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Chapter One

ROLE TRAINING: PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE

Virtually every person possesses a desire to function adequately as an individual as well as to experience satisfaction in relationships with others in various kinds of groups. The bringing about of effective functioning does not come about unless certain achievements have been made. One of these achievements is the development of an appreciation of the existence of certain dynamic forces in human life and of the particular concrete form they take in different cultures and sub-cultures.

In human relationships there are two major dynamic forces which exist in an uneasy and often volatile relationship. One of these dynamic forces is a desire to live fully, to experience purpose and meaning, to create ideals and live by them, and to love. It is this desire to live fully that is experienced as an inner urge to move out, to feel, to be and to make. A second dynamic force is the desire to stay secure. This desire for safety and security is demonstrated by all those powerful forces which hold back the impetus of growth such as the fear of appearing odd or different, the fear of the unknown, the fear of letting go the old, or the fear of development. That dynamic force which disturbs us and pushes us forward from within as well as that dynamic force which is conservative and therefore reacts against the forces of development are experienced within us mentally, emotionally and physically. These forces are also experienced externally to us taking the form of encouragement or discouragement by others. Our task is to live dispassionately and thoughtfully when faced with these forces. In other words, there must be a letting go of either a like or dislike of the present state of affairs.

The creation of effective human relationships also involves the development and activating of specific means for shifting the balance of dynamic forces such that the creative forces lead to the expression and fulfilment of healthy ideals. Role training brings about a greater awareness and appreciation of the dynamic forces which exist within us and around us and also assists in bringing

the creative element of individuals to the fore. Therefore role training deserves careful, thoughtful attention. The aim of all the description and discussion which follows is to bring about understanding and experience of the role training method such that your personal and professional functioning is enhanced.

Definition of Role Training

It is best to begin with a broad definition of the term role training and a brief description of what it is.

Role training is the application of the principles of role theory and of specific techniques to cause the development of specific, limited aspects of human functioning such that goals for work or one's personal life are achieved more adequately.

Role training involves first of all the delineation of a specific aspect of functioning that an individual wishes to improve and of a specific situation or situations where a person wishes to develop themselves. Role training also involves the enactment of a situation, the role diagnosis, the preparation of a role training programme, the carrying out of the role training programme using specific techniques, the providing of a role test and the re-establishment of connections of an individual with the group.

Since human beings act in such a wide range of different ways, there are an infinite variety of areas that are focussed on in any role training session. Since the focus in a role training session is normally on only one role or one aspect of a role, one session might focus on the resolution of part of a role conflict, another session might focus on the expansion of a person's view of life, another session might develop the action component of a person's functioning and another session again might focus on the development of feeling or emotional expression. If we look at any person in their daily functioning we can conclude at any moment that their functioning is either adequate, over-developed in some area, under-developed in some way, conflicted, or that aspects of human functioning are entirely absent. Therefore some sessions are entirely focussed on the further development of adequate functioning. Other sessions will aim to bring down to size functioning which is over-developed or further develop functioning which is under-developed. Thus in role training the primary focus is not on the reorganisation of the total personality of the individual although naturally the modifying of one aspect of a person's functioning effects the functioning of the whole.

Eight Elements in a Role Training Session

Role Training Occurs in a Group

The role training session is normally conducted in a group and if it is not conducted in a group it always involves functioning of a person in a group.

Warm Up Phase

Secondly, the practice of role training involves motivating the group to focus on a specific area of functioning and it is necessary for the group and the role trainer to be aware throughout of the motivating and reactive forces already mentioned and of the group culture in which they manifest themselves.

So, the first thing that happens in most role training sessions is an endeavour to find out what area of human concern the whole group is interested in and that would be called the warm up period of the group. This phase of the work is discussed in greater detail in a later section.

Initial Enactment of an Incident

The third phase of the session involves the enactment by somebody or by the group of this particular area of concern. Usually the enactment involves the person in their relationship with one or several people. A part of the skill of the role trainer is to be able to produce an accurate enactment of what the person does in their life so that we can all see it, share, feel with the person in what they're doing. Basically during that production of enactment there is not any specific intervention to help the person to change what they're doing. There is simply the encouragement of the full enactment of what's going on in all its different dimensions. There is more than a portrayal of what happened in life itself. There may also be the expression of what is unexpressed by the individuals concerned. Thus there can be a viewing, a seeing, of the whole interactive system.

Role Diagnosis

Fourthly, following that enactment there is normally a role diagnosis. This can be done by simply sitting down with the protagonist and talking with them about their functioning using role theory. This discussion accents assisting them to see which aspects of their functioning in this enactment were adequate. It is best to focus initially on what is adequate. When people become aware of what is adequate in their functioning their self esteem is enhanced

and other problematic areas of their life become easier for them to manage. So there is a focus on the health first. Secondly, there is a focus of attention on those aspects of the person's functioning which are overdeveloped. Again frequently a person's self esteem is enhanced by realising that there are aspects of their functioning which are perfectly adequate but are somewhat over used. If they are less used then the person's life will become more vital and interesting to other people. Thirdly, there is a focus on those aspect of the person's functioning which are underdeveloped, which need a bit more encouragement, development, a bit more training. Next the focus is on those aspects of the person's functioning which are conflicted. And finally the focus is on those aspects of the person's functioning which are absent altogether due to lack of training and lack of experience. A person, for example, may have never done any carpentry so the role of the carpenter is entirely absent. It doesn't mean that there is anything wrong with the person, it just means that their experience is lacking. Following the above priorities works best because the simplest thing for a person to do is expand their adequate functioning, and the difficulty increases as the focus changes to what is over-developed, under-developed, conflicted and absent.

It is best to involve the person you are working with in this role diagnosis. Have them make their own diagnosis first. Involve the group in the role diagnosis making it a whole group endeavour. The role training director is involved throughout sharing their own perceptions.

During this role diagnosis it must be borne in mind that roles and role systems develop in a context and therefore are relative to the culture and the subculture and that what may be inadequate in one culture may be perfectly adequate in another. So the role diagnosis needs to be done in the light of understanding the total system that the person is in. You might not personally like what somebody is doing and you might want to object to it on that basis. This must not occur. Let your perceptions and your sharing be based on some appreciation of the culture that the person is portraying, some sensitivity about that culture and its demands. What might be possible for you to do in your life might not be possible for this person to do in their social setting that they're living in. In fact it might be destructive for them to attempt it.

Planning a Programme of Role Training

Having made the role diagnosis build on this in the fifth stage which is the working out of a programme of role training. The planning of a programme is based on the long term goals that are worked out with the individual concerned and their immediate situation and short term goals associated with that. Thus plans vary enormously from one person to another. Some individuals will readily commit themselves to doing work on one specific thing in one session but will make no further commitment. Such people may very well return at a later date to develop another ability further. Others have in the foreground a longer term view of their life and wish to be involved in a number of sessions spread out over a period of months or years. Many people have successfully done work in a small group for four, six or eight sessions and in that period of time have learned to face conflictual situations without withdrawing or fighting or developed some other relevant ability. There are benefits from a realistic assessment of the time involved in developing a specific ability and from basing any programme on that assessment. The knowledge required for making these assessments is only built up through experience. Every role trainer benefits from completing successful pieces of work in different time periods. Many people have benefited from a piece of work lasting only five minutes, twenty minutes or half an hour. The value of the work is never to be judged in terms of the time duration of a session.

Again, it is usually best to involve the protagonist and the group in making an adequate programme since different individuals can make their own contribution and the consequent breaking down of isolation makes for an enabling group culture.

Re-enactment and Application of Specific Techniques

Sixthly, the role training programme proper follows the diagnosis and assessment phases and this involves re-enactment of a situation and the possible application of a number of specific techniques originally developed by Dr J. L. Moreno. These techniques include scene setting, interviewing for role, production of interaction, the aside, role reversal, mirroring, modelling, coaching, concretisation, and maximisation. The next part of the book presents a role training session with one individual and you will see the session structure that is utilised.

Role Test

The end of the role training session comes at the time when the person has successfully enacted something in a way that satisfies both them and the director and also the group. This is followed by a role test when the person is confronted by some difficult situations to test out their new behaviour and strengthen it so that it can hold up under stress. If the new functioning is not maintained the role training may proceed and with further practice an individual may develop a much greater confidence and inner strength.

Re-integration into the Group

Eighthly, the session concludes with everybody in the group, or a significant number of people in the group, sharing something about themselves and how the protagonist's work was relevant to them. The example of this which is presented later shows the value of this.

Flexibility in Following a Structure

The above eight-fold structure is workable in any session and if used correctly will bring about a good result. Even so, there is a need for flexibility in its use because during the early stages of any session individuals are acting and interacting with one another and therefore a segment of what an individual says and does can be taken as the equivalent of the initial enactment referred to above as the third phase of the session. In a similar way an individual may develop and act a new and relevant role during the assessment phase and this may obviate the need for any further re-enactment or application of specific techniques. Furthermore, role tests frequently emerge in the course of interaction in the group and therefore there may be no need to introduce any role test in the context of a role training session with a protagonist. Sometimes it is best that the role test be faced in life itself.