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**ACWA CONFERENCE**  
**'KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION' 2 TO 4 AUGUST 2004**  
**NOTES FROM TWO WORKSHOPS BY PETER SLATTERY**  
**Session 10 and 31**

I have put the notes from the two workshops together here. They will of course make most sense if you attended those workshops because they are notes rather than formal papers. However, you are of course welcome to them whether you attended the workshops or not and you are also welcome to contact me with any questions at all about what is written here or about the topics the workshops addressed. I have also decided to soon write something about Resilience and post it on my website. It is an important idea and also one that is getting a little over-used at the moment I feel. But it does matter and so I will throw my ideas up onto the web for discussion.  
Cheers...pete.

## THE PROCESS

### WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DO WHEN WORKING WITH FAMILIES? SOME KEY IDEAS

The process, in many ways, is pretty straightforward in what we have to do:

- We need to do something to establish rapport with the person/family
- We need to find out what is happening for them
- We need to work out with them, what to do next

In establishing such a process, I am always bearing in mind:

#### **Creating democracy**

How I can help establish a 'democratic' process. That is, one where all present can contribute equally though perhaps differently

#### **Inviting participation**

How can I help people be part of, actively participate in this 'conversation' or process, and how can I help them do so in ways which fit for them... which includes perhaps physical movement, or thinking or drawing, or simple body movements to represent something...many different ways which include the verbal but do not privilege it

#### **Helping establish understanding and empathy**

How can I help people get in touch with each other's thinking, feelings, concerns, worries, hopes or dreams?

## **RESILIENCE**

Underpinning all this work is the rather fashionable, but important idea of Resilience. The following ingredients pop up repeatedly in readings about ways in which people develop resilience; that is, an ability to bounce back from life's hardships and to push on. These ideas strike me as being simultaneously both common sense and quite profound. They also seem to apply to people of any age. They are really useful to bear in mind.

- **Having some sense of meaning in life**
- **Having a meaningful relationship with another or others**
- **Actively participating in what is happening around you**
- **Having some personal power or potency**
- **Others having positive “expectations” of us**

In our work, this means people having a worthwhile, perhaps even pleasant or interesting, experience with workers, whether doctor, social worker, counsellor or someone else, and no matter how brief the contact. It also means that in this contact the people need to be able to participate and contribute in ways which fit for them. They also need to be an active part of this process, not simply passive consumers of it. And finally if we seek the best in people, the best in them may well emerge. I reckon that establishing this process is our task as workers. All this might help a young person identify or locate what is meaningful to them in life.

## **STRATEGIES**

**The following strategies as used in the workshops are described below. ( I think this is most of them! I may have thrown something in spontaneously that I have not included here.**

**The activities can be used to facilitate the process mentioned above. The strategies need to be used with some care, thought and creativity. Even the seemingly playful ones can create a process where quite serious and intimate things can happen. Some of the activities are more suited to groups and others to more private conversations with families or individual family members. Have fun with all the strategies, and change them to fit your circumstances, and your own style and the styles of those you are talking with.**

# WORKSHOP 1

## 'WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES'

### STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP A MEANINGFUL CONVERSATION

#### MAKE A CROSS AND CIRCLE

Make a cross with one hand and then a circle with the other..AT THE SAME TIME.

This is fun, foolish and playful and helps people start to relax around what is actually an incredibly important, their own wellbeing

#### MEANING AND PURPOSE

Write up what are the most important things in your life..what do you hold close to your heart. Now put these into a piece of image theatre. See below for a description of this. (As a kind of introduction to the idea of image theatre, the Augusto Boal activity of Image of the hour is really useful. See below for this too.)

#### Image of the hour

Show us what you are usually doing on week days at 7 in the morning...at 8 in the morning....at 10....at midday.....at 3 in the afternoon.....

The purpose here is to:

- To signal that speaking will not be the only means of communication in the process to follow.
- To develop an exchange between those present. This might just be you and the person you are talking with.

#### Image Theatre

Image theatre at its simplest is people using their bodies to show thoughts and feelings. The images which are created may be frozen or involve movement. Quite complex ideas and relationships can be shown. It is possible to show not only thoughts and feelings but hopes and dreams, an aspect of a conflict, of a dilemma, of a distressing event, of a fear or a desire, and represent it in the image. It might just be also simple mime or just 'striking a pose'.

People are able to share with each other what they hold dear, what they cherish.

#### BLIND DRAW...YOU!

Starting to think about who you are as a person...(I think this too might come from Augusto Boal in some form)

Draw a picture of yourself..WITH YOUR EYES SHUT...don't look at yours or anyone else's...

I will put them altogether and we will have a look at what we have done! Try to pick your own and which one belongs to whom.

This is also playful but starts the process of moving to consider who we are. It adds to a sense of democracy as it is IMPOSSIBLE to do this well. We all do it

equally bizarrely. The sense of democracy is usually added to as people swap comments about each other's pictures.

### **THIS SIDE THAT SIDE**

To start to think in a more detailed way about who we are as people  
Stand of this side of the room if you were born outside of the state, on that side if you were born in this state...

This side if you can speak any languages other than English...the other side if only English...what can you speak? What would you like to speak?

This activity simply seeks to ask people to think about who they are and where they have been. The questions can be playful and lead into much more complex ones such as:

Have you ever done anything foolish...over THAT side...

And keep to yourself what you have done but how come you think it was foolish?

Have you ever done anything of which you were ashamed?

And again...what was it about what you did so that you were ashamed?

Ever done anything you are ashamed of...

### **A DRAWING OF GENEROSITY**

Think of a time when you acted well, when you did something for another person...and draw this...and fill out the whole story...who was present and what was happening...and also write down the quality or the skill or talent that you brought to that event

This activity reminds people that they have contributed to the worlds in which they live, and that they can continue to do so.

### **A QUESTION (with discussion)**

What brings out the best in you...

### **MORE ABOUT YOU AS A PERSON**

See the scales below...this workshop asked questions about how you move thru life..

speedily.....or calmly

in an organised way.....or more 'go with the flow'

and if you wanted to work on something important...

preferring to work alone.....or with others

### **WHO IS THE MOST**

Thinking of your 'family' however you define this...

Who is the person who laughs most?

Gets most easily upset?

Does most cleaning in the house?

Does most emotional 'cleaning up' in the family?

And any other questions that seem useful...

### **YOUR CONTRIBUTION**

What do you most contribute to your family?

### **CLOSE**

## **WORKSHOP 2**

### **WORKING WITH FAMILIES WHO HAVE ACTING OUT ADOLESCENTS ie who are doing not-nice things because something not-nice is happening for them**

#### **THE PROCESS**

The key ideas are repeated here as they are as true to the content of this workshop as they are to the one described above. However there is an additional idea listed below as well which this workshop focused on; that is, the idea of seeking to look beyond unattractive behaviours to what may well be driving them.

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##### **Additional idea**

##### **The idea of 'peeling the onion'.**

That is, looking through the layers of behaviour, often quite ugly behaviour, to where it is coming from, what is motivating it or driving it. The strategy of 'The rainbow of desire' listed below is particularly useful for this.

## **STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP A (in this case 'OUR') CONVERSATION YELL AND WAVE**

Just so we know we are alive and present!

### **THE WEATHER OF YOUR WEEK**

So how has it been? Cloudy? Windy? Sunny? Stormy? Light showers?  
Scattered rain? Breezy?

And what contributed to your weather being as it was?

And which of those things do you have some control over and which ones not?

### **RAINBOW OF DESIRE (Based on the idea from Augustos Boal)**

Look at a snippet from 'IDIOT BOX' a great Australian film starring Ben Mendelsohn (Spelling?). A very angry aggressive scene.

And another scene which shows him trying to give his mum a present ...and being rejected. A quite completely different image of a young man seeking affection and approval.

This activity is one way to 'peel the onion', to get some sense of what is happening behind a person's behaviour.

### **RAINBOW OF DESIRE 2**

This simple but profoundly useful strategy can also be done with theatre images and drawings. In the theatre version people stand in a frozen scene showing some moment of conflict. Other group members stand behind them showing what each of these people might be thinking or feeling. Using moments from popular films such as 'Idiot Box' you can ask people to draw what is happening with each character, or you can find different moments in a film which reveal the person's deeper motivations as shown above.

### **YOUR STYLE OF BEING IN THE WORLD**

On a scale of 1 to 10..how angry would you be:

**NOT AT ALL ANGRY.....HEAPS ANGRY**

If someone insulted your body?

Your sexuality?

Your family?

On a scale of 1 to 10 how hurt would you be:

**AH NUP NOT AT ALL.....DEVESTATED/BROKEN-HEARTED**

If you gave someone a present they didn't like?

You overheard someone you like making fun of you?

Someone you really liked simply didn't turn up for a meeting with you?

### **VIEW OF A VIEW**

Think of someone you know well and think about what you answer to this question is...

How well do they listen to you...on a scale of 1 to 10

**STONE DEAF.....ALL EARS**

You could go and ask this person just how well they think they listen to you...and ask them to guess what you chose. You can reverse the process of course and ask the same question of the other person as to how well they think you listen to them.

The purpose here is to invite some understanding between people of what is happening for each other. This can be a delightful activity as it can remind people what they know of each other intimately. It can also be a wrenching activity as people come to realize that they are out of touch with each other. Either way, it tells you something about the nature of the relationship, perhaps where it is working and also where it might need some work.

### **CAUTION**

This activity can quite lovely and delightfully emotional. It can also prove to be quite hard for people to do, and quite disturbingly revealing. So proceed with care.

### **CLOSE**