The Development of Training Strategies for Community Organisers in South Africa: An Overview of the Process

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of a training programme for people with no formal training in community work. A programme which would equip them for work in troubled townships and 'homelands' in South Africa. An attempt was made to develop a programme particularly relevant to the needs of South Africa, with emphasis on personal growth and participation, and on a problem posing and problem management approach. Details of some of the actual techniques and strategies used are given, with explanations of the underlying assumptions made by the training designers. The paper ends with a summary of the learning gained from the experience of developing the training programme.

Introduction

The writers first became involved in training community organisers when the International Committee of the Red Cross entered the arena of conflict in South Africa at the beginning of 1986. There was a need to develop training strategies for people who had no formal training in community work, to equip them to render service in the troubled townships. The aim was to empower them to work effectively in conflict-torn communities which have few resources and services, where there is poverty, unemployment, inadequate training and education, lack of housing and forced removals, together with a political ideology which compounded these problems.

Later, the same basic methodology was adapted to devise a training programme for community leaders in a church community of a Witbank township, community leaders who were selected to train others to promote family life under the auspices of the South African Catholic Bishop's Conference. The community worker

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employed by the Bishops' Conference, who was also a trainer on the Red Cross programme, used the programme developed for the Witbank diocese for the promotion of family life in Marianhill, Natal. The programme culminated in the production of a manual on "Preparation for Marriage".

Recently the Welfare Department of the tiny homeland of Kwandebele approached the Department of Social Work at Unisa with a request to train their social workers and supervisors in specific community skills. After a visit to Kwandebele by lecturers of the department, to listen to the expressed needs of the workers, a programme was drawn up, following the broad principles of the original Red Cross programme. At the time of writing, only the first three-day workshop, encompassing material on human relations and basic community work skills, had been held. The feedback from and evaluation by participants was very positive, and two more workshops geared to their specific needs, namely supervision and groupwork, are planned for 1991.

Because much has been written about the futility of using First World models in Third World situations (Korten,1980; Prins,1985; Guitteriez,1985), difficulty was experienced in finding an appropriate training model. Time constraints, when the Red Cross programme was initiated, did not allow for a review of the work done in Third World situations elsewhere in the world. Initially the writers tried to adapt programmes successful in academic and clinical environments. These were primarily Egan's training as treatment model (Egan, 1982) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which could serve as a guide to assessing the needs of communities. At a later stage, after reflecting on the partial failure to meet the needs of the participants, as well as the organisation, in the first training programme, the writers drew on Korten's (1980) learning process approach.

One of Korten's most valuable concepts was that of "embracing error". Simply stated, this means using error as useful data to be analysed and utilised as a basis for future planning and training. Thus, for example, we originally used empathy training by means of role plays in the same way as we do skills training with social workers. This was too unfamiliar for our Red Cross trainees who often seemed immobilised by having to take the roles of 'client' and 'counsellor' in front of a group. We learnt to place our trainees in situations which were highly participative as a first step in understanding a concept such as empathy. The situation could, for instance, be responding to a dramatised guided fantasy of a real situation with which they could identify. We not only 'embraced error' ourselves, but we highlighted for the trainees how they could embrace error in working with their communities. **Training for Transformation** (Hope and Timmel, 1984) provided a valuable source of training material for subsequent training programmes. This article is an attempt to share some of the experiences and learnings derived from the dialectic between theory and practice during the ongoing process of developing training strategies.

The beginning

Our decision to use Egan was based on the following:
* It was, in our experience, the least culture specific helping model.
* It was a flexible and eclectic model providing a framework which can systematically order a wide variety of strategies and techniques aimed at solving/managing problems.
* Whatever the community organisers acquired in knowledge and skills could be used and developed further in community work.
* This model, which focuses on experiential learning and training as treatment, leads to personal growth. Egan stresses that effective helpers earn the right to promote growth in others by striving to live fully and creatively themselves (1982: 26-28,175).

Egan describes his model as being a problem management approach where helping is collaborative, and helpers share skills and information as part of the process of empowering clients. To illustrate, an exercise used to establish an atmosphere of trust in the training group could, in turn, be used by the trainees when working with groups in their communities.

In the first training course, theory input was alternated with exercises which helped participants internalise the learning. The emphasis was on training people to become active listeners and to develop empathy. This was to enable community organisers to develop relationships based on respect for and appreciation of the frames of reference of others. The writers believed that this fundamental attitude was vital preparation for entry into a community.

Personal growth as preparation for entry into a community

The writers began from the premise that a central concept of community work is a recognition of the needs of the community, rather than with helping programmes imposed by outsiders and experts with different value orientations. Being open to the needs of others requires a level of selfawareness which prevents the confusion of the worker's needs and those of others.

The most important notion abstracted from Egan was that of "training as treatment". This implies a dual process, the first being personal growth, and the second, development of skills. Every experiential activity hinges on the experiences and events in the lives of the trainees. It is in large part this focus which promotes a purposive development of selfawareness. In terms of selected experiences the participants explore 'what do I know, what do I understand, what do I value, what skills do I possess, or can I develop further, what new skills do I need which will be of use in helping my community work with me in striving for a better quality

of life?' As the exploration of self and resources progresses, every stage is matched with the appropriate skill. An exploration of this process includes looking at the influences which have shaped the trainee's life, current situations and hopes and aspirations for the future. All this is symbolised in an exercise known as 'The Tree of Life' (Hope and Timmel, Book 2, 1984). Each participant draws his/her tree, where the roots represent formative influences from the past, the trunk represents current life situations, and the fruits are seen as achievements, while the buds represent future hopes and aspirations.

This exercise is done in dyads, and in addition to selfexploration, the partners also gain experience in listening and responding to each other. In the large group discussion which follows, many experiences of the various dyads are shared. This leads to the discovery by the participants of both universal and unique characteristics in each trainee's life. What the trainees are also engaged in is the process of abstraction, a skill which is encouraged throughout the training. In a way they are beginning to formulate their own theory. In one of the Witbank groups, where religion was given as a formative influence, the trainees explored conflicts arising between traditional belief systems and Western values, and the implications this might hold for the community.

At a later stage some of the trainees may enact short scenes drawing on situations with which they are familiar. Each situation illustrates a different communication style, ranging from poor to good communication. The group observes and comments afterwards, listing the qualities and behaviours which enhance or hinder the helping process. The group summarises the learning, and the facilitators give additional input which consolidates and expands on the discoveries of the participants.

After the theory input, the participants do roleplays where the issues discussed and explored may be drawn from the Tree of Life exercise. Observers from each small group and the facilitators comment on the use of communication skills. The whole process is like a spiral which encompasses activity-discussion-abstraction-theory-practice-activity, and so on. Each successive loop integrates all those that have preceded it.

This process can be illustrated briefly by describing a recent workshop for participants coming from different parts of Southern Africa. (They had participated in workshops prior to this one.)

Activity. The opening activity was: Draw yourself, or a symbol representing yourself, which tells how you are feeling today. The participants placed their drawings on a map of South Africa showing where they came from. The symbols showed a lot of pain. For instance, there was a caged bird, a bird with clipped wings, a river dammed up with rocks, hands tied, a tree without roots, where roots represented values and where the trainee

expected herself and her children nesting in the tree to be blown over in the next storm.

Discussion. The discussion which ensued picked up on all the feelings of pain and helplessness and the experiences and events connected with these.

Abstraction. The common themes were highlighted. They were violence, fears for survival, obstacles to peace and happiness, and erosion of values.

Theory. The theory expanded on the sources of violence and the difficulty in retaining core values in the face of an increasingly hostile and frightening environment.

Activity. An exercise was given where each participant drew, then discussed with a partner, their Paths of Life. The Path of Life exercise shows all the obstacles, for example truncated education, preventing partic'pants from fulfilling their potential, as well as their joys and achievements.

One of the explorations which led to a tentative theory in this exercise was the meaning of land to an African. It is regarded as more than private possession of property. It is actually a connectedness with country and community.

The process of planning a project as preparation for work with the community

In the first few workshops of the Red Cross programme, there was a fragmented approach to teaching community work skills. Different aspects of community work were dealt with by trainers who were not part of the planning team. The outcome was a compartmentalisation of knowledge and skills. For instance, recruiting volunteers might be presented at a time to suit the trainer, rather than because it fitted logically into the process.

In the fourth training workshop all the trainers formed part of the planning team. A more holistic approach, involving going through the process of planning a community project, was adopted. As with the Human Relations phase of training, there was the same spiral of activity-discussion-abstraction-theory-practice-activity and so on.

The activities followed a natural progression. These began with an analysis of the organisation and its terms of reference, followed by a social analysis of the community. The trainees then practised styles of approaching a community which led to a discussion of effective leadership styles. Shared leadership emerged as the chosen style. Trainees were grouped according to region, and each group interviewed other groups in order to establish regional needs and priorities. Maslow's Hierarchy was used as a framework for understanding and prioritising needs. The survey questionnaire constructed by each team was subjected to careful evaluation by the trainers and the whole group. The result was a raising of the level of critical awareness.

After the needs assessment, planning for the implementation of a project took place. This involved exploring resources as well as obstacles. The final and exciting phase was an exercise, a simulation game, where each team presented a written proposal to 'management' played by the trainers and group leaders.

Encouraging adaptive responses to stress

The writers view this aspect of the training as complex, and, when they entered the field, as new terrain in South Africa. They do not claim to have found all the answers, but what has been learnt from experience is that anticipation of stressful events and ways of dealing with them reduces feelings of helplessness and increases a sense of adequacy. Together with "the work of worrying" (Janis, 1982) goes a realistic appraisal of inner strengths, coping mechanisms, and social resources. Throughout the workshops stressful experiences are shared, and solutions explored. Two activities were specifically directed at confronting and handling stress. One, designed by Professor Ayalon of Haifa University (1987), stimulated creative efforts to cope. The other, designed by one of the trainers, was geared to handling conflict. The immediate effects of these exercises seemed to be the release of creative energy and a greater sense of selfconfidence.

Exercise on coping with stress. The participants deal with stress in a progressive manner, starting with external objects related to stress and coping strategies, and ending with an exploration of internal processes, culminating in the generation of hope.

In the first step of the exercise participants are instructed to take three articles from their bags or packets and, after five minutes reflection, to describe to the group how these objects are associated with stress. The group should not be larger than 5-8 members and the exercise will not work if people are so poor that they do not ·carry bags or have possessions in their pockets. If this is the case, people can be asked to draw objects associated with stress instead.

In the second step the participants share with the group the feelings evoked by the stress identified in step 1 and how they dealt with the stress.

The third step involves thinking of an event or experience which was very stressful and answering the following questions:

What were your feelings?

What were your physical reactions, eg dry mouth, sweating palms, stomach cramps, etc?

What did you do?

What helped you the most to cope with this experience?

After sharing responses to all the above questions, the participants are asked by the facilitators how they would cope now if confronted with a similar situation. The purpose of this is to elicit a cognitive awareness of coping strategies and processes of which participants may previously have been only dimly aware.

This step of the exercise can take from one to two hours depending on the size of the group. In the final step of the exercise the group is issued with a large sheet of paper on which each person is asked to draw themselves or symbols representing their feelings and experiences, as well as their coping strategies. These individual drawings form a collage which one group member (when more than one group is present) uses to describe the group experience. The combination of all the drawings provides a wide understanding of stress and a variety of coping strategies. Experiences of being understood, elaboration, and the combination of ways of coping generate a feeling of hope and empowerment.

Exercise on conflict resolution. The exercise is part of a complex process which is difficult to impart briefly. It involves a theory input on conflict as potentially growth producing. The positive aspects of relationships within which conflict occurs are stressed. The exercise also deals with a process whereby each participant owns his or her role in the conflict. Opportunities to practice the skills of challenging and confrontation are an important part of the exercise. The final step is an invitation to joint problem solving in conflict resolution.

As conflict situations are dramatised by participants in a role play, other members of the small group, or the facilitator, may stop the process to comment, give creative criticism or take over a part in the role play.

The culture of silence: training oppressed communities

The writers have continually cast around for ideas and training models which are not culture-specific and do not impose Western values on the trainees. Because the writers are products of these cultures, there must have been many occasions when they failed, and were unaware of impositions or prescriptions. At first glance, one of the best First World models available is that of Brager and Specht (1973) because it is geared towards organising communities using a 'grass roots' approach. On reviewing the text and looking at this in conjunction with Freire's "Levels of Awareness" (Hope and Timmel, Book 3, 1984:58-59) it would appear that Brager and Specht were talking of communities at the third and fourth levels of awareness.

Brager and Specht developed their model in an urban context where certain infrastructure already existed. They actually stated that (Brager and Specht, 1973:92):

> "the effort to promote community change requires capital, and workers with environmental change goals will seek to recruit those poor people who have the capital to expand...that is those who have not succumbed to selfdefeating pessimism, or are not so apathetic that they may not be aroused, or who have not been depleted of energy...We expect, in short, that it is the angry poor (since anger generates surplus energy) and the upper-lower and lower-middle class who will engage in institutional change activity"

This is a telling statement as it implies that the oppressed poor, who have become apathetic, are beyond redemption. Freire (1981) honed in on the so-called apathetic poor. In describing the first level of consciousness, he wrote of a "Culture of Silence" which develops in communities where consciousness is *closed* or *broken*. The people are naive, dependent, alienated and suppressed. Closed societies are not open to change and in broken societies new patterns seem impossible to understand. A fatalism or resignation leads people to accept the status quo as "The Will of God" or "the only way things can ever be". There may be magical explanations for events and an unquestioning acceptance of explanations by those in power, with no effort to change the present or future. There is unchanging repetition of activities to meet basic needs, and traditional rituals, while Nature, Culture and History are regarded as *givens*, not *shaped* by the community.

It is essential that the "culture of silence" be broken if people are to be brought at least to the second level of awareness, that of *awakening* consciousness, where there is growing consciousness of inequality and justice, and attempts by the community itself to reorganise some elements of economic, social and cultural life through selfhelp projects. At the third level there is the sense of a struggle to improve the functioning of the system. There is a recognition of different classes with opposing interests and open conflicts. There are the beginnings of Trade Unions, Farmers' Associations, and so on. There is also a desire for selfdetermination and reliance on own reserves.

At the fourth level, that of liberating and transforming consciousness, there is a self questioning of old values and the expression of new values, as well as the creative development of new types of structures expressing these values.

Brager and Specht's is a four-stage process model encompassing a socialisation phase, primary group formation, organisation-building and the consolidation of institutional relationships. They consider the first two stages as being necessary but secondary to the third and fourth stage, whereas Freire would regard the socialisation, or even a pre-socialisation phase, as being a primary goal of community development in the Third World.

Korten (1980) had something to offer in this regard. His concern was for the development of management technologies suited to the needs of participative rural and urban development. He had a strong conviction that Third World development assistance programmes must be part of a holistically perceived learning process as opposed to a bureaucratically mandated blueprint design. His case studies of programmes in Asia provided rich insight into what can be accomplished, if the development process itself can be viewed as a learning experience for all participants.

In South Africa most of the community organisers belong to oppressed groups, and so training programmes must begin by breaking their "culture of silence" and

address their need to be liberated. They can then go out into the community to begin to facilitate a similar process in their communities.

Contextualising: an exercise in social analysis

If an important aspect of community work is awareness raising of members of the community, it cannot proceed without an examination of social, political and economic realities. The problem is that the community is inextricably linked to the wider context in terms of these realities. Without a critical social analysis which looks at root causes, the community organisers and their communities would be working in a vacuum, without understanding that "a critical understanding leads to critical action" (Freire, 1981:44). Guitteriez (1985) stressed that community work methodology in the Third World should start with a study of the situation. He has outlined a three-stage model for training community workers as part of a popular education programme in Costa Rica.

The first stage is termed the connotative stage where the expression of feelings is encouraged. This has to do with the emotional impact as the 'I' or 'Me' confronts the social reality. Guitteriez warns against remaining at this level as actions or programmes conceived here will tend to be in the nature of 'handouts' which only reinforce feelings of powerlessness.

In the second, or denotative stage, the participants link facts and feelings in order to discover the meaning of this reality. To illustrate: an El Salvadorian refugee talks of feelings of hopelessness, "Our children are hungry, they ask for food. They have no food, because we have no work. We cannot get work without permits, or more special training in skills, in this country (Costa Rica)". As the group of participants pool their experience, the "shell of silence" (Guitteriez) begins to break open.

The third stage, the structural stage, challenges the group to search at a deeper level for the connections between the problems and the environment. The search is for root causes and looks at economic, political, social and ideological structures. Guitteriez believed that in traversing through these three stages, people in the community discover their own social reality. He stressed dialogue and consensus in the process of recognising more problems.

The process is highly participative and releases creative energy and hope until the group arrives at a generating nucleus. The generating nucleus is that part of the reality that really moves people. It is the point of departure for action which will change the existing social reality. Guitteriez states that if people have a problem somewhere they also have the solution. A solution coming from 'outside' is not always a solution because then the people will not grow.

The trainers consider the Human Relations part of the courses devised by them to be very similar to the connotative stage. Guitteriez's second and third stages are telescoped into one activity where participants are stimulated to explore their world, using an exercise adapted from **Training For Transformation** (1984). As they graphically map their world, they identify strong current forces influencing their lives, look at forces still emerging, and forces dying out. The source, nature and impact of these forces are argued and discussed. In spite of time constraints, participants become very absorbed in the activity. They produce relevant and insightful material.

The trainers believe that the process of contextualising problems is essential for the following reasons:

* It is a revitalising experience and breaks through feelings of apathy.
* This kind of analysis results in a more precise realisation of the nature of resources and obstacles, which leads to more realistic and meaningful change strategies.
* Even if some of the projects are shortterm in the sense that they aim at alleviating immediate distress, there are other longterm benefits. The skills, knowledge and attitudes acquired are likely to persist beyond such projects, perhaps enabling people at a later stage to confront their problems and look for more lasting solutions.

Learning from our experience

There were many learnings for the writers, but among the most important were:

* The writers reached the conclusion that in order to optimise learning, it is necessary for trainees to have some exposure in the field before receiving basic training. This helps trainees to identify their learning needs and become more participative in the training process. To be cost effective, shortterm training (usually three-five day workshops) should be 'on the job' training. The first recruits for the Red Cross programme had no time in the field prior to training so they were more partial and they were unable to contextualise their learning.
* Shared learning, rather than imparting knowledge via experts, provides the best learning mode. The trainers came in with the idea that they had some expertise to offer. On reflecting on the evaluation and feedback from the trainees they realised that they had not always drawn sufficiently on the experience, knowledge and skills which trainees already possessed. In subsequent programmes the move was towards a shared learning and the role of expert was de-emphasised. To highlight this point, a field of expertise of the participants is their first hand knowledge and experience of living in oppressed and strife torn communities. This is an invaluable data resource, and participants are empowered by having something to offer by way of expertise.

Close teamwork is required to ensure a logical flow from the first module (Human Relations Training) to the second, that is training for community work. An important finding is that community work training of this nature is a technocratic exercise unless it is preceded by the kind of personal growth experience and dialogue which transforms and empowers people. Therefore, careful planning by a closeknit team is required in order to integrate the personal growth, commitment, vision and learning from the first module into the actual process of getting to know the community and understanding its needs.

After each activity trainers should focus on ways in which participants can use the material in their own communities. We have found trainees to be creative in adapting the various activities and exercises for their own use and as methods of training and awareness raising in their own communities.

It is vital that the sponsoring organisation engages in joint planning and/or training sessions or seminars with community organisers. They need to share and understand the kind of demands, pressures and stresses to which each are subject in terms of work experience and responsibilities.

Between the community organisers and the organisation "the critical fit is between the means by which beneficiaries are able to define and communicate their needs and the processes by which the organisation makes decisions" (Korten, 1980:496). In addition, if the organisation does not dialogue with the workers in the field, they impose and prescribe needs and goals which are not syntonic with those in the community.

Evaluation of every workshop by participants is vital information which serves as the basis for planning future workshops, not only for a particular group but for future groups. In the training done by the writers, they depended on the recommendations of the trainees, as well as their own observations and experience, to formulate and plan programmes which would best fit their needs. Another major issue for the writers is that while community organisers may be aware of root causes, often their terms of reference from the sponsoring body precludes social action which directly confronts unjust structures. While Freire's concern for people is so central that he sees the goal of developmental change in terms of transforming people not merely structures (1981:121), he also raises a very valid question: Is dialogue possible "as long as there is no change in the latifundiary structure?" (Freire, 1981:121). This is because it is "in this structure that the explanation of the silence of the peasant lives" (Freire, 1981:121). The writers believe it is possible to heighten the level of awareness of individuals and communities within these restrictions. It is perhaps an act of faith in human nature to hope that small changes promoted by the community organisers and their communities is in the direction of preparing for a just and

peaceful society. The methodology which inspires the community work process in itself carries the seeds of change, even in situations of acute distress. It is easier to illustrate this point by means of an example. The norm of relief work in crisis-torn areas is often to set up soup kitchens run along paternalistic lines. In contrast, a Red Cross community organiser reported a different approach. In talking to the people in a squatter community displaced by violence, food was identified by them as one of their immediate and urgent needs. In the dialogue which ensued, she allowed the people to take responsibility and decisions were based on their analysis of the situation. The form of help, the safest site and even the preferred kind of food, within the limits of costs, were decided upon by the people themselves. They undertook to help with the cooking and distribution of the food. These people were not merely positive recipients, but active participants, and must surely have emerged from this experience feeling more autonomous and confident.

Conclusion

Although the process described in this article was initiated because of the need in troubled townships for services from people not previously trained in community work methods, the writers also introduced the principles they discovered in formal training of social work students at the universities at which they teach. Feedback from, and evaluation by, students testifies to the soundness of their experiencing within themselves and their own groups the processes which they will use when working with communities. They become more sensitive and empathic towards the community and are more able to work at the community's pace without complaining of frustration at what might formerly have been defined as "lack of motivation" on the part of the community. Rather, by joining with the community, dialoguing and analysing with them, they search for the generative theme which will activate the community to search for their own solutions to their problems.

The writers do not claim to have produced a blueprint for training strategies in Third World communities, but because there is such a dearth of relevant material it is hoped that this article may stimulate some discussion and exchange of ideas. Meanwhile, the learning continues.

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