supervision seems suitable as an instrument of reflection. The aim is to enable the individual or the group to extend the possibilities of behaviour or intervention as well as to improve the ability to communicate and cooperate. A pre-requisite for supervision is that each individual is willing to question his/her personal style of work, teaching, counselling or leadership as well as to admit to and reveal conflicts. The piece "What can Supervision Offer Adult Education?" presents possible topics of supervision for staff in adult education and expands on forms of supervision and their specifics.*

*A further piece on the topic of supervision views this area from the perspective of the tutor. The various working conditions of tutors at Volkshochschulen result in a number of problems in communication, cooperation and organisation. Added to this come the questions and difficulties of course work. In spite of the number of problem areas, or perhaps because of this, the question arises whether disturbances in the field of work do not offer the chance of thinking about what has become routine and recognising mistakes as an opportunity for new changed behaviour.*

*When the staff of an institution have decided to take supervision as an accompanying measure of further training, before they start, the institutional conditions, financing, supervisees' interests as well as questions of organisation and procedure have to be cleared. The final piece shows opportunities for practical preparation which are very important for the success of supervision.*

## ***What we understand by “Counselling”***

In German the term counselling is one which is used very frequently in everyday language in many different areas. There is consumer counselling, occupational counselling and sales counselling as well as educational counselling, sexual counselling and others. We feel that these many and very various meanings of counselling make it necessary for us to state briefly what we understand by the term. If one proceeds from the original German meaning of the verb, this contains aspects which are important for our work: “consider something for oneself, ponder on, sound (out),...take consideration of, take care of something,...suggest, recommend and divine, indicate.”<sup>1</sup> In German as it is generally used, counselling is usually understood as giving advice in the sense of telling the other what to do. We do not share this view. The original meaning of the term in the sense of “circumscribe” or “set the outer limits of advising”<sup>2</sup> is closer to what we feel to be the meaning. For us, counselling someone means to set up links between the various pieces of information which the person seeking advice provides, constructing relationships, working out connections, setting up assumptions and hypotheses like “Could it be that...?” The one seeking advice decides whether the counsellor has divined correctly. We assume that the one seeking advice brings along the solution to the problem implicitly, but that it requires the methods of the counsellor to uncover this/to decode it/to work it out.

An essential element of our counselling work lies in the inclusion of learning or life history. We assume that the significance we attribute to things, people, abstract terms like moral principles and so on have all been learnt. The ways in which adults behave are the result of the interpretation of their experiences. “We are self-determined by the sense which we give to our experiences; this sense is however probably always erroneous if we make certain isolated experiences the basis of our future life.”<sup>3</sup>

An essential concern of our counselling work consists of enabling the one seeking advice to understand earlier interpretations and to consider current strategies for action in the light of life history. It is the conscious grasping of the sense of ways of behaving up to now or rather the errors in the attribution of sense to these which provides the one seeking advice with the possibility for change. Our counselling work takes place within the framework of adult education. It is based on the individual psychology of Alfred Adler (deep and social psychology) and includes the unconscious components of the personality of the one seeking advice. In order to prevent any misunderstandings: The term individual psychology has as its object a holistic view of the person concerned (individual – not divisible).

### **Bibliography**

- 1) Duden, Vol. 7: Das Herkunftswörterbuch (Dictionary of Word Origins), Mannheim 1963
- 2) *ibid*
- 3) Alfred Adler: Wozu leben wir? (What are we Living for?), Frankfurt 1979, p.21

# Counselling – a step towards changing the self-image of students

*Elisabeth Fuchs-Brüninghoff*

All students in literacy courses have one thing in common – they have failed in some way in their educational history. This makes literacy work quite different from learning in school and, as a consequence, literacy tutors, in addition to their jobs of teaching and organizing, must be able to provide counselling in their courses.

## Use of the term counselling

In general language usage this term appears in all sorts of different connections: e.g. marriage guidance counselling, child guidance counselling, educational counselling, sales counselling, cosmetics counselling, and legal counselling as well as counselling contract, industrial counsellor, counselling centre. One can almost say the term has become a fad much over-used. This fact makes any sort of agreement as to the real meaning of the term difficult. The following, however, does apply in all the different fields: “Counselling is provided by experts in the respective areas (for instance tax experts, construction specialists etc.) and is usually accepted voluntarily and for a limited period of time.”<sup>1</sup>

If we look at the way the term counselling is used in the context of school and adult education, it very quickly becomes clear that it is very important that we distinguish between counselling and therapy whenever education is concerned. For one thing, psychologists often provide therapy under the label of child guidance counselling; for another, some psychologists in the interest of expanding the scope of their profession “sell” counselling as therapy.

For pedagogy, as early as 1965 K. Mollenhauer described the value of the “pedagogic phenomenon of counselling”<sup>2</sup> for school and social work with youth. Within adult literacy programmes, the term is used in compound nouns such as initial advice and counselling, diagnostic counselling, learning counselling, course-concomitant counselling, and counselling in choosing courses.

When I argue in my opening paragraph for the introduction of counselling into literacy programmes, I refer to the entire process of learning. This can be better understood once we consider the learning background of the students.

## The learning background of literacy students

Students in literacy courses are people with a learning history of scholastic failure. They either did not acquire sufficient competence in written language while attending school, or they lacked the confidence to apply what they knew in routine situations and this lack of practice lead to their losing what-

ever language skills they may have possessed.

Being unable or only insufficiently able to read and write makes things very difficult in a highly industrialized society with compulsory school attendance, as social acceptance is denied to those people who are not able to use written language in the accepted way. Illiteracy is often equated with an individual’s incompetence, stupidity, and personal failure. As a consequence, illiterates intend to conceal their weakness; they try to find people they can trust and work out a way of life with the help of these people who take care of all things involving written language. They are thus excluded from those areas of life which require that one has learnt how to use written language.

Over the course of time the constant experience of not being able to read and write adequately leads to a firmly entrenched negative self-image. Making up for this deficiency at a later date is closely tied to a big change in the way this person lives; it implies a move from dependence to independence, from fear to self-confidence and participation in society. These changes are only possible, however, if learning how to read and write is concurrent to the development of a positive self-image.

For the students, literacy implies a process of struggling to strike the right balance between written language acquisition and personal development.

## Consequences for the set-up of courses

What are the consequences of the facts listed above for the set-up of literacy courses? There is more and more discussion about how this background – a learning history of failure, life arranged around the lack of written language competence, and a largely negative self-image – makes it necessary to provide counselling. As to what forms this should take, there are various considerations,<sup>3</sup> but as of yet no single agreed-upon approach. On the other hand, there is little disagreement on how best to teach reading and writing.<sup>4</sup> How can we enable students to apply in their everyday life the knowledge and written language skills they have acquired in the course? There is still no satisfactory answer to this question. To put it into more general terms: How can acquired knowledge be transferred into concrete acts? An answer can be found, if one again deliberates the situation of literacy students.

## Applying language skills means changing one’s life

For the students, to apply written language means to change

their everyday lives:

- they have to do things they had never done before because of fear of failure;
- they have to do things on their own which someone else always did for them – this means both to relieve the other person and to take tasks away from them;
- they have to do things they were convinced they could not do because of their own particular incompetence.

Applying the newly acquired knowledge of written language requires a new way of behaving in everyday life that to some degree directly contradicts the former behaviour. This entails diverse difficulties. There is the danger of over-estimating oneself which results in yet another failure, or of underestimating oneself which precludes experiencing success. In some cases, the partner who has spent years taking care of certain tasks feels superfluous now that the other person is handling these things on his own. In this case, the partner may put up a fight to be needed again.

Experiencing yet another failure or lack of success, or having to face crises in relationships makes the student feel insecure. He or she relives memories of previous failure and these confirm the self-image of “I can’t do that”. It is all too obvious that this will have effects on the learning process in class. Depending on the extent of the difficulties, learning problems will arise, a deadlock in learning will occur, and, at worst, the student will drop out of the course. How can the tutor break this vicious circle or prevent it in the first place?

### **Counselling as encouragement to apply language skills**

An initial important step could be to make the student aware of the fact that his learning history, the way he lives his life, and his self-image are all interrelated. For “Conflicts and problems which arise (can be traced back) to misconceptions in the self-assessment of the person seeking advice and/or to misconceptions on the part of the social group and society he lives in.”<sup>5</sup> If the student is only given instructions or told what should be done in particular situations, this offers little help. He will always end up encountering the same difficulties and will fall back on his time-tested patterns of behaviour.

If we want to make the students aware of the connections between their learning history, the way they live, and their self-image, this requires two things: that the course provides the opportunity for such discussions, and that the tutor is able to supervise discussions of this type.

Counselling is considered the linchpin for bringing about self-confidence and achieving a change in self-image; both are essential prerequisites for changing patterns of behaviour. Counselling in the context of literacy programmes intends to help the students to help themselves. They are encouraged to begin to understand their learning histories and to recognize what they have to change in order to be able to apply the written language skills they have acquired.

### **The danger of pseudo-literacy**

If the tutor cannot provide this support, there is a danger that the students will acquire a knowledge of written language and will be able to practice their skills, but only within the sanctuary of the classroom – outside the course they will continue to behave exactly as they did before: they still avoid all situations where they have to use written language and

continue to rely on help from people they trust.

This danger of “pseudo-literacy” was hardly noted until a few years ago. In time, however, it became clearly recognizable, especially in the context of tutor training on the subject of “learning difficulties”. Tutors were saying again and again: “Yes, my students can theoretically read and write quite well, but they never apply their skills outside the course.” Discussions with tutors pointed out that they had never talked to their students about how to use written language in everyday life. They had talked to them about everyday life, work, and hobbies, and had let the students write about these topics in order to relate to their language experience and to establish a link between the contents of learning and the interests of the students; but other than that, they had assumed it would be a matter of course that students apply what they had learnt. This shows that literacy work keeps a fragile balance between the mediation of language skills and counselling; because of this, it involves far more than providing German lessons for adults.

### **Counselling – a pedagogical technique that addresses students individually**

Counselling in literacy is a person-to-person talk between tutor and student within the context of a process of learning. It keeps the balance between “salvage” and prevention, and its stated aim is to try to enable the student to participate fully in society. We must not, however, foster the illusion that counselling can bring about any changes in social conditions such as unemployment which influence the specific problems of the students.

In any individual case of counselling, the topic is “the particular situation of the one seeking advice, which of course involves the general conditions of his social standing, but only as they become the object and content of counselling in their subjective and individual representation. This does not by any means exclude – in fact, it expressly includes – that counselling makes the student aware especially of those objective social conditions as the context of his own problems.”<sup>6</sup> To get back to literacy work: literacy (teaching of written language skills plus counselling) can provide the individual student with the prerequisites he needs if he is to fully participate in society.

### **Staff Qualifications**

The above underlines how significantly the qualifications of the staff figure in successful literacy work. For one thing, tutors must possess comprehensive knowledge of linguistics and didactics and must be familiar with specific approaches to literacy in order to be able to design the class in a way that corresponds to the particular backgrounds and needs of the students. For another thing, tutors must be versed in counselling. Being versed in counselling entails more than acquiring theoretical knowledge and learning how to proceed according to a method; being a competent counsellor requires the reappraisal of one’s own learning history. If someone has not experienced what it means to recognize and correct flawed assumptions in one’s own self-image, then it is hardly to be expected that he will be able to assist students in literacy courses in this process of personal development.

Unfortunately we can observe tendencies that plan to confine literacy programmes in the rigid structures of school and intend to limit the subjects discussed in class to merely

technical knowledge and a compilation of facts and figures. Teachers who have not analysed their own learning history and therefore uncritically pass on their own "misconceptions" to their students are the ones responsible for this trend. The dilemma is that these teachers are unable to recognise this fact. Judging from their premises and preconceptions, their behaviour appears quite logical. If all instructors in literacy programmes were to participate in extensive tutor training (focussing both on specific topics and on the dynamics of interaction between individuals in general) before they begin to teach and were able to supplement their work with a regular program of supervision, this impasse might be broken.

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#### Notes

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- 3) cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff, E. et al.: Alphabetisierung - Arbeitshilfen für die Praxis: Lernen - Sprache - Übungen. (Literacy - Practical Guidelines and Materials: Learning - Language - Exercises) Bonn – Frankfurt 1985, p. 10-19
- 4) cf. Kreft, W.: Die Methodendiskussion in der Alphabetisierung. (Discussion of Methods in Literacy) In: Kreft, W. (ed.): Methodische Ansätze zur Schriftsprachvermittlung. (Systematic Approaches to Teaching Written Language) Bonn – Frankfurt 1985, p. 7-16
- 5) Tymister, H. J.: Beratung. (Counselling) In: Wörterbuch der Individualpsychologie. (Dictionary of the Psychology of the Individual) München - Basel 1985, p. 50
- 6) Mollenhauer, K. (1965), op. cit., p. 41



# Learning Counselling

*Elisabeth Fuchs-Brüninghoff*

## Learning Problems and Learning Counselling

The learning situation of the individual is characterized by his<sup>1</sup> present situation and learning history that resulted in a particular self-image and image of the world. These images, the product of encouragements and discouragements, and the present standing in life shape unconscious patterns of behaviour which contribute to the success or failure of learning. If learning is successful, there is hardly any need for making a point of this unconscious blueprint of action; whenever learning problems arise, however, it becomes necessary to take up this subject. One must proceed from the situation and background of the individual student and see how he *relates* to them in his daily actions. This is the synchronic level. On the other hand, this *behaviour* can only be understood, if one is familiar with the individual's ways of looking at things and with his patterns of behaviour that he acquired in the course of his biography, and thus includes the diachronic level.

Among the frequently encountered learning problems mentioned by tutors of literacy courses are: lack of progress in learning, learning deadlock, passivity, insufficient concentration, late arrival, skipped classes, clinging to old methods of learning, negative self-descriptions such as "I'll never learn that!", inability to understand linguistic structures. If these learning difficulties are to be classified at the synchronic level, they can be roughly divided into three groups:

- learning problems based on the personality of the student;
- learning problems resulting from interaction in the group;
- learning problems connected to the topics of learning and the way they are conveyed, hence problems that are related to the teacher as well.

The background of the participants has an certain influence on what happens in the literacy course due to the fact that both students and tutors tend to insist on their ways of looking at things and confronting problems. People continue, e.g., to behave in a scared or open way, make contact to others easily or only with difficulty, introduce or accept working material uncritically. The background of participants and tutors is therefore not transparent as such because it is much more complex affair than the mere sequence of what happens in the classroom – it leaves some manifest traces, however, in concrete verbal and non-verbal acts.

It can be seen from the work of various schools of deep psychology, in particular the psychology of the individual and from group dynamics, that almost all learning difficulties appear as strains in establishing relationships, resulting from the fact that both the students and the tutors unconsciously, and that is unreflectedly, transfer their familiar ways of looking at things and their patterns of behaviour that they acquired in their learning histories to the current set-up of teaching and learning.

Thus we might find that a student assumes he must not make any mistakes lest he be ridiculed by the group. Old experiences in school are the background to this fear: his teacher

had always exposed especially "original" spellings to the entire class. As a consequence, the student avoids all situations involving writing in the literacy class as much as possible, "forgets" pencil and paper, or else he emphasizes the importance of reading and claims that he wants to practise this more intensively.

Another illustration might be that a tutor assumed a student had not properly mastered the synthesis of sounds as he had trouble again and again trying to read an easy word such as "I" (German: "ich"). The background to this, however, was that the student had great difficulties accepting himself as a person with his own needs and wishes. The tutor was not aware of this, hence constantly introduced new drills on the synthesis of sounds with the result that the student's reading became worse and worse.

As demonstrated by this example, problems which on the synchronic level seem to result from the object of learning and how it is taught show a cathexis with recollections from learning history; on the diachronic level it becomes obvious that these recollections must be seen as closely linked to strains in the interaction between teacher and student.

## Aims of Learning Counselling

Counselling sessions, be they group discussions or person-to-person talks, lend themselves to unravelling this tie between the synchronic and diachronic level (cf. contributions by Meinhardt-Neeck, Lindemann, Waldmann). These counselling sessions that accompany the learning process – all generalized under the term learning counselling – may take many different forms, yet all of them aim at one thing: to make successful learning possible.

In other words: counselling sessions are focussed on practical requirements; hence they do not exclusively attempt a *reappraisal* of the past, but always intend to change patterns of learning and everyday behaviour as well. In this sense learning counselling is the search for solutions both to handicaps and deadlocks in the process of learning and to difficulties in the application of acquired skills in everyday life.

Learning counselling traces the points at which unconscious recollections of other situations are transferred to the current teaching and learning situation and result in impediments.

Depending on what types of impediments arise, different strategies of intervention are called for. Sometimes it is enough to encourage someone to enable him to act differently in particular situations. In other cases it may suffice that a student becomes aware of his transference errors. In other instances it may prove necessary to not only recognize a particular way of looking at things and patterns of behaviour, but to uncover under which conditions and in which emotional contexts they were acquired during childhood (and to see that this made sense back then), if the student is to understand his current situation and to discover his potential to devise new modes of action (cf. Waldmann, Hamann, Lindemann). Learn-

ing counselling is of great significance in terms of prophylaxis as well: it can prevent failure of the new learning process. In this context, counselling is not only understood as a discussion to solve problems; rather, the point is to integrate elements of counselling into the general work of transmitting knowledge; this may, for example, take the form of regular “talks about learning”.

It proves most expedient to introduce such “talks about learning” at the very start of literacy courses. Learning backgrounds, learning difficulties, learning achievements and conflicts which may arise in the group are talked about. The aim of these talks is to gradually improve accurate perception of oneself and of others and to gradually bring about increased awareness of oneself and better mutual understanding and comprehension of processes in order to create a positive atmosphere for learning which allows both for cooperative efforts and individual learning. Counselling sessions only make sense, however, if they do not deteriorate to the escapism of discussions about oneself for their own sake, but instead generate results that bear consequences for the learning process. Discussions about learning must be conducted within a very definite framework. Participation must be voluntary for all parties. The sessions must follow a set of rules: there is a time limit; it is up to each student what topic they raise and how far they want to go; any results of the discussion are documented jointly.

Discussions about learning are a possible means of approximating the integration of teaching and counselling. What further forms of integration can be realized depends, on the one hand, on the counselling qualifications available and, on the other hand, on the degree to which the students and instructors reflect what happens in the course; much depends on whether or not it becomes possible to recognize and make transparent to what degree the counsellors and students share in the process of learning and teaching. Such a step would prevent that the difference between counselling and teaching is defined only by the formal aspects of the setting: conversation face-to-face would be accepted as counselling, discussion in the group would be considered teaching.

The qualification of the tutor is the decisive prerequisite for the success or failure of counselling sessions. Besides possessing theoretical knowledge and being familiar with counselling methods, the tutor must have reappraised his own learning history. Otherwise there is the danger that he unconsciously transfers his own principles of action and expectations concerning relationships to the participants, or that he cannot recognize what expectations actually having to do with other people or circumstances are being transferred by individual students to him or the entire class. These expectations may be quite different things such as the fear of being punished when making mistakes, assuming to be given a job, or to at long last find a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Both the tutor's need to acquire counselling competence and the demand of adult education institutions for appropriately qualified staff increase constantly. Up to now, sufficient opportunities for tutor training do not exist; in addition, neither the salary nor the employment status of tutors as part-time staff correlate to the high demands in terms of qualification.

## Limits to Learning Counselling

Discussions taking place within the framework of learning counselling find their point of departure in the learning process; in turn, the results should lead to manifest consequences in learning or in the application of acquired skills in everyday life.

It happens that students in the context of such discussions state that they need further help concerning other aspects of their life; e.g. they have to face unsurmountable amounts of debts or have come to realize that their partnership or marriage is in a serious crisis. Problems of this type cannot be integrated into the counselling that accompanies the learning process. In these cases, however, tutors should be able to refer the student to competent sources, to debtors' counselling or marriage guidance counselling etc.

Another line must be drawn between learning counselling and therapy. Once the extent of the damage done to the personality of the student is so great that the techniques of counselling – to comprehend and to experience – do not trigger any learning, these individuals need therapeutic help.<sup>2</sup>

Despite all the merits of resorting to counselling, it must not be overlooked that counselling is a technique of applied pedagogy/andragogy that addresses itself to individuals and is designed to give the clients a greater potential to act. One must not foster the illusion that counselling can change social conditions – e.g. unemployment – that affect the individual problems of the students. It is extremely important that teaching and counselling programmes in adult education point out precisely these objective social conditions as the context of the problems of the individual; it is important that staff in adult education are aware of this fact, if they are to assess their educational activity realistically. It may show fatal consequences for the students, if they are unaware of the interrelation between their personal situation and the social and economic conditions. In that case they might interpret their difficulties of finding a job in terms of personal failure. Socially induced threats to individual survival then run the risk of being reduced to the level of personal and educational problems – and thus politicians are no longer held accountable and are absolved of their responsibility.

## Notes

- 1) For smoother reading, the masculine forms have been used throughout the text.
- 2) cf. H. J. Tymister: Gefährdungen individualpsychologisch-pädagogischer Beratung durch Psychotherapie? Gedanken und Erfahrungen zur Abgrenzung der Beratung von der Therapie. (Dangers to Pedagogic Counselling Using Techniques of Psychology of the Individual Caused by Psychotherapy? Thoughts and Experiences on the Distinction between Counselling and Therapy) In: F. Mohr (ed.): Zur Patienten-Therapeuten-Beziehung. (On the Relationship between Therapist and Patient) [Part of the proceedings of the Fifth Delmenhorst Workshop for Tutor Training in Psychology of the Individual] Munich 1986, p. 84-96

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# Counselling – on the difficulties involved in putting feelings, impressions, and images into words

*Elisabeth Fuchs-Brüninghoff*

The concept of counselling as an essential element of literacy work is often challenged by remarks such as: “The students cannot express themselves properly, they have only got a limited range of language.”, “The students want to learn, not to talk.”, “The students feel uncomfortable talking about themselves.” In my opinion, all these statements contain elements which are very important for the counselling of literacy students. Many students indeed possess a limited range of language, but this does not imply that they cannot express themselves. Their forms of expression, however, are very different from those of the tutor.

The students often talk in images, or through their actions. How they express themselves is the result of years of having experienced debasement and feelings of inequality, of years of not being understood. No one ever spoke much to them; they were simply dealt with. Students talk about themselves: “I couldn’t take part in the lessons, so I had to sit at the back. I was treated as if I wasn’t there. I used to go out and come back in again and no one really noticed whether I was there or not. The teachers said they couldn’t teach me anything. I was a hopeless case.” In the school report, from the teacher’s perspective, this student’s performance is described as follows: “Conduct: very good. (...) Paul cannot follow the lessons. (...) Paul was moved up for reasons of age. “ Another student recalls: “The teacher had another student read out loud a text I had written that contained a lot of mistakes. Everybody laughed. I cried.” A third student says: “My mother wanted me to learn to read and write. When it didn’t work out she would beat me saying: ‘Then I’ll have to beat it into you.’ The teacher at school didn’t encourage me at all. When I had problems I started to cry. The other children called me crybaby.” Almost all students in literacy courses can recall experiences similar to those described above. It is therefore hardly surprising that they initially hesitate to talk or are unable to talk at all; they are left speechless, but not because they were unable to express themselves.

In the course of my work with literacy students I have learnt to recognize non-verbal signs and signals and to double-check my perceptions and interpretations in discussions with the students. Moreover, I have, especially because of these discussions, become aware of the vivid expressivity of the language the students use which contains many images. On the other hand, the students have learnt that talking to each other can be helpful in many different ways; hence I have been able to slowly introduce them to counselling by way of various short exercises.

For a long time I shied away from writing about the non-verbal elements of counselling for fear of misunderstandings and lack of comprehension. The feedback from many readers familiar with adult education made me hesitate for a long time; these people claimed that the most important part of counsel-

ling had escaped them in all papers they had read this far. Meanwhile, however, I have become convinced that what the readers missed was the experience of counselling itself - and this experience will never be conveyable in any text. Whoever wants to indeed become familiar with counselling must experience it for himself or participate in counselling sessions with others. Thus the following text can only to a certain extent capture the specifics of my counselling work.

## Recognizing signals

What do I mean by signals communicated by the students? What kinds of questions do these signals trigger in me? I will give a few examples:

**Posture** – upright or bent? Someone twitches nervously whenever I step behind his chair. Is this an unconscious reflex conditioned by many blows to the neck? Have there been negative experiences with a teacher who was always looking over the student’s shoulder and exhibited his mistakes to the class?

**Facial expression** – scared, insecure, challenging? Is the student afraid that what he has written might be wrong? Does the student want to ask me something, but doesn’t dare to do so? Or does he/she think I might think the question silly? Does a student expect me to ask what’s the matter?

**Learning deadlock** – have I been going too fast? Did I pay too little attention to the student in the last few lessons? Does it prove difficult to apply the acquired skills outside the classroom? Have my teaching methods and teaching materials conjured up old memories of school? Has a negative self-description such as “I have reached my intellectual limits” been challenged? Is a student under pressure at work and therefore tired in the class in the evenings?

**Insufficient concentration** – is my teaching schedule inappropriate? Are the work periods too long? Are there any indications that learning is an unaccustomed strain? Do students, for instance, complain: “My head is spinning. My eyes hurt.”? Is the subject of a lesson too difficult or personally painful or is it altogether uninteresting? Are there tensions in the group?

**Self-descriptions** – what labels do the students ascribe to themselves when talking to me or the other students? Here are some examples: “No one takes me seriously anyway.” “I’m a bit slow to understand.” “I’ll never learn that.” “I’m stupid anyway.” “I can’t do it by myself.” “No one likes me in the first place.” “I was always the black sheep.”

Are there echoes of these descriptions in particular learning situations or social interactions in the course? How “active” is the individual student in seeking confirmation of his or her own self-image?

While taking note of all of these signals, it is important that I both draw a tentative conclusion and at the same time keep one thing constantly in mind: “It might be a quite different thing!”, to quote one of Alfred Adler’s key phrases, or, as Umberto Eco insists in “The Name of the Rose”: “My interpretation of the signs, however logical, need not be the actual cause of the thing.”

Let me illustrate this note of warning: I had noticed that some students did not acknowledge their birthday or felt uncomfortable if I wished them a happy birthday. After this had happened several times, I told the group what I had observed; I then remarked that the religious background of students, whether catholic or protestant, might play some role in this, but that I was not sure whether this was the explanation. A lively discussion comparing the significance of birthdays and name days quickly ensued in the group. Several students talked about personal recollections, for instance: “We used to celebrate only name days and I want to keep it that way”, or: “My granny was born the same day as I. She always had visitors that day and no one paid any attention to me. At some point I decided I didn’t want to celebrate my birthday! “ During this discussion I noticed that one student had not said a single word. He wriggled about uncomfortably in his chair and looked at me as if appealing for help. I knew that Bernd had grown up in a boys’ home and the thought struck me: “Maybe he has never celebrated his birthday, perhaps his birthday didn’t matter to anyone.” As I was not sure whether he wanted to tell anything about himself or not, I didn’t address him but maintained eye contact while the others in the class kept talking. Bernd grew noticeably more relaxed and finally began to talk. “My birthday is the worst day of my life and I don’t really want to be reminded of it. My mother died while giving birth to me, and my father didn’t want me any more after that, and so I was put into a boys’ home.” Bernd felt noticeably relieved.

One of the students, who had noticed this, commented: “You really flung a heavy load off your back when you said that. One could hear it strike the ground.” “Yes”, said Bernd, “Now it’s come out at last.” The discussion ended with the group agreeing to find a “birthday procedure” for each one of the students. They unanimously agreed it had been a good idea to talk about this issue. As they were leaving, I suggested to Bernd that we could “talk about your birthday if you still feel it is something bothering you.” Bernd looked at me and left with the reply: “I’ll see.” After about three weeks, Bernd came to me and said: “You recently said we could ... you know ...” Bernd felt the need to talk but found it difficult to say this explicitly. He had never before made a counselling appointment with me. During the person-to-person sessions that followed, it became clear that Bernd felt responsible for the death of his mother and had wanted to punish himself by failing to cope in various areas of life.

## Giving signals

It is difficult to say when and how to discuss the impressions one has of individual students or of the whole group. Usually one suggests such a discussion by saying: “I’ve noticed that... If you’d like to, we can talk about it.” The most important principle is that such a discussion must be voluntary.

It is, admittedly, sometimes difficult to remain patient when a student is unwilling to take advantage of such an offer or does not take it up right away.

In general, it may be said that the question of whether or not the tutor and the student can establish the rapport which is the prerequisite for any counselling will have been decided long before the actual occasion.

The tutor will offer (both verbally and non-verbally) to establish such rapport at the very outset of the course or counselling. Literacy students tend to express themselves non-verbally; hence we can assume two things: they will deduce the instructor’s attitude towards them and their learning ability from his/her conduct in class, and they will put even more emphasis on this than is the case in any given interaction, as described by Watzlawick et al. in their book “Human Communication”.

The tutor’s attitude towards students facing serious problems or even failing to learn is decisive for successful literacy work. Our interpretation of these difficulties is influenced by our own experiences and the theories we have become acquainted with. It makes a decisive difference whether I interpret deviant behaviour in class as a result of painful experiences with relationships, or as an attack on my work and person. In the former case, I will see a plea for help and will respond by offering to establish a working relationship; in the latter, I will punish the student and possibly exclude him. How I react depends on how sure I am of myself. It would be easy now to demand that only those people should work as tutors in literacy work who are sure of themselves and their ability to form working relationships. The question is, however, how to gain this self-confidence. Manès Sperber says in this context: “This creative ability to form working relationships stems from a deep understanding of oneself and an active recognition of one’s own qualities. The educator must learn to understand others within their systems of reference and to consider how they plan their lives” (Sperber 1978, p. 288).

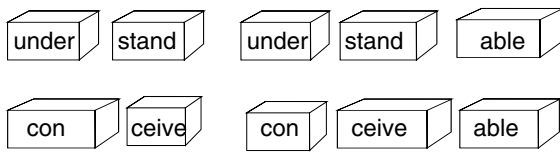
To get back to the subject of literacy: In order to make the students “capable of speech”, the tutor must be made “capable of relating”. The means to achieve this end is the analysis, within the framework of tutor training and supervision, of the tutor’s own learning history. The objective of such a confrontation with oneself is not to sort of “cleanse” one’s personality, as is sometimes assumed by tutors who have not yet had the chance to take part in such tutor training seminars. The goal is rather to reappraise one’s own learning history, to recognize how one dealt with positive and negative learning experiences and how this shaped both one’s learning and one’s teaching.

Those who know from experience how it feels to have one’s signals (and calls for help) misunderstood and used for ridicule and rejection, those who have analysed how helpless or aggressive they felt because they were not understood, will be able to recognize the signals given by students for what they are and will respond by signalling a basic rapport. The process of “putting things into speech” can commence on this basis. The students will sense that they deal with someone who trusts them to find their own way and is not afraid of crises and human depravity, since he has experienced for himself how such a struggle with one’s own past and feelings and such a confrontation with one’s self-image leads to a concomitant change of attitudes that generates new self-confidence and opens up new paths (cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff 1987).

## Practice for putting things into words

People who are neither used to discussing things in a group nor used to talking about themselves, need to be encouraged to learn to do this. The aim of counselling sessions is to put events, feelings, and images into words and to make them vivid and comprehensible to the counselling partner. Once one can make the students visualize what this means, a first important step in the direction of counselling has been taken. At this point, I would like to present a few exercises which the students and I have found useful in the course of our work.

**Working with morphemes** – when the concept of morphemes as building blocks of language were introduced, one student found it difficult to imagine this system. Since he worked on a building site, I came up with the idea of writing the morphemes on bricks.



The students could now pick up the bricks and thus the bricks became under-stand-able; they could be grasped and became graspable. One student very succinctly put into words how he felt about this: "I have now grasped what it means to grasp something; now I see how one gets a graphic description of things. We should be able to do the same with other things!" For the students in this group it became a fixed expression to ask whenever something was not quite clear: "Can't you make that easier to grasp or a bit more graphic"?

**Speaking stones** – the speaking stone is a useful tool, if one wants to give the students and the tutor a graphic example of what it means to "bear" the responsibility for how long one speaks in the group. The speaking stone is a smooth, large pebble which fits neatly into the palm of a hand. Whoever wants to speak gets the stone and holds it for as long as they want to speak. If someone else wants to speak, too, they can signal this by holding out their hand. Experience has shown that use of the speaking stone can be a great relief to the tutor as well, particularly in group discussions on very personal subjects, and especially so whenever the tutor is uncertain of how much the students want to say about themselves. When the tutor hands over the stone, the responsibility is put into the speaker's hand, and he/she can put experiences, fears, etc. into words as he/she sees fit. It is very important that the group attempts a joint evaluation after such a discussion.

**Getting acquainted with different ways of looking at things** – one of the purposes of counselling is to point out to the other person how one looks at certain things and recollections. There are various ways of giving the students a graphic illustration of this.

**Old Woman, Young Woman** – The portrait of a woman painted by W. E. Hill has become well-known through the work of Tobias Brocher. Depending on how one looks at it, this portrait can be seen as either depicting an old or a young woman. The realization that different people who look at the same painting see completely different things is an experience which leaves a lasting impression on the students.

**The Two-coloured Box** – A box with two colours is placed in the middle of the table. One side of the box is green, the other red. Depending on where a person is sitting, he/she will claim that the box is green or red. The students quickly realize that both ways of viewing the box are perfectly acceptable, depending on one's perspective. Thus both points of view are right, even though they contradict each another. Both are one-sided. If one wants to understand the other person's perspective, one must go and have a look from where the other is sitting.

Only someone positioned far enough away can see both sides and help the two persons to understand that their views are one-sided.

This experiment is often used by students as a model for discussion at home. Thus Mrs K. goes home and explains to her husband and daughter that any time they have an argument, each person merely upholds his/her view and the result is a stalemate.

Mr D., who has frequently quarreled with his wife in the last few months, slaps his forehead and says: "What fools we are! Now I understand what we've been doing the whole time." After having learnt to apply his newly acquired written language skills, he had gone and withdrawn money from the bank on his own, got his driver's licence, and now the couple had to share the car. "We were only reproaching each other all the time. If Helga had looked at things from my point of view and I from hers, things would have looked quite different." During this evening in the course, Mr D. could hardly wait to get home. He wanted to immediately talk to his wife about his new insights. It has impressed me again and again how quickly students put what they have realized into practice.

**Red-blue Glasses** – With the help of glasses tinted blue and red, specially prepared material can be seen three-dimensionally. Depending on which colour one looks through, things are seen either in depth or elevation. It made a strong impression on the students that, once they changed the lenses, they saw the exact opposite of what they had seen before.

While evaluating this exercise, usually one or the other student referred to the expression "looking at something through rose-tinted spectacles". I consciously chose this exercise and its evaluation to introduce the students to a discussion about the effects of one's life and learning history. Quoting concrete examples, I showed the students how certain experiences, particularly if witnessed repeatedly, work like a filter over time. For instance, the experience of being laughed at for writing mistakes can become so engrained that one does not want to try anything new and is afraid to write at all, and hence is reluctant to do so even in literacy class. The following summary concludes discussions of this sort: in the course of our life we are exposed to many different impressions which in time congeal into images – images of ourselves, of those close to us, of people in general, and of our environment. We carry these images with us. They work like a pair of glasses. But glasses must be retested now and then to make sure they still fit us. This is what we want to do in our literacy course, along with learning to read and write.

To highlight how students transfer discussions like these into practice, I would like to give a few short examples. "Impression comes from impress. At home and in school I was rubberstamped: 'You'll never manage that anyway.' Here in the course I have noticed: 'That's not true at all.' I've already managed quite a lot. After all, I can already read short things."

During a lesson one student said to her partner in a pairwork exercise in writing: "You've got your 'I can't do that' glasses on again tonight. But you know very well that they don't fit anymore. What's the matter with you?" The other student replied that she had wanted to fill in a parcel form at the Post Office the day before, but then had not dared to do so because of all the people and had taken the parcel and the form home to fill it in there.

When, after six months, a new student joined the group, the 'old' students explained to him how we work. "Well, you know, here we learn how to read and write, we've got cards for that, work sheets and games, and so on. But we also talk a lot about learning, whether things are going well or whether there are any hitches. Whenever there are any hitches, we sometimes go back and think about the past and see what things were like and how we were feeling back then. Doing so, maybe you realize that your 'present' feeling, the fear of making mistakes, is actually a 'used-to-be' feeling which doesn't make sense in the course at all. Talking about old worries can make you feel pretty funny, but afterwards you feel really good."

### "Counselling Language"

The language the students and I used for counselling sessions was a strange mixture of common language, local dialect and neologisms that we thought best conveyed the meaning of what we wanted to say. We created this mixture because it would have been impossible for the students to express emotional concerns in the High German that has to follow rigid norms. Had I insisted on that, they would probably have remained silent or been left speechless. Here, I was able to profit from my own learning history. The language of my childhood and family is Westphalian Low-German. Only in this language can I talk adequately about things from my childhood that have affected me deeply. I have 'of course' learnt to also talk in High German about events and feelings connected with my childhood, but this definitely makes them lose colour and life.

Referring to this background of my own learning history, I used the first few lessons to talk with the students about language. I wanted to point out that there is High German as the norm and standard written language, but that there are many other languages that are spoken in families or in particular areas. The literacy course did not intend to replace the language they had spoken up to now by High German; rather the point was that High German should be learnt step by step as an additional language and social must for certain situations .

When I put my observations and hypotheses into words, I could and did try to use a language familiar to the students; still I could not speak their own language. Therefore I encouraged them again and again to replace the expressions I used with their own terms. "Let me try to put into words what I have understood this far, and then you tell me, if you think it's right and whether I hit the right tone or not, and how you would express it."

To conclude: Literacy combines both counselling and the teaching of written language; hence it develops the students' language skills in several ways. They acquire the cultural techniques of reading and writing, and by talking about various subjects they also become acquainted with the cultural notions attached to these topics. They learn to put experiences, images, and feelings into words and are familiarized, through counselling sessions, with critical deliberation as a method of personal development.

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# Counselling sessions as a method and tool for assessing learning progress

*Elisabeth Fuchs-Brüninghoff*

Within the last few years, counselling sessions as tools for problem solving have proved increasingly important in the area of education and training. According to their different points of emphasis they have been differentiated into specific forms as educational counselling, parental counselling, learning counselling, and training counselling. In the field of literacy work that has emerged over the last ten years within adult education, counselling has been considered a valuable tool from the very beginning. Counselling sessions quickly became a regular element of such work (cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff 1986). Special attention has been given over the last three or four years to those counselling sessions that accompany the learning process and have been categorized under the term learning counselling. This term learning counselling implies various forms of counselling (cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff/Pfarrmann 1988) which allow students to discuss their individual backgrounds, problems, and progress encountered while learning as well as any conflicts that may arise within the group. For two reasons progress in learning will be the focus of the following remarks:

- the interrelatedness of counselling and assessment of learning progress has hardly been dealt with in the literature published thus far;
- the question of what exactly constitutes progress in learning in the context of literacy still lacks a precise answer; this paper is intended to shed some light on this unanswered question.

## 1. What do we mean by learning progress in the context of literacy?

This question is by no means easy to answer. The initial response may well be: we can speak of learning progress, when participants in literacy courses are able to write reasonably well with few mistakes in spelling and grammar. This proficiency can be measured by means of written tests in the course. After a few years of literacy work it became apparent, however, that this concept of learning progress was a false conclusion and that many students had not become literate at all but had become pseudo-literate.

Within the sheltered environment of the classroom the participants had indeed learnt to be proficient in written language and were able to make use of it. Outside the classroom, however, they behaved as they had before: they avoided all situations demanding written language and continued to rely on the help of persons they trusted. This phenomenon of “pseudo-literacy” or “non-applied learning” was uncovered in the context of tutor training workshops for literacy instructors. The tutors reported that students hesitated to leave the course with the argument “it doesn’t yet work at all outside of the class” despite the fact that they were reading and writing fairly well by now. Discussions with the instructors made clear

that they had not talked with the students about how to apply the newly acquired competence in written language in situations outside the classroom. They had talked about everyday life, jobs, and leisure activities and had asked the participants to write about those topics in order to orient the content of the lessons to the actual environment of the students – still the tacit assumption had been that the application of the acquired skills would be a matter of course.

Why is the application of newly learnt knowledge of written language such a problem for the students? Especially the adults – the situation of adolescents is somewhat different – have for years experienced their lack of command of written language and have encountered manifold difficulties in routine life because of this fact. What then keeps them from applying the skills they learnt?

In order to understand this behaviour of the participants, we must have a closer look at the situation of adult illiterates in our society and/or must consider the conditions that lead to illiteracy. The participants of literacy courses are people with a history of scholastic failure. Despite attending school they did not acquire sufficient competence in written language. Our highly industrialized society with compulsory attendance denies social acceptance to those who cannot read and write or are functionally illiterate. This inability to use written language according to the norms is often equated with personal incompetence and stupidity.

Almost all participants can refer to decisive negative experiences after having left school that were caused by their deficits in written language skills. In order to protect themselves from scorn and hurt they quickly “learn” to hide their handicap by cleverly avoiding all demands for written language; in addition, they looked for a person they trusted to take care of any affairs involving writing. Such an arrangement on the one hand protects the illiterates from negative reactions within their social environment, on the other hand it reinforces their negative self-image as relating to written language competence.

The later acquisition and application of written language skills is linked with decisive changes in the students’ life – from dependence to independence, from fear to self-confidence, from withdrawal to participation in society. Those quite fundamental changes are only possible if the gradual acquisition of language skills is combined with the encouragement of a positive self-image and a change of the dependent relationship with the person of trust into an equitable relationship. For the student literacy thus means struggling to strike a balance between acquisition of written language and personal development.

Assessing learning progress in the context of literacy must therefore account for changes in both of these areas. Progress

in terms of personal development is difficult to measure. Through counselling sessions we have found a way of pointing out personal changes to both the students and the instructors. One of the major difficulties of literacy work is the fact that language is at the same time the content as well as the medium of the process of learning and of counselling. Therefore I want to preface my more detailed remarks on counselling sessions as tools for assessing learning progress with some reflections concerning the meaning of language.

## 2. On the meaning of language

Language is a medium of communication and decisively contributes to the genesis of identity. "When learning language, children learn also that which is meaningful for the society into which they were born. With their language – the vocabulary as well as the patterns of syntax – they learn meanings and modes of thought that are culturally transmitted by society: causal ones, mystic ones, religious ones" (Balhorn 1981, p. 11). Language is the content and medium by which we (both socially and individually) symbolically appropriate the world in the process of understanding and structuring it. Language is a medium of mediation:

- Between people who communicate because they act and live socially...
- Between man and environment insofar as it is language alone through its concepts and conceptual systems that allows man to understand nature, his environment and civilization in their past and present...
- Between man and his inner self, as language and communication with one's fellow man are the prerequisites, incentives, and causes for reflections about oneself..." (Tymister 1978, p. 33 ff.).

Communication and understanding are the functions of language: language allows us to understand ourselves, the world, and our fellow man.

"Language and writing require a bridge to our fellow man. Language itself is a co-operative creation of mankind, a result of communal spirit (Gemeinsinn). To understand is a communal act, not a private affair" (Adler 1979, p. 200).

In the present context, further elaborations on language and writing would go beyond the confines of this paper. For further discussion I want to refer the reader to the paper on Literacy and Theories of Language written by W. Kreft (cf. Kreft 1988).

Break-downs in the process of language acquisition such as a total or partial failure to learn written language in school can be regarded as signs that point out conflicts between parents and child and/or instructor and student in the process of establishing a relationship and understanding each other. What are the reasons (and the background) for such problems in the process of establishing relationships? As far as the parents are concerned, it is often – aside from deep crises due to specific incidents – severe personal strains that are the result of their impoverished socio-economic status leading to the neglect of their children. For the children, this inability of the parents to establish relationships often results in sub-standard capacity of perception, memory, and language expression. The teachers often fail to understand or recognize the situation and language usage of these children and thus trigger learning difficulties. In addition, the importance that is ascribed to written language in routine life (at home) plays a vital role for the acquisition or non-acquisition of written language in school. If reading and writing are in the family, in contrast to school, considered to be of little or no

merit, and if the children have no or only contradictory experiences of written language being useful, this often causes conflicts for the children. Wanting to be loyal to their family, they may try to "solve" this dilemma by exhibiting learning difficulties or non-learning.

School contributes to this genesis of a "situation of non-learning" because the usefulness (and insight into this usefulness) of reading and writing is on the premise of the system's immanent notions assumed to be a self-evident given. Therefore teachers do not usually try to talk with children who experience learning difficulties about how they individually or in their families value the "merits" of reading and writing. If teachers fail to convey the point of written language to children with deficits in language (writing) experience during the first years of school, permanent learning impediments ensue. Research into the causal factors of illiteracy (cf. Döbert-Nauert 1985 and Fuchs-Brüninghoff/Pfirrmann 1989) points out that adult illiterates can usually state fairly precisely at what points of their learning histories they encountered problems with learning and language acquisition and at what point it was "too late".

For the second learning process to be successful, it is essential that students understand why they failed in the first learning process. When they recognize that their non-learning "made sense" in their situation back then, this brings enormous relief. When they no longer interpret their deficits as the result of an "impossible" personality that cannot be changed, but comprehend them as something generated by a specific set of circumstances, this encourages the students to learn in a new way (cf. Kummer 1986, p. 51). This exposé of non-learning entails a process of reappraisal in which language plays a vital role. The repetition of certain utterances (figures of speech/self-descriptions) by the students or the images underlying their forms of expression often contain key terms that condense negative (learning) experiences (cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff 1988). Counselling sessions give us the chance to find out how the individual student constructs meaning and "makes sense" in specific situations, and thus allow for the gradual abolishing of the mental blocks and fears generated by this mechanism (cf. case-study 1: "The dangers of writing wrong").

"Images, emotions, and directives for action that are part of the meaning which we ascribe to verbal signs are the results of one's learning history. Setting out to understand one's own learning history or that of others means that one must consider the ties between individual and family, group, stratum, and society in which and through which a biography is made possible" (Balhorn 1981, p. 13 ff.; cf. also Lorenzer 1972).

It is important that the participants recognize that their beginning to understand why they failed in their first learning process is an essential prerequisite for successful learning in the second learning process and must hence be considered a "learning achievement". As long as the students lack this insight into the importance of their beginning to understand their past, they will experience counselling sessions as "hog-wash" and will not benefit from counselling.

When students through counselling come to experience that the conscious coming to grips with language opens up better understanding of oneself, others, and the interrelations between events, the bane on (written) language is usually lifted, and they are intensely motivated to further pursue reading and writing. If they experience the usefulness of (written) language in concrete situations, this motivation is there for keeps (cf. case-study 2: "I am a new person").



### 3. What is the concept of counselling in literacy?

The term “counselling” has become a current fad much over-used both in everyday language and in education. This makes a clarification of the term difficult but absolutely necessary, as we otherwise must expect a plethora of misunderstandings. By the term counselling we designate the communication in dialogue between an individual or a group and a counsellor concerning a question that was raised by the person seeking advice as a starting point for communication (cf. Tymister 1985, p. 48). Counselling is always “part of (one or) several processes of communication and action that make use of verbal and non-verbal means in order to give a more “human” shape to social life through interpretation and the solving of problems and conflicts. Within this process learning takes place as the filling in of information gaps, as the satisfying of needs to comprehend, as the securing of mutual agreements” (Tymister 1988, p. 2). As counselling sessions are very closely tied to the persons participating in them, it is relatively difficult to describe the concrete procedure beyond individual case-studies. Even though it is possible to formulate general principles and to point out basic methodological steps, the process of counselling cannot be codified into a set of rules. “Intervention in counselling must be introduced cautiously; it finds its concrete form only on the spot and requires pedagogically creative thinking. On the other hand it is this mansidedness and limited predictability of counselling that makes it difficult for some tutors to do justice to the ever new and diverse occasions for counselling” (Aurin 1984, p. 8).

To name some general principles:

- voluntary participation on both sides;
- equal status, i.e. the person asking advice decides what is talked about and draws the limits, the counsellor determines the methods, chairs the discussion, and explains how she/he proceeds;
- mutual agreement on the setting, that is on all the details like place, time, fees etc.

The aim of counselling sessions in literacy work is to engage in efforts towards mutual understanding on various levels in order to create a learning atmosphere that allows both cooperative work and individual learning. Counselling only makes sense if it generates manifest consequences for the learning process and the application of (written) language outside the classroom (on the various forms of counselling cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff/Pfirrmann 1988).

### 4. Some case-studies of counselling

The three case-studies that follow have been selected to illustrate various aspects of learning achievements. The first case-study, “The dangers of writing wrong”, centers on coming to understand why one failed during the first learning process.

The second case-study, “I am a new person”, stresses the changes that are wrought when applying the acquired skills in routine life.

The third case-study, “I still don’t know how to read and write all that well but my daughter no longer has difficulties in school”, on the one hand deals with the changes in relationships in everyday life and with the negative results of contradictory experiences of the meaning of written language during childhood on the other hand.

#### *Case-study 1: “The dangers of writing wrong”<sup>1</sup>*

When Mr P. starts attending a literacy course, he is able to read fairly fluently. Asked about his proficiency in writing he replies: “No longer existing, gone.” In the class it soon turns out that Mr P. suffers from a serious writing block. He hesitates for a long time before he writes anything. “I don’t know whether it is correct” is how he comments his behaviour. He is obviously afraid of making mistakes. The instructor assumes that negative experiences are the cause of this fear. She suggests to Mr P. to at some point take a look together at the roots of his mental block. Mr P. takes her up on this offer. During several counselling sessions the following facts emerge:

In his family reading and writing played a relatively important role. His father was a salesman and had to do much paperwork, his mother was fond of reading books. When Mr P. was seven years old, his father was sentenced to prison for four years because of having forged documents. The children were told their father had taken sick, still Mr P. had somehow found out that his father had made some kind of mistake in writing. Mr P. reacts to the vanishing of his father by becoming scared of the “dangers of writing wrong”. As a consequence he decides: “It is best for me to not write at all so that something like this will never happen to me.”

His interpretation that it is “the right thing” to avoid writing anything “wrong” is confirmed by his teacher in elementary school who punishes even inkspots in exercise books and dog-ears. From then on, Mr P. more and more often refuses to write whereas reading is no problem for him at all.

After having left school, Mr P. on several occasions finds corroboration of the “correct” nature of his childhood experiences. As an adolescent he writes a post-card from his holidays to his sister. She makes fun of his mis-spellings and he becomes the butt of family jokes.

In the army Mr P. has to do some writing during basic training. His superior, a non-commissioned officer, who examines the assignment ridicules Mr P. in front of the entire company: “Is that supposed to be Chinese? You illiterate!” After this incident, Mr P. refused to do any writing whatsoever in public until his wife managed to motivate him to start attending a literacy course at the age of 41.

In the course of the counselling Mr P. detects his “misinterpretation” and is able to understand it and develop new strategies for action. Very quickly he finds out that no-one is being made fun of in class because of mistakes. Whenever possible, the tutor gives Mr P. the chance to detect and correct his mistakes (misspellings) on his own. As a result Mr P. builds up more and more “audacity” in writing and makes quick progress in learning.

#### *Case-study 2: “I am a new person”*

At the beginning of the literacy course Mr St. hardly possesses any knowledge at all of written language. He knows some letters and can read some short signal words like “post office” (POST). He cannot write at all. Mr St. comes from a family where of the seven children (four girls, three boys) all, with the exception of two sisters, are functional illiterates. His father was a junk dealer and the family lived as outsiders in the village. The father did not know how to read either, but knew how to calculate. Mr St. has a fairly clear notion at the start of the course why he didn’t learn how to read and write during his childhood: “Reading and writing were of no impor-

tance in our family. The teachers and the other children at school did not like us because we were dirty and unkempt and our clothes were often torn. The things that happened in our school had little to do with my world. But I never gave the other children any slack. If anyone wanted to mess with me I socked him a good one. Everybody was scared of me. I was the strongest. Because school didn't give me anything, I often skipped classes." Mr St. refused to learn out of loyalty to his family. After finishing school he finds a job with the sanitation department. At the age of 18 he meets his girl-friend who is now his wife. He learns from her that the bank does not charge the 80 DM per month for statements of account that his mother deducts from his wages. He breaks with his family as he feels he has been cheated by them.

The family of his wife accepts him with his deficits because he is otherwise "a swell guy". He receives all kind of support from them, still he cannot feel to be truly a part of the family as he cannot read and write like they can. This begins to bother him. Joining the literacy course is not easy for him. First his father-in-law visits me in the adult education school to get the feel of things. For the first interview Mr St. arrives "taken in tow" by his wife. Only after this does he come on his own to the initial course counselling. To my question about his motivation for wanting to read and write he replies: "Heidi (his wife) trusts that I can do it. I want to be a fullfledged person at last and want to learn a trade. Then I would truly belong."

Mr St. learns extremely fast and has no problems applying his new skills in everyday life. After two semesters his learning process all of a sudden slows down. In a counselling session he balances the books: "I got my driver's licence. I am able to go to the bank and get my money on my own. I found out that thinking is fun, even if it was very, very hard at first. I have become ambitious. It's almost as if you had been blind and suddenly you can see. In the old days I drank a case of beer and was a feared bully in the neighbourhood. I am a new person. I could be the happiest man alive if I didn't always fight with Heidi. She is not at all glad that I move ahead, but nags at me all the time."

The interview reveals that they constantly fight about the car, that his wife accuses him of squandering his money and behaving like "King Louis"; her opinions don't seem to count anymore.

I try to point out to Mr St. that his progress is only one side of the coin and that it doesn't necessarily appear in a bright light to his wife. She had always had the car for herself before; now she has to share it with him. She had always drawn money for him from the bank before and thus had kept control of the finances; now he goes to the bank himself and draws the funds that he considers appropriate without her knowing of it, etc.

In order to illustrate my point I place a two-coloured box in the middle of the table. On one side it is green, on the other red. I can demonstrate how an observer will claim the box to be green or red, depending on what side of the table he sits at. Mr St. right away concedes that the box allows both views. In other words, both views are correct, even though they contradict each other. Both views are one-sided.

Mr St. slaps his forehead and says: "What fools we were. Now I understand what we've been doing all the time. We only reproached one another. If Heidi had for once looked from my side and I from hers, things would appear different. I have to talk about this with her."

During the next class Mr St. tells me that he had talked to his wife but that they had ended up quarrelling again. Now he

wanted to ask me whether I would talk to the two of them. As his wife knew me from the initial interview for the literacy course she considered this to be a feasible solution. In the sequel we meet for two counselling sessions with the two of them. In these talks they become aware that the gains for one initially mean losses for the other; they have to change patterns of behaviour they had practiced for years and must learn new ones and get used to them. It becomes clear to them that it was his progress that led to this crisis in their relationship. But since both of them want to witness this progress, they can be patient and accept that it will take some time to get used to the new situation. The essential thing for Mr St. was to comprehend that his wife who had given him so much support over the years felt to some degree threatened by the fact that so many things changed so fast.

Mr St.'s learning slowly picks up again over the next few weeks and he assures me that ever so often he and his wife talk about the positive and the problematic aspects brought about by his learning. Crises in the relationship with the partner or family do not always find such a happy ending as in the case of Mr St. In her paper "Nicht sprachlos werden" ("Don't be left speechless"), D. Waldmann describes how a young literacy student who still lived with his parents fell into a severe crisis and suffered serious learning set-backs because his family proved unable to accept his progress.

*Case-study 3: "I still don't know how to read and write all that well but my daughter no longer has difficulties in school"*

Mrs I. starts attending a literacy course because her daughter has begun school. For one thing she is greatly troubled that her daughter might find out that her mother cannot read and write, and for another she wants to be able to help her child. After a certain number of literacy lessons, I asked the participants of Mrs I.'s course to write down for themselves what they considered to be the most important aspects of their progress thus far. At the same time I suggested they use these texts as starters for group discussions if they felt like it. Mrs I. wrote the following summary:

"Problems with child rearing.

When my daughter Christine began school at age 6, I had great difficulties. My daughter now came to me with her homework. I felt very insecure because I could not help her. As an excuse I told her to wait until her daddy came home as I was busy. I had always read picture books to her before. The stories I had made up myself. Now I am very glad that I learnt how to read and write in the Volkshochschule (adult education school). Thus far my daughter has not found out that I had been unable to read and write. And I am very happy this is so" (Geschichten von 'Öchern'; Stories by 'Öchers' 1984, p. 39).

When we talked about her story, Mrs I. related how much she had suffered under her illiteracy. She had been so afraid of losing face and authority in front of her daughter that she had often scolded her for no reasons whatsoever. And when the child had started to have problems in school, the mother had panicked and thought: "Now she will remain illiterate as well." She had begun working many jobs as a cleaning lady in order to be able to buy her daughter lots of tapes and records to make amends. In addition, she had always made a point of telling her daughter how important it was to learn to read and write. "In the evenings, when my daughter was in bed, I always studied with my husband so as to learn very quickly. I still don't know how to read and write all that well but my daughter no longer has difficulties in school."

What had happened? Once she had acquired a fairly decent command of reading and writing and had mastered looking up words in the DUDEN (the standard German dictionary), Mrs I. had studied in the evenings with her husband and had read the school books of her daughter, especially done all the exercises and assignments in German in order to be able to help her child. She no longer needed to be afraid and hence didn't have to reject her daughter. During the discussion she became aware that she had transmitted two contradictory messages to the child before: "Reading and writing is important" and "If you ask for help with your homework, you are asking for trouble." The daughter had responded to this double-bind with learning difficulties. Now that the mother's behaviour was consistent, the daughter could learn.

This case-study highlights how contradictory experiences with written language in the family can cause learning difficulties for the concerned children. In the learning histories of adult students we often find recollections of similar situations like Mrs I.'s story. For example one participant recalls: "My father was very strict and gave us a hard time and beat us whenever we got poor grades, still he never helped us with our homework and never practised with us."

## 5. Concluding remarks

Counselling as described above is closely tied to the qualification of the tutors. Thus far there is no regular university major or course of studies which would supply them with the necessary skills. Hence they must acquire this competence during their work as literacy instructors. Suitable concepts for tutor training have been developed and tested by now. In addition to the focus on the theory and methods of counselling the emphasis is on a reappraisal and reflection of the tutor's own experiences with learning and language. Our present dilemma is that for one thing we do not have the necessary funds to offer tutor training to a large number of literacy instructors. For another thing both the status and salary of literacy tutors is so insecure that many of the qualified people leave in order to work in other areas.

### Note

- 1) This case-study derives from a literacy course taught by Monika Heigermoser of the Volkshochschule Wuppertal.

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# Background-Related Tutor Training for Counselling Work in the Field of Literacy

*Elisabeth Fuchs-Brüninghoff*

## 1. Literacy in Practice

Literacy is an adult education programme directed towards German-speaking adolescents and adults who have attended school, but whose competence in reading and writing is not sufficient for them to function as full members of German society. Literacy is a new area of work which has developed in the Federal Republic since the end of the 70's and differs in several aspects from other programmes. All the students in literacy courses have two things in common: deficits in written language and a learning history of failure at school. "A two-fold demand is placed upon those who take on the task of literacy work. (...) What is demanded is ... a reappraisal of learning difficulties which have biographical roots" and compensation for "deficits in the techniques of mastering tasks" (Tietgens 1986, p. 3).

A two-fold demand in terms of qualifications is thus placed upon those teaching in this field. They must be prepared to teach adults written language as well as conduct counselling sessions. Literacy work entails "on the one hand more than German lessons for adults, while, on the other hand, it must be distinguished from therapy. Acquiring competence in counselling can help provide adequate support for students" (Meinhardt-Neek 1986, p. 11).

For those working in literacy, the difficulty lies in the few possibilities available for gaining the necessary qualifications before beginning work. This is due to a lack of language and learning research findings in this field. Competence in literacy work is therefore generally acquired through practical experience coupled with tutor training. It still needs to be defined what competence in counselling must entail, or what counselling in literacy work consists of. In a dialogue maintained over several years between the Literacy Project of the Educational Services Centre (PAS) of the German Adult Education Association (DVV) and various literacy experts working in the field, important insights have been gained which have benefited or rather provided the basis for the development of a concept for background-related tutor training.

### 1.1 Counselling Tasks in Literacy

As early as 1984, the members of the project group "Kursleiter und Alphakoordinatoren" [Literacy Instructors and Literacy Coordinators] claimed that counselling was an activity employed at various levels in literacy work. The following were named: student counselling, tutor counselling and counselling of institutions (cf. Zur Theorie und Praxis der Alphabetisierung, issue 3/1984, p. 12).

The necessity of counselling at these different levels has been recognized over a period of time, at various moments. As a result, the corresponding concepts of counselling differ in their level of development, as will be seen presently.

*Learner Counselling* (cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff 1985, pp. 12 ff)

- Initial counselling – At first glance this means an exchange of information. The student receives information from the counsellor about the institution and the differences between school and literacy courses in adult education, e.g. non-compulsory attendance, small learning groups, working methods, etc. The counsellor learns something about the student's motivation for attending the course, his/her difficulties in reading and writing, expectations and fears in relation to the course, etc. The "information" given by the student is of a very personal nature. He or she takes someone who is until now a stranger into his/her confidence. This situation requires a great deal of sensitivity on the part of the counsellor. He must deduce what the person seeking advice wants and must consider carefully what questions to ask and what information to give in order to fulfill the aim of initial counselling, namely to find the appropriate programme for the student.

- Placement counselling — This is to find out the student's level of knowledge, i. e. to realistically assess what skills and difficulties he/she has concerning written language. In its widest sense, this again is a question of information.

- Learning counselling – In this context, we must emphasize, on the one hand, that the students learn to understand how their negative self-image developed in the course of their learning history, what their situation is at present and what changes will result from becoming literate. They can thus gradually achieve a change in their self-image and increase their potential to act. On the other hand, learning counselling refers to the actual process of learning during the literacy course. It should help overcome learning problems, create a positive learning atmosphere and enable the students to apply and utilize what they have learnt in the course. Learning counselling is pedagogical counselling in its narrowest sense, that is, it helps to cope with personal problems.

- Counselling in the choice of courses or learning programmes – This should help the student plan his/her own learning programme. Such counselling can take place both when joining a literacy course, and later on, when students move on to other education programmes after having learnt to read and write.

- Telephone counselling – This is a new form of counselling using television advertisements (since summer 1986). In these ads potential students or those close to them are encouraged to ring the telephone numbers given, if they

would like help. The telephone counsellors provide assorted information and try to motivate callers to seek personal counselling at an adult education institution (cf. Lindemann 1987).

Extensive material on initial and placement counselling is available to the counsellor (cf. *Theorie und Praxis der Alphabetisierung*, issue 5/1985). Counselling in the choice of courses or learning programmes has much in common with general education counselling. As a rule, telephone, initial and placement counselling, as well as counselling in the choice of courses or learning programmes require from one to three sessions and are meant to help in reaching decisions.

In marked contrast, learning counselling usually accompanies the course and lasts over a period of two to three years, with the function of supporting literacy students in the process of their personal development (cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff 1986).

#### *Tutor Counselling*

This takes place, firstly, within the context of mutual help among colleagues, in particular between experienced and new tutors; in addition, as regular supervision or within the framework of tutor training. Essentially, the purpose is to extend the tutors' qualifications and to assure psychohygienic reflection of one's work (cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff 1987).

#### *Counselling of Institutions*

This counselling is provided by pedagogical staff members of literacy projects; the purpose is to inform either their colleagues working in other contexts of the literacy project or the staff of other institutions such as welfare, youth services, employment and probation services. The aim of such sessions is, on the one hand, to provide information on approaches to literacy and to generate understanding for the situation of illiterates. On the other hand, the purpose is to initiate or improve co-operation between the various institutions.

There is general agreement among literacy staff about the necessity of most of these counselling tasks. Course-concomitant learning counselling, however, has now been for some time a controversial issue, especially since it calls for continued training for instructors and other literacy staff.

## **1.2 Literacy Staff**

The profile of demands placed on literacy staff consists of skills and qualifications in didactics and methodology, language and learning theory, pedagogics and psychology, as well as organizational and personal abilities.

As a rule, it can be assumed that tutors possess only some of these skills from their previous training. Many tutors also lack experience in teaching adults. This calls for intensive efforts during the initial period in the new job.

The essential characteristic of literacy is to integrate counselling and teaching. It is often assumed that literacy is the teaching of written language techniques to adults. But it quickly becomes clear that this can only be one aspect of the work, if one looks more closely at the learning background of the students. All of them share a learning history of scholastic

failure. To reappraise the learning difficulties rooted in the students' biographies thus becomes a prerequisite for successful learning that will lead up to applying the language skills learnt during the course in routine life. Not only must the students acquire written language skills; in addition, they must through counselling gradually change their negative self-image stemming from their language deficiencies into a positive one. For the tutors, this means that they must possess qualifications that can keep the balance between counselling and teaching written language skills. This makes heavy demands on the tutors – how do they react to them? On the whole, three approaches can be differentiated:

a) Tutors dismiss this demand.

They consider literacy to be German lessons for adults. They were able to successfully maintain this point of view for as long as they had students of the "first generation" in their courses. In the early stages of literacy work, these students often led very stable personal lives and had steady jobs. Who doesn't remember the reports about the works council chairman or the self-employed small businessman who in the briefest period of time learnt to read and write and apply these skills in their routine lives? Meanwhile, however, the great majority of literacy students are unemployed and/or live in difficult personal circumstances. The reaction of this first group of tutors is: "These students are incapable of literacy." These tutors are unable to consider the possibility that their own understanding of literacy may be wrong. They dismiss the demands made on them because they want to protect their own self-esteem against the insight that they have acted "wrongly" up until now and must therefore "change".

b) Tutors are unaware of this demand.

They are, however, personally moved by the daily trials and grim learning histories of the students. Thus they show more commitment than called for and often invest two or three times as much time as they are paid for. Yet, since they did not receive any appropriate initial training, they lack the professional means to do justice to the demands made on them. This may have negative consequences on literacy programmes: the students make no further learning progress or drop out of the course; the tutors are disappointed and drastically reduce their commitment or even look for other employment. The institution may misinterpret the situation and assume that the students do not "want" to learn to read and write.

c) The tutors are aware of this demand; they are the ones who state it.

These tutors can usually say exactly what personal strains and responsibilities their work entails. They are aware "that for a positive learning process the interrelation between the respective student and the tutor must be "right", i.e. must not be flawed" (Gobelius 1987, p. 11). If the tutors are to consciously utilize this interrelation as a tool, this requires that they be aware of what role they play in the participant's learning process. "In order to act confidently and be clear in their interrelations with their addressees, the people working in adult education must be able to differentiate whether they offer teaching, counselling, material help, or therapy" (Schlutz 1983, pp. 10 ff). Tutor training is called upon to provide them with this competence.

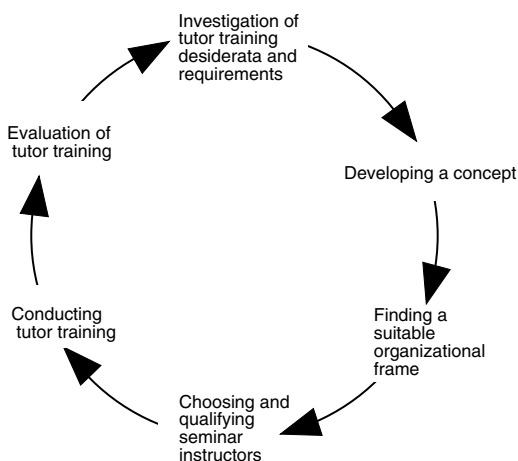
## 2. Development of a Concept of Background-Related Tutor Training

Two forms of tutor training were initially developed by the project: introductory seminars for new tutors and seminars on special topics for tutors with more experience. When the concept was tested, it eventually became clear that yet another form of tutor training was needed: background-related seminars. The tutors felt the need to deliberate their own biographical background as it influenced their literacy work; and this form of background-related tutor training proved a necessary response to this demand.

The development of the concept proceeded step by step. In a first step, interviews with instructors, managerial staff, and other people involved in literacy polled what practitioners considered to be necessary in terms of continued training for tutors and other literacy staff. In a second step, a preliminary concept was drawn up on the basis of two sources of information: on the one hand, the evaluation of theoretical findings concerning the relevance of the "persona" of the tutor in teaching and counselling, and on the other hand, the analysis of practical experiences in adult education and teacher training. In a third step, this preliminary concept was revised and improved after an exemplary test that was evaluated intensively. In a fourth step, the revised tutor training was put to a practical test again.

"Each course ended with an evaluation in which trainees and instructors shared equally. The results of the evaluation were then taken into account in the planning of follow-up courses with the same trainees as well as in planning identical courses with a new set of trainees. In this manner, a continually self-correcting work cycle developed" (Fuchs-Brüninghoff and Tymister 1984, p. 88).

### Concept Development as a Self-correcting Work Cycle in the Form of Intersubjective Feedback



### 2.1 Desiderata as Seen by Tutors

A few voices on this topic: We "tutors need permanent tutor training which does not exclude the personal aspect, that is, the experiences and feelings that concern us. At least I don't want to settle into routine and ossify, but would like to learn more from 'failures', want to see more clearly and not repress

those things which affect and bother me and the students" (Meinhardt-Neek 1985, pp. 92 ff).

"We wondered:

- What do we actually expect of the learners, our colleagues, ourselves?
- To what degree do we influence the learning atmosphere in the group? How do we conduct ourselves as tutors?
- Where should we/must we draw the line between ourselves and the learners' needs?
- To what extent do we want to/must we concern ourselves with the learners' difficulties?
- What sort of interrelation do we want to cultivate with the learners?
- Where are our personal and institutional limits?" (Finke 1985, pp. 46 ff).

"The way I act, react, and function as a tutor in the learning process of "my" students is connected, first and foremost, with my personality, and thus can only with competent guidance be discovered and deliberated by myself" (Gobelius 1987, p.12).

In summary, with students in literacy courses, one assumes that their negative self-image gained in the course of their learning history determines their present situation and hence also their learning situation. If we accept this, it must be equally true that the tutor's own learning history will also have an effect on his/her current conduct as a teacher/learner. If tutors are to consciously plan their conduct as instructors, this requires an appropriate self-knowledge on their part, i.e. a reappraisal of their own learning histories. A further reason for the tutor to come to terms with his/her own learning history is that, if students are to work on the re-interpretation of their self-image, then the tutor must know from his/her own experience what fears, feelings of insecurity, and hopes are linked to such a struggle to come to terms with one's identity.

### 2.2 Theoretical Statements on the Relevance of Learning History to Teaching and Counselling

There are various references in specialized literature to the relevance of learning history, though the various authors stress different aspects. Brocher describes the psychological situation of a student as follows: "He develops [when listening; E. F.-B.] a particular, emotionally based network of interrelations with the speaker, the initiator, the familiar and unfamiliar co-listeners present, the room, the perceived content of the discussion, and any activity within his field of interrelations. This network of interrelations depends on his experiences and prejudices from his earlier psycho-social reality" (Brocher 1967, p. 42). Emphasis: Group behaviour among adults is shaped by social interrelations in childhood.

Maurer assumes that "the acquisition of new patterns of orientation is generally connected with experiences of biographical significance and with the gradual and socially stimulated explications of ego and individual concept of life [Lebenssinn] that are embedded in the subjective reality of the individual, unobservable from outside, as well as in their biography and learning history ..." (Maurer 1981, p. 112). Emphasis: Learning is linked very closely with the ability to remember. Learning impediments can be uncovered via the analysis of the family background and the child's life situation.

Lorenzer and Görlich stress a different aspect: "To the extent that school ignores that the language-symbolic organization of actions taught by it has a forerunner of a fundamentally different nature – an organization of behaviour which, as we saw, not only begins at a pre-lingual stage, but is also preserved non-lingually, namely in sensuous-unmediated organismic residues –,to this extent the efforts at pedagogic perfection become a dangerous perfectionism" (Lorenzer and Görlich 1981, p. 101). Emphasis: Learning history must be understood via the process of socialization.

Singer sees an obstacle to humane learning in the willingness to obey that the teacher acquired as a child: "That fear, willingness to obey, and the urge for regulations are so strongly manifested is related to one's own upbringing, which generally makes more dependent than independent" (Singer 1983, p. 22). Emphasis: Overcoming the teacher's self-coercion.

Antoch holds this view: "No relationship of cause and effect exists between the organic disposition, the socio-historical framework, and the family network, i.e. the family constellation and place in the order of siblings on the one hand, and on the other, the attitude taken towards these givens" (Antoch 1981, p. 27). Emphasis: Each person develops his/her own life style through a personal stance to the givens.

Against the background of these theoretical statements, the question must now be asked: How can the reappraisal of learning history take place within the framework of tutor training, and how can it be made useful for the tutors in their practical work in class? In other words, what form must tutor training take so that tutors can both acquire theoretical knowledge and systematic routine in counselling, and at the same time deliberate and expand their personal backgrounds and abilities?

The first difficulty is to decide on a theory of counselling relevant to literacy work. Dietrich (1983, p. 21) cites 42 theories that prove relevant for the psychology of counselling. Such diversity only tends to confuse. Therefore, it is necessary that the counsellor decide on a theory; only then will he/she have a basis for understanding their own self and developing their counselling which can then be outlined to other people. From this basis, the counsellor can proceed to expand his counselling and become familiar with other theories.

### 3. Tutor Training in Counselling Based On Adler's Psychology of the Individual

For several reasons, Alfred Adler's psychology of the individual lends itself as a basis for counselling work in literacy:

- As a theory, it makes transparent that, given their life style, it "made sense" to discouraged children to not learn written language. Thus one can comprehend which living conditions motivate the "refusal" to learn, and how changed living conditions lead adults to attend a literacy course.
- As the counselling approach of a school of depth psychology, the psychology of the individual takes the learning history into account when trying to solve current problems and conflicts.
- The procedural method in staff counselling is largely transferable to student counselling. This means tutors can experience for themselves what they will later apply when

counselling their students. They can analyse counselling sessions presented to them and break the systematic proceeding down into small steps as models for their own work. This allows tutors to engage in exemplary learning in both senses of the word.

### 3.1 Counselling Applying Adler's Psychology of the Individual

According to its self-definition, counselling applying the psychology of the individual aims to solve problems or conflicts in the three life tasks of love and marriage, work and profession, and the community. In this approach, the problems and conflicts that arise are traced back "to erroneous parts in the self-assessment of the person seeking counsel and/or of the social group or society in which he lives" (Tymister 1985, p. 50). Current problems and conflicts of adults are often the attempt to fall back upon previously experienced definitions of interrelations and to apply patterns similar to those used during childhood. This familiar and practiced behaviour contributes towards a supposed security.

To solve this problem, counselling applying the psychology of the individual turns to the unspecific tool of encouragement in its broadest sense; if this is insufficient, it resorts to the specific tool of analysing the patterns of behaviour acquired during childhood.

In other words, after the adequate analysis of problems or conflicts, the attempt is made with the help of joint:

- analysis of the family constellation
- goal-oriented interpretation of early childhood memories
- goal-oriented interpretation of dreams
- analysis of patterns of orientation such as "what do I want" (priority) and "what do I definitely want to avoid" (dead-end) (cf. Kefir 1983)

to reappraise those aspects in the life style which "are founded on a mistaken compensation of actual and/or fictitiously assumed inferiorities and have lead and will always lead to an exaggerated confidence in one's self-esteem" (Tymister 1985, p. 50). It is analysed to what degree the counsellee possibly contributes to the present problem/conflict. This is the sine qua non, if one is to subsequently work out with the counsellee his/her own possibilities for change. Before this stage is reached, though, it is the task of the counsellor to make clear to the counsellee what positive role his/her behavioural patterns have played up until now; that these patterns were possibly necessary for survival in childhood, but now, in his/her current situation, contain erroneous elements or assumptions. Only after the counsellee comprehends these connections in their emotional contexts, can he/she also understand the current problems and develop possible solutions and consider concrete steps to make changes. The aim is to help the counsellees help themselves.

The following principles apply when conducting counselling applying the psychology of the individual:

- voluntary participation on both sides
- equality; that is, the person seeking counsel decides the topics to be discussed and sets the limits. The counsellor determines what methods to use, chairs the session, and makes explicit how he/she proceeds
- mutual agreement on the setting, i.e. on all conditions concerning place, time, money, etc.

### 3.2 Aims of Tutor Training in Counselling

Within the framework of tutor training seminars, the tutors have the opportunity to become acquainted with the various forms of student counselling and clarify for themselves which qualifications are needed to practice these different forms. The tutor training essentially focuses on teaching counselling skills and stresses these three aspects:

- the counsellor's personality
- principles and aims of counselling
- methods of counselling.

Seminars are designed in such a way that learning is possible both via theoretical insight as well as practical experience in order that tutors gain as much practical competence as possible.

### 3.3 Content and Methodology in Counselling Seminars

As far as content, the focal points are:

- reappraisal of one's own learning history
- student counselling
- staff counselling
- principles and methods of counselling
- understanding how one deals with oneself.

Depending on the content, work varies from exercises in sensitivity training to counselling demonstrations and supervision to the presentation of seminar papers.

The following section presents a few model examples.

#### 1. Exercise with sibling constellation

The following exercise with sibling constellation proved worthwhile as *one* example of analysing ways of looking at things and patterns of action acquired in childhood.

Teams whose members have the same sibling position are formed in order to investigate the typical advantages and disadvantages of their respective sibling positions. The evaluation of the exercise takes place in plenary assembly. The following quotes cite some general aspects frequently mentioned.

"The youngest child always has one or more brothers and/or sisters before him/her who occupy positions in the family of 'sensible', 'clever' or something similar, so that nothing remains for this child but silliness or a life as the 'sunshine' of the family. The youngest child has the advantage of no longer having to fight for everything with the parents to get his/her way, though this implies the disadvantage of having to learn later on with great effort how to carry through his/her own interests. Youngest children rarely achieve their often powerful position in the family by means of open confrontation, instead they cleverly use, for example, their charm or small size to attain their goals. They acquire the ability to manipulate people and learn to decide when to be clever and when not. They regard it as a disadvantage to always have someone before them. Attitudes towards their siblings and parents are often marked by envy, admiration, and a feeling of powerlessness.

"The middle child occupies an unclear position in the family. On the one hand, he/she is older than one or more siblings

and therefore has more duties to fulfill. On the other hand, he/she is younger than the eldest and has fewer rights. This child tries to emulate the eldest, frequently does not achieve this, but also does not enjoy the protection that the youngest child receives. Fears of failure sometimes arise as a result. Middle children often think: the others do the 'real' things, and I just correct their mistakes afterwards.

"The eldest child frequently takes on the position in the family of feeling responsible for the younger siblings and being sensible. In this way it retains the parents' love despite the birth of a younger sibling (a rival). The eldest child learns early on to act independently. This child often engages in confrontations with the parents, as he/she is the first to have to 'clear a path.' This frequently leads eldest children to leave home relatively early. They find out that more duties do not necessarily mean more rights, and that they can lay no claim to these. The eldest child avoids being a problem case in the family.

"The only child has to stand up to a powerful front of adults and constantly compares him/herself with them. This often results in a child growing up too fast ('precocious'). Only children tend to keep conflicts to themselves. They have experienced what it is like to stand between arguing adults and often take on the role of arbitrator. An only child makes great demands on him/herself, but also of others (difficulty with people lacking initiative). He/she has learnt to be self-reliant (to take on work or carry out tasks on his/her own)" (Heuser et al. 1985, pp. 2 ff).

The tutors differ in how quickly and clearly they see the connection between these observations and their work with students. Some do already in the initial evaluation correlate acquired patterns and conduct towards students; for example, tutors from the group of eldest children commented about themselves: "We fairly quickly agreed that our strength, taking on responsibility, could at the same time be our weakness. We tend to feel too much responsibility for the concerns of the students, and in this way bind them to us and impede their process of becoming self-reliant."

Others only become aware how relevant this exercise is for their own work, once they review the entire exercise as such. To quote two statements: "This exercise led me to see that I have always associated *learning* with school, and was not aware that I actually learnt a great deal before ever starting school. The crazy thing is that I constantly try to remind my students that learning also occurs outside of school." – "This exercise made me realize how careful I have to be in discussions with students about their learning history. I myself felt the thing struck pretty close to the heart, and my own learning history is actually quite agreeable."

Part of the evaluation of the exercise is to remind the tutors that the sibling position is *only one* of various factors which lead to the formation of patterns of behaviour and particular ways of looking at things. The imprint of a sibling position can also manifest itself in very different ways, depending on whether one is an only boy among girls or girl among brothers, whether one was a sickly child or particularly strong, whether one displayed certain family characteristics, etc. The development which, for example, an eldest child goes through, essentially depends on what progress the next-born makes. In reciprocal reactions, the children decide for themselves on their role-casting and positions, while the parents confirm or mitigate this process.



## 2. Seminar paper on procedures for securing understanding on the basis of pragma-linguistic discourse analysis according to Wunderlich (1976)

“Language barriers exist between people of different backgrounds of communication and experience; their verbal procedures are different, their social schemata of interpretation are different” (p. 373). “Communication between people with differing habits of communication always [contains] a certain potential for misunderstanding. (...) Through the application of procedures for securing understanding, they can avoid these misunderstandings or partly solve them” (pp. 374 ff).

Counselling is seen by Wunderlich as a schema of interaction that realizes procedures of securing understanding “such as confirmation, repetition, paraphrase, specification, summary, and reconfirmation” (p. 352) in varying degrees.

“General *structural* features of counselling are:

1. There is a more or less definite topic of counselling to be discussed ... in the session.
2. The counsellor is, at least for the topic of counselling, a specialized authority for the client. Both parties are aware of this. (...)
3. The initiative for the counselling session comes from the client (even when they are obliged to attend)...
4. The initiative for interaction can be left in certain circumstances to the counsellor. The initiative in determining a topic, however, again rests entirely with the client.
5. The counselling itself is ... by nature non-obligatory. (...)
6. Each session extensively uses procedures for securing understanding. (...) Each party can by means of their own utterances obtain signals of confirmation from the other party. In this respect, there is largely reciprocity between the parties. (...)
7. Due to the roles of client and counsellor, distinct phases arise in all counselling in which, in particular, the use of procedures for securing understanding is varyingly apportioned” (pp. 353-355).

Papers like these serve to provide insights into questions relevant to counselling. Theoretical insight, however, rarely leads to changed behaviour. It is therefore important that a step of practical experience be included.

## 3. Counselling demonstration and supervision followed by systematic evaluation

Counselling demonstrations before a group are a standard component of tutor training in counselling. In a session with one of the teamers, a trainee brings up a question concerning practical literacy work. The second teamer does not witness this. Afterwards, the second teamer conducts a supervision session with the first teamer in front of the group. The first teamer reviews the counselling session and points out his insecurities and questions in order to shed more light on the counselling activity through joint reflection with the supervisor. The counselling and supervision demonstrations have several functions:

- Those trainees not yet familiar with counselling can get a graphic picture of what it looks like.
- By observing what the teamers do, previously presented theoretical aspects can be better understood.
- The role of the counsellor becomes clear, as the counselling conduct of the first session becomes the topic of

counselling in the supervision.

- The identical sequence of events is witnessed by all the trainees, yet different individuals receive quite different impressions. Tutors realize that they perceive and interpret tentitiously against their own background of experience.
- The observed counselling sessions can become the topic of systematic analysis.

## 4. Concluding Remarks

The general purpose of tutor training in counselling is that literacy instructors are to acquire skills so they can assist the students of their courses in the personal development that accompanies the process of becoming literate. The essential aspect of the training concept described above is that the tutors are supposed to experience “in vivo” all these various forms of counselling. Only in this way can tutors assess the effectiveness of these forms.

The learning process in this kind of background-related tutor training is planned as an emotional-cognitive process: everything is mediated both by means of theoretical insight as well as by practical experience, and thus the technique can be transferred into practice. The experiences articulated during this process can in turn be taken into consideration for further research.

Within the context of tutor training in counselling, literacy instructors – because they first grasp various procedures for securing understanding theoretically and then actually experience how they work – come to understand why one should employ these procedures. We know from evaluations conducted after a certain lapse of time that literacy tutors often go beyond employing these techniques in counselling contexts; in fact, they apply them throughout the course, for example, when choosing jointly with students course contents and working methods.

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# Self-Awareness as a Prerequisite for Responsible Pedagogical Action

## Concepts for Counselling and Staff Training Developed in Literacy Work and Basic Education

*Elisabeth Fuchs-Brüninghoff*

“Today I know better what I am capable of. For a long time my course of studies in Educational Science seemed insignificant to me, I took my expert capabilities for granted. One consequence of this was that I tended to overestimate the qualifications staff possessed as I took for granted that certain specialist demands were fulfilled. Now I can more clearly judge my capabilities, both those as a pedagogue as well as my qualifications in dealing with the communication structure of the professional field. Through this I am more confident of myself. I am more independent of others and better protected against demanding too much of others.”<sup>1</sup>

“For my work in the course, it was of particular help that I could develop the awareness of my own behaviour in the course. The counselling sessions in Dorfweil on problems with certain types of participants were important. I felt that the counselling methods and the ways of seeing human learning which we worked out in the training session were of great value. Regular sessions on the learning taking place in my course led to many participants being able to assess and regard their state of learning and their strategies more independently. They now behave more cooperatively and more critically with one another.”<sup>2</sup>

“Of course there are problems, but I have a different attitude to them from the one I had previously. In the past problems were something which had to be got out of the way as quickly as possible, it was embarrassing that they existed at all, in fact they were an insult and as such designed to humiliate me. ‘It’s not professional not to have any problems, but to know where one can get help and to get this help.’ A wonderful sentence which was something I got out of the training session for myself.”<sup>3</sup>

Amongst others, one of the objectives of the specific training and counselling concept which has been developed and tried out at the Educational Services Centre of the German Adult Education Association is to develop awareness of one’s own capabilities, ways of behaviour and attitudes, for instance to problems, as mentioned in the preceding statements by participants in the training sessions. The concept has been worked out within the framework of two projects in literacy work and basic education and is now heavily in demand by staff in areas of adult education.

*1. How general phenomena of educational work in work with illiterates reflect or intensify each other and can lead to new searching and finding.*

Adult illiterates are largely people with a history of learning failure. In the actual work done in the course it soon becomes

clear that problems for new learning arise from this. For the staff this implies a search for suitable course concepts. Linguists, pedagogues, psychologists and others all brought their own specific viewpoints into the process of finding. In the course of this it became clear to those involved that there was more to it than a correct method for teaching written language. They saw themselves increasingly confronted with basic questions of learning and educational work. It became clear from work on the causal factors of illiteracy that a decisive element in the coming about of learning failure or in the success of learning lay in the self-image the learner had of him/herself. The logical consequence of this finding was that in order to make successful learning possible, the self-image of the participant and the connection between this and the coming about of the learning history<sup>4</sup> must be taken into consideration in literacy work.

These results from literacy work correspond to the anthropological requirements for learning formulated by Tietgens for general adult education.

“If learning is seen as the capability humans have of behaviour towards each other and thus being able to change this behaviour consciously and reasonably, and if communication is regarded as a medium for this, the image that the learner has of himself acquires a substantial weight. He should also be reflecting in this on how far this self-image is determined by outside images or how far the assumption of outside images in turn affects the self-image. (...) After all educational work is work on this self-image, if one assumes that this self-image experiences its self-assurance and its changes only in confrontation with the environment.”<sup>5</sup>

As common parlance puts it so well: The most difficult path is that from recognition to action. How much truth there is in this sentence can be seen from the lack of proven concepts in practical work in adult education which integrate “educational work as work on the self-image” into the concrete work of teaching. This integration has been successful in literacy work and basic education.

A concept has been developed on counselling<sup>6</sup> which has as its objective the building of a new learning ability amongst the participants which they can also assess realistically and, building up a lasting motivation for learning so that they become self-sufficient, independent learners. What is important here is realistic self-assessment, as both under-assessment and overassessment lead to new failure and discouragement. In this connection Dohmen talks of “mental basic education”.<sup>7</sup> What is particular in the counselling ap-

proach I present is the inclusion of childhood, the pre-school period, in the reflection on the learning history. This may surprise the reader and has been a battle-cry for many a critic, but has after all proven itself very well within the work itself. Without the confrontation with the basic learning problems experienced by participants in literacy courses we would not have been able to see with such clarity the significance of early experiences with learning for the behaviour and learning of adults.

The current learning situation of the course participants, the "result" of a long learning history, is frequently marked by contradictions. These contradictions are incomprehensible and "tantalising" at the same time. In order to understand them we have followed up the process of the coming about of the "results of learning history" in the counselling sessions, mostly in reverse chronological order. In this it becomes clear that real understanding is often only possible through the inclusion of certain childhood experiences. In this, elementary basic patterns of learning were revealed, which are contained in current behaviour as principles of effect but in no way correspond one to one. "The situation of coming about is understood more simply and more immediately than the more complex result. This is why the "original understanding" becomes the key to the understanding of the complexity".<sup>8</sup>

## *2. How new possibilities for staff action in the complexity of everyday professional life grow out of the work on basic patterns of behaviour.*

In analogy to the work with participants, staff training<sup>9</sup> also works along the following principle: the current complex ways of behaviour can be understood and, where applicable, changed, if the basic patterns in them are recognised and light thrown on the way these came about.<sup>10</sup>

In the early phase of his development people form their individual attitude patterns through evaluation of experiences. This is a genuine "creative achievement" as the people, objects, circumstances etc. which determine the world the child lives in are initially unfamiliar in their properties and functionality. They must be assessed, classified and functionalised by means of a personal judgment. In time the child develops his/her "subjective" perception, his/her opinion about him/herself, fellow-humans and the world. This process of primary opinion formation ends in a basic pattern of attitudes. This does become more differentiated in later life and is partially corrected but remains as a basic principle as long as the "self" is not "conscious" and corrected.

"We are self-determined by the sense which we give our experiences; this sense is however probably always faulty in some way when we make certain individual experiences the basis of our future life. The sense is not determined by a particular situation. We determine it ourselves by the sense which we give situations".<sup>11</sup> Adler sees here very clearly that there are "certain childhood situations, which frequently lead to heavily mistaken attributions of sense", for example to total learning failure. "Mistakes in the attribution of sense to life can only be erased if the situation in which the mistaken interpretation took place is reconsidered, the error recognised and the attitudinal scheme corrected. In rare cases the individual could perhaps through the consequences of his mistaken approach be forced to rethink the sense which he had given to life and he could be successful in bringing about changes through his own force."<sup>12</sup>

The coming about of a certain way of looking at things or understanding an interpretation also means looking at the "situation" more closely, i.e. the social environment, this being here closer – consisting of family and friends – as well as the extended – society – which in turn affects the closer and here allows certain "situations" to arise. The analysis and the understanding of the primary process of opinion formation, or, to put it another way, the coming about of self-images and images of people and the world, as a rule provides those concerned with an enormous relief because they can see that their ways of seeing things and interpretation of connections at that time and under those circumstances made sense to them personally. This understanding clears the way for the development of new or extended patterns of action or for the conscious coping with proven ones.

What does this all mean for the concrete training work with staff who are to be made capable of "educational work as work on the self-image"? They require theoretical knowledge, methodological tools and must know their own basic attitudinal patterns. To achieve this the learning process in person-related staff training is set out as an emotional-cognitive procedure, i.e. all things are conveyed through understanding as well as through experience. In order to make this procedure more comprehensible to the reader, I would like to clarify it through one example.

### *The Topic "The Group" in further Educational Training*

The topic "The Group" in staff training was chosen by the participants of the seminar themselves, because they worked with groups of various sorts (in courses, at work, in staff training sessions) and wanted to extend their competence in action. Some formulated particular questions such as: How can I design the initial phase differently, I always feel under enormous pressure at this point? If conflicts arise in the group, I often feel powerless and incapable of action – how do I get out of this? My groups usually end abruptly, because I have such difficulties dealing with the final phase, the various methodological steps that I have tried out have not achieved the effect described in the books.

In view of the principle "tracing basic patterns" all were set the task of answering the two questions: "I feel good in groups when ...." and "I don't feel good in groups when ...". It was left open to the individuals whether they wanted to see themselves as participants or as group leaders. In the second step the situation was to be portrayed in picture form. Oil crayons and drawing paper were available.

The "pictures" of the experiences in the groups were discussed, as far as each wanted, in small groups. In counselling sessions light can be thrown upon the earlier situations in which these points of view are familiar to me. As a rule it is the family. Sometimes members of the childhood family are even shown in the pictorial examples. The presentation of the individual steps of a counselling procedure such as this one would extend beyond the framework of this text. For this reason I would like at this point to allow a participant in the seminar to speak. This participant formulated the results she gained from this work as follows: "I felt great pressure as a leader in training sessions to be so much under the gaze of the participants. From experiences in my childhood, I drew the conclusion that it is better for me if I do not place myself so far into the foreground – then I am a more difficult target. (...) However as it belongs to the tasks of the leader to set

processes going, to introduce these, to show ways of doing things, summarising, analysing the group processes and guiding these, I always felt great tension. I had to work against my nature. I noticed the enormous effort but I couldn't explain it to myself."<sup>13</sup> Other components of the work in the seminar on the topic "The Group" were: how phases run in the group, possible intervention in certain situations, forms of feedback etc.

In conclusion, the seminar participants each formulated for themselves the points which they would pay particular attention to in the work with groups after the seminar was over. In this connection it is decisive that each really decided for him/herself what and how much s/he wants to see and change. This could be one single point, but just as well include a whole list of points. The point is to find one's own way.

To make clearer what the seminar participants were made aware of in the course of the work, i.e. what was transferred to their self-awareness, here is some subsequent feedback: "A further point was the challenge of rethinking my new function as leader, with all its consequences for this field of work and relationships to colleagues. In this connection it was essential for me to keep objective interests in view, to motivate and to learn to say no. I had to differentiate between working relationships and friendships and set myself more clearly against being dragged in and aversions. I found the counselling training helpful in order to clarify where I have to set my limits, where I can trust myself and what responsibility means to me."<sup>14</sup>

In summary, it can be said that in this sort of person-related staff training social and personal competence is acquired in dealing with oneself, with participants, colleagues, staff, superiors, groups etc. The clearer one's own self-awareness is, the less absolute are attitudes and the more differentiated is pedagogical action.

In conclusion, turning Dohmen's statement around that "functional illiteracy is a clear symbol for a deep and comprehensive educational crisis which presents a challenge for educational science, in particular for adult education"<sup>15</sup>, I would like to ask: Are then the concepts which have been developed in this area on "basic" questions concerning education, models which are the foundation for adult education in general?

#### Notes

- 1)-3) Extracts from personal evaluation reports by participants in the training series of the projects "Literacy work" and "Basic Education".
- 4) Learning history is here set on a par with life history. This use of the terms is analogous to Maurer's: "If one sees learning as the essence of the ability to change or the changeability of a person, then life history is primarily *learning history*" (Maurer 1981, p. 109) The use of this extended meaning for learning finds its expression in the choice of topics and methods as well as in the work with course participants and in staff training.
- 5) Tietgens 1986, p. 114

- 6) As a presentation of the corresponding concepts would extend beyond the framework of this text, I would like at this point merely to refer to relevant literature: Elisabeth Fuchs-Brüninghoff/Monika Pfirrmann (Eds.) 1988; Elisabeth Fuchs-Brüninghoff (Ed.) 1989
- 7) Dohmen 1990, p. 139
- 8) Dohmen 1990, p. 137
- 9) Further excursions on the coming about and transfer of this training concept can be found in: Fuchs-Brüninghoff (1987), Fuchs-Brüninghoff, Ed. (1989, p. 67-92)
- 10) cf. also Tymister 1990
- 11) Adler 1979, p. 21
- 12) Adler 1979, p. 20
- 13), 14) see note to 1)
- 15) Dohmen 1990, p. 126

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# What can Supervision Offer Adult Education? – A Form of Training with Varying Applicability

Elisabeth Fuchs-Brüninghoff

## 1. Preliminary Remarks

As a form of training in adult education supervision has gained increasingly in importance over the last few years. Its emergence cannot of course be viewed independently of structural changes in adult education.

As a result of developments in society such as the increasing use of technology, great changes in information and communication structures as well as growing unemployment or long-term unemployment, the face of adult education has slowly but steadily changed. Apart from the classic programmes offered by Volkshochschulen (public adult education institutions), represented by areas such as cultural education, languages, mathematics and science and technology, political education etc. one could speak of a second programme structure developing alongside. In this the concern is mainly with the ironing out of deficits in school-leaving and occupational qualifications as well as with elementary skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic. In these areas, the staff are firstly of a new type “full-time part-time” who because of their own (professional) unemployment have to earn their living. In these areas new programmes have been developed which can mostly be classified under the heading of “schemes”. Deviating from the mode of financing which has been usual in adult education for a number of years, new forms of financing have come about. These are linked to constantly changing conditions. They are sometimes very short-term so that now these schemes and other programmes exist alongside each other. For the participants in these areas, education has become a vital means of dealing with life.

Staff in adult education – teachers and planners – have found themselves more or less suddenly and with no preparation faced with the task of carrying out life and learning counselling as well as organizing and carrying out teaching programmes. It is therefore hardly surprising that very soon the first voices were demanding supervision, already a familiar instrument in social work up to then, as a necessary means of coping with the work. The “need for supervision or counselling” first became clear in the target group area, in time also in adult education in general. It was covered by various occupational groups: supervisors from the field of social work, psychologists, psycho-therapists and pedagogical/psychological counsellors.

I have consciously chosen the formulation “need for supervision or counselling”, because the question has still not been cleared for me as someone who has worked in adult education for a long time, as to what the best support is for an adult educator. Adult education is not social work. Adult education is not therapy. Adult education is far more a combination of teaching, counselling and organization, more and more frequently known as management. Adult education does not have the protective field, linked with a clear setting which therapy does. Adult education does not have the openness of social work. Adult education has the task of making particular

results, both personal and in substance, possible to the participants within a certain time span and a certain framework.

For me the questions posed as to whether the forms of supervision or counselling, which have been clearly proven in other areas can offer adult educators what they need to cope better with their specific working life, or whether adult education must develop its own or extended forms of support for itself. Nevertheless in the following I would like to examine the question of how far supervision or certain forms of supervision are suitable as instruments of training in adult education.

## 2. What is Supervision?

In the Federal Republic there are essentially two main fields of application for supervision:

1. as an *instrument of training and control* during social work studies, accompanying an additional training as a supervisor or counsellor, or in the final phase of training as therapist. As a rule this supervision is carried out by experienced colleagues who are approved by the training institution for this purpose as teaching supervisor, teaching counsellor or teaching analyst. Its objective is to give the trainee opportunities for reflection and it serves simultaneously as control of the process of learning. The supervisors are in this case a part of the system of training.

2. as an *instrument of counselling* for reflection on professional action, in particular in those fields of work where people work with people and the relationship becomes an instrument of work or where everyday work has a large cooperative share. The objectives of supervision in these areas are to enable the participants to understand the web of interaction and the structural connections in the field of work, especially to be able to recognise in problem or conflict situations what part they play personally in the constitution of such situations and what part others or institutional and social conditions play. Clearing up the situation in this way makes a realistic assessment of one's own room for action possible as well as the development of joint solutions. A prerequisite for this sort of counselling work is that the supervisors are themselves not a part of the system, i.e. they must come from outside as neutral persons. In the following only the second field of application is referred to.

Supervision as an instrument of counselling for reflection on professional action accompanies practice. Its general objectives are to enable the individual or a group to extend competence in action and possibilities for intervention and to improve the ability to communicate and cooperate.

A prerequisite for this form of work is the readiness of individuals to question their teaching, counselling, leadership or organisational style, to confess to difficulties and to reveal existing conflicts.

If this openness is lacking, then limits are set from the start to the supervision; this is especially the case when several colleagues from one institution take part in a group or where a team or the entire staff of an institution is concerned.

In every process of reflection there is one topic, personal concern of the individual through the topic and a relationship between the people concerned. Light can be thrown upon the interaction of these components in varying *forms* and with varying *methods*. Amongst the *forms* are individual, group and team supervision (or organisational counselling and institutional analysis. I will not go into these two forms as they make up a special form of supervision).

In individual supervision, the supervisee makes a "contract" with the supervisor on a regular number of supervision sessions spread over a certain length of time. In group supervision the supervisees come from various institutions from the same or different fields of work. There is also the same clear agreement of work between the supervisor and the group.

In team supervision, a fixed group of colleagues looks for one or two supervisors according to the size of the team. Team supervision differs clearly from normal group supervision, as here a fixed group of people is faced with one person from outside. In a team there are forms of interaction which all are familiar with and which are always also relevant to the work. Thus in team supervision there is a decisive additional topic which is the cooperation between the members of the team. Besides these clear-cut forms in practice there are frequently mixed forms, i.e. that a small team of two people takes part in a supervision group.

Above and beyond this, several colleagues could form a supervision group with colleagues from another institution. In mixed forms like this difficulties often come about with time. These arise from existing working relationships between individual members of the group. Each form offers certain possibilities but also has its limits (more on this in section 4).

The various *methods* the supervisor has for working on the structure – topic, personal concern, relationship – can be traced back to various concepts of supervision.

With these concepts of supervision, two general directions can firstly be differentiated between if origins are considered. One stream comes from the field of social work, the other from the field of psychology and therapy. Supervisors with a background in social work frequently stress that they give the here and now of the working situation with its institutional dimension a central position. They criticize the psychological-therapeutic tendency for placing the individual too much in the centre of things. The defenders of the latter tendency usually stress that their way of working – including biographical aspects – gives the supervisee the possibility of understanding his/her current behaviour from his/her own living and learning environment. This brings with it mental relief and makes changes in behaviour easier.

According to the respective theoretical background, supervision concepts differ in the image of humans they are based on and are more or less systemically thought out, i.e. the institutional and social conditions are also taken into account. Concrete practice in supervision shows that the way individual supervisors work often oversteps the directive boundaries. Each individual supervisor must be asked about his or her concept. A particular training does not by any means logically imply a particular way of working. The emphasis of one or other tendency should also always be seen against the background of market viewpoints. Adult education is crystal-

lizing more and more as a market for supervision, and certain groups consider themselves more suitable for this than others.<sup>1</sup>

For staff in adult education, it is often difficult to decide which offer is the right one for them as there are seldom opportunities for comparison. It is however already recognizable that colleagues who have *once* had bad experience with a supervisor often transfer these too quickly to supervision in general, as they are not familiar with the entire range of facets possessed by this working instrument. Above and beyond this it must be considered that not every supervision concept is suitable for each group of people at any given moment in time for every problem.

### 3. What are *the* Topics for Staff in Adult Education?

Before I proceed to the varying applicabilities of supervision, I would like to glance again at the topics and questions which particular affect adult educators. The following considerations have arisen against the background of my work in counselling in adult education over a period of many years. In the course of the work three instances have stood out for me at which topics part ways. These are the point in time, status and fields of work although there are numerous combinations of the three aspects. I would like in the following to make it easier for staff in adult education to decide whether their topic or question is relevant for supervision.

#### *Point in Time*

The *length of time in the profession* is extremely decisive for topics which concern staff in adult education. Those just starting work and "old hands" have, independently of their status, – teachers, full-time staff, heads of department – differing topics which are worthy of reflection.

The point in time at which someone needs support can be structured quite differently. For one it is a situation of *change* or *flux*, e.g. taking on of new tasks, acquisition of a new qualification, working with a different target group, change in status from teacher to full-time member of staff, from full-time teacher to head of department or similar in which orientation and position can be found more easily with help from outside. For another it is *continuity* and *routine* over a period of years which lead to fixed patterns of behaviour, lack of creativity or *being burnt out*. A reason for quiet reflection and taking balance and to develop new perspectives, directions and ways with support from outside.

According to the nature of the point in time, supervision can serve the development or the maintenance of professionalism, can lead to orientation and steadiness or can set something in movement.

#### *Status/Professional Position*

Further, topics relevant to supervision will be determined heavily by staff status – whether free-lance or full-time – security, insecurity – or rather the professional position, whether course tutor, someone employed short-time as part of a job creation scheme, further training teacher, full-time member of staff, administrative employee or head of department. Which activities from the range teaching, counselling, organizing, administrating or leading are in the foreground depends on the professional position or rather which activi-

ties are combined and in what proportions and whether with this problems of transfer, questions of organization, the confrontation of pedagogical and administrative or leadership tasks are in the centre of reflection. If there is – as is the case in larger adult education institutions and educational institutions – a distinctive hierarchical structure, further topics will arise in connection with staff and management leadership, delegation upwards or downwards, personnel responsibility etc. What all these activities have in common is that they are concerned with situations of communication. Success in work depends thus on the success of understanding. Understanding and misunderstanding will always be topics of supervision.

According to the type of position and the work done by the adult educators, the support must comprise varying matters. The range extends from personal counselling through transfer analysis and organisational counselling to institutional counselling. In this a particular form of support is not always linked to a particular professional position. It can well be the case that a transfer based on biographical factors lies behind a problem of leadership or that an administrative principle is behind the learning problems a participant has which cause the tutor so many headaches.

#### **Field of Work or Department**

The various fields of work or departments in adult education “produce” different problems which can be solved through external support.

A full-time staff member in the English department with 120 part-time teachers has different tasks from his colleague in Vocational Training who offers pre-qualifying measures with workshop practice for the long-term unemployed, where representatives from occupational groups like social workers or specialist teachers, craft masters and possibly also psychologists having to cooperate with each other. One would like possibly to put a new concept in foreign language teaching into practice which is being met with little support from teachers with 10 years experience, the other is confronted in his field with hefty conflicts among occupational groups in which differing social values for work are reflected amongst other things in the payment received by staff who do not want to accept this situation any longer. For both these the situations are critical and can certainly not be solved using the same pattern even with support from outside. The critical situation faced by the colleague from political education depends in certain cases on local politicians from one party not considering a particular course in his term plan as “politically supportable”, interfering in the planning autonomy through their demands after the course has been dropped and by means of specific press action exerting enormous pressure on the adult education institution. This can lead additionally to conflict between the head of department and staff.

The question posed here is whether staff in adult education can find the desired support in a correspondingly mixed supervision group independently of their topics, status and field of work and their experience with supervision or whether it would make more sense to look for a supervision group with certain points of similarity? A clear answer of yes or no cannot be given here. The answer depends far more on what is more important to the individual member of staff, i.e. everyone should ask before going into a supervision group: Do I want to meet colleagues who are in a similar position to me or would I rather meet people who work in different areas from

me and possibly also have a different status from me? Either can be fruitful for the work one does. What is decisive however is that one is aware of one’s own needs before going into a supervision group. Otherwise it can happen that it becomes clear to one or another person after a few sessions that what is going on in the group is exactly that he/she doesn’t want. Disappointment and frustration, possibly also the conclusion “Supervision is actually no use” are the results. What can be maintained against such considerations is that it does not depend on the similarity between fields of work or lack of this as to whether supervision is worthwhile or not. It is rather a problem of transfer whether someone can make deductions for his/her own work from recognitions gained from other cases. However from my many years’ experience in supervision I would still say that the criterion “field of work” plays a role in whether the supervisee is satisfied or not. It is especially relevant if the participants in a group have different experiences of supervision or none at all. “Newcomers to supervision” generally prefer homogeneous group because this makes their entry into this new form of thinking or the reflection on their own activity easier, whereas those with experience of supervision or experience in person-related further training value the variety of mixed groups.

## **4. Different Applicabilities of Supervision**

The difficulty of showing when and how supervision is suitable as a support for questions which arise in adult education is largely connected with the fact that, depending on the organisational form – individual, group or team supervision – the methodological procedure and the background theory changes the applicability. Added to this are the individual characteristics contributed by the person of the supervisor. In the following I will throw light on several aspects of supervision from my *perspective*<sup>2</sup>. I make no claims to totality.

### **4.1 Methodological Procedure**

Before I go into the individual forms of supervision and the specifics of these, I would like to outline the basics of the methodological procedure in supervision, as far as these can be generalized. A supervision session consists essentially of three phases:

1. Presentation of the problem/case report.
2. Assessment of what has been presented and understanding of the problem and the personal “participation” of the supervisee in the problem.
3. Working out of possibility for action and solution.<sup>3</sup>

A supervision session generally begins with the supervisee bringing in a problem or a question from his work. It could be that the supervisee says beforehand where he would like to place the main emphasis – on the relationship to a participant, colleague or superior, on his own methodological procedure in a counselling session, on institutional connections or on a personal problem which is presenting him/her with professional problems. It could also be that the main point of the problem only becomes clear during the course of the session. “Bringing in” a problem mostly takes place along the following lines. The supervisee (within arranged length of time) reports or presents his/her case without being interrupted by questions from the supervisor or from the group. S/he receives the opportunity of saying as much as s/he wants and in the way s/he wants. Through this, the supervisor gains a first impres-



sion from the picture that the supervisee has of e.g. his/her relationship to a colleague. When the report is finished, there are various possibilities for continuing the work. These may depend on whether the supervision is individual or in a group. The supervisor may give feedback on his first impressions or say which questions occurred to him during the course of the report, or, if a group is involved, a group session may ensue on the case in which the one who gave the presentation is merely a listener, or, the supervisor induces the members of the group to say what they have imagined during the course of the report. "The supervisee can sometimes perceive the messages more clearly that he has not heard or re-experience his feelings more clearly if he is confronted with many aspects of "the other" in imaginations. In this first phase, concern is with clarifying what has been experienced in the report which has been presented to the group. Experience is however not all there is to supervision, but at most a precondition for it." <sup>4</sup>

Sometimes this phase ends or goes over into the next phase with an understanding coming about between supervisee and supervisor (and group) on what the most important question in the whole presentation of the problem is for the supervisee and on which s/he would like to continue working. In the course of the process it may turn out that this is not the main point of the whole problem but is the first point the supervisee wants to have cleared up.

The second phase is concerned with interpreting what has been presented in order to understand the problem or to analyse the various factors constituting the problem in order to see how the supervisee is involved. Without this understanding no working out of the supervisee's room for action in the third phase can be possible. What however does "interpret" mean in this connection? "It means putting the "extended initial understanding" developed up to this point into a context which is meaningful for the one presenting the problem and for the group. The creative achievement of supervision work, for which the supervisor is responsible in the first place, is searching for and finding this connection." <sup>5</sup>

How the supervisor with the supervisee (and the group) finds this "meaningful" connection does not depend only on objective points of view, but essentially on the training the supervisor has had. The "school" in which the supervisor feels at home distinguishes his thought models and his view of man. The most well-known directions include psychoanalysis in its various forms, linked with the names Freud, Adler, Jung and Balint, group dynamics, Gestalt therapy, topic-centred interaction, organisational sociology, constructivism, social psychology, psychodrama etc.

This means that someone working in Freud's tradition will see a problematic relationship under the aspect of "transfer and retransfer", whereas an Adlerian will more likely recognise and throw light upon patterns acquired in childhood in the complex current patterns of behaviour and perception, and the Gestalt supervisor will make the supervisee have it out with his partner in the conflict by means of the "empty chair". The supervisor oriented towards psychodrama will have the conflict presented in the supervision acted out "dramatically" with other means and people. The group dynamist will possibly have the group experience various levels of the dynamic process in the course of which all participants are obliged to relate to their positions.

The third phase of the working out of possibilities for action and solution can also take place in different ways according to the direction the supervision adopts.

"For a supervision group with Balint's style it is the case that no-one will be dismissed with a pedagogical or psychological piece of advice on what he should do. Understanding the situative structure into which the tutor (supervisee) has entered is the only concern. No more but no less. The tutor (supervisee) can then "work out" according to his own judgment views on what seems to him to be an appropriate form of behaviour." <sup>6</sup>

"I then ask the group, and mostly only then, when the supervisee expressly wants this, what *each individual* would do if he were the one who had to do something. I likewise try to get the presenter to listen in a relaxed way to what the others would do without thinking immediately that he should do the same. It is only when he experiences the evidence for something, i.e. "Yes, exactly, that's what I can and will do" that he is capable of accepting "advice" and extending his ability to act." <sup>7</sup>

If, in the second phase, the supervisee has found the part s/he plays in the problem which has been presented and has understood the positive sense of his/her behaviour in other situations as well as understanding the mistaken shares and erroneous assumptions this contains for the present situation, then s/he can state the possibilities for change in the third phase and if desired, work out concrete steps of action. <sup>8</sup>

In common parlance, it is said that many roads lead to Rome. This could also be said for supervision, where everyone must decide for him/herself which road s/he wants to take, i.e. which supervision direction is the right one. This is easier said than done. First impressions of what the features of the individual directions in supervision are can be gained quite adequately from literature. Further impressions should be gained in concrete situations where decisions have to be made in which the possible supervisor or supervisors describe the direction they have been trained in and their way of working.

## 4.2 Forms of Organization and People Concerned

If the question is asked about the applicability of a supervision group, the question is also one of individual, group or team supervision. In particular with groups, the composition plays a not insignificant role.

### *Individual Supervision*

Staff in adult education often choose individual supervision, if there is no opportunity in their area for taking part in a group, or if someone prefers the individual situation for personal reasons. Usually in this case a year is chosen as the length of time for a series of sessions. The advantage of the individual situation is that the supervisee can ask his questions at each session, whereas in a group session only one or two people can bring in their questions at a time. The disadvantages of the individual situation are that certain ways of working where other members of the group could bring in their points of view are not possible. As well as this individual supervision is more expensive than participation in a group. Individual supervision can also be in the form of an individual session. In my experience this individual session takes place in addition to the group session, on the one hand sometimes for acute problems, and, on the other hand, individual sessions and short series are frequently arranged by staff members who have previously been in a supervision group or who

have known the supervisor for some time. Reasons for individual sessions of the second type are either situations where decisions have to be made or where difficulties have been building up for some time which the individual sees as having led to a dead end.

Example of an individual supervision <sup>9</sup>

"I've lost my balance."

A colleague from a medium-sized adult education institution rings me up and asks for an individual supervision session. She took part a long time ago in a supervision group I had over a period of several years. She describes her concern in the following way: "I have the impression that some things have got mixed up in my work. I know that I can organize my work well, but recently it's become more and more difficult to see my way through it and I don't enjoy it any more. I have the feeling that I have reached my limits. I've completely lost my balance."

At the beginning of the arranged session I ask Mrs W. to present to me once the situation she is in at the moment at work and if possible to name the problems. Her report is as follows: "You know the structure at our school through our supervision sessions. Actually nothing much has changed. However there has been some change in the staff mainly in the administrative sector, but we have also got a new full-time teacher. In any case, the atmosphere at work has got worse. Some of the "old" colleagues say that I have played a part in this, they say I've become too dismissive. I don't get on particularly well with the new colleague. He is very sensitive and quite helpless in some situations. It has already happened a few times that he hasn't done certain things properly, especially in connection with the city administration or the Employment Office. In the staff discussions we have had with the boss, he has just sat there helplessly and then the boss usually says "Mrs W., what about what Mr B. is doing, that's something you've done umpteen times. Can't you give him some help?" At first I found this okay and didn't mind doing it at all, after all, he was new. But now it happens more and more frequently that I have to do tricky jobs for him. I feel that he really relies on me. What annoys me is that I can't tell him that I don't think it's right. As well as which my own work is suffering because of this. I haven't got time for things that are important to me."

After this report I tell Mrs W what impression I have gained, firstly of her relationship to Mr B and secondly of her attitude to her work. I ask her first to listen to the pictures I have formed during her report and then afterwards to react. My picture of the relationship between Mrs W. and Mr B.: There is a link I cannot yet quite grasp between Mrs W. and Mr B. From earlier experience I know of Mrs W. that she can draw very clear limits. The adjective "helpless" stood out most for me in her description of Mr B. So I formulate it like this: "He is "helpless", without help, if you don't help him, no-one will. If you help him, you are important to him, for your boss, for the institution, as well as which you are a professional in the area where he needs help." I also noticed that Mrs W., who is otherwise very straightforward and direct in telling other people what she thinks, is inhibited in some way towards Mr B. This leads me to assume that either she has experienced people like Mr B. in other areas of life and has "learnt" this "inhibition" in other relationships, because it made sense in those relationships, or that she doesn't know people like Mr B. and doesn't possess the appropriate patterns of behaviour.

My impression of Mrs W.'s attitude to her work:

"You like doing your work and are involved in it. You place a

great deal of value on organizing your time and work well so that you have enough time for other areas of work which are particularly important for you. If your organization and balance are disturbed by others, you get annoyed just as you do in the case you have described. You cannot defend yourself, at least not in this particular case and let yourself be thrown off balance." After I have finished giving her my impressions, Mrs W. sits in thought. After a while, she says: "Your word play with "weight and balance" really affects me. If I continue it for myself, it means that there is something very weighty in this relationship with my colleague. If I find out what it is I should get a great deal further in my understanding of myself. It's been a long time since I found a situation such a burden and so difficult.

I would like to say on the first part of your feedback that your pointed description of the "helper role" startled me in this way: I am important when I help. I don't know if you can still remember that we got involved with the topic of "helping" previously. At that time I was of the opinion that if participants had a problem then I had to help them *straightaway* to find a solution. I got myself involved at the most impossible times and places in complicated "counselling situations". Since I have come to terms with my understanding of myself at great length and have learnt something about counselling, I haven't found myself in these "help situations" any more. I can't put my finger on it but helping my colleague is somehow at a different level to what helping the participants was then. When you mentioned my "inhibitions about saying what I think" I thought at first: It's not that! but the more I think about it, the more I come to the conclusion that it's true although at the moment I haven't got the faintest idea why."

After this first phase of reporting and feedback, I ask Mrs W. whether she can name the decisive point in the problem. After some consideration she says: "I think there are two things. Firstly, I have somewhat lost sight of my priorities in my work in adult education and at the institution, as well as which something makes me help my colleague B., something I don't understand but would like to." To make sure I understand I ask: "Do I understand properly – you see yourself in a conflict between responsible pedagogical action on the one hand and wanting to or having to help on the other?" She nods. I ask: "Which side shall we start from – understanding oneself or the blind spot?" To which she answers: "The blind spot is naturally the burning question. I even notice that my heart is beating slightly faster when I think about approaching it." Based on the background to this statement and my previous supervision experience with Mrs W., i.e. that she stays with the topic even when it is a burning one, I ask her the direct question: "What is important to you in your work?" Mrs W.: "Let me think for a moment – Well,

- I would like to do my work well, that is I have certain ideas about quality.
- I would like my work to do some good for the people for whom I do it, for it to have some effect.
- I would like to do something for others with others. I don't think it's right when everyone works on his own for himself.
- I see my work confirmed when the participants accept the programme.
- I value the many sides of my work. What I mean is the wide range from dealing with participants to dealing with those who provide the money, like the employment office. I like seeing that the money that I have got from the employment office for some measure I have developed and put into practice with qualified tutors provides participants with prospects for their life and work."

With reference to the problem that Mrs W. has, two points stand out clearly for me: 1. She likes working with others. 2. Representing the adult education institution to the outside is something she finds a stimulating task. This means that I can find direct points of approach in the aspects which Mrs W. finds important. I tell her that. She comments on this: "Points of approach like pivots! Of course, I didn't notice at first what was going on with Mr B. I can remember exactly when Mr B. started at the institution, I was pleased that I had a new colleague to work with and in such an important area as outside representation." I ask: "Do I understand what you have said to mean that beside the still unknown helping there is yet another connecting level, that of professional action?" Mrs W. says this is so.

Before I approach the topic of helping, I still want to know how looking after Mr B. has affected her work negatively.

Mrs W. explains that this is essentially a time problem. I still want to know what effect this has had. "I can tell you that, I have worked longer to do my work in the way I want." "And who paid for this?" I want to know. Mrs W.: "In time, my husband and my daughter started complaining more and more often. Firstly I was getting home later and later, and secondly, I was always in a really bad mood. Oh, something has just occurred to me: my colleagues in the administrative sector also had their share. I often didn't have any time for their questions. Hardly surprising that they say I've become "dismissive". Where I've often thought: "They must see that I can hardly see for work!"

I ask again: "If I have understood you properly, everyone possible has felt the pressure of the work pressure that you have been under through your support for Mr B., and only he has not noticed it?" Mrs W. on this: "That's right, or even worse, at first I had doubts about my organization of my work. It was only after a while that it dawned on me what was going on and only then did I notice that it was almost being taken for granted that I took over certain things for Mr B. – mostly outside representation." Mrs W. is quiet for a moment so I ask: "And when did you notice that you couldn't talk to Mr B. about possible changes?" "Not straight away" she answered. "At first I was glad that I had realized the situation that I was in. At that point I said to myself: "It will only be when you have reached your limits that you will see that you have to set others limits!" When I wanted to put this into practice, I noticed that something was holding me back. The I said to myself "You can't do this to him, he really can't help it and apart from that he is always so nice and friendly to you. He really doesn't want to exploit you." As well as this, I believe that poor outside representation in his department would be damaging to the whole institution and would also possibly have a negative effect on my department." My commentary is: "There we are again at the point of dual connection, helping and pedagogical responsibility. Could it be that in taking over the responsibility for the whole institution you are saving yourself the trouble of really looking to see whether Mr B. is really so helpless and whether he could perhaps learn certain things?" Mrs W.'s answer is: "I assume that's the case." I ask Mrs W. directly: "Do you know helpless people like this from other situations, perhaps from your childhood, or is his behaviour something completely new for you?"

Mrs W. answers: "It's hit me like a bolt from the blue. He's like my father. My father was also help-less in this way. In outside matters I was his prop. In return he was always particularly nice and kind to me and let me do things my brothers and sisters weren't allowed to do. Exactly, that's it! I never spoke to my father about it. It was an unspoken agreement. To say out loud that he couldn't do certain things would have been

betrayal." It takes a while before Mrs W. can grasp what she has realized. So I ask her: "Would you like to try to put the transfer of your experiences with your father to the situation with Mr B. into words or shall I do it?"

Mrs W. puts it this way: "The same sort of helplessness made me jump to it, the nice friendly manner confirmed that what I was doing was right, the unspoken agreement led to my inhibitions about saying anything *and* the two points which are important to me in my work "with others" and "outside representation" finalized the whole arrangement."

I ask Mrs W.: "And how do you feel knowing this?" She says: "Firstly I'm really relieved that the whole thing makes sense. Then I see it as a great weight off my mind that I can understand my inhibitions about talking to Mr B. because I was really annoyed with myself about this not-being-able-to-talk-to-him. I can still remember how I told myself off: "And you want to counsel people when you can't even talk to your colleague about the share of the work you do!" Now I can say: "With those experiences with my father behind me it's understandable."

In order to make clear whether understanding the entire connection is enough of a result for Mrs W., I ask her: "Mrs W., is this result enough for you or do you still have questions you would like answered or would you like to consider future steps you can take?" Her answer is: "That's enough for the moment. I can see what's going on now. It was a lot that had collected, I shall have to let it sink in. At the moment I'm quite optimistic about regaining my balance. And we talked in previous sessions about how I can put realizations into practice step by step. I don't think I need that today. If I can't manage at all, then I'll get in touch, that's enough reason for another session."

In this example of individual supervision as a single session the phases described in 4.1 of a supervision session are made concrete. As well as this it becomes clear from the example with Mrs W. that someone who has had experience with supervision can use this instrument at any time as support and achieve far-reaching results in a relatively short time.

If someone has very little experience of supervision, this process of realization takes much longer (cf. example of group supervision).

### **Group Supervision**

Group supervision is the most frequently occurring form of supervision in adult education. Ideally each person comes from a different institution, i.e. they do not have any concrete working relationship with each other. This makes it possible for the individual to speak very openly about his/her area of work and the people concerned. The topic of supervision is then always the work of one member of the group outside the group itself. The other members of the group can then give their impressions and images of this. As soon as two people come from one institution the situation in the group is changed, a different network of relationships exists than that between the other members of the group. Possibly the two colleagues have the same boss or they work with the same participants. This means that the way each sees the work of the other is that of someone involved in some way. As well as this there are sometimes reservations as far as reporting openly is concerned if two group members come from one institution. An additional possibility for them however is that they can work on problems of interaction which exist between them.

In what follows I would like to limit myself to the pure form of group supervision as different conditions affect the work with groups where several people come from one institution. These partly overlap those of team supervision.<sup>10</sup>

What is the function of the group in group supervision? Basically there are three different positions: 1. The supervisor can carry out an individual supervision with one supervisee in the presence of the group. The group members are then listeners and it is left up to them to draw conclusions from what they observe. 2. The supervisor can involve the group in certain phases of what is going on. In doing this, the supervisor structures the group process and if necessary protects the supervisee from over-reaction by the rest of the group. 3. The group takes over the function of the supervisor and leads as a group the session with the supervisee.<sup>11</sup>

Individual supervision within the group sometimes makes sense when a group is new and some members of the group are still very uncertain, otherwise it is not really ideal because the group remains almost without a function. The third form of group participation is problematic "because of the imbalance between one supervisee and many supervisors which can easily become a hunter-and-hunted situation."<sup>12</sup> The most frequently applied form in supervision practice is the second form in its various aspects.<sup>13</sup> What this is like in practice has already been described in the examples of the supervision phases.

### Example of a Group Supervision

"My Superior at the adult education institution doesn't see what I really do at work."

Before I go into the problem which Mr N. brought to the supervision group, I would like to describe the group briefly. It consists of six people, two men and four women. All of them work in the field of literacy and basic education. However they have different functions and training backgrounds: head of a project literacy/basic education (graduate in education), with a full-time contract after working for three years on a job creation scheme; educational worker in the field of literacy work (social educationalist), second year in the job creation scheme, responsible for initial counselling, social educational accompaniment, and tutor of two courses, will be unemployed again shortly; tutor (trained teacher for secondary schools with the subjects German and History), is tutor on a free-lance basis of two literacy courses and works in the field of leaving certificates for elementary school-leavers, "is waiting for" a job in a school; tutor (journalist), as well as other free-lance jobs works as tutor for one literacy and one basic education course; tutor (trained teacher for elementary school with the subjects German and Maths), is tutor on a free-lance basis for a literacy course and several language courses for migrants of German origin, mother of two small children, does not want a job in a school at present; head of department (graduate in education) at a medium-sized adult education institution, responsible for courses leading to the elementary school-leaving certificate and special programmes like literacy, does mostly initial counselling. The members of the group all work in different institutions.

They know each other from a regional working group, have made up the supervision group themselves and asked for me as the supervisor. Their respective institutions pay the supervision costs for each one of them. Only one tutor and the head of department have any previous experience of supervision or person-related training, this way of working is new to all the others.

When Mr N. brings in his problem I have been working for half a year with the group. They meet every three weeks for three hours. At the beginning of the session, in the phase where a topic is looked for, Mr N. registers his need for supervision with the following words: "If no-one else has anything, I've got a problem with my boss, he wants me to write a report for him on our literacy and basic education project but I don't see why at all." Mr N. is an educational member of staff at a large adult education institution in the field of literacy and basic education. He has a permanent contract and in the institution his function is known as "project leader". In the hierarchy he is placed beneath the head of the department "German for Germans". In Mr N.'s field there are two "job creation workers" and four free-lance tutors. He made the decision on filling the job creation jobs jointly with the head of department and the head of the institution. The choice and employment of tutors in his field is entirely his responsibility. When Mr N. was given the job as project leader in his institution, a new step in the hierarchy was created between the head of the department and the tutors. According to his contract of work, Mr N. is responsible for project leadership, concept development, initial counselling and looking after tutors.

Mr N.'s report goes as follows: "My boss doesn't see what I really do at work. He insists that I write a report on the work in my field. He says he needs this to be able to make clear to the employment office and politicians what is done at the institution. I think that's complete rubbish, as well as this I am overworked already. I haven't got any time to waste on things like that. The work with the participants is far more important to me. I have already spoken to my head of department and asked him to convince the boss to make do with an oral report in order to see what the state of work is. But he won't listen to my reasons. He leaves me in mid-air. As he's quite well in with the boss he could stand up for me but he's not interested in my field. As well as this, he always says he doesn't know what I'm getting at when I want to talk to him about matters in my field. Apparently I don't express myself clearly enough. I sometimes get the impression that he doesn't want to understand me so that he doesn't have to do anything for me. He probably even thinks it's a good thing if the boss puts me under pressure." Mr N. pauses. I'm not quite sure whether he's finished with what he wants to say. But Mr N. goes on: "And the worst is that the tutors and those in the job creation scheme jobs even think that a report like that might not be a bad thing at all. It could possibly even lead to better financial security. When I said that if they found the report so important then they could write it themselves, they looked at me stupidly and said: 'But that's your job, Bernd. You're the leader of the project here, as well as which you know about everything to do with this, we only know parts of the field.' When they said that to me I was flabbergasted and really disappointed. I had actually expected something different from them, but no, even they let me down. I always have to do everything myself. If I invite them to meetings, they tell me it's too much for them, that they have to give up their free time and that our meetings are often ineffective." After a short pause, Mr N. says: "Well, that was it for a start."

Now it's the group's turn. Usually I don't allow information questions to be asked of the one giving the report. This has two reasons: Firstly in this way the presenter could be made aware of possible communication problems which he has set off, and the group members are in a position to say what their first impressions are or to fill in any gaps with their own imagination and experiences. In the group discussion which follows on the case, the presenter has the role of listener. He

should signalize neither agreement nor rejection of what is said but can take notes for the next round when he can speak again.

I firstly ask the members of the group to give their first impressions but not any interpretations of this. The following feedback is given: "I see a whole load of problems in this case. If I was Bernd I wouldn't know at all where to begin." – "During the report I felt more and more paralyzed." – "I don't really know what Bernd is going on about. I've got a lot of questions." – "Bernd's problem has many sides for me. During the report I felt that they were looking at him from all sides." – "It's all too one-sided for me. I see Bernd "left alone" really big. All the other people concerned are not really clearly defined." Bernd listened carefully during the group session and made notes of a few points. I ask him if he can recognise himself in what has been said.

Bernd says the following: "I often feel I'm not understood. The image with many faces around me fits really well. Unlike Karin who said she saw me as really big, I feel really small, the others around me are enormous and as they don't understand me, I feel really alone."

It becomes clear to me from the feedback round and Bernd's reactions, that Bernd's problem with his boss is in the foreground, but behind it lies a very basic problem. This is making himself understood, being understood by others and understanding others. Bernd's problem is mainly a communication problem which is repeated at all levels (head of the institution, head of department, tutors). As far as this is concerned, the group understood straightaway what Bernd's real (most important) problem is. For this reason I decide on the following procedure. I ask Bernd if he agrees to the members of the group trying to interpret his problem in the next round. As he does agree, I ask the members of the group to say where they see Bernd's problem. The following collection of comments is made: "He doesn't ask enough, for instance he could ask his boss what the report should be like and when he should do it." – "He doesn't keep at something, for instance with his head of department – What has remained unclear? What didn't he understand? etc. Bernd is left with his assumptions. He doesn't clear up the situation." – "He doesn't say clearly what he wants. For example, he expects support from the tutors but doesn't demand this clearly and is then disappointed when he doesn't get it. However he then doesn't make this disappointment known." – "I think it is really difficult for Bernd to imagine what the others' position in each situation is." – "I feel that Bernd is a lone fighter."

While the group has been collecting their impressions, Bernd has been listening thoughtfully. It can be seen that it is working within him. After a while I ask him: "Would you like to say what has got across to you?" Bernd answers: "What I can see is, that I have problems at work with making myself understood and understanding others. I haven't seen this up to now. I felt that the others didn't want to understand me! I've never thought about my part in this. I've got a lot ahead of me." What has happened between Bernd and the group with guidance in the supervision group is what has failed in his work – a process of understanding.

I put this to the group. Bernd says what he thinks about this: "How come it has worked here when it's so difficult elsewhere?" I work out with the group the differences between the supervision situation and the work situation. The main difference is seen to be that the supervision group has the declared objective of understanding others, whereas at work there are other interests in the foreground (like for instance in Bernd's case getting a written report or not writing one). However in

the end it is mutual understanding which is required for agreeing with others when differing interests are at play. This is unless someone imposes their interests on others through a position of power without any real understanding taking place.

To make the whole thing more concrete, I ask the members of the group what they have done in order to understand Bernd. The following answers are given: "I tried to see with Bernd's eyes." – "I made an effort to take in alternately the various positions of those concerned." – "I did try to identify with Bernd but didn't succeed. His way of thinking is too unfamiliar to me." "I saw the whole situation analytically and asked myself what was actually going on here." – "In the first place I paid attention to the feelings Bernd's report gave me." – "I took over Bernd's position in my thoughts." Bernd is visibly affected by the statements made by the other members of the group. After a while he says: "It has just become clear to me that I find it incredibly difficult to put myself in someone else's shoes and to see things from his standpoint. If I could do that better, I probably wouldn't have these problems with my boss and so on."

In order to make sure for myself that I have understood Bernd correctly, I ask again: "Does that mean that in connection with this problem which you brought into the group, you have come to the conclusion that the main thing for you is to learn to see others' points of view, and that then your problems will more or less "sort themselves out", or to put it differently that you can afterwards solve your problems at work "yourself"?" Bernd agrees with me. So the solution to his problem is clear and further consideration is only needed as to which concrete steps are possible or make sense.

I suggest to Bernd and the group that we do a communication exercise on the topic of "Points of View" in the next supervision session. The idea for this suggestion came to me during the course of this session as "seeing things with others' eyes one-sided, mutual, taking on the point of view of the other" etc. were mentioned. Within person-related training, which I often carry out especially for the acquisition of competence in counselling, these exercises are a definite component of the programme.

As I am here in a supervision session and not in a training seminar for which I have prepared an exercise programme, I put this subject to the group. In the contract which I made with the group at the beginning of the supervision series there was no mention of possible exercises as part of the supervision. I therefore feel it is necessary that the members of the group can decide for themselves whether to agree to a change of this nature or not. The group agrees to my suggestion after a short discussion. We agree further to carry out supervision *discussions* with the group, deviating from the initial agreement, if I feel it would make sense to employ other media.

This example of group supervision shows that sometimes the result of a session can be seeing an existing problem more clearly. Bernd got much nearer to the solution of his problem in the following session through the various communication exercises. One of the exercises consisted of firstly individual members of the group and then Bernd too taking over the positions of the other people concerned (head of the institution, head of department "job-creation-staff" and tutors) and formulating how they saw the matter from their point of view. With this Bernd got quite a bit further at both levels of the problem. It was only months later that it came out in a session where I worked with Bernd on a different case that particular experiences in his learning history had led him to the conclu-

sion "Others let me down. I always have to do everything myself."

As well as this it should also be clear from the example which possibilities there are in working with a group: The members of the group can feel their way into the position of the one making the report. They can hear other interpretations of a situation. They can "relive" the situations and people described. Communication behaviour can be concretely experienced and practised.

To lead through into the topic of team supervision I would like in conclusion to present two positions from the literature. These give some indication of the limitations to and the overlapping between the two forms of supervision, group and team supervision.

"In group supervision the participants do not as a rule work alongside each other, whereas in team supervision they are in constant professional contact with each other. Various focal points in the subject-matter arise from this. In group supervision, the participants report on situations which have happened outside the group and which through the reports become a topic in the group. Whatever else happens in the group, the interaction between participants and leader only comes to the foreground insofar as it is necessary to contribute to understanding the case or in cases where the group cannot work because of internal tensions. However, the focus remains the case from outside. This is different in team supervision. Here there is always a double focus, the working relationship between the members of the team and the work, as it comes into the group through recounting."<sup>14</sup> Here Raguse describes the "classic setting" of group supervision.

In particular in adult education, where supervision is not yet very widespread, it is often difficult for staff to find a supervision group. Thus deviations from the classic setting are almost always the rule, e.g. in one region two members of staff from the medium-sized institution A with three members of staff from the small institution B come together in a supervision group which is then completed by a colleague from the small institution C. The single staff member from C is however friendly with a colleague from B. As well as this, their status is different and they work in different departments. One each of the members from A and B is also a member of a working group in the regional association etc.

Rappe-Giesecke takes this reality into consideration when she writes: "As group supervision often (...) does not take place in a classic setting (...), a number of **asymmetries arise in the relationships between the supervisees**. This undermines the constitutive equality of group supervision. Hierarchical differences, belonging to different professions, working relationships of some who belong to one organization and private contacts create differences between the supervisees who always present a potential topic. The asymmetries created through deviant settings should be principally capable of being made into a topic if this leads to tension in the group and obstructs work on the agreed topic"<sup>15</sup>. Dealing with these deviations from the setting adequately requires certain theoretical knowledge and practical procedure from the supervisors. The supervision concepts with which I am familiar offer various requirements for handling these deviations. It is possible that it is exactly at this point that there is a need for development of supervision concepts for adult education.

### **Team Supervision**

The difficulty in describing the working form of team supervision begins with the definition of the term team. In general team is understood to mean a dependent section of an entire organization which however makes a contract on its own with a supervisor. "In our opinion a team is an organisational form defined by collegiality and self-reliance with clear internally and externally visible divisions of work, authority and hierarchy."<sup>16</sup> In practice in adult education there are frequently large teams which are sub-divided into constantly changing smaller teams. This means concretely that all staff in a job preparation scheme or an intensive course in literacy see themselves as a large team. Within this large team there are then sometimes overlapping small teams. These either work together in team teaching or are jointly responsible for a particular group of participants. This means for the two "burning points" of supervision, cooperation and work with participants, that there are interactional relationships with varying degrees of intensity in the team, and it becomes clear in the discussion of cases that individual members of the team work with the same participants as the one giving the report, that is they have their own, possibly different, picture of the situation or relationship. This is a decisive factor for the participation of the group in case-related work. Under certain circumstances, a struggle for power can come about between colleagues about who is right. Or to put it differently: There can easily be an overlap in team supervision between case-related and cooperation-related work.

With the subject of cooperation concern is with "how the members of the team carry out their joint tasks. Cooperation can be divided into its individual sub-terms which at the same time present the basic themes of supervision. (...) These are: communication, group norms, leadership, roles, solution of problems, decisions, relationships outside".<sup>17</sup>

Outside relationships mean the relationship to other groups within a large institution as well as relationships to outside. Besides working on the topics mentioned, depending on training, the team supervisor can perceive unconscious group processes and make these accessible to the group in the form of interpretations.<sup>18</sup>

Team supervision in adult education can maintain or develop the ability to cooperate within the teams and intensify the work with participants.

## **5. What Supervision Does Not Offer**

Supervision is not a remedy for all the difficulties which can arise in everyday working life.

In particular, supervision does not offer *quick solutions*. In supervision *groups* as opposed to individual supervision the work often only gets going during the course of a year, as, especially with those who have no experience in confronting their own selves, a relatively long time is needed before they can adjust to the new ways of perception and working. Short periods between the group sessions at the beginning of a supervision group make the initiation into the new way of working easier but are not always possible for reasons of money and time.

Supervision does not replace specialist training. Deficits are always being made clear in the specialist area, e.g. in teaching methodology, office administration, working with new technology etc. through intensive reflection on action

and work. This is independent of the area the supervisees work in. Supervision can help the individual to recognise his/her needs more clearly, but these can only as a rule be fulfilled by the appropriate specialist programmes.

In teams, the call for supervision often only becomes heard when nothing else seems to work, when the fronts have hardened so much between individual sub-groups that some colleagues no longer speak to each other. In a case like this miracles are often expected from the supervisor. If he assesses the team situation correctly from the outset and rejects what is demanded of him as unrealistic, or recognizes in the first session that this form of work is not being approached openly enough and makes this into the topic, the relevant people often reject supervision in general as "useless psycho-stuff".

Supervision does not replace action of one's own. Sometimes as a supervisor one gains the impression that some supervisees expect that work which has been tiresome up to now will function independently because of their participation in a supervision group. It usually has a sobering effect on the supervisees when after the initial relief of realizing the relevance of the part they play in certain problem constellations in concrete practice, they also realize that the new or altered action first has to be practised in small steps and may not even then proceed forwards very quickly.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

Supervision as an instrument of work in its various forms offers many possibilities for training for adult educators. In my opinion, this statement can no longer be disputed. It must however be seen that supervision is not always supervision. This term covers a range of forms of counselling and reflection which all display specific applicabilities. These have been partly proven in other working areas apart from adult education. A one-to-one transfer of forms of supervision from other areas to adult education is not always a good idea, however proven these may be. I share Wolfgang Schmidbauer's opinion that there is no such thing as a "universal supervisor" for all occupational groups. In his opinion there should be "additional training for educators, social workers, educationalists, psychologists, doctors etc. which qualifies these people as supervisors in their respective basic professions".<sup>19</sup> Up to now there has been no supervision training for adult educators. In my opinion it is necessary for qualified adult education that more thought is given to whether adult education makes certain demands on supervision which cannot be fulfilled elsewhere. An intensive confrontation with this question or the effects of experience gained up to now could give adult educators more self-awareness, meaning more awareness for the competence and concepts they already have, but also for their deficits.

### Notes

- 1) A discussion as to the different directions supervision takes with regard to its applicability for certain occupational groups or areas of work has not so far taken place to a sufficient extent. This discussion is mostly carried out indirectly by means of brief remarks in publications or in lectures at specialist conferences. It is my impression that at present it is mainly the supervisors from the field of social work who, partly for reasons of professional policy, keep themselves apart from colleagues of the psychoanalytical school or classical concepts of counselling. I do not want to name examples here so as not to make this division into a "front". As a

representative of adult education, I would like to see more open discussion on the possibilities and limits of the various concepts of supervision in order through this to achieve a reasonable programme of supervision and counselling for adult education. The lack of (self-)awareness among adult educators leads in some places to hasty acceptance of available concepts. I do not find this unproblematic as through this more subjective defence rather than discussions as to content follows.

Beside the discussion on concepts there is also the topic "integration of methods – variety of methods". What is meant here is that supervisors from various schools also enjoy using effective methods from other concepts alongside the "classic methods" of their direction. This link is not always unproblematic because "the methodological divergencies extend into the realm of world views" (Richter, K., 1990, p.66) This means that there is also a need for discussion with regard to the topic of methods.

- 2) I feel the reference to "my perspective" is important, because it is my opinion that an absolutely neutral presentation of all the forms and schools of supervision is not possible. I have my learning history, my experience in adult education, a training in counselling using individual psychology with additional training in "other schools", and many years of supervision practice mainly with tutors and full-time teaching staff in adult education, but also with staff from social and school sectors as well as industry.
- 3) On the phases of supervision cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff 1990, p. 84ff; Raguse 1985, p. 6ff
- 4) Raguse 1985 p. 7
- 5) *ibid*
- 6) Mader 1990, p. 197
- 7) Raguse 1985, p. 8
- 8) cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff 1990, p. 85
- 9) As the author of this text I find myself in a difficult position. On the one hand I would like to give the reader a description of supervision that is as close to practice as possible, but on the other hand I am bound to silence as a supervisor. For reasons of discretion, I have therefore made certain changes in the presentation of the institutions concerned and the individuals in order to prevent a possible identification. This was done after speaking to those concerned.
- 10) On the subject of asymmetries in the relationship between members of a supervision group cf. Rappe-Giesecke 1990 a, p. 76, and 1990 b, p. 62ff
- 11) cf. Fuchs-Brüninghoff 1990, p. 89
- 12) Raguse 1985, p. 6
- 13) On the methodology of group supervision cf. Bausch 1985, p. 13ff, Kersting; Raguse 1985, p. 6ff
- 14) Raguse 1990, p. 38
- 15) Rappe-Giesecke 1990 a, p. 76
- 16) Berker/Jansen 1990, p. 83
- 17) Raguse 1990, p. 39
- 18) cf. on this particularly Raguse 1990, p. 43ff (psychoanalytical school) and Gfäller 1986, p. 69ff (group analysis after S.H. Foulkes)
- 19) Schmidbauer 1986, p. 46

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# Supervision from the Perspective of the Tutor as Supervisee

*Monika Pfirrmann*

For those who have been following the process of development and change which has been taking place in adult education institutions\* over the last few years will probably as far as the use of the term “tutor” is concerned, want to know more precisely which “type of tutor” is meant here. The term “tutor” can no longer mean a homogeneous group of people, but covers many different heterogeneously created working relationships, for instance free-lance staff who would otherwise be unemployed, free-lance staff who are studying for a second degree, staff on job-creation schemes, staff with limited contracts of one year who are then employed as lecturers etc. The part-time member of the teaching staff, i.e. someone who, besides a full-time job, also does parttime tutoring has – at least in the area of work with target groups – given way to a group of people who although they cannot be counted as full-time members of staff nonetheless are not included in the classical use of the term “part-time”. “The free-lance worker without a full-time job can be regarded as a new and independent type of tutor”.<sup>1</sup> The problems arising in the work in adult education institutions correspond to the range of aspects presented by this new type of staff member: the threat of unemployment, insecurity at work due to having various separate sources of income, work as a tutor at various institutions and in various schemes, involvement expected which extends beyond the hourly rate paid, entry qualification (teacher, social educationalist and so on) against current field of work (adult education), self-image and image held by others of the work as a tutor etc. etc.

It should be clear to many that the causes for these difficulties can by no means be found solely in the person of the tutor or in the institution itself. However it can occur that blame is laid on the tutors as they lack the necessary help in order to take in different and more differentiated points of view. How far supervision can be an instrument used to work on these problem areas in a productive way will be presented in what follows. This will be done with the help of concrete examples.

Tutor, Mrs M., 34 years old.

Mrs M. has been working for four years as a tutor at a small-town adult education institution on a free-lance basis. She works there on two different schemes. She teaches ten hours in a literacy course for German adults and five hours mathematics in a course leading to the elementary school-leaving certificate. Mrs M. is qualified as a teacher for (the equivalent of) secondary modern schools with the subjects biology and social studies. Because of the cuts in the employment of new teachers at the end of her teacher training she was obliged as an unemployed teacher to look for a different field of work. She heard about the possibility of working as a tutor in an adult education institution through friends and acquaintances. As Mrs M. only had slight experience as an unskilled

worker in several industrial concerns gained during her studies, she was quite pleased to be able to work in her field. She is gaining her first experiences of work in adult education at this institution.

She was introduced to the work and made familiar with it by her present colleague who has been working on this scheme for 6 years. By now she has come to terms with this field of work, enjoys the work, in particular she sees the work in the team and with the small groups of participants as very effective. In the first year and a half of her work, she had the opportunity of taking part in two training weekends for tutors in literacy courses. But since there have been no further programmes, although in her opinion these are very necessary precisely for those who have been working in the scheme for some time. She greatly regrets this lack as she profited a great deal from the two training sessions she attended.

Although she very much enjoys the two literacy courses, recently she has started brooding on things more frequently. Brooding about whether everything is perhaps too routine, for instance in team work – because otherwise where do the recent tensions come from? The relationship to the full-time member of staff is at present somewhat tense – they have again demanded some financial support for the scheme – but surely the disagreements in the team can't be put down to this, she thinks. Mrs M. has also realized that ideas for course work are not so forthcoming as they were a year ago, that some of the participants are even complaining that they have now had various texts to work on for the second time and are finding things increasingly boring. And then there is the participant P. who is a particular headache for her. She talks to her friends, acquaintances and colleagues about all these things but this doesn't really help her much. Her feelings of “being drained”, of “not really knowing where to go from here” are being reinforced by her work in the school-leaving certificate course. In contrast to the literacy course this is composed almost entirely of adolescents and young adults who have been sent by the employment office, completely lacking in motivation and frequently already “spoiled by schemes of one sort or another” and who would rather stop coming today than tomorrow. These are the people she is supposed to teach biology and social studies and to convey an awareness of politics and the environment. Mrs M. sometimes doesn't know how she is supposed to do this although she thinks that social studies and biology can be linked very well and this can be very exciting. Up to now she has also had good ideas. Various projects and excursions have been carried out, connected with practical discoveries and activities. But even so – things don't seem to work here any more. The team is being awkward, doesn't want to do the extra work that is necessary for projects like this, as free-lance workers don't get paid any more for additional effort. As well as this, the full-

time members of staff have also made it clear to her that their time is so taken up with organisational work that they have none left over for her “crazy” ideas and demands. Mrs M.’s bad feelings remain as they are. She continues doing her work conscientiously but has the occasional sneaky feeling that it might make more sense to look for another job.

Tutor Mr B., 37 years old.

For 2 years, Mr B. has been teaching in an intensive language course for refugees and also German in a course leading to the secondary school-leaving certificate in a city adult education institution. Up to a year ago, he was still busy with his dissertation in German Studies, so the flexibility of the work at the institution suited him very well. Here he could arrange his time to still have enough time for his dissertation. As well as this, he could collect experience in teaching German as well as in working with adults.

Mr B. is married. His daughter was born three months ago. Through this change in his family circumstances Mr B. has to contribute more to his family’s maintenance and feels that he needs to look for other sources of income. In view of this personal urgency he takes the opportunity to take on more courses. Time is no longer a problem as he has finished his dissertation. As an adult education institution in a smaller neighbouring town is looking for German teachers he has initially no further difficulties. Thus Mr B. teaches fifteen hours of German in an intensive language course and five hours of English in a course leading to the secondary school-leaving certificate at one institution and another ten hours of German in a special scheme for migrants of German origin at another institution. Through this division of work he belongs to three different teams and so must see that he coordinates the respective team meetings as well as possible. These team meetings are his only opportunity to meet his colleagues, to make organisational arrangements and to exchange views on content. As the meetings take place in the main building he can also use this opportunity to make photocopies. The fact that many of his colleagues work under similarly split conditions means that the absence rate at the regular team meetings is often quite high. It is not so easy to coordinate the different teaching activities at various places with different teams and participants. This situation is reflected in the team meetings. Quite a lot of time is spent on discussing the problems that this “split” work entails. Then there are also the participants who are often absent, the ones one has difficulties with, who don’t really want to understand what one is trying to teach them. After all this frustration has been poured out, it is established that there is no time left for further discussion, for organisational matters or even basic discussion of contents. These are then postponed to the next meeting and so on and so on. Mr B. leaves only a very few team meetings with a feeling of satisfaction.

### Supervision for tutors

The conditions described in the examples are in no way conducive to work which is effective and productive. Participants as well as tutors notice this fairly quickly. Neither Mrs M. nor Mr B. are content to see this situation at work as one which cannot be changed. Therefore both of them suggest to their institution that difficulties be eased with supervision. This requires first of all some discussion with the colleagues in the team and of course also with the full-time members of staff who are responsible. Against the background of the financial burden they are presented with, these are not very enthusi-

astic about this solution. The reactions in the teams are also not very encouraging. Some think that “something like this only rummages about in your mind”, others want to know first what supervision really is, what happens in supervision and what the individual tutor and work can get out of it.

The decision against this method of problem and conflict solution is often made through uncertainty about what supervision actually represents and how effective it can be for the work of the individual or for the institution.

For teaching work of quality in the field of further training for adults however, it does make sense that tutors who may be specialists as far as conveying information is concerned and who have the necessary methodological instruments at their disposal do gain their own experiences with “further education” and acquire additional competence in the dynamics of learning and group processes with adults. This demand gains particular significance against the background of the given objective of “participant-oriented adult education” and “the teaching of key qualifications”. If one looks at the programmes offered by adult education institutions today and the tasks for tutors in connection with this – especially in the work with target groups – the increasing demands for qualifications which tutors are confronted with become obvious.

“During this time it has been shown that the target group we are dealing with in our courses has become difficult rather than otherwise and that we are increasingly confronted with problems which have nothing to do with learning to read and write but which nonetheless can have a substantial effect on whether the process of learning is successful”.<sup>2</sup> Lack of perspective, disorientation, low estimation of one’s own person and discouragement as far as chances and opportunities in society are concerned: these are all problems with which tutors are increasingly confronted. Their own problems as far as a permanent contract of work is concerned only increases the difficulty of dealing with these problems in an objective fashion. As there is no special training for most areas of adult education, “the extent of further training becomes decisive for one’s suitability for work in adult education. With this the old principle gains a very concrete significance that no-one can exist in adult education who has not personally experienced what is demanded from adult learners”.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from supervision or person-related further training which other possibilities are available to tutors to gain this experience, to solve in a productive fashion the contradictions and difficulties which arise from the tensions of adult education? Or is the only possibility for staff to work themselves to the point of exhaustion and then be so drained that they look for a different better-paid job and it is merely accepted that with this, experienced and qualified staff are being lost?<sup>4</sup>

A programme of supervision for tutors serves not only the aspect of “help in developing and encouraging professional activity” but also “mental hygiene”. This means taking preventative measures against “being drained”. This seen not least of all from the point of view that prevention is cheaper than “cure”.

Using supervision in this sense, in gaining access, is probably more easily possible if one can take on the view that disturbances at work or in the course of work present a chance of reconsidering routine, encrusted patterns and what is no longer noticed and that mistakes should not be avoided but that in admitting and recognizing these, the chance exists for new changed action.

As the two case-studies presented show, adult education comprises far more than merely teaching activity. The spectrum of work is very wide so that the division of tasks often makes the part-time job of tutor into a full-time one. This is particularly the case with tutors working with the various fields of target groups. Demands such as counselling, teaching, planning, organizing are no longer only demands made of full-time staff.

Adult education as the conveying of orientation, skills and abilities, "adult education between school and social work", adult education as a mixture of teaching and counselling activity, all these statements make clear that the corresponding demands are made of staff at adult education institutions, that is of the tutors.

"What appears to be dialectic at the level of society is reflected in adult education, at the level of planning as well as at that of interaction. There are diverging tendencies which nonetheless must be brought together in social activity and there are contradictory demands which must be brought into agreement in professional activity".<sup>5</sup>

If one considers certain basic fields of conflict in work as a tutor such as the discrepancy between the training received and the work actually carried out, the necessity of reproduction and social status, the work in a team, the work with "problematic" target groups, dealing with the institutional network and the organisational consequences which result from this etc., then one must ask whether it is not precisely in the work as a tutor that these diverging tendencies and contradictory demands are reflected. Is it not precisely at this point that the meeting between institutional and organisational conflicts at work at their interpersonal and intrapersonal levels becomes particularly visible? The two examples presented show the range of this field of tension. If one observes this field of tension more closely, it becomes clear that a number of the problems listed result from the difficulties in understanding amongst those involved in the educational process in their different roles, whether they have chosen these themselves or had them determined from outside.

Supervision presents a possibility of throwing more light on this field of tension person-clientele-content-institution, of gaining more clarity on the role played and the significance of the various components which determine this field of tension and developing perspectives for action from these. For this it is necessary however to focus more closely on one's own person, to observe the institutional network, to see the intentions of the participants and to recognize the interplay between these factors.

Therefore supervision gains the function of extending one's view of oneself and self-development both for one's own self-perception as well as for one's own person in connection with the respective situation at work. The release of the problem and its analysis, for instance in a supervision group helps to make the various points of view clearer and thus makes a contribution to more understanding of or for people and/or situations. For frequently a question of method reveals itself on closer inspection as a participant's or even as a tutor's problem. As difficulties at work are usually connected to the person (see the examples presented) or insufficient "wrong" methods, supervision can contribute "to seeing" or clearing up which personal, institutional or group-specific parts there are.

In this those concerned are to be supported in finding their way or being put firstly on the right path, if appropriate, accompanying them a little way, and so giving them help in

orientation and stabilisation in order to find their own concept in educational work.<sup>6</sup>

If supervision is now spoken of as help towards professional action, what does this mean for the tutor's work, for the problems shown in the examples?

"As supervision is concerned with tutors lighting up blind spots in their self-perception and extending their competence in teaching and counselling, what is offered is precisely a form of counselling which takes into consideration the place of feelings in the teaching and learning process as well as cognitive insights. Those teaching who – within the framework of supervision – experience in their own learning process that teaching always takes place holistically are best qualified to organize an effective learning process for their participants".<sup>7</sup>

For the examples presented this can for instance mean:

- finding ways of better organizing and structuring team meetings
- gaining a clearer view of the work which one has done
- recognizing personal as well as institutional limits
- gaining insight in to one's own attitude to learning and to the various methods of teaching
- learning to deal with colleagues and superiors cooperatively etc.

However in order to reach this point, not only reflecting on one's own work, but also allowing strategies for action to arise from this reflection, it is necessary to observe one's own learning and teaching history as well as that of the participants, the institutional network and the components which determine the working field (of the tutor). The individuals working in the institution and the relationships arising from this work(together) largely determine the system. Everyone acts against the background of their own individual history in which the various components of social norms and the experience with institutions (school/profession etc.) are closely interwoven and from this a personal standpoint develops. Thus supervision – if it wants to set anything in motion – cannot exist without the inclusion of the person. Supervision throws light on connections, brings past and present into dialogue with each other in order to develop other new forms of action and so to contribute to an extension of the individual's competence in action. In doing this, supervision actually "only" fulfils the function of enlightenment. Enlightening precisely that which takes place – consciously and unconsciously – in these relationship structures and the "part" the supervisee plays in this. The aspect of change in supervision lies in this enlightenment and the conclusions the supervisee draw from this. Supervision does not reproduce a teacher-pupil relationship in the sense of "the supervisor knowing everything (better) – the supervisee nothing", but far more serves to support the supervisee's own activity and to reinforce this. The supervisee provides the contents, the supervisor the methodological instruments.

In what follows some insight will be given into how this "process of enlightenment" proceeds, what the possible contents of a supervision session can be. This will be done with the presentation of a supervision session as well as some background information. As the aspect of change contained in supervision also has its foundations in the process in the nature of supervision, i.e. that the factor of time plays a corresponding role, the information which extends beyond one session will serve to make clearer the "result" of supervision, i.e. the possibilities and limits of its possesses.

### **Supervision with Mr G.**

Mr G. has been teaching for four years in a course leading to the secondary school leaving certificate in the subjects Maths and English. Over the course of the last year increasing discontent has been expressed in the fortnightly team meetings over the constantly problematic group of people in this scheme. Statements like "I don't know what I have to do with the participants for them to learn something", or "I am not trained to cope with such difficult participants" could be heard at almost every meeting. Mr G. also expressed his dissatisfaction with the course work and says how the "latecomers" also throw everything into confusion and that because of them one always has to start again from the beginning. Due to several reports from one colleague about her positive experience with person-related training, the team decided to take advantage of supervision. After some negotiations with the superiors responsible, the arrangement was made that one of the two monthly team meetings would be given over to supervision. In one of these sessions Mr G.'s concern was dealt with.

#### ***"The participants in my maths course just can't stick to the times"***

In the supervision session Mr G. talks about what is to him an important issue, how the participants just can't stick to the times and how he really finally would like to do something about this problem. After he has presented several situations in lessons, it becomes clear that it is not only participants who come too late, but also that there is basically little adherence to times in general, which means for instance that too much time is always taken for the tasks, participants dawdle about and so on. As this is a very complex topic which often comes up particularly in schemes with unemployed young people, Mr G. is asked to present what is for him the most disturbing aspect and to use a particular case as an example to demonstrate this. Mr G. however finds it very difficult to concentrate on one aspect which is essential for him in the case he uses as an example. What happens is that the various "time problems" become mixed up again and again so that for the purposes of further work it is arranged that what should be dealt with is how he actually sees his own concern with time. Keeping to fixed times is something very important for him, he says, it means keeping to arrangements and has something to do with reliability for him. At this point it occurs to him that it has recently not been so easy for him to come on time to his lessons or to start teaching punctually. A few times he has had to wait in front of locked doors because the caretaker has forgotten to unlock the room, or he has arrived too late because there was once again a rush for the photocopier in the main building of the institution or he has been kept there to give some details of participant lists, contracts or similar. And the institution itself does not stick to arrangements. The contracts for free-lance work generally come only two months after the work has started, discussions with full-time colleagues were frequently cancelled without notice of this being given in time beforehand, there was always a search for rooms for team meetings or talks with participants. This "chaos" was gradually beginning to get on his nerves and he wondered why he should keep to arrangements if others didn't do this.

When it was brought to his attention that the two levels, personal and organization were very mixed up in his description and that concrete steps could only be worked out if Mr G.

would concentrate on one aspect of the problem, he decided to apply himself more to the personal part. He said that he felt personally under attack through the participants' behaviour, that he didn't see his teaching valued and felt he wasn't being taken seriously either by the participants or by the staff at the institution as a result of what he felt to be (time) arrangements which were not kept to.

With his agreement the others members of the group are included in the further analysis. In a first round they are asked to give their personal impressions of Mr G.'s description. In the second round they can make assumptions as to the causes and make suggestions as to initial changes. As M. G. is only a listener for this part he then has the chance of saying something or taking up certain aspects which seem useful to him for solving his problem. In further discussion with the supervisor those aspects are worked on which Mr G. sees as necessary for him to be taken more seriously and accepted in the future. In this it becomes clear to him that he will only then be taken seriously when he takes himself and his work seriously and accepts these himself and also tries to accept the others, participants and staff in their various ways, in their differences and to understand their own ways of "seeing and dealing with time". Differences can continue to exist, arrangements must only be made so that "chaos" does not arise.

The various ways of seeing things which Mr G.'s colleagues have of his presentation make it possible for him to see individual components in a different way from before, so that, for instance he does not take the participants' behaviour necessarily as a personal attack, but sees that it could be the expression of a need for attention or as an expression of their resistance to the "chaos" in the course. Before the concluding round for everyone, Mr G. formulates a few ideas for further steps he could take, for instance that he wants to discuss the topic of "coming late" with the participants, and that he would like to find another time to make photocopies, amongst other ideas.

In the last joint round it becomes clear that the topic which has been below the surface is also of interest to the other members of the team, that of the difficult "chaotic" working situation of tutors. It was therefore arranged that, as this was wanted, more time should be devoted to this theme complex in the next few supervision sessions.

In the following sessions, by means of working on various cases given as examples by the team members, the so-called chaos and confusion at work became more tangible and concrete for all concerned. It thus became possible for them in the course of time to recognise more clearly the various levels (personal/institutional/content), to separate these from one another and to name causal factors.

The following relevant points were given as those which they wanted to work further on (and to change):

- the tutor's person
- the course group/ the participants
- the team
- the organization of the scheme.

In the continuing step by step analysis of the factors listed, it was then possible for the supervisees to see clearly both the limits of supervision as well as experiencing the necessity of change "in small steps". Supervision can neither change anything in the status of the tutors nor have an influence on the superiors nor can it arrange for better financing for the scheme.

## Concluding Remark

The question “Does supervision makes sense for tutors?” which one may with reason assume is behind the title of this article “Supervision from the Perspective of the Tutor as Supervisee” can certainly be answered with yes as far as I am concerned and also from the perspective of the people named in the examples. This yes however does not apply to any sort or direction of supervision. It is linked to requirements and conditions, which are essentially provided by the working field of “adult education” and the specific demands made by this situation. In my opinion, supervision can only be welcomed if it is an open offer with the premises of voluntary participation and offers tutors the possibility of reflecting on their field of work, their own activity at work under the objective of “professional specialist identity, clarification of the specific understanding of the task, extension of competence in action and gaining greater security in action”. I would like to understand reflection in the sense of giving the tutor an opposite (mirror) which helps him to discover and make visible (reflect) the mistakes, difficulties and discords, to make a more differentiated observation possible and provide feedback to the person, field of work, adult education and its social connections.

How far tutors accept and share the view of supervision presented in this article and whether they want to or can take up an offer like this, depends not least of all on their special staff status and the attitude and support of their superiors. “According to surveys carried out up to now, a “broken tutor identity” must be spoken of in the case of free-lance staff. The teaching staff are as rule intrinsically motivated and identify themselves to a great extent with their task. They see in this great chances for personal development. Their interest is concentrated here on the teaching; initial difficulties are overcome on the basis of the acquisition of competence in adult education. This acquisition takes place during their work and mostly autodidactically. Their interest remains however limited to the didactic areas of decision (teaching techniques, choice of media etc.) An wider-ranging acquisition of knowledge covering more than adult education and work in adult education institutions rarely takes place. Connections between teaching activity and particular social events are only registered beside work, if at all. Their identity comes apart at the join between the immediate field of activity and this split continues up to the didactic areas of condition. Problems with reasons beyond the course itself are not covered by their own competent desires for action, but are seen as inhibiting work. Their removal is demanded of the institution as the one responsible for this”.<sup>8</sup>

It is demanded of the institution Volkshochschule, not only as the one responsible, to do something for its free-lance staff and also to give them help in ironing out the deficit in qualifications in adult education, in removing the difficulties which have arisen from the confrontation between institutional structures and individual circumstances and to see to it that the mentioned “broken tutor identity” is counteracted and that educational work is carried out by committed and motivated staff. The term “staff guidance” understood as “working with each other” and “guiding cooperation” takes on meaning against this entire background.

A programme of further training which takes this direction must, in doing this, contain parts related to topics as well as persons. The help given by “supervision” – a form of person-related training – makes, through reflection on professional work, possible the creation of links between person, content and form.

## \* Translator's Note

In the original German version, the term used is Volkshochschule. The Volkshochschulen are public non-profit-making adult education institutions, administered in several ways, for instance municipally or communally. Rather than use the German word throughout, I have simply referred to “the institution” or “the adult education institution”.

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# Modalities for the Practical Preparation and Carrying Out of Supervision

*Monika Pfirmann*

A first important step has been taken towards new perspectives for action and problem-solving strategies when the institution or its staff have recognised supervision as a specific method of counselling which serves to support practical professionals in doing their work more competently, and see supervision as professional further training in the form of practical guidance or counselling. Arriving at the practical carrying out of supervision and taking the second essential step means turning to the modalities of concrete preparation. Before the first meeting with the supervisor various points must be considered which can decisively influence the course and outcome of the supervision. Before one starts making efforts to find a supervisor certain questions must be cleared up beforehand which concern a) the (institutional) conditions prevailing and b) the supervisees (the group) and the supervisor.

Furthermore information should be collected beforehand on

- the organisational forms of supervision
- the procedure in supervision sessions
- the meaning and possibilities in the contracts.

## **Institutional Conditions**

One of the most important questions concerning supervision is usually the question of financing. As supervision is not regarded as a form of staff further training which is worthy of encouragement, financial support from the institution depends rather on the conviction of individual members of staff and their commitment to supervision. It is therefore at this point that many problems can already arise. These have sometimes led to the question of supervision being decided on negatively at this point for only this reason.

If initial difficulties arise at the point of whether the institution/ the employer is to take over the costs of the supervision, it should be considered whether some form of solution could be considered where the participants take on some of the costs themselves, where institution and supervisees contribute to the costs or, in the case of the group being made up of staff from various regional institutions, a form of financing could be considered which involves a number of institutions perhaps in cooperation. In order to be able to determine the financial framework as clearly as possible, information must definitely be collected as to the fees the supervisor expects as well as an initial decision made as to the prospective number of supervision sessions and with this the number of hours. In close connection with the question of payment is also the following question of whether the supervision is to take place inside or outside working hours and which possible extra costs may arise in connection with this, such as travelling expenses, overtime etc. as well as organisational problems such as that of substitution.

The question of where the supervision can take place should be cleared up before the first meeting with the supervisor and whether rooms are available at all at these times or whether it would be better to arrange the meetings outside the place of work. It should be noted here that the course of the supervision can be affected by the choice of rooms and these effects should not be underestimated. If, for instance, course rooms are used, certain supervisees can feel themselves put in the position of their own participants, if the rooms are used in rotation, this can lead to a feeling of being pushed about ("no-one has got room for us") and not-being-taken-seriously which can definitely be a reason for discontinuing the supervision.

## **Supervisees (Group) and Supervisor**

As far as the composition of the supervision group is concerned, it must firstly be cleared up which form of organization (see the section on "Organisational Forms of Supervision") seems appropriate for the respective problems to be dealt with. If the difficulties lie rather in the forms of communication within a team, then team supervision may be suitable. If perhaps individual members of staff from various departments or schemes would like to work on certain questions which concern other areas as well as their own, this would be possible in group supervision. If only one member of staff in an institution feels the need for supervision, participation in an external supervision covering more than just his/her area of work or individual supervision may be possible. When after relevant information or counselling by persons experienced in supervision the decision has been made for one form or another, for instance for group supervision then, if appropriate, the question must be answered whether it seems to make sense that the head of department as superior who has already expressed his interest should take part in the supervision. It should be clear to the members of the group that the participation of a superior or of hierarchical groups at all can have an effect on the topics dealt with in the supervision as well as on its procedure. However, whether this is positive or negative definitely depends on the people concerned and especially on the questions to be dealt with.

Before the first discussion with the supervisor the group or the individual should be able to formulate their interests, objectives and expectations of the supervisor and the supervision in a relevant way as well as have an idea of the times of and intervals between the sessions. The clearer and more definite the position of the supervisees is, the easier the process of selection of the supervisor and the discussion of the contract will be and the more clearly decisions can be made (see section on "Contracts").

The first meeting with the supervisor is concerned with negotiating the working conditions, forming impressions of

each other and of course finding out more about the supervisor and his way of work. It can be expected of the supervisor that he makes his position clear on the following points or gives information on these:

- the theoretical background to his work,
- the ideas and expectations the supervisor has of this particular working situation (even supervisors are not neutral and unbiased),
- his knowledge about the supervisee's area of work,
- the methods he does use.

In order to gain as complete and tangible a picture of the theoretical background to the supervision offered the following topics should be the subject of the first discussion: the human image of the underlying psychology, the meaning of equality and voluntarism as well as how resistance is dealt with. The supervisor's presentation of for instance how he deals with resistance makes clear whether the dominating view is one where the supervisees' resistance is made into an object of analysis without gaining their permission for this or whether personal limits and the corresponding assurance of these is accepted of the supervisee.<sup>1</sup>

### The Organisational Forms of Supervision

Supervision can be carried out as individual, team or group supervision. The form chosen depends on the institutional conditions prevailing as well as on the questions to be coped with. Individual supervision is usually used as a training or further training reflection or as an addition to group supervision in "emergencies". In group supervision – probably the most frequently found and most necessary form in adult education – as a rule three to seven people from various institutions or schemes meet at regular intervals of two to four weeks for a three to four hour session. The topics which make up the content of the respective sessions are the problems or questions brought in by the participants. There are once again various ways of working on the problems in this group. The first is individual supervision in the presence of the members of the group, who are in this case merely listeners. The conclusions they draw (for themselves) from what is presented are left up to them. The second possibility consists of connecting individual supervision and subsequently including the group. In this case the structuring of the group process is left up to the supervisor in order to protect the supervisee from a possible over-reaction on the part of the group. The participation of the group usually makes it possible to get to know various ways of looking at things and ways of dealing with the situation presented. The supervisee can then choose the one most suitable for him. As a third possibility the group can take over the function of the supervisor. This working form however requires that the members of the group have extremely good and long experience of supervision or if possible have carried out counselling or supervision themselves. This because the danger of group transfer and little structuring of the procedure is very high.

Team supervision is in a way a special form of group supervision which means the supervisees have a common field of work, work in the same institution, with the same superior and perhaps with the same participants. As in supervision there are other pictures of the problem presented by the supervisee which are given by the colleagues and are sometimes contrary to the one presented, team supervision presents a more complex field of work for the supervisor than is the case with group supervision. Working on the network of relationships in the team is an essential component of team supervision.<sup>2</sup>

### The Procedure in Supervision Sessions

As well as the knowledge of the various forms of supervision, information about the procedure in the sessions should also be considered as important as a criterion for the choice of supervisor.

A division into three phases – presentation of the problem, work on the problem with relation to the personal part played and the development of steps for action or solution – is usually chosen. What actually happens in these phases, at which points something becomes clear of the underlying psychology, the thought models or the human image is already described in detail in the contribution "What can Supervision Offer Adult Education? – A Form of Training with Varying Applicabilities" by Fuchs-Brüninghoff so that more detail is not necessary here. Reference is made to the above-mentioned contribution.

It should however be mentioned that supervision represents a method and an instrument which helps to reinforce the supervisee's own strengths and activities as well as the potential for self-help. The giving of advice in supervision sessions contradicts its objectives and is therefore misplaced.

### Contracts

As well as the determining factors already mentioned, the aspect of the regulation of working together should not be underestimated for the course of supervision and also for its success. Regulating the future cooperation together through contracts (explicit voluntary agreements between supervisor and supervisee/counsellor and client) is an advantage for both sides, because through this the whole thing is provided with a framework which not only limits but also structures what is happening and makes the essentials clear. There is therefore more security and clarity for all concerned.

- Contracts give those concerned some security of action insofar as they help to make critical points of the working relationship foreseeable and therefore usable. These are for instance the regulating of the extent of intimacy and openness in the sessions, the right of the counsellor to intervene and confront with interpretation – the right of the client to reject this offer etc.
- Contracts lay open the possibilities the client has of intervening (and thus make it more difficult for him to withdraw secretly from the work).
- Contracts thematise the difficulty existing for many clients which is making decisions and taking the responsibility for their outcome (actively) instead of behaving according to the usual patterns, letting decisions be taken away from them, and so being able to keep a distance from the outcome. The – changing – way the client deals with contracts is therefore one of the indications of his personal development within the counselling relationship.<sup>3</sup>

The framework agreed upon must however be open to changes in the conditions and situations during the course of the supervision. This means perceiving the way the supervisees develop, the emergence of new learning objectives, the failure of the methodological approaches applied up to that time or even disturbances in the supervision relationships, laying these open and developing new arrangements from these. This is possible through a constant reflection on the process in the form of feedback and interim evaluations/stocktaking sessions.

## “Stumbling-blocks” in the Practical Preparation and Carrying Out of Supervision

The modalities presented in the sections up to now on the preparation and carrying out of supervision make no claims to entirety. Nor is it claimed that in keeping to these no further difficulties will arise at all. They are seen rather as an orientation or guideline for the field of “psycho-programmes” which is not always a clearly-defined one. As unforeseen stumbling-blocks can occur even if these orientation aids are taken into consideration, in what follows a few possible critical points are mentioned.

In the phase where the supervision group is being composed, where the group is being made up, where the question is being considered whether only staff from one particular specialist area or one department can take part or whether staff from different field of work should participate, whether the offer of supervision is only for staff of one particular institution or for more than one institution, whether supervision is wanted for various staff members of the institution or only for staff of one team, decisions are made which can have lasting consequences for the process of supervision. For instance, the fact that two members of staff from two competing institutions meet each other can lead to these two expending most of their energy in this competition, involving the other members of the group in their difficulties by making them into referees or trying to get them to fight on one side or another. It can also happen that neither of the two possesses the courage to talk about deeper problems because they are afraid (rightly) that this “information” will be exploited.

*Who* chooses the supervisor will also influence the development of the supervision. Whether the choice represents the result of a joint decision by the group or whether the superior makes the decision, this happens against the background of differing interests and objectives and will therefore in this sense also have corresponding effects as a consequence. Disturbances in the course of the supervision can be expected both when taking part in the supervision sessions is regarded (by the superior or the supervisor) as an obligatory task. In both cases heavy but probably veiled forms of resistance amongst the participants can be foreseen. Similar reactions can be expected when the *constancy of the external conditions* is not guaranteed. Particularly in group work in the course of which things are spoken of which can cause unrest and feelings of insecurity, the need for security and continuity must be taken into account.<sup>4</sup>

If one considers supervision once again from the aspect of these possible points of conflict, it becomes clear that the preliminary discussion plays a central role in the course of the supervision. Existing ideas of supervision and the expecta-

tions linked to these can be expressed at this stage, misunderstandings about the content of the work cleared up or preliminary work done to make misunderstanding less likely. The spoken arrangements made before the supervision begins and their binding force make working and staying together possible and encourage it as well as having a similar effect on the working atmosphere. Clear arrangements and the equal consideration of the various interests of all concerned with fair rules create a basis for trust and lay the first important foundations for further cooperation. Not giving this initial phase enough place, putting it under pressures (of time) would mean pre-programming disturbances and resistance.

### Notes

- 1) “In dealing with resistance, working with it, interpreting it and dissolving it, the success of the therapeutic relationship is proven. Resistance work is, according to the opinion of numerous authors, decisive for the success or failure of the treatment. However, the theoretical working out of the concept of resistance is far from uniform, the handling of resistance phenomena is in fact extremely divergent. Where unity dominates in the schools of deep psychology in dealing with transfer and counter-transfer, the differences show up clearly where resistance concepts are concerned.” (Petzold, Hilarion: *Konzepte des Widerstandes in der Psychotherapie* (Concepts of Resistance in Psychotherapy) in: Petzold, Hilarion: *Widerstand. Ein strittiges Konzept in der Psychotherapie* (Resistance. A Controversial Concept in Psychotherapy), Paderborn, 1985, p. 7.)
- 2) cf. on this Fuchs-Brüninghoff, Elisabeth: “Supervision” als individual-psychologisch orientierte Mitarbeiterberatung in der Erwachsenenbildung (“Supervision” as Staff Training oriented towards Individual Psychology in Adult Education) in: Tymister, Hans-Josef (Ed.): *Individualpsychologisch-pädagogische Beratung* (Individual-psychological-pedagogical Counselling), Munich, 1990.
- 3) cf. Boettcher-Lupges, Roswitha: *Der Lehrer als Berater? (The Teacher as Counsellor?)* in: Schmidt, Rainer: *Die Individualpsychologie Alfred Adlers* (The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler), Frankfurt/M., 1989.
- 4) cf. Roth, Jörg Kaspar: *Hilfe für Helfer: Balintgruppe* (Help for Helpers: Balint Group), Munich, 1984, pp. 93-97.

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