

Learning Interventions in Organisations

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Introduction

I guess I have always considered myself and have been described as others as the outsider to the process of change happening within an organisation such as a school. My role if anything has been to help facilitate an evolving state of change concerning professionalism, the raising of standards, articulation of pedagogy and values of education, families and community through facilitating learning groups and 1-1's or 1-2's sessions with educators, teachers and senior management. In recent times I have networked groups together nationally and across international borders with the idea of working together as a group as a powerful motivator for change. I have done much of this, if honest as something I enjoy and find challenging but without much theoretical underpinning, instead applying what I know about children and learning groups to the idea of working with adult learning groups. Therefore, the course in Edinburgh sounded a great way to think about what I do but from a different point of view beyond the realm of educational theory. Loris Malaguzzi (founder of the Reggio Emilia approach to Early Education) reminds us of the importance to read, understand and question from a multi-disciplinary stance as does Gregory Bateson (English anthropologist, social scientist, linguist, visual anthropologist, semiotician and cyberneticist) whose work spanned many different fields of thought and action. What I attempt to do here is share some of my thinking around what I have understood and what I am now thinking about. Some people have requested I share something of what I have encountered in my time in Edinburgh, it doesn't represent everything I did but gives a flavour of the intensity of the work and learning.

Learning groups, emergent processes and tensions

In Learning Groups, I know that one can enter into the group in different ways but what is often apparent in my work, that despite what I or the senior management might think of as being the most important area for discussion at a particular given time, there often appears to be an energy within that group that exudes a different agenda. If we see learning as a human, social system of interaction then this energy comes out of the interactions of the organization and the elements within it and also with those that surround it. Therefore, there are situations that require the facilitator to work in a more emergent way (rather than pre-planned) to catch the energy of the moment and work with that and to build on what is happening in the present. It means being able to remain alert and engage in visibly listening to the variable energies in the room. Carla Rinaldi calls this the pedagogy of listening and the pedagogy of relationships.

What I am often co-researching with groups is:

- How does learning happen? (In adults and children)
- How does it work?
- What is required for it to work?

- What are the relationships between learning, knowledge, and life?
- How do children and ourselves learn how to learn?
- What does it mean to think and how do we do it?
- How do we work with the construction of knowledge effectively?
- And what are the ways that hinder this process of constructing knowledge?

There are times of course, in any group context where tensions rise. Learning, and evolving change is not easy and at times can be confusing, unsettling, unnerving too. The course has made me think about how we feel about these uncertainties given that change is a constant as is uncertainty. Uncertainty can be seen as a place of encounter but we cannot ignore the emotional climate that uncertainty can create. For example, within a learning group (of either children and adults) I am trying to think more about:

- Does everyone feel safe within the group?
- Am I acknowledging other peoples fears?
- Do we have a sense of belonging?

If for whatever reason there are people within the group who do not feel Ok, who do not hold respect for themselves or others, who do not have a sense of entitlement, then feelings of low self-esteem, lack of security, trust, conflict and shame can emerge and the individual can disconnect from the group. In this context learning cannot happen. It is simply too overwhelming to learn or to contribute or to feel part of something.

Shame, Humiliation and Power

Shame based cultures exist and we all feel it at some point or another in our lives, for example when being told off or being humiliated even when the person doing it doesn't intend for that to happen. Learning happens when there is vitality, an excitement, and liveliness. When feeling shame, these important elements are missing. In these cases, we have to build a bridge to connect with the individual and their work again but also recognize the need for their withdrawal. It is not just a simple case of jollying them up.

Shame is linked to power and relationships of power and in any organization, including educational organizations there is usually a hierarchal power present in its staffing systems with each level reporting to a manager up above their own, typically a top down approach. We could ask ourselves, where does the child fit in with this way of organizing things and what do they learn from it? There are also different levels of power that manifest itself within organizations such as power relations to do with gender, race, age, and ability. Girls go to the girl's toilets, boys are seen as reticent readers and writers, educators in the early years fields are typically female, we each socialize with people of similar ages or common interests etc. Trust is vital in a group context, and shame based or power hungry cultures dismantle trust, yet one cannot make someone trust you, you can only create a context for trust to evolve. As a facilitator you cannot make it go away however you can acknowledge

mistrust, for example, when I am seen as a threat when in the nursery environment observing and taking notes, I can say, I know this unsettles you, I don't think you trust yet what I am doing.

With strong feelings shame, humiliation, conflict it is often more about the instinct of flight or fight. What we can do is look at what support is required to tolerate and eventually overcome these feelings which maybe to work in a 1-1 rather than group context for a while, to pause, to mediate, or even to move away from the problem and instead find out what the common ground or interest is.

Group Process Model, being and feeling included, controlled and affected

When thinking about what is going on for people within a given group context, Will Schutz's (1958) work is useful. He has examined the polarities of experience and feeling people can be operating between. We can use these observations to help frame our thinking, to offer back observations or to enable us to think about which ways to facilitate the group i.e. which choice of interventional mode. According to his theory there are three dimensions of interpersonal relations, which are deemed to be necessary and sufficient to explain most human interaction: *Inclusion*, *Control* and *Affection*. These dimensions have been used to assess group dynamics.

	Inclusion		Control		Affection	
Concerned with	Being in or out of group, acknowledgement and recognition		Being top or bottom: power influence and dominance		Being emotionally near or far – love and hate	
Polarity	Introvert	Extrovert	Abdicate	Autocrat	Underpersonal	Overpersonal
Goal	Keep distance	Be centre of attention	Avoid responsibility	Be powerful	Maintain emotional distance	Get close
Behaviour and feelings	Quiet, shy	Noisy, attracting	Retreat from initiating and leading	Competitive	Rejecting / avoiding people. Superficially easy going	Makes personal remarks / is ingratiating or possessive
Unaware beliefs	No-one is interested – I'll stay away	No-one is interested – I'll make them pay attention	I'm incapable of adult behaviour and others will find out if I risk making a mistake	No-one thinks I can make decisions but I'll show them by deciding everything	I find affection painful since I have been rejected. I will avoid the risk of intimacy.	I find affection painful since I have been rejected. I will try harder
Deepest anxiety	I'm worthless and empty		I'm stupid and irresponsible		I'm nasty and unlovable	
Main need	Positive recognition		Trust		Warmth	

William Schutz. A Three-Dimensional Theory of Interpersonal Behavior. New York, NY: Rinehart (1958)

So as you can see, within each dimension there are polarities concerned with being recognised as part of or out of the group, of power, influence and dominance of being considered top or bottom of the group and finally whether you feel emotionally close or far away from the group i.e. loved or hated.

Within each dimension he considers the goals of the individual and /or group the behaviour and feelings, the beliefs that maybe unconsciously held, the most pressing level of anxiety and the main need that the anxiety gives way to. If we can, identify where people are, how they feel and not just what they are doing, we can all work in more effective ways given that education is changeable, adaptable field that is often challenging. I am thinking about the difference in schools that have a performance development driven climate (that focuses on doing and achieving) that is different from one that is supervisory driven (with a focus on achievement but also strongly linked to emotion and feeling). I don't think, but I am no expert that it is a case of one or another, but rather a mixture of the two, where educators working as part of an organisation are worked with and listened to a holistic way, that includes the mind, the body and the emotional climate.

Being present, listening to ones own feelings and reactions

When beginning work with any group, it is important to consider:

- How you as a facilitator enter into that group
- To acknowledge the assumptions others may have of you e.g. an expert, a fixer, a problem solver, a pain
- How you will find out what is significant for that group and avoid making assumptions of what you think, or others think are significant

One way of doing this is to listen to yourself and to become conscious of how you are feeling in your own body. If you are nervous and anxious, then this could well be mirrored in the group, if you are fearful, is the group fearful too? This can help you to map out what is in the field and help you make choices of how to proceed.

One way of proceeding could be to face it, and to offer your observations of what is happening. You could acknowledge your own feelings or your observations of others, so for e.g., when a group is simply overwhelmed with something, you can stop it and say, this seems to be so overwhelming. Acknowledging what is going on can help create a sense of where we are even when we feel deeply lost and disorientated. We do not have to rush in with answers of what to do but rather just acknowledge what is happening and how people feel. Listening to each other and ourselves is simply too important. We are social beings interacting with each other and everything around us in circles of interconnectivity so we cannot afford to be linear in our thinking or in our facilitation of groups.

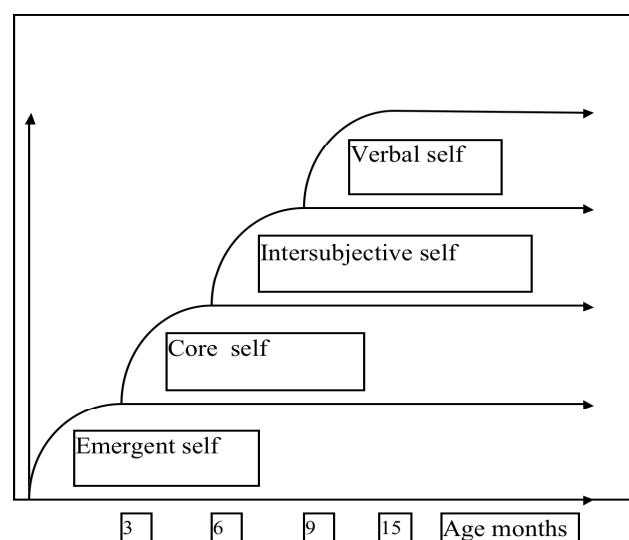
Reading and acknowledging the field, finding out what is present in the field

Field theory is a psychological theory developed by Kurt Lewin, a Gestalt psychologist in the 1940's that examines patterns of interaction between the individual and the total field, or environment. The theory is based on the concept that behaviour is interdependent on what is coexisting within any given environment or 'field'. In terms of a learning group, we have to open ourselves up as facilitators of the group to see what might be significant and to map out as such the relevant factors in and of the field. We must understand the factors in the field in order for the group to grow, evolve and learn.

Each field is unique, nothing and one thing is the same. As the Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus remarked, you cannot step into the same river twice because it is always flowing. The field is always in a state of flow, always shifting, never fixed. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi considers 'flow' as a defining process of creativity. Within an organization we could say we have done this before, we have made these choices before, we used to work like this a few years ago...however, just because we have done or said it before, each decision we make is a new choice set within a different field or context. It never the same, our choices are always in flow.

Domains of Self and relatedness to others

Daniel Stern's work on the domains of relatedness is a useful framework not just to consider how an infant begins to engage in a sense of self and connectedness with the world but also as how a learning group might be developing too. He postulates the development of the self as beginning very early and proceeding by the development of four stages of self-formation. The stages develop one after the other, but each sense of self continues to grow and develop through time – one does not supersede the other. As this is not a model of development that ends with the onset of adult hood it can be seen as how human beings in relation to other human beings coexist, relate and interact over time.



- **The emergent self** is about experiencing being alive, it is an awareness of being alive but before the realization of that it is 'you' that is alive. It is about the feeling rather than the understanding that 'you' are feeling it. There is no sense of 'me'.
- **The core self** is where a sense of agency begins to formulate, a realization of ones own touch, that there is another holding you, that your mothers arms are not part of you.
- **The intersubjective self** is recognition of a relationship where the other knows that I am 'me' and I know that they know that I am 'me'. Reciprocity is

present in that the infant knows that they have a place in the world and that the world interacts with them.

- **The verbal self** is the entering into the world of symbolic languages, of understanding language and being able to label things and experiences. For example the pre-verbal self knows they are happy because they feel it, the verbal self can communicate this sense of happiness, can describe it to another using language.

The above is a very simple overview of something that is very complex and for a more complete understanding; I would read *"The Interpersonal World of the Infant – a view from psychoanalysis and developmental psychology."* (1985) Daniel Stern.

The point of this framework is that it is not linear or based on one stage superseding the other but rather about how these domains flow and interact through the course of life. Life being seen as the individual as connected to others and not separate from each other or the world. We can consider too what happens between these domains when there is a deficit, or a problem occurring, when there is over stimulation or understimulation, non attunement and misattunement. Within a group context, can the group connect, feel alive and also able to articulate what they are doing, feeling? Can the group interact in positive meaningful ways or have they learnt to become silent, mute, angry or aggressive, reliant on one, jealous of another? If we lose a sense of our core self, either individually or organizationally as part of a group then we can collapse, we become too fragile for change or healthy development. Over time this fragility can affect our behaviours as we learn to express and represent in ways that do not fit with a strong sense of identity, possibility or belonging. We learn to react in unfathomable ways.

Trauma and cognitive thinking

Another affecting factor on behaviour is Trauma and this can be viewed in two ways.

1. A single extreme experience where the sense of self is threatened, e.g. a car crash, a bomb explosion, a violent crime where the person affected feels a sense of shock and disturbance relating to survival. The experience is so strong one could have nearly died, has felt a sense of not surviving or not pulling through.
2. A trauma that is continued over a period of time, is accumulative and lived as an ongoing state e.g. physical or sexual abuse, fear of being killed by hidden explosives of soldiers in the field. The trauma is lived each day and there is a sense of knowing it could and will happen soon, a heightened sense of alert and fear that the trauma it is coming.

In trauma the limbic brain goes into fight or flight mode, in trauma mode 2, the limbic is in a constant state of panic and can cause the cortex to shutdown its usual cognitive functioning causing it to freeze and lose its capacity to think. The developmental process is disturbed and cognitive thinking is greatly reduced. In a group context, if they are in a state of work place trauma, then their cognitive

thinking, their sense of being OK is also greatly reduced. They cannot make choices because they are too fearful of what may happen. It might be that the group is simply overwhelmed with too much to do, too much to think about, too fast a pace of change, too uncertain, and therefore cannot literally think straight about how to proceed or what to do next. In these circumstances the best a facilitator can do maybe is help with paths of choosing, to offer choice of this or that...helping the process of thinking. It is a complex role where at times one has to take responsibility or offer observations, or seek clarity from a web of confusion. Knowing how and when to intervene is key.

Intervention analysis, modes and dimensions of facilitation

Intervention can be seen as something we do when crisis happens. In early years in the UK we often talk about intervention as something to help narrow the gap and prevent problems from occurring later on down the line. John Heron speaks about intervention as being broadly based with two categories, one of Authoritative and the other of Facilitative nature – see table below. All interventions are based on a spectrum ranging from:

Effective – ineffective

Respectful, accurate, ethical – unfair, inaccurate, exploitative, unethical

Relevant to the person's capacity and immediate interest and experience – irrelevant

Overpowering – under-powered

Well paced and timely – rushed, shocking, ill timed

Authoritative	Prescriptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give advice, instruction and guidance • Tell the other person how they should behave • Tell them what to do / not to do
	Informative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your view and experience • Explain the background and principles • Help the other person get a better understanding
	Confronting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge the other person's beliefs, assumptions, thinking, choices • Raise the awareness of the other • Tell them what you think is holding them back • Help them avoid making the same mistake again
Facilitative	Cathartic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the other person identify or express

		<p>their feeling states</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge them
	Catalytic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions to encourage fresh awareness and thinking • Encourage the other person to generate new options and solutions • Listen and summarize, and listen some more
	Supportive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuing the person, their being and their expression • Contribute to their sense of support, well being and integrity • Show them they have your support, respect and commitment

John Heron (1996) Helping the Client – Intervention Analysis

I have been thinking about how to use these modes and to become more aware of the types of ways of intervening. It requires me to be more alert to what is going on in the field, the significant issues arising in the present and then making a choice of how to proceed. I could, and I am trying this currently, is to make my thinking of how to proceed more visible by sharing my thoughts i.e. I could help you to find out for yourself what you think is the best thing to do about X (facilitative mode) or I could choose to tell them what they could do next about X based on my experience (Authoritative mode).

Either way is legitimate, but it depends on the group context, always. I have probably always erred on the side of the facilitative, not wanting to deny others the possibility of learning for themselves but probably not listening to the relationships in the group or identifying first the significant factors in the field. If the group is overwhelmed, then co-constructing a path forward may not be effective even if that is what I believe is best. It does not mean however than I have to remain in an interventional approach that is more *prescriptive* or *informative*, but to be there momentarily until the group are in position for me to return to a more *catalytical* approach.

Any interventional approach takes different forms, and choosing how we are to be in a group does not just have to rest with the facilitator. Again Heron (1996) has looked at different models of facilitator dimensions and decision modes. In the table below we can see how there are different modes of facilitation. The first to be the *Director*, (to do it for people), the second is as a *negotiator*, (to do it with people) and thirdly as a *delegator*, (to give it to people.) In terms of dimensions of facilitation, he considers 6 primary factors that can all be used by Direction (which is to do with hierarchy), Negotiation (which is more aligned to co-operation) and Delegation (that is connected to autonomy).

- **Planning** (the programme of learning and development)
- **Understanding and Meaning** (making sense of experiences, images and

ideas)

- **Confronting** (raising consciousness about defences, distortions and avoidances)
- **Feeling** (the energy and managing of the emotional dynamic of the group)
- **Structuring** (the current learning activity of the group)
- **Valuing** (choice and creating a climate of celebration and respect)

	USE BY DIRECTION	USE BY NEGOTIATION	USE BY DELEGATION
PLANNING	Mastery of decision-modes and decision-levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • applied to programme of learning • applied to all F dimensions 		
MEANING	Use of conceptual maps Use of discussion and dialogue for reflection and review Use of imagery: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and tactile Use of interpretations and process comments Use of suggestion Use of feedback and assessment: self, peer, facilitator		
CONFRONTING	Use of confronting interventions for consciousness-raising		
FEELING	Use of charismatic presence and voice Use of experiential space Use of attunement, ritual, and the holonomic principle Use of switching and of polarities Grasp of group dynamics, transference and counter-transference Healing the memories: cathartic use of content and process cues		
STRUCTURING	Use of pregroup contract Use of culture setting to create a learning environment Managing contribution rates: use of the catalytic tool-kit Use of the experiential learning cycle and structured exercises Use of multi-stranded learning and activities		
VALUING	Use of validation and appreciation Use of reaching out Honouring choice and personal autonomy		

Reference: John Heron (1996), *Helping the Client*, Sage Publications. Facilitation modes and dimensions.

Conclusion

The course has enabled me to:

- Listen to myself and how I feel as a facilitator of a learning group during the process of facilitation and not just in evaluation. I know I need to hone these skills and find ways of being more readily able to listen to myself. I found it fascinating that how I feel directly links to how the group might be feeling also and how to use this information to think about how to proceed.
- To gain a deeper understanding of the elements in the field (field theory) and of what might be going on (to help interpret actions and behaviours of the group).
- To think more about the theory and frameworks of Daniel Sterns work on the development of self but in using this to apply within a group context.
- To see myself not as an outsider to the group, but part of it.
- Has given me permission to be authoritative when required, to take responsibility and negotiate others responsibility. To understand in a clear way the roles of being authoritative and facilitative.
- Begin to understand my needs, my own insecurities and myself.
- Unpick case studies from my own practice – to understand the past moments of tension within a group with fresh eyes and exploration of strategies of how things could have been done in a different way.
- To think about the needs for my ongoing support in the facilitation of learning groups and networks.

