

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL  
FOR COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
TRAINERS AND PRACTITIONERS

# FORWARD

Issue No.6

Summer 1994

Published by the Northern Ireland  
Community Relations Council

# Not all black and white

**Rob Fairmichael** looks for relevant  
parallels between South Africa and  
Northern Ireland



Northern Ireland  
Community Relations Council  
6 Murray Street  
Belfast BT1 6DN  
Tel: (0232) 439953  
Fax: (0232) 235208

Mandela photograph on page three  
courtesy of Marnix van der Sijs

The views expressed are those of  
the contributors and should not necessarily  
be attributed to the  
Community Relations Council.

## EDITORIAL

### The proof of the pudding

“**Y**ou are what you eat” is a slogan from macrobiotic and other food campaigners which has been around for decades now. To say it is the whole truth is taking an important truism- what you eat effects how you are, what you can do, and your health - and building it into a dogma. But let us take another thesis (which we have just thought of), “You reveal your true self in conflict”, as our jumping off point here.

Being community relations minded can be easy or difficult according to what you’re doing and where you’re doing it. Working on community relations in some situations is setting you up for involvement in conflict; others may see it as unnecessary, unwarranted interference in a situation where “we all get along together very well” (and where the fact that people don’t mix or talk, with people physically attacking each other a few miles away, is glossed over). So courage is often required.

But there is another aspect of conflict- conflict between people who are working broadly between the same parameters and for the same ends. This is, as we know in Northern Ireland, often more bitter and close fought than conflict between opposing sides. Since much of ‘party politics’ in Northern Ireland is actually within the respective unionist and nationalist ‘families’ then this is obviously true. And how do we treat conflict within the community relations or reconciliation arenas? The answer, unfortunately, is often ‘not very well’.

When someone from an ‘opposing’ side disagrees with us, or attacks us, we can safely dispose of the arguments because they are coming from such a different perspective and “they would say that, wouldn’t they” comes into play. How well we listen here in this instance is an example of how broad-minded we are. But when someone ‘on the same side’ disagrees with us, no matter how gently, we can feel undermined, let down, even betrayed.

This says more about our own insecurity, perhaps revealing more about ourselves. We have part of the truth. Others have part of the truth too. Finding a creative, creating way to allow these different versions of truth to dialogue and debate, with our own personalities and egos out of the way, is a great challenge. We have come a long way in recognising stages of conflict, in considering appropriate mediation strategies and so on. But when it comes to the bit, when it comes to us being involved in conflict, then our wisdom and our models of procedure can go out the window.

We would like *Journal* to contribute to a healthy debate on any issue concerning community relations. At times this may be difficult but we would like to disengage the personalities from the issues as much as possible. In this *Journal* one of the undersigned editors, Fergus Cumiskey, takes issue in a personal capacity with a previous piece on affirmation and talks about the model used in the Advanced Group Work Skills course. We invite a response and further debate on the issue.

Two closing points. Whether you like or don’t like what you read between these covers, we’d be pleased if you could use the enclosed questionnaire as a way of saying what you would like in *Journal*. Your response can help us provide the kind of material you want.

And finally, if too much of this issue of the *Journal* seems to emanate from the undersigned, this is because some commissioned pieces did not materialise despite our best efforts. We have some fascinating material ‘on order’, so normal service will be resumed as soon as possible. Speaking of which, material for the next issue should be in by 10th September at the latest. But might we suggest a way to combat those boring days of summer when you are lounging in the sun, drinking your favourite beverage, and with absolutely nothing to do (!). Just say to yourself, “I must get to my keyboard immediately- I have to write a fascinating piece for the CRC *Journal*”. Don’t say we didn’t suggest it! Having a lovely time, wish you were here, see you soon,

**Fergus Cumiskey**  
**Rob Fairmichael**

● Having just returned from South Africa **Rob Fairmichael** looks for relevant parallels with Northern Ireland

# Not all black and white

It probably requires a certain amount of audacity to reflect on a massive country like South Africa after only a month there. I do so after an intense experience monitoring in a particular location, and I am aware how much situations vary from place to place. But the point here is also to 'compare and contrast' South Africa and Northern Ireland, I hope not too simplistically - or maybe just being aware of that I am being simplistic! I also want to declare, at the outset, that despite all the right rhetoric, I went out to South Africa with a European mixture of conscious and unconscious prejudice about Africa and black people.

South Africa now has the freedom to achieve greater freedom. While the feeling which all South Africans have about their country may have changed following the first democratic elections, there is no sense in the idea that there is real freedom for those on the breadline, eking out an existence in a drought-ridden landscape, living in a mud hut. The poverty statistics are appalling, and have got worse in recent years. W B Yeats' two line poem comes to mind;

*"Parnell came down the road, he said to a cheering man:  
'Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break stone. '"*

In that economic regard Northern Ireland is definitely part of the 'first world'. There is poverty here and it also has been getting worse, due to recession and government policies. There are holes in the social security safety nets - people involved in welfare rights could tell you just how threadbare some of the safety net is - but it still exists in a way which it doesn't in South Africa. A different argument can be made if you consider power and powerlessness in Northern Ireland.

But there is a hopefulness and an optimism in South Africa which doesn't exist in Northern Ireland. Is that optimism and change due to the fact, as a number of commentators have said, that the situation was so bad people really had to take risks for peace? I think it is due to a number of factors, including this.

Some of that optimism has been there before the important breakthroughs. It would be interesting to see if this is related to the much more prevalent presence of a particular kind of Christian faith in day to day life. Have you seen the words of 'Nkosi Sikel' i Afrika' ('God bless Africa'), the national anthem?

It may be sung with a fist in the air but the words are a pure Christian prayer! Maybe it is Africa which has shaped its own faith. Here in Northern Ireland Christian faith tends to be pessimistic and sectarian. Mind you, where I was in South Africa there was still a "Christ for white Afrikaaners" church. Don't laugh; there are plenty of 'Christ for Protestants' and 'Christ for Catholics' churches in Northern Ireland.

Further down the road there may be a challenge to be open to people of other religions and none; though despite

considerable 'Christian' identity shown it didn't seem to be a problem that I could identify at this stage - maybe people have had other things to worry about until now.

Apartheid is alive and well, not any more as government policy, indeed now the antithesis of government policy, but in the hearts, minds and often practices and patterns of South Africans. It could not be otherwise. A teacher in an Afrikaans school cannot use the staff room because he is 'Indian'. During the period before the election, five black African monitors went looking for somewhere to eat in a coastal resort. The first place they called to they were informed that the restaurant was closed - despite the sound of music coming from upstairs. The second place there were insufficient 'faces of colour' to make them feel comfortable. The third place they found somewhere to their liking and needs. Racial housing patterns will take a long time, and economic change, to break down; it was interesting to see the 'peace line' in Durban between white and Indian areas consisted of a 'cordon sanitaire' of sugar cane.

We are aware in Northern Ireland how sectarianism does not necessarily need ill will to thrive, it can simply be a feature of living apart. I saw that there are prejudices about black people

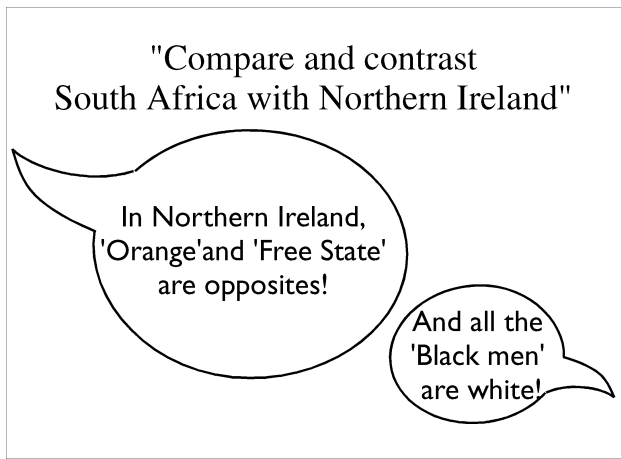
*Swedish and Canadian monitors at an Inkatha rally.*

held by 'white' and 'Indian' people, and undoubtedly different prejudices when it comes to vice versa. There is also still considerable fear among whites, 'Indians' and 'coloureds' about the future, which partly explains why the National Party did quite well in the election. It will require an amazing amount of work, and time, to break down these fears and prejudices and some of it can only come as blacks get their fair share of education, employment and thereby experience. Some of our work here (on prejudice and developing understanding between groups) may be of use to share in this direction; I can easily understand South Africans and Irish forming alliances at an international mediation conference ("they seemed to share a desire to emphasize the communal dimension of conflict", Brendan McAllister, CRC Journal No.5).

There is much that we can potentially learn from their situation. We can study the process of negotiation, the factors that broke the logjam, the guarantees about participation - and the unending struggle to achieve that participation resulting in the Inkatha Freedom Party of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi only coming into the election a week before voting started! We can study the

Goldstone Commission on violence and intimidation, a respected commission which can take evidence in private and which has been able to influence government policy. We can study the National Peace Accord itself and resultant regional and local peace committees, whose work has been significant in many areas not just in tackling thorny issues but also in bringing representatives of parties and statutory authorities into creative interaction. Many of these structures have difficulties but they have delivered a considerable amount.

One of the things which I was most interested in experiencing in South Africa was monitoring or observing work (the two terms are used in different senses by different people but can be thought of as similar if not interchangeable). In Northern Ireland, INNATE, the nonviolent network, has been involved in developing observing as a means of being present in situations of potential conflict; a conference in March decided INNATE should continue this developmental role on observing. Anyone interested in this - either being involved as an observer or calling on observers to be present in a situation, or simply wanting more information - can contact INNATE at 16 Ravensdene Park, Belfast BT6 ODA, phone Belfast 647106.



In South Africa, while monitors/observers from abroad had some official status (either through involvement in peace committee structures or, during the election, through the Independent Electoral Commission) much more authority came from simply being identifiable outsiders who had a neutral but concerned role to play. South African monitors would have been more directly attached to either a peace committee or the Independent Electoral Commission. While events which I attended were generally peaceful, there were one or two potentially explosive situations, and it is clear that monitoring structures had a useful preventative role to play and, as in Northern Ireland, helped people on all sides to be on their best behaviour.

In South Africa there has been a willingness to change, and a process over a number of years. That willingness to change is not overwhelmingly manifested in Northern Ireland. It exists at times, as shown after the Shankill and Greysteel killings late last year, or back in 1976 with the start of the Peace People. But it is not as deep and pervasive as that which shifted South African politics into forward gear after many years in reverse. Self interest cannot be left out either; business in South Africa was keen for change and contributed significantly to the process, much of it due to sanctions and resultant isolation and the economy withering. The same economic self interest doesn't exist here to anything like that extent.

And the scale of the change is breathtaking. Umkhonte we Sizwe (the ANC army) is being integrated into the national army; as Padraig O'Malley commented on Radio Ulster, this is equivalent to the IRA being integrated into the army here! The mind boggles at this comparison but I think it is a useful analogy simply to illustrate just how big a leap South Africa has taken.

Northern Ireland has come to the brink, the edge of the abyss, at different times since 1968. The period after internment was arguably the worst of these, simply in terms of deaths and violence. The Ulster Workers Council strike of 1974 was more dramatic in a different way. The hunger strike period also approached this kind of apocalyptic feeling, and there have been other times too. But that abyss into civil war and the unknown has never been traversed. And it has never been traversed precisely because 'public opinion', that amorphous mass of humanity, has said 'enough' - and paramilitary groups have faced the prospect of losing what support they do have if they persist with particular forms of activity.

I was reminded of the power of public opinion when Inkatha came into the South African elections a week beforehand. A decision was made not to cross the abyss in South Africa. There was also self interest at work here; party officials faced wilderness years without participation, and Buthelezi extinction of much of his power base. Without their participation, the election was likely to have been a blood bath in Zulu areas -

rather than the calm affair it proved to be. And by the way, the 'vote early, vote often' brigade here could certainly pick up some tips from South Africa; even if there was intimidation of election officials involved, the creativity of setting up your own polling stations is pretty amazing! Nevertheless, the calmness and dignity of South Africans in the election days impressed the world.

Policing is an issue of importance in any society. There are changes needed there, and different changes needed here. There I hope the police 'heavy squad' of the Internal Stability Unit will be disbanded. But normal police systems need much improvement. At best there is at times police inaction concerning violence; in other cases active collusion with people perpetrating violence. Leaving behind body parts (a hand and a foot), which I witnessed at a murder scene, is not particularly professional, nor was the fact that it took me a whole day to try to find out, ten days later, who, in what division of the police, was dealing with the case when the officer I was talking to should have known because of his contact with the case (he had a piece of relevant evidence in his desk).

Thinking about my month in South Africa at an emotional level I was interested to discover that talking about finding body parts was actually less traumatic than talking about a black middle aged teacher, living in a violent area where she cannot cross the road (sounds just like Northern Ireland, doesn't it), never having had the opportunity to receive postcards from abroad. Something which we take so for granted! Never to have been abroad, all right, with poverty and apartheid that I might have expected. But not to have received a postcard from abroad! It triggered something in me.

We are thus lucky in this part of the world to deal with the problems we deal with. We are also unlucky because South Africa has pulled off something we haven't. I don't want to start discussing majorities and minorities in this piece but obviously there is more about that to be thought about. How we are going to arrive at our 'amandla' is not even in the pot yet, indeed the ingredients are only being gathered. The problem in this regard is not necessarily too many cooks spoiling the broth but the fact that the cooks haven't had the necessary training, are not particularly imaginative, and, most of all, have a very undemanding clientele.

If South Africa can tackle basic issues of water, housing and employment in the next five years so that ordinary people see a difference then there is hope. If not then political divisiveness may tear apart the consensus which has been so carefully constructed. But they got it right at the top first; not some instant agreement (and there are issues still to be fully settled, e.g. the position of kwaZulu areas) but an outline and an agreement to proceed in a close working relationship. Who can dispute that we need some of the same?

- Fergus Cumiskey examines the Groupwork Skills model and offers a reflective critique of QPEP's training philosophy

# Living with conflict as an ally

In the last edition of *Journal* Jerry Tyrrell expounded upon the theory and practice of the Quaker Peace Education Project. This article will seek to explain the values and practice underpinning the CRC's Advanced Group Work Skills Programme while offering a reflective critique of QPEP's training philosophy.

The need for an advanced programme came from CRC's Action Learning Programme trainees. Having applied their learning in a variety of contexts, running anti-sectarian workshops, facilitating contentious political discussions, exploring the implications for Community Relations work of local antagonistic histories, workers reported they had difficulties in their work, including:

1. Lack of support and supervision - usually due to being the lone Community Relations activist in an agency or community context, lacking CR skilled line management.
2. Lack of an adequate regular or consistent peer support or supervision context where projects could be mutually developed and evaluated.
3. Lack of a professional development and evaluation opportunities with a dual focus on living with conflict and coping with fear.

In response to these findings CRC commissioned the Advanced Group Work Skills Programme.

One of the clearest findings of CR work facilitators is that the issues keeping local groups and work organisations from the vigorous pursuit of anti-sectarianism, although complex, are worth naming and can be clustered around the following assertions. Sectarianism, due to the culturally-maintained, historically-perpetuated and structurally-reinforced elements in its make up, as a discriminatory system, makes it too big and powerful to tackle by individuals and organisations. The same goes for sexism and racism which, albeit in a piecemeal

fashion, are being tackled. Why not sectarianism? *Fear* seems to be the block. Fear of rejection isolation, misinterpretation of motives and the vulnerability which ensues with a preparedness to confront or discuss sectarianism. To discuss sectarianism in Northern Ireland is to be political and to do so courts judgement and danger.

So we have the equation, sectarianism + fear = danger. Not surprisingly, most people choose avoidance as a coping strategy. The inertia to change is maintained by a fear of conflict and the terror which can be evoked by the experience of challenging sectarianism.

Given these tried and tested assumptions as the premises upon which CR practice is based, to train in this area of work requires not only a focus upon communication skills specific to conflict but also a commitment to take care of oneself. Flexibility, resourcefulness and updating a current affairs awareness and an interest in learning are vital.

The work of a CR activist has at its core the challenge to sectarianism while devising alternatives to crippling enervation. To court conflict in this way means the worker must be prepared to experience conflict, as a participant, not a neutral observer or mediator. As protagonist in conflict the worker learns the excitement, anxiety, fear and relief in outing difficult issues. Unlike Jerry Tyrrell's article on QPEP's work (*Journal 5*) this paper contends that conflict is an essential element in the every day dynamics of human relationships. To suggest that human beings do not have intrinsically competing interests as Val Carpenter's quote (*J5*) claims is to imply a Utopian ideal, which just does not relate to the experience of CR workers. We live in a world of finite resources and inevitably competing needs, interests, ideologies and practices. The dynamics of competition and the inevitable conflict which ensues are a primary driving force of human interaction, which can ultimately discharge the energy required for true co-operation.

A little more now on the theory underpinning our practice in CRC's Advanced Group Work Skills Programme.

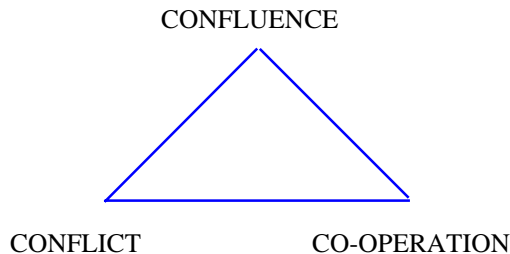
The focus is upon three clear elements each of which have two intensive learning days, delivered over a three week period.

The three stages of the Advanced Group Work Skills training programme mirror the Gestalt theory of group development.

The first session has four important elements:-

1. Introduction/Ice-breaker: Who are we and why are we here?
2. An exploration of expectations, hidden agendas and group rules leading to the setting of ground rules for the course; agreement about the group's task and whatever negotiation about course content or methodology you are willing to undertake.
3. A discussion of participants' work with groups; identifying areas of their work in which they may and may not feel confident, leading to the setting of individual learning agendas.
4. The theory of confluence within the model of group development.

The second session focuses upon Awareness and Communication.



**Confluence** means flowing together or uniting.

**Confluence** is essential for learning and can be a positive force when there is anxiety.

**Confluence** can be a negative force when it suppresses individual expression.

**Conflict** means a "meeting" of individuals with different interests or opinions.

**Conflict** can be healthy and natural; burying conflict is energy consuming and restricting.

**Co-operation** means working together to the same end with individual differences acknowledged and used.

When we **co-operate**, commitment to the task becomes central and individual differences are used creatively.

These two initial days establish a learning contract and set the boundaries of the learning context, while establishing the "confluent" cohesion upon which the training group can build the confidence needed to introduce their core learning needs as trainers and CR group work practitioners.

The theory and practice elements of the work converge in a creative, dynamic learning process, structured in negotiation with the group and designed to move progressively through the support materials and the group and individual learning needs which emerge.

Session three focuses upon strengths, limitations, boundaries and support for workers; managing stress at work and providing the preamble to managing conflict at work on day four.

Days three and four support the group's learning through focused small group work, reflection on theory and practice in the large group and encourage responsibility-taking for how each worker manages conflict at work.

Days five and six move on to consider managing conflict in groups we work with; and finally, support and co-operation strategies after the course, and evaluation of the programme.

Our experience delivering the programme has confirmed the relative isolation of CR workers in their pursuit of often very risky, emotionally highly-charged contexts. Of the three programmes delivered, half the course participants have spontaneously developed peer support groups to encourage their continued personal and professional development as CR animators.

If we recognise the conviction to do something progressive, developmental and challenging as the impetus to community relations work, this passion and vigour can only be sustained and effectively channelled if the worker can feel safe and supported to go the next step and meet the emerging conflicts guaranteed by such work with confidence and courage. This is not for a moment to suggest that training for CR work implies bombastic evangelism to some kind of pseudo ethic of reconciliation, but does explicitly demand that CR activists take their development and learning seriously and do everything possible to ensure their own safety whilst encouraging independence and responsibility taking, supporting the collective confidence and advocacy of the groups and committees they work with.

This inevitably draws CR workers into conflict with their own internalised enculturated learning blocks, having been raised in this place and having been impacted by the historical and current sectarian realities of everyday life here. In facing those conflicts with the support and safety of other committed yet diverse learners, there are enhanced possibilities for personal growth and an immediacy of energy available to apply that learning in community relations group contexts.

Inevitably my perspective gleaned from practical experience draws me into conflict in several fundamental ways with the essentially confluent bias of the QPEP analysis presented in No.5 issue of the Journal.

There is a chasm of difference between a singular focus upon affirmation as a means of communicating appreciation and the richness available in honest feedback. I agree wholeheartedly with Jerry Tyrrell's assertion that contracting, encouraging a sense of belonging and support of openness are essential values to sustain a learning context in focused CR work, which is often sensitive, emotive and deeply evocative of painful experiences and memories which require airing and a hearing. However, for affirmation to be the only form of feedback appropriated is to reduce the credibility of the source to break point.

Jerry's assertion that to affirm rather than put down sometimes challenges the habit of a lifetime, is a truism particularly for Irish men, but to suggest the corollary i.e. to be effective in developing communication and co-operation one must focus on affirmation alone, is exchanging one toxic cultural norm which is damaging i.e. put downs with a synthetically constructed alternative, what Jerry calls "put ups". This smells of another form of dogmatism, alien to and undermining of clear, direct, honest person to person contact which offers the full range of possibilities of human expression, conflictual expression included.

To suggest that competition leads to "good people attacking each other", based upon the extreme example of the intellectual polemics of the Colmcille Debating Society is to overstate the case and simplify the dynamics of competition. We must compete every day of our lives to survive, and when we compete explicitly there is a possibility to establish normative rules, laws of engagement to protect all the participants in community life. Making group rules explicit and open to challenge are core concepts in effective CR work, in order to not only encourage "survival", but also to encourage the group and its individual members to thrive in their diversity, and rich

wealth of often contradictory experience of the same community and life events.

Part of healthy "belonging" to a group or community has much more to do with the diversity of opinion and interests represented than the commonalities. The "sameness," although evident in our neediness as human beings and supportive of a baseline confluence, can become oppressive. To declare difference through identifying individual and collective competing ideologies, resource requirements and attitudes, provides for explicit, (and with support), perfectly survivable conflict, the energy discharge from which can release resources for more meaningful co-operation.

There is no doubt that ground rules are a safety net but they can become a morass, a quagmire, if they limit the possibilities of non-violent, energised, angry, often impassioned exchanges. People who work consistently to make positive changes in CR terms, in my experience, are extraordinary in their ordinariness. They have no special recipes or formulas. They are however special in their acknowledgement of their humanness, they talk to each other, they get angry, upset, delighted and frustrated.

They not only deserve affirmation but demand feedback, the honest reportage of those with whom they work, in the understanding that this is a reciprocal contract, accepting the challenging rigour this work ensures for both participants in the dialogue.

Again, I depart from Jerry's advocacy of affirmation when he suggests that everyone can be affirmed. How do you affirm someone you are in conflict with? How does the hurt or angry party in any conflict affirm the perceived aggressor?

I feel the assumption alluded to in Val Carpenter's (Mediation UK) assertion that less than 100% respect and welcome of another human being means you must be hurting in connection to the past and not the current reality, seems to represent at least an overstatement of the Freudian analytic concept of transference and at worst is dangerous psycho-babble which makes mumbo jumbo out of CR theory and practice.

The Gestalt theoretical base, as one of the informing frameworks to CRC's Advanced Group Work Skills Programme suggests that transference, i.e. past hurts which are often family based are of significance to here and now interactions, but do not in any way undermine the integrity of the current exchange, and must be considered in relation to the participant's context and their unique experience and expression of that milieu.

To be the recipient of genuine feedback one has the option to take or leave the learning and assess for oneself the appropriateness of the meaning and content of the feedback source. When working with children as in the QPEP example, although the locum parentis responsibility pertains, honest feedback, however it comes, gives the child an accurate and consistent awareness of their effect in the world. The feedback source becomes incredible if only one type is available, either positive or negative.

One sole repertoire of narrow human response creates insecurity and often leads the child to guess what is missing. This often results in the child having inaccurate and catastrophic judgements and fantasies about what the other is thinking. When working with adults, a purely affirming feedback source is likely to be dismissed as empty rhetoric, as the quote from the prisoner in Jerry Tyrrell's article confirms.

My thesis argues strongly that conflict is a necessary and pervasive dynamic to human encounter and is the almost inevitable preamble to co-operation. The issue is not that how we communicate must be prescribed one way or another, e.g. put downs or put ups, affirmation or criticism, the imperative for effective communication and co-operation is the willingness to speak out from how you are, in the moment of exchange. This is only possible when trust and effective boundaries have been established and constantly renegotiated, picking up on nuance as it emerges as new circumstances and additional needs.

There are some fights worth having and in Northern Ireland to fight, non-violently in the safety of a discussion group context, is a much preferred option than the explosive energy of ad hoc or planned violence on the streets or the stubborn withdrawal and tantrum throwing still present in much of what passes for political discussion.

Jerry finally asserts that children are dealing more effectively with conflicts as a result of learning co-operation, affirmation, and communications skills on QPEP courses. This may well be the case and I have no reason to doubt it. To spend time attempting to process conflict rather than controlling or avoiding the issue is bound to have an enhanced effect on conflict handling skills. But there are other ways - ways which affirm conflict as a constant ever present and purposeful dynamic to be engaged with interest and curiosity.

Community Relations work has a key task to perform in beginning to transform our aversion to conflict as a bete noir of human experience and embrace it as an ordinary yet potentially powerful energy source for community growth and development.

## Good practice guide for inter-church work

*Len Munnik/Peace Media Service*

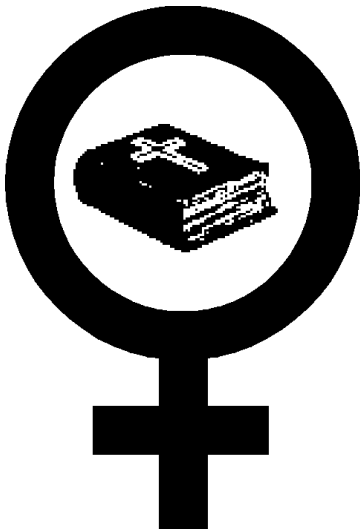
Now available (price £1) from  
Community Relations Information Centre  
31 Castle Lane, Belfast  
Tel. 0232-311881

# Reflections on Action Learning

*Libby Keyes and Eamonn Fleming have recently completed the Community Relations Council's Action Learning Programme (Libby also completed the Advanced Group Work Skills Programme). Here they give an account of their experiences. (Note that details of the next programme are displayed on the opposite page).*

## Libby Keyes

I was appointed Cookstown District Council's first Community Relations Officer a year ago, and the first few weeks were daunting, to say the least. I knew that I had come to the post with skills to offer, but I wasn't certain that I was using them in the most effective way. It was a relief then to know that training was available from Community Relations Council. In the past months I have completed the Action Learning Programme and the Advanced Group Work Skills Course, both of which have changed my approach to this work. The training has lessened my feelings of isolation and given me a network of contacts in Community Relations work that could have taken years to build up. Identifying personal strengths and limitations has helped me find the best ways to utilise my time and energy.



For the Action Learning Programme, we were asked to undertake a project concerned with some aspect of our work, particularly an area in which we might be experiencing difficulty. I choose to do a project on the cultural and political identity of Protestant women, in particular mothers within the 30 - 50 age group. I was interested in the question of whether/how this identity has changed in the past twenty years, and also to consider their influence within family

and community. The project was of strong personal interest to me, but also covered ground that would be of distinct relevance to future community relations work.

The well documented silence of this group is often misconstrued as complacency, or indifference, or even arrogance. A major problem for me was trying to encourage people to discuss freely, topics which they admitted they avoided thinking about, let alone talking about. The underlying sense of exclusion and isolation is reinforced by the walls of politeness. The argument arises as to how we as Protestant women can expect to discuss our feelings with Catholic women when we don't discuss them with each other. Doing this project forced me to look at where I came from, to identify what has shaped my

attitudes, and to recognise the roots of my own sense of confusion.

The women I talked to were strong and resourceful, and very aware of the roles expected of them within their own tradition. Loyalty- to husband, family, church- was paramount, and even those in full time jobs felt obliged to be "good managers". All women I talked to stressed the importance of the church in their lives, echoing the findings of the Opsahl Commission that "for many Protestants, religion is a far more important element in defining their identity than their "unionism" or Britishness".

To the question "How do you feel your identity differs from that of a Catholic woman", the same words and phrases came up repeatedly: "They're more confident than we are". "They have a far richer culture". "They have a stronger and clearer sense of identity". "They're more easy-going". "They know how to enjoy themselves". There was acknowledgement that both Catholic and Protestant mothers faced the same problems bringing up children in Northern Ireland.

There was an overall feeling that the link with Britain was gradually weakening, and there was apprehension for the future, from a social and from an economic viewpoint. There was a strong feeling of being a diminishing people, and a need to rediscover a consciousness of being something and of belonging.

For me this has scratched the surface of an area that will provide a wide range of work for me. If I can develop an approach which offers safety and no hidden agenda, then it may be possible to encourage women to look more closely at their own identity, and at differences and to realise that where we start from will determine how far we get.

Both the Action Learning Programme and the Group Work Skills course involved hard work and commitment. I felt challenged by both courses, and I have no doubt that my learning will influence the direction my work will take in the future. Also, I now have in place a support network which will preclude any feeling isolation.

## Eamonn Fleming

I was appointed Development Officer for Drumcree Faith and Justice Group in May of 1993. This was an altogether sobering experience in that the gaps in my educational background were exposed. I became quite daunted by the size of the task in front of me. That's why when the fliers came through the door for the Action Learning Programme, I jumped at the opportunity to take on board the training. So apart from bolstering your mail bag, thus making you feel very important, what are the benefits of a course such as this?

The content of the course itself was at all times interesting. I particularly enjoyed the inputs which looked at sectarianism, history and the political discussion workshop. Somewhere near Ballycastle there are two local politicians scratching their heads wondering how they ever got conned into taking part in our political discussion workshop.

As part of the course each individual participant has to carry out a project. This for me was perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the course. I undertook initially to assess the feelings and opinions of key members of the Portadown community towards Community Relations work in the Portadown area. Ordinarily I would have been content enough with this as a piece of work. However, there was something about the nature of support received during the Action Learning Programme which pushed me that little bit further. So, as an additional aim I undertook to personally develop relationships with influential individuals and organisations living and operating within the Portadown area. This part of the work had a particular emphasis on collecting views and opinions of those organisations who in

their endeavours, would seem to be blocking Community Relations activity. I am reluctant to go into the substance of this activity in such a public forum as this paper. However, I feel I can say that the results of this work were personally very challenging and the potential development for my work has been significantly increased as a result.

Another rewarding aspect of the course was the wonderful cross-section of people who took part. Any course is only as good as its participants and if that is true, this was an excellent course. Some of the best exchanges went into the early hours of the morning. The responsibility for developing these contacts lies firmly with myself. Already these contacts have led to spin offs, which the course could only have hoped to provide.

Throughout the course the participants were witness to two quite varied styles of facilitation. Michael Doherty's approach was at all times thought provoking and challenging. A lot of his work centred on personal development. This was generally of an implicit nature. In contrast to this, Fergus Cumiskey's approach encouraged a more explicit representation of your learning. This was equally as challenging and also quite likely to lead to healthy open debate. These two styles of facilitation always seemed to complement each other and provided course participants with optimum potential for learning.

Earlier I spoke of being daunted by the task in front of me. This is not now the case. I have abandoned any feeling of inadequacy and appreciate the great challenge of my future work. I now firmly believe that my work can and does make a difference.

# CR Training Diary Dates

CRC are again offering **Advanced Group Work Skills Training** in September. The course is aimed at CR Trainers and Practitioners.

Dates: 15-16 September 1994 } inclusive  
 22-23 September 1994 }  
 29-30 September 1994 }

Venue: Queen's Common Room.  
 Facilitators: Marie Quiery & Fergus Cumiskey

## The 1994/95 Action Learning Programme

Aimed at CR workers, voluntary and paid, in full time CR work contexts, the Action Learning Programme has been delivered four times since its inception in 1990.

Induction Day	- Monday 7 November
1st Residential	- Wednesday 30 November, Thursday 1 and Friday 2 December 1994 Beach Hotel, Port Ballintrae
2nd Residential	- Wednesday 25, Thursday 26, Friday 27 January 1995 St. Columb's Reconciliation Centre, Derry
3rd & Final Residential	- Wednesday 8, Thursday 9, Friday 10 March 1995 Causeway Hotel

Presentation of Certificates - Wednesday 5 April 1995, Duke's Hotel, Belfast

# REVIEW

*Aspects of Implementing Anti-discriminatory Practice in Social Work Education in N.I.: a preliminary study* Marie Smyth, Helena E.M. Schlindwein, & Gill Michael. [University of Ulster, Magee (1993)].

Review by **Colin Neilands**

I'm sure that any CR practitioner reading this report will, as I did, find him or herself constantly recognising and agreeing with points raised and the views and fears expressed by the writers and others involved in this research. If further evidence is needed, here is ample proof of the value of placing anti-sectarianism within the wider family of discrimination, in both our training and practice.

UK directions for all social work students to "commit themselves to anti-discriminatory practice and produce evidence of their abilities to practice social work in an anti-discriminatory manner" needed some reworking in the N.I. context to incorporate our additional issue of sectarianism. Over the past few years, the Department of Applied Social Sciences at Magee College has been developing an ADP curriculum, and last year initiated some preliminary research into its impact on the work required of students during their placements, and of which this is the report.

The published study consists of some general background to introducing ADP to social work training, a description of the teaching involved, the research design and methodology employed, and findings and conclusions. An additional 40 pages consist of appendices which set out the various questionnaires and (fascinating) samples of the students' ADP work.

Early on, the authors voice concerns and caveats over the introduction of ADP which echo those of many working under the label of Community Relations- "Will our 'clients' go along with the new thinking only because of the immediate benefits to themselves (i.e. passing an exam, gaining a grant), rather than valuing and embracing it for its deeper professional and social implications? Can we avoid the cynicism which says that sectarianism, and all the other -isms, are endemic in our society and unlikely to fall through our piecemeal efforts? Are we simply involved in window-dressing exercises?" However, the authors have sufficient faith in their own insight and abilities to recognise that their work for change through ADP will only be called into question when it "becomes routinised, easy, smooth, emotionally undemanding and fear-free". As with ADP, so with CR this should be a salutary guide for us all.

On their placements the students had no difficulty in identifying issues of discrimination, particularly sexism, sectarianism and disablism (racism, classism, ageism and homophobia are also cited amongst the students' reports). Given some of the work situations in which student social workers can find themselves, choosing to work with sectarianism is amongst the most risky,

and the fears, anxieties and safety issues raised generally about tackling ADP are intensified by the real threat of intimidation and violence. Here is another parallel with our work in CR, and one which I would be interested in seeing further researched - we all touch on the fears and anxieties raised by CR for ourselves and the groups we work with, but why haven't they

been sufficiently valued for us to write up even in descriptive terms (is there avoidance, a fear of naming here? - in me as in others). Two other areas which emerged from the report as deserving further analysis and discussion are the definition of sectarianism (which the authors rightly say currently lacks clarity), and the urban/rural dichotomy which, to my knowledge, has not been addressed in CR training or literature. I'm sure other readers will find many other seeds scattered throughout this volume to trigger their interests and which merit help to germinate.

Two pieces which I for one will be lifting from the report are the excellent section on the learning contract and ground rules established with the students (unfortunately too long to quote here), and Marie Smyth's model of the levels and systems of subordination, which some will have heard her explain at NICVA's 'Breaking the Barriers' conference last summer. It is crucial that all of us engaged in intervention work should have insight into its implications and limitations, and Smyth's model provides a very clear and accessible key to such understanding.

Any review, of whatever length, will not do justice to the quality and content of this report - I am frustrated that I am only able to highlight a few of the salient points when so much deserves a full reading. I would very much like to see a slightly amended version produced (omitting some of the appendices and expanding on the teaching methods and materials) and made available to a wider public. If the authors could be prevailed upon to do the editing, might not CRC facilitate us all and make the publication possible? In what is still a relative desert of both descriptive and analytic work in our field and context (ADP, CR, equity, change - call it what you will), this report offers some refreshing sustenance.