PAPER
05

Mechanisms for democracy

Bob Dick (1989) *Mechanisms for democracy in learning: some reflections on continuing experiments on democracy in the tertiary classroom*, second edition. Chapel Hill: Interchange.

First edition 1987.

Introduction

This is an account of continuing experiments in classroom democracy in a number of university classes in consultancy skills. They range from undergraduate programs through fourth year courses to parts of a coursework masters program in organisational psychology.

On a number of occasions I have run workshops on classroom democracy. On average, about half of the participants have attempted to introduce more participation in their classrooms, but have given up. The obstacles, they found, were too great. This seems to be as true of primary and secondary school classrooms as they are of classes at tertiary level, where my own experience lies.

Despite this, I have been able to achieve high levels of participation, sometimes very high levels. This is particularly so in the fourth year classes I teach. Although the changes from any one class to the next are relatively trivial, the cumulative effect over fifteen years is considerable.

The end result, for one class, is that class members collectively design and run the course within very wide limits. After some initial sessions, they decide the course content, choose the processes to be used to address it, and then do it. I should also add that experiential methods are used in all of the classes, some more than others.

It all began in 1974. The University of Queensland borrowed me from the public service for six months, and then another six months. They then invited me to apply for a lecturing position within the psychology department. As I later recount, I tried to bring into the classroom the job design principles I know from my work as an industrial psychologist. I would have to say that some of my early endeavours were just promising enough to persist; but they could not be described as unqualified successes.

As I often do when I'm trying to get my mind around something, I avoided the literature until I had found a way to get the classes working more effectively. I tried to set up the classes as self-improving systems, so that they would get better over time. I then tried to extract from the experience just what it was that made a class effective and satisfying. An earlier version of this document was the result. At this point I went to the literature to compare my experience to that of other people.

Some of the important processes in each course are described. Historical information is included so that the evolution of the classes can be followed. Some principles for introducing participation are then extracted from the experience.

The key requirement for effective participation and learning seems to be arousal without anxiety. Techniques for encouraging participation are included. Impor-

tant amongst them are clear roles for teacher and learner, and the provision of credible information to learners early in the course is also important. The third year class serves as an apprenticeship for the fourth year class. Contact between previous and present class members has been found to help.

Ways of removing some of the anxiety from participation are also discussed. Close interpersonal relationships and high class cohesion, developed through deliberate team building, are key features. Providing a "standard package" and encouraging people to renegotiate it, has led to more real participation than starting with a clean slate. Removing the risk from assessment has played an important part.

Acknowledgments

The first draft of this paper was written while I was a visiting fellow at the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE), Australian National University (ANU) during 1984. It was prepared for a workshop on democracy in learning, held at the Office for Research in Academic Methods (ORAM) at ANU. The workshop was arranged with the help of Allen Miller, Director of ORAM.

I acknowledge with pleasure my debt to Allen Miller of ORAM, and the people I worked with at CCE. My early enthusiasm for democratic teaching was encouraged by my contact with them, and I had hoped the time I spent there would be fruitful. I wasn't disappointed.

The people to whom I owe the most, however, are the class members of PY219 (later PY338), PY411 (later PY479 and PY480), and the postgraduate courses PY812, PY824 and PY860. They joined enthusiastically in the experiments, and many of the improvements over the years came from their suggestions.

I also owe a lot to three colleagues. John Damm, from whom I inherited the classes and the philosophy, is one. Phil Harker who shared responsibility for the

courses with me in their early years, is another. Cindy Gallois and I currently team-teach one of the courses, and originally team-taught a second level course in communication skills.

Many thanks also to the other staff members with whom I shared the classes at different times—Tricia Vilkinas, Pat Noller, Debbie Twinn, Dawn Cumes, Keithia Wilson, Greg Hearn, Di Guthrie, Neal Ashkanasy, and (as I write this) Paul Donovan and Roslyn Smart. Greg and Roslyn, particularly, have helped me through times of dramatic change. I have been more fortunate with my colleagues than I could have anticipated. All of them have brought much to the classes. I enjoyed working with each of them.

The thoughts I express here have been refined somewhat in the course of three half-day workshops on classroom democracy, the one (already mentioned) at ANU, and similar ones organised with the help of Ingrid Moses, Marjorie Searle and Geoff Isaacs at the Tertiary Education Institute (or Tedi), University of Queensland.

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Introduction

This document is still in the process of development. In its present form it represents a second revision of the unreferenced draft I wrote at ANU, plus some further fine tuning. I hope to revise it further in due course. In writing it I have drawn on two earlier documents. One is a paper I wrote for Brad Imrie at the Tertiary Education Institute of Queensland University. [1] The other is the course handout for PY411. [2]

I have tried to strike a balance between sufficient detail for this to be used as a resource document, and sufficient brevity for reading not to be too onerous a chore. It is for the most part descriptive, though I have tried to identify some of the underlying principles in a way that allows them to be used in practice.

Two recent partial revisions have increased the detail a little. At workshops on classroom democracy it has become apparent that there are university teaching staff who would like to increase the amount of democracy in their courses, but lack the methods to do so. There has been a particular interest in some aspects of assessment, which is seen as a frequent obstacle to greater democracy. I have responded to this by providing more step-by-step detail. I have also included some details of the earlier history of the courses I describe, as this offers a path for slower adoption of participative methods.

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1. Small groups and classroom democracy: class structure and its contribution to more democratic (and more effective) teaching, in Brad Imrie, ed. (1980), *Small group development reference file*. St Lucia: Tertiary Education Institute, University of Queensland.
2. *PY411: a course in social consultancy* (1986). St Lucia: Department of Psychology, University of Queensland.

I would not presume to say that the procedures described here are applicable to every tertiary teaching situation. The conditions I work under are particularly favourable for democratic experiments. Academic freedom is still a real value at universities, and this removes some of the risk of experimentation. Courses for intending practitioners of community and organisational change (PY338 and PY411) are an especially fitting vehicle for activities which improve skills in communication, problem solving and change.

I would tentatively suggest, however, that this is not sufficient reason to dismiss outright the wider applicability of the ideas. After all, most courses in psychology use very similar teaching methods to those used in other subjects in universities and other teaching institutions. If a change is possible in psychology, perhaps it is appropriate elsewhere. In partial confirmation, I know of a course in Computer Studies which makes extensive use of group work and participative methods.

Let me also acknowledge freely that my own likings have had an influence. Any course design can profitably take into account not just the subject matter and the class members, but also the style and preferences of the teacher. My natural leadership style is closer to laisser faire than anything else. The approach to teaching described here is one I feel particularly comfortable with.

Preliminary considerations

It is one thing to wish for more classroom democracy. It is another matter entirely to bring that wish to realisation. It depends on the use of appropriate democratic mechanisms. Outside the field of adult learning there has so far been little written about such methods.

In this document I describe two tertiary courses where quite high levels of participation have been achieved. They represent the interim result of twelve years of

experimentation which is still continuing. I hope that others may be encouraged to respond with their own experience. A pooling of information may lead us to a better understanding of the more promising approaches. Some of the methods described here have also been used in other courses which I don't mention, or mention only in passing.

Democratic methods can be imported from other fields which make use of them. Industrial democracy and community development are two such examples.

My own experiments have been influenced by my experience in organisational development, management consulting, and small group work in organisational and community settings. Methods which work in these settings can be transposed to some extent into the classroom. For best results some adjustment is needed.

I have also been influenced, in a more negative way, by my own formal education. I endured more years of tertiary study than I care to recall. Some of them I found enjoyable. But many of the courses I found unenjoyable and constraining. Even in some of those courses I enjoyed, I regretted the control that some lecturing staff had over my conduct. My distaste for this has made me reluctant to inflict the same experience on others.

The two courses I describe are third and fourth year electives within a university bachelor's degree. They are part of a four-year degree which comprises the basic (that is, minimal) qualification for practitioner psychologists. (There is currently a push within the profession for Masters level qualifications to be regarded as minimal; unfortunately this seems likely to succeed. My own view is that if we taught what people most needed, we could turn out in four years people at least as highly skilled as those which presently emerge from a theory-oriented undergraduate program and a skills-oriented masters program.)

I first describe some of the more important assumptions about learning which underlie the design of the courses. The courses are then described, first in out-

line and later in more detail. Following this, I discuss some of the barriers to effective classroom democracy, and the general approaches which may help to remove or minimise them. The final sections relate the specific practices in the two courses to the identified barriers and remedies. In doing so, I offer what seem to me to be some of the key theoretical issues.

I ought perhaps to say something about the theoretical basis underlying the practices described here. While familiar with the adult learning literature, I chose to ignore it and to devise self-improving courses which would evolve over time. I hoped they would eventually become more democratic and more effective. This, I think, has happened.

The design of the courses could now be described in terms similar to those used in various theories. These include self-directed learning, for example, by Knowles, [3] or Revans' action learning. [4] Alternatively, many of the concepts of job design, both American [5] and Australian [6] could be drawn upon. For the most part I have chosen not to do so.

Instead I use a general action research [7] framework. I focus on those theoretical considerations which have appeared most important during the evolution of the present courses. Those of you who work from other theoretical bases may find encouragement that the end result is so consistent with the theories you use.

In justification for this approach I would offer the thought that the explanations offered here are more easily related to basic psychological principles than can some of the other approaches. Although I do not make explicit the links between

3. Malcolm Knowles (1975), *Self directed learning: a guide for learners and teachers*, Associated Press, Chicago.
4. Reginald W. Revans, (1980), *Action learning: new techniques for management*, Blond and Briggs, London.
5. e.g. Thomas G. Cummings and Edmond S. Molloy (1977), *Improving productivity and the quality of work life*, Praeger, New York.
6. Fred and Merrilyn Emery (1975), *Participative design: work and community life*, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT.
7. Kurt Lewin (1951), *Field theory and social science*, Tavistock, London.

these experiments and the basic concepts of psychology, it is not difficult to do so.

It appears that very different theories often address very similar phenomena. Special vocabularies often conceal the similarities. I have tried to avoid developing a jargon specific to democracy in the tertiary classroom; I hope that this may make it easier for you to translate the ideas here into a form more suited to your own situation.

Assumptions

I start from certain assumptions about the learning process. I believe I could argue for each of them; but I will limit myself to offering them here as prejudices. You may wish to make allowance for them as you read on.

- Learning is unavoidably a participative exercise, as only a learner can learn. The most a teacher (so called) can do is create situations within which learning is made possible and is encouraged.
- Skills and concepts are both important. Or at least they are in organisational and community change, the subject area of the courses described here. If there must be a choice between them, skills are more important. It is relatively easy for someone with the skills to acquire the knowledge when it is needed. It is not so simple for someone with the knowledge to acquire the skills.
- Skills are learnt by practising them, not by hearing or reading about them.
- Knowledge can be acquired either through discovering it or by hearing about it. Discovery is both more time-consuming and more effective. A combination of discovery and a more didactic approach is often most appropriate.
- Practitioners need intellectual theories. By this I mean theories of which they are consciously aware. Such theories are akin to what Argyris and Schön [8]

call espoused theories. They are valuable before the event in planning, and after the event in review. They can be acquired by reading and listening.

- In what might be called a real time situation, so much information arrives simultaneously on so many channels that the practitioner must be able to react more quickly than conscious processing allows. For this, intuitive theories are also needed. They resemble what Argyris and Schön call theories in use, and depend among other things upon experience.
- If a practitioner is to be effective in moment-by-moment practice, but also capable of planning and being able to learn from self-criticism, compatible intellectual and intuitive theories are needed.

Important skills

There are other assumptions about what is learnt, and how it is learnt, that are important enough to be treated in more depth. I will use the classification of skills which I acquired from Edgar Schein in discussion with him in 1980, when he visited Queensland. (I am relying heavily on my memory and I may not do his ideas justice.)

He groups managerial skills into three categories, which he calls technical, interpersonal, and emotional.

For managers, technical skills include such things as reading a balance sheet or preparing a critical path network. These, Schein comments, are the main focus of management education. They are mostly well taught.

As presently taught to psychologists, technical skills almost always include research and statistics. They may also include administration and interpretation of psychological tests, behaviour modification techniques, and micro-counselling skills. I would expect some or all of these to be an important focus of most courses with a large applied component. They seem to be reasonably well taught

8. Chris Argyris, and Donald A. Schön (1974), *Theory in practice: increasing professional effectiveness*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

for the most part, though with a much more substantial component of covert ideology than I would prefer.

Interpersonal skills consist of the social and communication skills that managers need if they are to make the best use of their technical skills in their work with colleagues. Schein remarks that such skills are taught neither extensively nor well, though the situation is improving on both counts.

Similar comments might be made about psychological training. It may be noted in passing that some interpersonal skills are taught as technical skills. The result seems to be that some psychologists communicate well only when they are wearing their psychologist hat. They behave quite differently in their everyday life. I shall have more to say of this.

In Schein's view the emotional skills are the most important. Ultimately, they limit the use that the manager can make of all other skills. They include the ability to make a decision when all the decisions are painful; to be decisive when required, even under conditions of great uncertainty; to be able to take responsibility for the consequences of ones decisions; to exercise judgment. One might call them, collectively, courage. Schein believes that despite their importance they are least well taught and learnt.

The same could again be said of psychologists. From some of the more painful aspects of my own experience it seem to me that some of my most damaging errors have been sins of omission. They arose not because I didn't have any idea what to do but because I didn't have the courage to do it at the right moment.

I suspect that few courses in psychology attempt to address emotional skills directly. It is true that self-actualisation is a claimed goal of many course. Self-actualisation and courage are admittedly similar. I am not persuaded, however, that the methods for pursuing self-actualisation are always understood enough to be effective.

All three categories are skills, or so it seems to me. Following my earlier presumptions it follows that they are learnt by practising them. The role of teacher is to create situations within which they can be practised. The difficulty in addressing interpersonal and emotional skills is that they may be most effectively approached sideways rather than directly. It will become more apparent what I mean by this in the next section.

Overall course design principles

In the explanation which follows I will make use of the distinction between content and process. The content of a course is its syllabus. It includes the topics it explicitly addresses and the information or skills which are covered as part of those topics. The process of a course consists of the ways in which the content is covered, for example by lectures, discussion, experiment, observation or the like.

Technical skills are most efficiently addressed, I think, by making them the explicit focus of the course: that is, the content. They are usually addressed in this manner.

While interpersonal skills may also be addressed in this way I suspect strongly that it is not the most effective approach. They are more thoroughly learned and more easily used when they are practised regularly in the process of taking part in the class.

If they are practised during the normal conduct of the course process, there is more chance of interpersonal skills continuing to be used afterwards. Treated as content, there is a risk that they will be used only in those particular situations in which they were learned.

In short, technical skills are acquired most economically when they are the content. Interpersonal skills, or so I am suggesting, are better acquired from the

process. Where interpersonal skills are concerned, as McLuhan might say, the medium is the message.

At this point I propose to use an extension to the content/process dichotomy. To involve class members in some responsibility for course process requires the use of something else again, a process for dealing with process. For this the term *metaprocess* seems appropriate.

You will have noticed that most course designs primarily describe content. What is usually called a course syllabus is a description of course content. Some course designs also describe the process, usually by explaining what teaching and assessment procedures are used. In such an instance, however, the content is most likely to be the main focus of the description.

Process designs can include procedures that engage class members in determining or partly determining class content. As the class members battle with the task of listing possible content and then deciding their priorities, they begin to practise important interpersonal skills. Note that this practice takes place in a less artificial situation than if the skills were exercised in role plays, for example.

Now imagine that you also wished to give class members the chance to help to decide the course process. You would then have to use a metaprocess design.

My early attempts to involve the whole class in defining the syllabus tended to work reasonably well. The problem was that they produced a list of topics that looked like the contents page of a mediocre textbook. Class members can decide content without stretching themselves much, provided they have a little more than a nodding acquaintance with the subject's content areas.

Before class members can decide process, however, they must address the difficult issues of how learning takes place, about the respective roles of staff and class, and the like.

Involving the class in the choice of process therefore engages them in making difficult decisions, and in exercising judgment. The consequences of their decisions are more far-reaching, and can have a considerable effect on the style of a course and the amount of challenge they face. They have to live with the consequences of their decisions, or make the effort to change the decisions. The consequences are not trivial.

In other words, class members may be able to practise their emotional skills in determining course process. In doing so, they are evaluating different processes and deciding their applicability. They are engaging in a metaprocess activity.

In partial summary, then, two points can be made.

Firstly, there is a useful distinction to be made between content, process, and metaprocess. A course design which is focussed on content is one which specifies topics. At the process level it specifies the methods to be used to address the content, including perhaps how the content is to be chosen. A metaprocess design describes how the processes are chosen.

Secondly, there is a correspondence of sorts between Schein's taxonomy of skills, and the distinction between content, process and metaprocess, as follows …

content	technical skills
process	interpersonal skills
metaprocess	emotional skills

though I do not want to press this correspondence too far.

The central teaching goal of the courses described below is now probably evident. Many features of the courses are metaprocess features. The courses are structured with the intention of providing opportunity and encouragement for class members to engage themselves in choosing both content and process, and

in managing both. I presume that in doing so they will develop further the emotional skills or courage which may eventually determine how well they operate as practitioners. And, I suspect, as citizens.

The courses

The two courses which comprise the case studies are the undergraduate and fourth year courses for which I am course coordinator.

The third-level course is called *Organisational and social psychology.* I hope it will be renamed eventually as *Social consultancy,* which probably reflects its orientation more accurately. Its official code, which I will use from now on as a convenient shorthand, is PY338. It is a one semester course of 10 credit points. In theory this indicates that to achieve an average grade an average person would devote about 10 hours a week to the course for each of the 13 weeks of semester.

PY338 is timetabled to occupy a single four-hour block each week. Usually three hours are used for formal class contact. The fourth hour is most often used by small groups to design workshops and plan assignments.

The fourth-level course is PY411, *Advanced social consultancy.* Until very recently it was titled *Applied social and organisational psychology.* It is a whole-year course of 28 credit points, indicating a time commitment of about 14 hours per week extending over two semesters. As such it constitutes one-third of an honours year. The entire fourth year can also be taken as a postgraduate diploma.

There is also a one-semester version, PY409, of 14 credit points. This is intended for those people who cannot enrol in PY411 without exceeding the 84 credit points which are the maximum for the year. They must be enrolled in courses which have their own practical components. They study social consultancy as a support to other courses rather than as their central interest.

PY409 and PY411 are, for the first semester, the same course. People enrolled in PY409 and PY411 mix in the class. Many of the small groups formed within the course cut across the boundaries of the two.

Both versions of the course are timetabled for eight hours each week. To this is added a two- or three-day workshop, perhaps spent under canvas, in first semester. Another for PY411 only is included in second semester. Added at the suggestion of the 1985 class, it has become a permanent feature.

Both PY338 and PY411 address skills, concepts and techniques for community and organisational change as their main focus. In the content and process, the emphasis is on developing "process skills"— process observation and facilitation, workshop design and conduct, managing change.

Preceding courses

Most class members enter PY338 after having studied core courses in psychology at first and second level. There is an alternative entry route which I hoped would reduce the in-breeding which characterises many university degrees; but almost nobody avails herself [9] of it. The first-level core consists of 20 credit points of general psychology, and five credit points of the ubiquitous statistics.

The second year core consists of one 10 credit point course, and five 7 credit point courses. Yes, the 10 credit point course is statistics. Four of the five 7 credit point courses are information oriented. Between them they are intended to cover psychology's most important content areas in more depth than the first-level courses are able to do.

The fifth of them, PY263, is a skills-oriented course in which class members develop basic communication skills through practice sessions and group activities. It is designed among other things as preparation for PY338 and PY411.

9. To avoid both male chauvinist language and circumlocutions, I use the feminine gender throughout.

Course coordinator is Cindy Gallois, an active researcher in the field of social psychology (interpersonal psychology is perhaps a more informative label). I team-teach it with her. (This arrangement will change in 1988, with more theory being added to the course and more of the lecturing staff becoming involved. As part of more widespread changes, there will also be courses offered in personnel psychology and in organisational behaviour.)

Subsequent courses

The organisational stream continues after fourth year into a coursework masters program in applied psychology. There, four courses oriented towards practical skills and techniques deal with job design, intervention techniques, training and development, and management-employee relations. A course in group facilitation is to be added in 1988, together with advanced courses in personnel psychology and ergonomics. Of these, two are heavily skills-oriented, the two I teach in intervention techniques, and training and development. The new group facilitation course will be a mix of theory and practice.

History

Both classes will be described for the most part in their present form. I will start, however, with a potted history. In later sections I may also, from time to time, comment on past changes which seem revealing of course design or the operation of the democratic mechanisms.

The history of the courses can be divided very roughly into four phases, approximately equal in duration (the fourth phase is a little briefer at this point, having begun in 1986). The changes from any one year to the next have been comparatively minor. The accumulated changes over about a decade have been considerable.

During the first phase my approach and experience were not greatly different from what Trevor Williams has described in his monograph. [10] (He has since refined his approach in ways that often resemble those I describe here.) The class as a whole decided course content. This was done in what might be called a fairly casual way. "Unstructured" was a favoured adjective in end-of-course evaluations. Phil Harker and myself team-taught both PY338 and PY411 and ran most of the teaching sessions. Most sessions consisted primarily of a loose mix of lectures and activities.

Phase 2 was a period of development. When class members first began to run class sessions these took the form of seminars or miniature lectures. This was done to some extent in PY411 from the start. I gradually stepped up class involvement in all aspects of the course. At the same time I increased the focus on skills and techniques, and the use of activities to develop them through practice. A number of people contributed in important ways to this development, particularly John Damm, from whom I inherited the course, and Tricia Vilkinas and Pat Noller who assisted me with it at different times.

In Phase 3 the amount of participation increased further. I became more skilled at explaining the metaprocess which helps it all to hang together. By making the metaprocess goals and procedures explicit, I have been more effective in helping class members to understand what was happening at the process level.

I am revising this document at the beginning of an exciting year. With the help of suggestions from the previous class, Greg Hearn suggested some changes for this year. The first five weeks consisted mostly of workshops which Greg and I ran. Control of the course was then turned over to the class in a more explicit way than has previously been the case. The original plan (again at the previous class's urging) was that the hand-over occur during a weekend workshop held off campus. Reasons beyond our control interfered with the timing; in the event,

10. Trevor Williams (1972), *Democracy in learning*, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra.

it was done during normal class time. The same approach is being used this year (1987).

As a consequence we are now in phase four of PY411. The procedure so far in 1987 is much as it was in 1986. Diane Guthrie (Greg's replacement) and I conducted workshops during the first four weeks. These comprised mainly goal-setting and team building. In the fifth week we conducted a process to identify the information needed in week 6. In weeks 6 and 7 the class collectively designed the content and process for the rest of first semester. They organise and run it themselves. Diane and I act as consultants.

External changes

Over the decade that I have been at the University of Queensland most of the changes have been internal to the courses themselves. There were however two important external changes.

PY338 was originally a second-level course (PY219). People enrolling in it usually had done little formally in communication skills even at a basic level. Despite its name of Organisational and social psychology the main content was often communication skills, problem solving, and the like. It was moved to third level at the same time that PY263, the second level course in social skills, was introduced. This has increased considerably the skills of many of the class members. It has allowed PY338 and PY411 to address more advanced skills and techniques.

PY411 originally existed only as a full-year version. Because there is a limit on how many credit points a person can take in a year, some people who wished to take it were unable to do so. A half year version was therefore introduced about seven years ago. I still have mixed feelings about this. Some things are much more easily accomplished in two semesters than in one. Most class members agree with my reservation (we have talked about the matter often).

The courses as improving systems

Most of the important changes in the courses are internal. Many of them originate from a feature which links one semester of PY338 or one year of PY411 to the next. The courses are designed to be self-improving systems; most of the changes are directly or indirectly attributable to this.

There is a very important difference between a classroom and most community and organisational settings. A class lasts for only a finite and relatively small length of time with the same class members. This has two consequences. Firstly, class members may be reluctant to invest much time or energy in class planning. Secondly, many important developments arise from the changed attitudes of class members over time. These valuable changes are lost at the end of the course unless something can be done to retain them. It is a pity if one has to start all over again at the beginning of the each course.

For a class to evolve over time some mechanisms are needed to provide more continuity from class to class. I could take the responsibility for doing this. But that would partly defeat the other objective of providing as much room as possible for genuine decision making by the class.

Further, if I determine the nature of the class, I may lose the benefit of the new ideas and different experience that each class brings with it.

In this context it is worth commenting on the change of teaching staff which has also occurred. Each of the other staff members who has taught the course with me has introduced innovations. These have more than compensated for the difficulties caused by the frequent changes.

Each course therefore contains procedures for making some of the experience of one class available to the following class.

Feedback for evaluation

One self-improvement mechanism common to both classes is the end of course evaluation. This is used to generate appropriate information which can be fed into the design phase of the next class. The evaluation process is different for each course, and is described in detail later. Both yield similar products: a set of suggestions to the next class, and a second set to teaching staff.

Both sets of suggestions are made available to the next class in their first or second week of the new class. At the same time I describe my own reactions to those suggestions which have been directed to me. I identify the course changes which have resulted from the suggestions, and also explain why I haven't acted on other suggestions.

Class meeting

PY411 also includes a further mechanism for self-improvement. Between the first and second week of the course I hold an informal get-together at my home for people from both previous and current courses. After seeing that introductions are made I usually keep out of their way so that they are free to talk. They discuss the course and how to get the most out of it. I'm there to answer questions if needed, but the important part of it is the contact between classes.

It is of interest that this innovation was itself an outcome of the end of course suggestions. At the end of one PY411 class I was told "If only we had known about X ...", where X included a number of the course's democratic (and for some, anxiety-provoking) features.

As it happened I had course notes which indicated that I had spoken about X. Not only that, but class members had handouts which spelled it out in black and white.

I asked how I could have explained it so that it would have registered. The class thought that a meeting with the previous class might have been useful. It was clearly too late for them to profit from this. On being asked, they agreed to perform the service for the next class. It worked very well. It has been a regular and useful feature of the PY411 class since that time.

PY338 in detail

In overall structure the thirteen weeks of PY338 fall into three main sections, described in the paragraphs which follow (see the diagram).

The middle section consists of miniature skills-teaching workshops run by class members. This section comprises roughly one half of the course. It typically occupies from about week 4 to about week 10, though this varies somewhat depending on class numbers and preferences.

The workshops are run by small groups of class members. The objective of each small group is to design and conduct an activity in which other class members will learn some skill through practice. Choice of the topic is the responsibility of group members, though they are encouraged to take into account the expressed interests of the class.

The early weeks of the course are a preparation for group work and for the design and conduct of the workshops. The later weeks, from 10 to 13, consist of three- to four-hour workshops which teaching staff usually run on topics chosen by the class as a whole.

All three sections of the class will now be described in more detail, in chronological order.

Preparatory activities

The class begins with preliminary activities for course design. These take place before phase 1, the preparation for the workshops. The design activities occupy all of week 1 and about half of week 2.

I first describe to intending class members the course structure. This is done in very nearly the same terms as I describe them below. I usually address assessment first. Much of the anxiety that class members express is bound up with doubts about either the assessment or the workload. The negotiability of both assessment and structure is stressed heavily.

The suggestions from the previous semester's class are displayed for comment. They and my reactions to them are often a key stimulus for the discussions which follow. Some minor details of assessment are sometimes decided, perhaps including submission dates for assignments. Most final decisions, however, are usually left until the following week.

To select the course content a process based on a modified futures search [11] is used. This occupies the second half of week 1. The class members work through the following steps.

- What will the world be like in about a decade?
- What are some of the most important current trends in social systems (including organisations)?

  (If the class consists mainly of people without work experience I may present some information here on social and organisational trends. Or, time permitting, the whole class may spend some time in the library to pursue relevant statistics.)

11. Merrilyn Emery, ed. (1980), *Searching*, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT.

- Taking into account those trends, and the likely world picture, what will be some of the more important characteristics of social systems in about 10 years?
- With those social systems existing in that world, what people problems do you expect the social systems to face?
- To work as an agent of change to help those social systems deal with those problems, what skills will you need?
- To begin to equip you with those skills, what sort of course should PY338 be now?

The method I use to collect the information at each step resembles what I would use in a consulting or training context. Class members are first given individual thinking time, typically of two or three minutes, to jot down their own thoughts. This makes it less likely that one person will colour the views of those around her. Class members then compare their individual lists with those of their immediate neighbours. They note down any items on which they agree. The common items are collected into a whole-class list.

The list is displayed throughout the following steps until no longer needed. The final determination of priority is by show of hands, once again after individuals are given time to make up their own mind.

By the end of the second last step the chalkboards (or sheets of newsprint) contain a list of skills. Written beside each of them is an indication of the priority the class as a whole accords to it. The information is used during the following week's class to decide course content.

The final step of the search is described on the first week but not actually done until the second week. The list of skills is then again displayed. There is a very brief overview of the assessment and structure which was described in more detail the previous week. It is again stressed that the structure and assessment as described are intended only as starting points for discussion and negotiation.

Now we come to the choice of course content. Working individually, class members take some time to decide which of the skills on the list are most relevant to their learning goals. They write these on sheets of paper. What then follows is ten minutes of relative chaos as they mill around looking for people with learning goals compatible with their own.

In choosing groups, most class members try to find others with compatible timetables. Finding suitable times for group meetings is otherwise often difficult. In this respect the frequent small-group work of PY263, the second level core subject in communication skills, has alerted them to the problems.

In selecting others as colleagues they are encouraged to look for difference rather than similarity on dimensions other than learning goals and timetable. As a result, most groups are mixed in respect of age, sex, work experience, ethnic origin and the like. Within the class the term L-group (for learning group) is used for these groups. I will use the same term.

The recommended size of L-group is about five or six members. My preference would be for even smaller groups than this. The difficulties of arranging meetings, forming a cohesive group, and dealing with the interpersonal problems that arise, seem to increase as more than a linear function of the number in the group. But class size, which usually ranges between 30 and 60, often dictates a number larger than the optimum. There would otherwise be too many groups to allow time for each of them to present a workshop. In one horrific semester there were 140 in the class, with 10 or so in each group.

The L-groups are given about half an hour to decide three things.

- The skills they will teach to other class members when they run a workshop.
- The time during phase two of the course when they would prefer to run it.
- Who of them will act as liaison person for contact with other groups.

This information is pooled to give what amounts to a syllabus for phase 2 of the course. If necessary I duplicate it on the spot with a spirit duplicator which is on permanent loan to PY338 and PY411. More often I arrange to have it duplicated by the departmental office for distribution during week 3.

Phase 1

One and a half weeks usually remain between finalising these decisions and starting the L-group's workshops. During this time I most often run two workshops for the whole class. (Occasionally I am asked by the class to do something else.)

The first of them is a mixture of lecture, discussion and activity. Its topic is designing and running workshops. The aim is to give class members sufficient understanding and skills, and in particular sufficient confidence, to handle the preparation and conduct of the workshop. I also have available for those who want it a step-by-step handout [12] that allows even relatively inexperienced groups to manage quite well.

The second is an experiential activity on group facilitation. In this, groups develop some understanding of common aspects of group dynamics. They also learn some specific skills and strategies they can use to reduce the problems. Again a handout [13] is available.

Apart from the obvious preparation for phase 2, these workshops are designed to serve two other purposes.

12. Bob Dick, (1983), *Design for learning* (mimeo), University of Queensland, St Lucia.
13. Condensed from the group facilitation section of my *Learning to communicate* (1986), Interchange and University of Queensland Bookshop, St Lucia. I have also recently published a more elaborate document on group facilitation Helping groups to be effective (Interchange, 1987).

Firstly, both workshops are intended to produce some team building for the L-groups and the class as a whole. For this reason I include a lot of small-group activity, both in the L-groups and in other groups.

In addition, the second workshop serves to some extent as a demonstration of a workshop that is skills-oriented and involving. There is otherwise a temptation for class members to fall back on the approach they know, which is to offer a small seminar resembling a miniature lecture. At the same time I discourage class members from modelling their own workshops too closely on those I conduct. The resulting variety helps to make the course more interesting.

Phase 2

Phase 2 consists of workshops, usually two per class, run by the L-groups. At the end of each workshop the course tutor or myself provide comments to the group running it, under headings already agreed (Appendix 1). Each group chooses whether to get this information publicly or privately.

We encourage public feedback for the vicarious learning it gives for other groups. To reduce the threat we provide copious positive comments. Negative comments are given in the form of suggestions. This removes much of their sting without reducing their constructive effects.

Phase 3

The third phase of the course consists of workshops on topics chosen by the whole class. The topics for these are chosen when almost all of the L-groups have presented their workshops.

To do this, class members think back to their individual learning goals. They first modify them to take account of any changes of mind they have had in the interim. They then identify the most important learning needs which have not

been met by the course so far. They suggest appropriate topics for addressing those learning goals. Their suggestions are recorded publicly as they offer them.

This gives a list of possible topics. I then describe a workshop design for each of the topics suggested. A vote is used to exchange information about preferences. Time permitting, and taking the vote into account, the whole class decides the number, topic and sequence of these workshops in open discussion.

Evaluation

The final half-class is reserved for an end-of-course evaluation. Class members are again asked to consider their own learning goals, as modified by developments during the course. They are also asked to take their enjoyment of the course into account. (Some years ago a multivariate analysis demonstrated that most of a class's reported satisfaction with the course was accounted for by a combination of reported learning and reported enjoyment.) Taking this as a starting point, class members then try to identify the features of the course that helped or hindered their learning or enjoyment. I sometimes collect this information, but if time is short I don't bother to do so.

When this individual reflection has taken place, class members compare notes in small groups. Their task is to identify common themes, and then to devise suggestions for overcoming the problems. I collect these suggestions in the form of two different lists. The first list comprises suggestions to myself and the other teaching staff. The second list consists of suggestions to the people taking the same course in the following semester.

The two lists of suggestions are fed into the next course at the appropriate time to act as the self-improving mechanism described earlier.

I respond to the suggestions addressed to teaching staff. For each of them I indicate if I intend to do something about it. If not, I explain why not. This session

often develops into a lively, constructive and extremely helpful discussion. Many of the present features of the class first arose in such discussions.

In acting on these suggestions I do not let the course vary too much in its general structure from that of PY411. PY338 serves as a useful apprenticeship for PY411, and some people who didn't like it much when they did it later enrol for PY411 having changed their minds. Others decide PY411 is not for them, and thus avoid committing a lot of time for a whole year to a course they might not enjoy.

PY338 assessment

The renegotiable assessment package has three main components, as follows.

1. The skills-teaching workshops run by L-groups in class time. These are assessed on a pass-or-make-up basis—a workshop is either satisfactory, or the L-group responsible for it is asked to do some further work.
2. The decision about whether or not the workshop is satisfactory is sometimes made collectively by the class. More often, class members provide information to myself or the other staff member, but leave the final decision to us.
3. A group assignment in which each L-group analyses its own functioning and development. This is marked on a pass-or-recycle basis. If necessary it can be resubmitted until satisfactory. The assessment is usually done partly or wholly by the class.
4. A substantial individual assignment on a topic of a person's own choice. The types of issues to be addressed through that topic are specified in some detail. The assignment is graded on the university's usual seven-point numerical scale. Partly because of the difficulties of the sheer logistics of peer assessment, the grading is usually done entirely by teaching staff.

There are two subsidiary requirements. Class members are required to attend workshops run by other L-groups. If genuinely unable to do so, they are asked to contact the L-group running the workshop to let them know. (It is not very good for a group's confidence to design a workshop for 30 participants, to find

that only 20 of them turn up.) If reluctant to attend for any reason, they may once again inform the L-group concerned, and also substitute some other learning experience which they report to me. Attendance at the final evaluation is also required so that we have as close to a 100 per cent sample as possible. After all, we want to hear from the detractors as well as from the enthusiasts. Those unable to attend may submit a written course evaluation instead.

In describing the assessment to class members during the first two weeks of class, I take some pains to make it clear just how negotiable it is. I also mention that some issues are still to be resolved, particularly about who assesses.

Renegotiation of assessment can take place at any of a number of levels. The class as a whole is invited to offer suggestions for any amendments to the standard assessment package, as I term it. Whatever they decide, any L-group can renegotiate it further. Whether or not they do so, any individual may further renegotiate it.

To renegotiate, the class or group or individual approaches me with an alternative proposal. The criteria I use to decide if it is suitable are …

- Is it true to label? That is, does it still lie within the bounds of social consultancy?
- Is it fair to those proposing it, to other class members, and to teaching staff?

If there is little doubt I make the decision myself. Otherwise I refer it to the class. I am reluctant to do this, however, unless there is a clear need. Experience has shown that the class comes to resent the decision-making if they believe it is unnecessary or if it takes too much time from the course as now decided.

In practice almost all proposals for renegotiation are accepted in their suggested form. On the few occasions where this has not been so, a satisfactory compromise has been achieved (satisfactory from my point of view, and to my knowledge also satisfactory to others).

Self-evaluation

One other feature of the assessment deserves mention. It has had very beneficial results. I require that each workshop or assignment is accompanied by a critique from the person or group preparing it. I also require that the accuracy of this critique is taken into account in determining whether or not the piece of work is satisfactory. The accuracy of the critique also affects any grade awarded.

The critique need not say whether or not the assignment or workshop is satisfactory, unless the person or group wishes to include this. Nor need it include a grade for the individual assignment. What is required is an identification of the main strengths and shortcomings, and perhaps some suggestions for further improvement.

I use detailed feedback sheets for my own critique of assignments (Appendix 2) and workshops. The self-assessment by a class member may take the form of comments on the same feedback sheets. There are two such forms, one for workshops and one for assignments.

Class members are encouraged to negotiate different assessment criteria if the standard criteria are unsuitable to their learning goals or to the particular assignments or other activities they undertake.

This has a number of effects. One is that the standard of assignments tends to improve. Another is that I know when to provide detailed feedback (when my assessment is different from theirs). A third is that, having made their own judgment, they are likely to treat mine with a bit more perspective. I have found this so useful that I have made it a standard feature in all the classes I coordinate.

Who assesses

The final aspect of course design is to decide who assesses the various pieces of work. These seem to be the decisions which occasion class members the most difficulty.

Almost all classes react with at least some anxiety and reluctance to the thought of assessing each other. After discussion, we usually arrive at some variation of the following scheme.

In most semesters, class members are happy to make recommendations to teaching staff about the workshops or group assignments. They usually prefer us to make the final decision, however. Commonly, therefore, class members provide feedback to other groups on their workshops and group assignments. This goes directly to the L-group doing the work, with a copy for teaching staff. We then make the final decisions, taking the class critiques into account. No serious contention has ever arisen about this, to my knowledge.

The individual assignments have always so far been left entirely to us. This is partly because the logistics of having them duplicated and circulated are daunting. It would almost certainly lead to a much earlier submission date being necessary, or the possibility for recycling assignments being reduced. It is also partly because no one wants the chore of reading and assessing a large number of assignments when it is near the end of semester.

PY411 in detail

In many respects the PY411 course is generally similar to PY338. Unless I say otherwise, you can assume that the features of PY338 mostly recur in PY411. When there are differences between the two classes, many of them arise from the greater amount of class contact in PY411. Some are because class members are in their fourth year rather than their third.

PY411 continues for 26 weeks rather than 13 except for those class members taking the one-semester version (PY409). It is timetabled for an eight hour block rather than four, as already mentioned. There are additional items of assessment in the standard assessment package. The L-groups in which class members do much of their work are usually smaller than in PY338, PY411 being a smaller class for the most part.

Because 1986 saw some new departures, I describe below the conduct of PY411 during the early 1980's. A later section describes the post-1986 design.

PY411 assessment

Two of the assignment topics were (and still are) almost identical to those for PY338. So were the workshops. Because class members have acquired greater confidence and sophistication, their work tended to be of a different standard. PY338 can again be seen as an apprenticeship for PY411.

The extra items of assessment in PY411 were as follows.

- An individual assignment, submitted about two-fifths of the way through first semester, provided class members with an opportunity for self-exploration. It was not assessed, but feedback was given.
- L-groups ran two or three workshops, not just one. As in PY338, assessment was pass or make up.
- A field project was carried out in some community or organisational setting. It was intended to be of mutual benefit to L-group and client organisation or community. It included at least some diagnosis of the client group's functioning. It sometimes included an actual intervention (for example, skills training, goal setting, or team building) if the client was willing. The official commitment was 150 hours per L-group member. Assessment was pass or make up. (From 1988 this will be separated from PY411 to conform to the new credit point arrangements for our fourth year.)

- L-groups exchanged regular learning inputs. Most often, these were one- or two-page descriptions of interesting and relevant theories or techniques class members had come across, and thought deserving of wider circulation. They were reproduced in sufficient numbers for each class member to receive two, one of which was returned with feedback written directly on it. The learning inputs could also take other forms such as posters, cartoons, brief classroom presentations, or anything else which successfully conveys the message.
- Occasionally, class members were asked to write very brief "process logs" analysing what occurred during the previous week's class. These were intended to help people reflect on their experience, in the interests of becoming more aware about the links between the conduct of the class and the learning which took place. It also served as a feedback mechanism for those involved in running any part of the class (including me).

Structure

In first semester the course structure in the past has not been dissimilar to that of PY338. A large part of the semester was taken up by skills workshops run by L-groups. Teaching staff or guests ran other workshops. With the class members taking more complete responsibility for the course this may be more variable in the future.

Second semester was usually similar. Sometimes, however, it took a somewhat different form. When content and process were decided at the beginning of the semester, some classes really began to exercise their freedom to make decisions. But more of that later.

PY411 preparatory stage

As in PY338 I began by describing the standard assessment package and the structure for the first six weeks, in that order. I also described my own teaching goals using Schein's categorisation [14] of technical, interpersonal and emotional skills. We then examined and discussed the suggestions from the previous

year's class. I announced the informal meeting with the members of the previous class, to take place at my home the following weekend.

The description was accompanied by a detailed course manual, though this was not distributed until the second week in case people changed their enrolments. (The manual presently runs to about 80 pages.) Included in its contents were detailed descriptions of each item of assessment, suggestions for running workshops and conducting field projects, and other related resource material. As it is usually revised annually to take account of class members' comments it is by now a reasonably clear and useful document.

The process for syllabus design differs somewhat from that for PY338. The steps used in recent years (but prior to 1986) usually bore some resemblance to the following typical description.

- Class members were invited to reflect individually on the skills which they would like to have acquired by the end of the year.
- One at a time they introduced themselves to the class. In a sentence or two they described the skills they wish to acquire. I recorded these on newsprint or overhead projector. They were also invited to add a sentence that would tell their colleagues in the class something about themselves as people. I didn't want them to think of each other as "students", a term I scrupulously avoid when talking about the class.
- Occasionally, I cautiously suggested some additions to the list.

Class members were then asked to decide individually which style of workshop best suited each skill. The choice was between short workshops run by them in their L-groups, or whole day workshops run by teaching staff or occasionally visitors.

Decisions about L-group composition were not made at this point. Nor did people choose the topics of the workshops they were to present. (Selection of L-

14. Edgar Schein, personal communication, 1980.

groups usually occurred about week 5, though there would have been some advantages in doing this earlier.)

Decisions were made about the skills which should be addressed within the first few weeks. I made a number of suggestions. Some of the time was typically spent in activities for self exploration. On the basis of earlier work, most class members by then accepted that a logical sequence for skills development begins with self development, moves on to interpersonal skills, and only then examines skills and techniques for change.

Apart from this grand plan, something also had to be done to address class members' anxieties about running workshops and getting involved in a field project.

By the time all of this was resolved, activities in these early weeks typically include life and career planning (often a whole day), workshop design (done more experientially than for PY338), and initiating and conducting a field project. In earlier times I usually conducted these workshops; recently there has been a growing tendency for someone in the class to offer to do so. I make those I conduct as experiential as time permits. Part of my aim in designing them is to provide as much time as possible for self-exploration and for class members to get to know one another.

Timetable

As I mentioned earlier the class was timetabled to run for a whole day each week. Occasionally in second semester we set aside an occasional half day for planning project work.

It should be mentioned here that in earlier years only half-day classes were used. Class members themselves asked for more time, preferably in larger blocks. With a busy fourth year class, however, it is almost impossible to find a spare whole day that suits even a majority of the class. With reluctance (because it makes the course more difficult for those attending university part time) the

present timetable was adopted. It has worked well, though special consideration has been needed by some part time people.

Another innovation was introduced by an earlier class to give them longer blocks of time together. We used to have a formal break in the middle of the four hour session. By the time people had walked to the refectory, been served their coffee, talked, and returned, sometimes 40 minutes had elapsed. The class as a whole decided to have shorter breaks and to forego the trip to the refectory. I bought an old urn (since replaced by a newer one) which sat in the corner of the classroom during PY411 classes. People helped themselves to a hot drink as the opportunity and desire arose.

This informality did a lot to break down people's expectations about university courses. It also played its part, or so I now suspect, in drawing class members into taking more responsibility for what happens in the class. I provided beverages and biscuits for the first few weeks, but I indicated that once we had settled down then it was up to class members to decide what they wished to do about it. They happily worked something out, and took over that responsibility from me. This shared responsibility also helped to establish some feeling of community within the class as a whole, a valuable by-product.

Selection of L-groups

By the time week 5 arrived the class was keen to form small groups and run their workshops.

For actual L-group formation I borrowed an approach used by some colleagues and myself in regular management development workshops run by the Centre for Applied Behavioural Science, or CABS. Self-scored questionnaires provided the information the class used to determine L-group membership.

In the CABS workshops we have experimented with a number of instruments. In PY411 I standardised on two. They were the Myers Briggs Type Inventory or

MBTI, [15] or more usually the short version devised by Hogan and Champagne, [16] and Belbin's Team Roles Questionnaire [17] or BTRQ. Both instruments were modified slightly to suit the classroom situation. At the same time the use of these instruments contributed to the early theme of self-exploration.

The whole class was then given the task of forming groups. The goal was for each group to have a broad enough range of skills and preferences, but enough compatibility of learning goals to function together effectively.

Both in PY411 and the CABS workshops the instruments acted to draw attention to the value of differences between people. Each of the instruments supports the notion of complementarity within a team—that each of us has certain strengths, and certain things we don't do well. An effective team finds ways of using the strengths of all its members and compensating for the weaknesses. That is, an effective team consists of people who complement each other, not a collection of people all selected in the same image.

At the same time the exercise encouraged a high level of self-disclosure within a safe environment. A lot of team building therefore took place within small groups and for the class as a whole.

Once groups had been formed the topics and timetable for the L-group's workshops were decided. These workshops occupied a large part of the rest of first semester.

We provided sufficient slots in the timetable for a regular review of the class and its functioning. Many of the workshops addressed skills and techniques the class regarded as advanced (for example conflict resolution). Others were used for

15. Isabelle Myers (1962) *Manual: The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator,* Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, Ca.
16. R. Craig Hogan and David W. Champagne (1980), Personal Style Inventory, *Annual handbook for group facilitators*, University Associates, La Jolla, Ca., p.80.
17. R. Meredith Belbin (1981), *Management teams: why they succeed or fail*, Heinemann, London.

experiential exploration of important conceptual themes (for example power), or to experience simulations or other types of activity.

Throughout first semester the L-groups prepared their learning inputs. Class members were thus helped to regard each other as resources rather than as fellow students. The learning inputs acted as a mechanism which prepared people to participate in course design and conduct. The process logs helped to make them more aware of process.

First semester review

At the very end of first semester a minor course review was held. This allowed those enrolled in PY409, who were about to leave the class, to have a say. It also provided a list of issues which could be used as a trigger for course redesign at the beginning of semester 2.

Designing second semester

PY411 had (and has) an elaborate structure, though often invisible because it was at the metaprocess level. Most of that structure was intended to encourage the class to take over much of the responsibility for the course. A little more than half the class members had served a lengthy apprenticeship: group work and basic communication skills in PY263; and two semesters of skills-oriented participation in PY338 and the first semester of PY411.

We began the semester by posting the list of issues collected at the end of first semester. This helped to maintain continuity. As a break of over a month had intervened, there would otherwise be a risk that important information from first semester might be forgotten.

Reflecting individually on their own learning goals, class members listed what they saw as the major problems and omissions of the course so far. Where individuals differed in their opinions about this, as they often did, I encouraged them

to regard the discussion as an exchange of relevant information rather than a debate. The information was exchanged. We then tried to make collective decisions which took all views and interests into account.

Again working individually the class members then decided what learning goals they would like to see pursued in second semester. These were collated publicly, usually in the form of a set of suggestions about course content. The decision on overall priority was decided by voting to exchange information about preferences. A discussion lead to the final decision being made. I regard this demonstration of consensual decision making as an important part of the course.

With course content and priorities determined, the time had come for decisions about how the content was to be addressed. In the years between about 1981 and 1985 this was often the turning point for a class. Sometimes they began to make real decisions about the overall process, and to volunteer to take responsibility for managing it. This took them well beyond their previous classroom experience.

Up until about 1980 I used an unstructured discussion for this session. I then began to provide a process which made it easier for class members to take as much responsibility as they were willing. It seems that people find it very hard to deal at one time with both content and process issues.

Taking the content suggestions in order of priority, the class as a whole worked through the following questions, or something similar.

- What possible processes could be used to address that content?
- Of those processes, which would best meet our learning goals?
- Who are the people, present or not, who could contribute to the achievement of those learning goals?
- Who presently is sufficiently interested to do the necessary planning for that work?

- By when could it be presented?

This procedure resulted in the establishment of a number of very small task forces. Each task force had the responsibility for seeing that a particular session took place. Some of the task forces themselves organised and ran activities. Others approached people off-campus and invited them to become involved. Others joined me in designing and running a workshop when I was seen as the best available resource person. With help from the other staff person I provided whatever assistance was required by any of these task forces, but only at their request.

In theory the class as a whole was responsible for both content and process. In practice the depth of this responsibility varied from year to year and from person to person. In some years the class made what could be called the default decisions: a repeat of first semester. In other years the course was dramatically redesigned. Almost all the learning activities directly addressed the identified learning goals and are at least managed by class members. In recent years this became the more usual pattern.

In general, the more experienced and mature the class, the more responsibility they took. This, I think, was appropriate. It took into account their level of readiness for responsibility. I think it can be harmful to push classes into participation they do not want.

It is also worthy of note, however, that class maturity isn't the only deciding factor. Class members took more responsibility, and with greater enthusiasm, when they were using an explicit metaprocess than when they were using unstructured discussion.

In recent years classes have taken much more responsibility, and I expect this to continue. The first semester design session in 1986 was run entirely by volunteers from the class. By second semester they were almost entirely comfortable

with taking responsibility for their own learning. On current indications, this is even truer of the 1987 class.

PY411 review

Each year ended with a detailed course review. Until 1984 I made use of Heller's [18] technique of group feedback analysis (GFA). This was modified to increase class responsibility for metaprocess aspects.

- Class goals were identified from earlier documentation. At the same time, individuals and small groups noted their own learning objectives.
- Working individually, class members reflected on the aspects of the course that influenced how well these goals and objectives were attained.
- Working individually or in pairs they devised a question (preferably answerable on a seven-point scale) to elicit information about other class members' attitudes to the issues seen as important. They were given the goal of so wording the question that it would obtain the information without biassing the responses. The questions were written on small system cards.
- The cards bearing the questions were spread out on a large desk or table. Two or three class members were selected by the class to collate the questions. They chose or devised 10 to 12 questions which between them captured as much as possible of the intended data. Everybody else looked on and made suggestions.
- As a question was selected or devised it was written up on chalkboard or newsprint. Questions were numbered for ease of reference. A wide right margin was left for the results, which were written up only after all the questions have been answered. All members of the class answered each question, again on small system cards. These were taken up and collated by volunteers, who also answered the questions.

18. Frank A. Heller (1976), Group feedback analysis as a method of action research, in Alf W. Clark, ed., *Experimenting with organisational life: the action research approach*, Plenum, New York.

The simplest analysis was done by shuffling the cards into rank order, and then calculating medians and interquartile ranges. Alternatively a calculator could be used to calculate means and standard deviations.

- The results were written up in the margin previously left for them. Taking them in order of extremity of response (that is, how far the mean or median of the answers to that question is from the midpoint of the scale) the class discussed each.

  The discussion proceeded through two stages—(a) what does this response mean? and (b) what could be done about it? As for PY338 the resulting action plans were written up as two sets of suggestions, one to teaching staff, and one to the next class.

My use of this technique had several motivations, three in particular. It produced a rich but information-based discussion of course content, process and metaprocess. It helped to make visible some of what people had learned during the year. At the same time it allowed the class to experience a robust and useful small-group or large-group technique which can be used for action planning or evaluation in community or organisational settings.

As a matter of deliberate policy I did not react to the suggestions until after all of them had been collected. For one thing, I did not want to contaminate results. After all, it is still my responsibility to award grades, and this might influence some class members to give undue weight to my opinions. For another, it helped the self-improvement aspects of the course if the next class saw visible evidence that it is quite all right to disagree with the teaching staff.

As before, the suggestions were fed to the next year's class as part of the course's self-improvement mechanism.

In 1985 I tried something different, with good results. I asked class members to design a course to teach people to learn how to learn. They then used their design as a sort of template against which to critique PY411. In 1986 the class designed and ran its own evaluation.

Because the course in 1986 entered a new phase, I now describe it in more detail.

Design of PY411 since 1986

In very recent times we have continued the slow evolution of the class. There is now a "mentor" scheme, where local consultants agree to meet with two or three class members at a time every three or four weeks during the year. There has been growing involvement of local consultants in the course, for example through running activities of interest both to consultants and class members. Occasional joint activities have been planned to involve present and past class members, many of the latter working as consultants.

Most class members now also, mostly outside class time, run a simulated organisation with real tasks; in 1986 they included making a video exam for a second year course and preparing a "survival booklet" for people enrolling in fourth year. One of the tasks for this year is to make a training videotape on conflict management.

There has also been a design change which is more dramatic. Largely at the suggestion of Greg Hearn and the 1985 class, the design procedure in 1986 and 1987 was as follows.

- The first week was generally similar. But right at the start we indicated our intention of managing the early weeks and then handing over the course to its members in the sixth week. We made it clear that this was an experiment—we would all be learning from it as it happened. We would be adjusting to the needs of the moment as they became apparent. This was met with less anxiety than we anticipated. We continued to refer to the hand-over during the early weeks to give people as much opportunity as possible to get used to the idea.
- During the first two weeks we directed a special effort towards creating a sense of class identity and cameraderie. We used activities which produced a high level of interaction between people. We encouraged people to talk

about themselves and their learning goals and experience. We encouraged people to learn each other's names (this may seem trivial, but does seem to have an important effect on team spirit). As a result the overall effectiveness in the class does seem to have improved; I have therefore increased the team building component in two postgraduate classes, with similar promising results.

- Although we took control of the overall process we continued to invite people to review the process continually. So, although the responsibility was ours, other people were gradually drawn into making decisions.
- With some misgivings, we urged people to begin their projects and select their mentors before the course was handed over. This was because the 1985 evaluation suggested that time was short even in a year and that an early start was advisable. During these sessions we took particular care to leave decisions to the class: we ourselves acted as consultants to them. In retrospect this increased early decision-making by those in the class. The choice of mentors provides an example. We asked people where they thought their eventual employment interests lay. We then described in detail some of the local consultants available as mentors. The choice, and the responsibility for making initial contact, was left to the class members concerned. To ease the difficulty of this, we encouraged class members to work in groups of two or three.
- We have given more than the usual amount of attention to identifying the skills and experience class members bring with them. This appears to have helped people see themselves as valuable resources.
- We introduced an extra two and a half days away together. In 1986 this was intended to be the time of the official hand-over; but the weekend most suitable to everyone was too late in the semester. It was instead used to explore outdoor and action methods. One of the class who has experience in this area functioned as a resource. In 1987 it was an informal camp under canvas.
- The week before the official hand-over we asked how the 8-hour class could most usefully be spent. We were asked to run a process which would compile the necessary information for what by then was known as "D-Day" (for

delegation day). This happy accident meant that the fifth week provided a useful transition from the first four weeks to the later weeks; we therefore repeated it in 1987 as a deliberate feature.

- On this same day, two members of the class offered to act as coordinators for D-day. The designed and ran the whole 8 hours, and did so very participatively and effectively.

The 1986 results exceeded our expectations. It was the happiest and closest PY411 class so far, and the quality and extent of its work was high. (On current indications the 1987 class will be at least as cohesive and effective.) The high levels of openness reduced anxiety, and made it easier for people to talk about what they were learning (or not learning). Friendships are being formed which I expect to last a long time and blossom into a informal support network. Many of those members of the 1986 class still (May 1987) meet regularly.

Many of the innovations of 1986 and 1987 will probably be adopted as part of the standard package. A heavy emphasis on team and relationship building will almost certainly be a part of future classes (including within other courses I coordinate).

The simulated organisation, also a class suggestion, is a useful "half way house" between the class itself (which people mostly don't regard as an organisation, though I do), and the outside world.

Some of the other happy accidents will probably also become part of the standard package. The current class each week asks for two volunteers to be process observers the week following, and coordinators the week after that. Working in pairs gives confidence, and a chance to experience some leadership responsibilities which are neither too onerous or threatening. Other class members know who to consult if some changes occur in workshop times. The coordinators look after the overall shape of the day. Small groups run the activities of the day.

Each day the first half hour is given over to what has become known as "odds and ends". On a notice board, anyone can write up an agenda item for information or discussion. The coordinators then take the class as a whole through this list at the beginning of the day. In this way, many housekeeping items are handled with ease.

At the end of the day, I run a "debriefing" session to review the day's activities. The process observers report what they have noticed about the day. This helps to make the process and the learning more visible.

Mechanisms for democracy

Now let me see if I can draw together some of the threads in the previous descriptions. As I do this, I will try to identify the features I see as providing the mechanisms for democracy.

The following discussion examines a number of issues in turn. The central issue of responsibility is explored in the section immediately following. It is accompanied by an identification of the methods for defining the limits of responsibility, and for negotiating roles within those limits.

Later sections discuss the importance of other issues. Producing arousal without anxiety is addressed. The mechanisms which can be used to draw on class members' natural motivation are then identified. Ways are then described of relieving the anxiety which sometimes unavoidably remains.

Roles and responsibility

If participation is to be used effectively, I see the central issue as one of responsibility. It is true that class members are unavoidably responsible for their own learning. But unless they are aware of this it can contribute little to their practising of the emotional skills which are the course's central teaching goal.

In the courses described above, class members take overt responsibility for many aspects of the course, both content and process. In doing so they become more aware of their responsibility for what they learn. Many people accept this in theory. The normal climate of most class rooms at university and elsewhere suggests that it is often little more than lip service that is being paid.

Where the issue of responsibility is concerned I find myself in something of a double bind. On the one hand, many class members are reluctant to adopt overt responsibility without a great deal of encouragement. On the other hand, the responsibility loses much of its point unless it is freely chosen.

In any event I can hardly force people to choose more responsibility than they wish. More importantly, to do so would not model the sort of behaviour I am hoping they will adopt within the course, and later as practitioners.

My approach is to provide as much opportunity and support as I can. To this end I continue to experiment with procedures which make the issues clearer without forcing people to do what they do not wish to do. I almost always stop well short of compulsion.

What can be negotiable?

To put it in different words, responsibility is decided through negotiation. The bounds of negotiation are determined by two categories of decisions, those that must be made by teaching staff, and those that must be made by class members.

Firstly, consider the decisions which must be made by teaching staff. Any issues which affect parts of the university outside the class fall into this category. Marking and workload, for example, relate to equity between one class and another. I must therefore retain some responsibility for ensuring that these remain within certain limits.

Also included in this category are any issues where I am not allowed to make the decision because of policy determined at departmental level or higher. The allocation of grades is an example. In this respect the teaching staff serve a boundary rider [19] role similar to that of a supervisor of a semi-autonomous work group in an organisational setting.

There are situations where it is better if the boundary conditions can be changed because they prevent some desirable features being implemented.

For example, all marking within the university where I teach is expected to conform within reasonably close limits to a particular theoretical distribution. This obviously interferes both with the recycling of assignments and with marking to preset standards against predetermined criteria.

With the cooperation of the department in which I teach, PY338 and PY411 are now exempted from too narrow an application of this provision about the distribution of grades. I am still required to maintain at least a distant approximation to the distribution, and to justify the deviations. But I think these conditions are appropriate in the interests of equity with other courses.

Secondly, there are decisions which must be made by class members. These are mostly to do with the amount of work actually done (as distinct from the amount set), and the energy devoted to it. As it has been put in another context, you can lead a horse to water ...

In other words, unavoidable staff responsibilities set one limit. Inescapable learner responsibilities set the other. Within these two limits lies a wide grey area where negotiation is possible. The grey area is probably much larger than either of the other categories. It is probably also larger than many staff or class members would realise without reflection. There are thus extensive opportunities for learner participation.

19. The term boundary rider is one I have heard Fred Emery use.

This same notion is usable wherever there is a power difference or a hierarchical difference between individuals and groups. It is therefore not necessarily a matter of resolving the debate about centralisation or decentralisation of decision making. Both are necessary. It is a matter of where in the middle the line is drawn, and which decisions are included on each side of the line, as Beer [20] has noted in a different context.

If the class members stay close to the inner bounds they exercise minimal responsibility. The closer they move to the outside, the greater the real responsibility they adopt.

I used to act on the assumption that the people in the class were the main determinant of how much responsibility was adopted. I still think this is partly true. This is the only way I can account for the sometimes dramatic differences between classes and individuals. But it is only part of the story.

It is now apparent that the procedures used for decision making are also important. Over the thirteen years I have been course coordinator for the courses the amount of responsibility adopted by the class has slowly increased. Part of this may be due to the slightly higher average age of the class. Better preparation at second and third level has made a contribution. Taking all this into account, it seems apparent to me that the use of more clearly understood metaprocesses has made the most important contribution to the improvements over that time.

Mechanisms for democracy

Many of the relevant procedures have already been described. I will identify some of them shortly. One of their key characteristics is that they often operate at a metaprocess level.

20. Stafford Beer (1975), *Platform for change*, Wiley, New York.

There are barriers which hinder class members from accepting the freedom they are offered. The main barriers include doubts about my motives, expectations about my role and theirs, and anxieties about the responsibilities and the workload. Some classes also show resistance to the sheer amount of time that consensual decision making can consume unless efficient procedures are used.

Below I discuss in turn three types of procedure. Some operate to provide a metaprocess. Others help to reduce scepticism about staff motives. A third category helps to make consensual decision making more economical of time.

Metaprocess procedures

Many people have difficulty in distinguishing between content and process. It is as if the processes we habitually use have been so ritualised that we take them for granted much of the time. As with meeting procedure or rules of debate we behave as if there were one right way of doing things. It is therefore difficult to entertain the thought of any major changes to them. They are so nearly universal that we often barely notice them.

It is nevertheless easier to interpret the content (for instance, what people are really saying) when the process is made explicit. Industrial relations practitioners have told me that it is crucial to understand whether your opposite number is playing her advocate role or is speaking as a colleague and perhaps friend.

This has an important extension. If the content is easier to follow when the process is explicit, it suggests that the process is easier to follow when the meta–process is explicit. My experience in PY338 and PY411 (and elsewhere) leads me to believe that this is so.

But there lies a further difficulty. If content, process and metaprocess are explained at once, the listener is likely to be overwhelmed and confused. There is little point in starting with metaprocess. It is too abstract a concept to be grasped easily.

The logical way to proceed is to begin with content, using an expected process. There are then no surprises at the outset. If the members of a class expect it, why not start with a lecture? — on the content of the assessment. One can then move into process, making a clear differentiation between it and content. For example explaining the way the assessment is submitted and evaluated will introduce process issues. (An alternative approach is discussed later.)

When the process is understood the next step can be taken. Metaprocess issues can be raised. The negotiability of the assessment, and the way in which the negotiation can be carried out, are examples.

In fact the negotiation procedures are amongst the more important meta-processes in PY338 and PY411. They are concerned with negotiating roles and assessment.

A good example of an explicit metaprocess design is the procedure used in PY411 to design the second semester of the course. It was described earlier. It also illustrates another principle of effective processes and metaprocesses. It takes small enough steps so that people are not being asked to consider more than one issue at a time. There is a limit to how many pieces of information people can juggle in their minds at once. George Miller [21] put it at seven plus or minus two, which isn't very much.

Most trainers and consultants draw on a wide range of miniature techniques which make process more failure-proof. [22] I use these in the classes. They make the process easier to manage, while modelling useful techniques for intending practitioners. An important one is to keep public information visible, as with chalkboard or newsprint. (Overhead transparencies provide a modern version which can be photocopied immediately if desired.) Separating the evaluation of

21. George A. Miller, The magical number seven, plus or minus two: some limits on our capacity for processing information, *Psychological Review*, 1956, 63, 81-96.
22. See e.g. Jack K. Fordyce and Raymond Weil (1979), *Managing with people: a manager's guide to organization development methods* (2nd edition), Addison-Wesley, Reading, Mass.

ideas from their generation is another; generate the information first, and only then try to analyse or collate or evaluate it. Giving people time for individual thought makes it more difficult for those who think quickly to make all the decisions for a group. Using collaborative rather than competitive techniques ("Do you want to win the debate or solve the problem?") makes it easier for people to listen to one another.

All of these are even more important for metaprocess than for process. Interestingly, most of them are not provided for in the normal rules of debate for meetings. That is fortunately no reason for excluding them from the classroom.

Scepticism about motives

I was at first surprised at the extent to which class members were sceptical of my intentions. Many of the doubts seem to centre on the reality of the offer of responsibility. Some class members remain sceptical about the freedom I am offering them. They suspect that some staff believe in democracy. But when it comes to the point it is easier for staff to exercise the power their position provides. (And indeed it is.)

Experience suggests that this is a reasonable doubt. As Argyris and Schön [23] point out, most of us are unaware of large discrepancies between what we think we believe, and how we behave. I have to keep giving myself the reminder I so frequently give to managers and leaders in my consulting work. Power is an inevitable barrier to free communication between people, no matter how well intentioned those people may be. The quality of the relationship I can establish with class members is an important variable here, and I think I would find it easier if I were by temperament a warmer and more outgoing person. But I'm working on it.

23. Argyris and Schön, note 8.

I have learned to my initial chagrin that people often perceive me as critical and distant. This came home to me most clearly a couple of years ago when a class member literally hauled a colleague into my office by the hand. She said something like "Talk to him. He isn't as bad as he seems." I relate this at the beginning of each year now, to provide some encouragement for people to make the approach.

The important thing, too, is to provide no support for the suspicions. There are two parts to this. In the first place, I must be careful to define clearly and accurately the limits to what is negotiable. I must be even more careful not to attempt to take back anything I have given away.

As an example, consider what would happen if I were unhappy with the decisions made by the class about course content. Suppose I were to exercise a veto over this, or even merely to urge reconsideration. I would be clearly demonstrating that the apparent freedom to decide course content was illusory. I would thus confirm the class's worst suspicions and strengthen the scepticism.

It also helps to provide clear examples of just what is meant by negotiation. I usually do this by citing the experience of earlier classes.

There are also some safeguards I can provide. One is to allow anyone who feels disadvantaged to fall back on the standard assessment package. Another is to provide maximum encouragement for people to air grievances, apparent or real, during class time. This usually happens only if slots of time are left free to do it. If someone complains to me privately, I try to resolve their grievance on the spot. I also invite them to bring it up as a public issue at the next opportunity.

The two-tier assessment, discussed at greater length in a later section, also removes some of the risk of taking me at my word.

Expectations

By the time most people at University have reached third and fourth level they have clear expectations about the role of lecturer and student. This is one of the reasons I avoid referring to people as students. I sometimes wonder if people would be more open to a different approach in first year. After all, people in first year classes at university begin with no real information on which to base realistic expectations. Unfortunately, first year courses are clear evidence that year one of university is in most respects year 13 of the type of schooling they have been used to. The "teacher's" role is to give out information. The "student's" role is to take it in.

I can expect people to walk into PY338 expecting it to be yet another instance of a course at level 15 of primary schooling.

Of course there are differences between primary and secondary school, as there are between compulsory and voluntary secondary schooling. And the transition to university is large enough for some previous high achievers to perform badly, and vice versa.

Despite the differences, the essential model of schooling remains the same. Teachers know the answers, which they contrive to impart to students who often show little cooperation in this endeavour. Some of my departmental colleagues have argued for such a view of the academic role. This is such a common model that teachers in a classroom situation as participants often behave like naughty pupils.

Exceptions to this are scattered throughout the years of formal schooling. But they are few. Many never experience them. There are probably more exceptions, and correspondingly fewer problems of motivation, in preschool than at tertiary level. This is because preschool education is learner-centred; and most other forms of education are not.

The negotiability of roles helps to draw people's attention to the usual teacher/student relationship. The overall quality of relationship between one class member and another helps them experience each other as people rather than as students, which no doubt helps their self-perceptions.

I have to admit that PY263, the second-level course in communication skills, does little to challenge people's expectations. It is oriented towards skills rather than information, which is some help. But the content is highly structured and to some extent predetermined. The assessment is entirely graded. There is little provision for negotiation. In defence I would claim that the size of the class and the aim of basic skills training provide much of the reason for this; but I suspect something could be done if we were to put more effort into it. And unfortunately, as part of the 1988 changes, the balance between theory and practice will tip further in the direction of theory.

On the other hand, PY338 works well as an apprenticeship for PY411. It draws many class members into an appreciation of the benefits and costs of taking more responsibility for what happens in the classroom. Even some of those who do not enjoy it much at first, in retrospect come to appreciate it. This parallels the experience which Trevor Williams reported in Democracy in learning. [24] Even for those who remain unconvinced, it makes for more informed selection of courses at fourth level.

It is not necessary that everyone in the PY411 class has taken PY338. Currently about two-thirds have done so, and the proportion seems to be increasing. But the advantages of having done PY338 are apparent even with much smaller proportions than this. It appears that if about one third of class members have realistic expectations based on first hand experience, they provide a sufficient leavening. The other class members are willing to be guided by their experience.

24. Trevor Williams, note 10.

In principle there seem to be two distinct ways of dealing with expectations. I remain uncertain which of them best fits a given situation.

One strategy is to start where class members are. That is, begin by meeting their expectations. One can then work within the role defined by those expectations, and begin from there to change the expectations.

The other strategy is to make it quite apparent at the outset that the expectations are unrealistic. One must then be prepared to work through the anxiety and sometimes anger which this produces.

One can deal explicitly with expectations before doing anything which impinges on them implicitly. In my absence during the first semester of 1984 on study leave, Keithia Wilson (a management and community consultant in private practice) took my place in PY411. One innovation she adopted was to use a formal role negotiation procedure to spell out her role, as well as the roles of Greg Hearn (who was assisting her) and the other class members. This is such a natural application of organisational development methods which worked well. She also demonstrated to me the effects of her own warmth and approachability, and I have since tried to learn from her example.

Saying is not believing

When it comes to the crunch, though, belief often becomes real only through action. No matter how much I say about what the class is really like, this may not mean much until the relevant action is required. It seems that until people are asked to put their behaviour where their mouth is, they do not realise how real or unreal their commitment is.

The self-improving mechanisms are clearly useful here. The suggestions from a previous class have more impact than what I say, coming as they do from someone speaking from a student rather than a teacher role. For PY411 the informal meeting between one year's cohort and the next serves a similar purpose.

In fact, there is a paradox here. People attach rather more importance to many of my content comments than I think is useful. I would much prefer them to collect the evidence, think for themselves and then make up their own minds. Process, on the other hand, is very different. Until it has been experienced, words mean little.

A stop gap measure is to give class members relevant information while they can still escape if their doubts are too great. Those who are threatened by the class format may change their enrolments. In PY338 many do. Those who decide to grit their teeth and persist have at least made a conscious decision to do so.

However, actions do speak more loudly than words. In an earlier version of the PY338 class I used to ask people to complete a questionnaire on their philosophy of learning. It included such questions as "To what extent do you believe that learning is the learner's own responsibility?" Answering "entirely" to this and similar questions did not prevent a person experiencing a later flood of anxiety when the responsibility had to be exercised.

I don't know why I was surprised by this. It is obvious that there is very often a gap between belief and practice. And as mentioned earlier, Argyris and Schön have explained the phenomenon in detail. Argyris and Schön also warn that people are unaware of the gap, and ungrateful when it is brought to their notice.

Requiring early decisions gives class members a chance to test their beliefs in action. Those who enrol in PY338 decide course content largely in week 1. They are warned to come back in week 2 prepared to choose small groups, decide their own workshop topic, and undertake a commitment to present it during the middle half of the course. PY411 members are asked for a similar commitment, though acting on it is somewhat more delayed.

There is some rough evidence that this approach has an effect. A few years ago I checked on the actual names of those who enrolled initially in PY338 and those who finally took the course. About a quarter of the class didn't return in the

second week. Those who did return sometimes brought friends. The overall numbers in the class remained much the same. Some of the faces changed. My attention was first drawn to this when I gave out course handouts during the first week. To my dismay a fair proportion of the class demanded handouts in the second week. I had to make hasty arrangements to have further copies run off. There are now no handouts distributed in the first week of either class.

Arousal *vs* anxiety

A lot can be done to relieve the anxieties that class members obviously experience. My views have changed over the years in this respect. I used to think that learning almost unavoidably involved pain, and often said so. (On occasions I have had the potentially embarrassing experience of having this view quoted back at me approvingly.)

It is now clear to me that is it not anxiety which is a common prerequisite to learning. It is arousal.

If the arousal is pleasant, so much the better. In such an instance you might label it excitement or motivation. Too little arousal results in boredom. People have no enthusiasm or energy for work. Too much negative arousal in the form of anxiety or fear or anger produces quite different harmful results. There is energy, but most of it is devoted to defeating the system or acted out in aggression and sabotage. It is high but pleasant arousal that is most likely to be channelled towards course goals.

It may not always be easy to achieve anxiety without arousal. It is certainly often possible. While it is often true that the easiest way to arouse people is to challenge them, there is no law which says that the challenge must be great enough to arouse anxiety.

I now suspect that an important aspect of teaching or consulting competence is the ability to generate arousal without anxiety. I have developed a better appreciation of the real professionalism, in the best sense, of a few (too few) of my own teachers who helped me to develop my sense of curiosity and my desire to learn.

Two broad strategies suggest themselves for dealing with anxiety. Most effectively, one can identify the likely sources of anxiety and remove or reduce them. This will be addressed shortly. Where removing the threat would also remove the arousal, one can deal with the anxiety as it arises. This is the subject of a later section. Before addressing either of these I will describe some of the ways in which high arousal may be maintained.

Generating arousal

On both theoretical and experiential grounds I assume that arousing situations are those which pose a potential threat to a person's self-esteem or physical well-being. Although I won't take the space to argue this here, let me point out that the activities we choose as exciting usually contain such a potential for threat. Provided the activity is worth the risk of discomfiture, situations produce arousal with minimal anxiety when the person feels that the threat is manageable.

The responsibilities offered to class members and described previously form a major source of arousal. The extent to which they are seen as manageable determines how enthusiastically they are undertaken.

A further source of arousal can be found in the challenge offered by the courses. This can be achieved by difficult assignments and projects, high standards, and inherently interesting material and activities. This must be tempered by keeping the components of the courses worthwhile. The high level of class determination of both content and process presumably makes this less of a problem than it might otherwise be.

Contact between the class and outside practitioners also helps to reassure class members that the skills they are acquiring are relevant to the profession they will later practise. The amount of this contact has increased in recent times. In 1985 we organised several class-practitioner meetings to discuss matters of common concern. Practitioner skills formed the topic of one such half day. 1984 saw the start of a mentor system, whereby class members in pairs meet for a few hours at more or less regular intervals with a practitioner to compare notes on practical activities. This has worked well, and has since been expanded. This year (1987) we invited consultants along to one of the early classes to help us define what skills were most useful to practitioners. This also gave class members a chance to meet many of those willing to be mentors.

In this regard it is fortunate that there have been several projects which evaluated fourth level teaching in the psychology department. They commented favourably on the relevance of PY411 to later practice as a psychologist. (Sceptics may be reassured to know that the evaluations were not done as part of PY411, nor was I involved in supervising or assessing them.)

Mechanisms for motivation

Some of the features of a course which may contribute to arousal are relevance, challenge, discovery, and involvement. Some of the specific mechanisms which are used are identified below.

Relevance

The assignments are chosen to have clear theoretical and practical relevance, both of these being marking criteria. As far as possible I set assignments which allow an element of choice. This makes it more likely that they will be chosen to be appropriate to the needs and interests of those doing them.

Similar criteria are applied to the assessment of L-group workshops. The workshops which staff members run address skills and techniques which are appro-

priate both to the immediate demands of the classroom, and the later work of class members as practitioners.

Challenge

An important challenge comes from creating assignments and practical work which involve class members in wrestling with important but difficult practical and theoretical problems. To this end I try to set assignments which require reflection and original thought. (An example is given as Appendix 3.) One way used to do this is to ask people to resolve, or at least to address, apparent paradoxes.

I discourage derivative work by trying to set topics which cannot be addressed from only one body of literature. This is quite easily done in the area of community and organisational change, where both psychological and sociological literature (among others) are relevant.

The marking criteria for assignments reflect the same concerns. They give most weight to those criteria which are inherently both difficult and important. Encouraging people to renegotiate the criteria provides some opportunity for them to think about the purpose of the assessment.

Discovery

Discovery offers two related advantages. By setting a puzzle, one creates a challenge. By inviting class members to explore the puzzle for themselves the enjoyment of discovery is opened up to them.

One important aspect of discovery is that there is no revealed truth which the class member has to discover. Rather, the rewarded answer is the one she has come to for herself. It is not a matter of discovering what the lecturer believes. The class member is encouraged to make up her own mind. She then marshals the evidence and argument to support and (importantly) to critique and refine her newly-discovered point of view.

A related point. In all that they do, class members are urged to think first, and go to the literature only after they have formed their own ideas and explanations. Admittedly they often reinvent the wheel. But invention, too, is arousing. And as I have often said, reinventing the wheel is perhaps the only way to understand how it really works.

Involvement

Participation tends to provide a high potential for people to be actively involved in what they do. It is not left to chance, however.

Most of the class contact hours are spent in workshops. Involvement is kept high in those run by staff by providing for activity other than just discussion. The feedback criteria for the L-groups' workshops stress the aspects of participation, involvement, variety and relevance. As well as adding to the challenge for those presenting the workshop, this provides interest and enjoyment for those on the receiving end. Awake people, I presume, learn more than asleep people; and I know from my own university studies how many people develop the facility to sleep with their eyes open and to feign listening.

Fun is an explicit course goal. Arousal is to be found in enjoyment. Most class activities are a happy mix of work and play. The work is better done on that account. I suspect that some of my colleagues assume that people who are enjoying themselves are not working; but this is a small cost for what is otherwise an advantage.

Anticipating anxiety

As I indicated earlier, some sources of anxiety can be anticipated ahead of time. When the anxiety arises from lack of accurate information, that information can be provided simply, accurately and clearly.

A lot of the anxiety arises out of fears that the assessment will be too difficult, or the workload too heavy. This is why I describe the course's standard assessment package before I do anything else.

I also check workload from time to time as part of the end of course review. A conscious effort is made to keep the workload close to what the credit points theoretically indicate. An independent assessment of workload carried out as a project for another subject a few years ago suggests that the class regards the workload as fair. (I am currently planning to remove some minor problems with one of the postgraduate classes.) The information on workload is given to both courses in the early weeks. There is some evidence that many of those in the fourth year class give it more effort than its credit points warrant. As this is an informed and deliberate choice it does not concern me.

Arousal arises from threat. Anxiety accompanies it whenever the person senses that the threat is more than she can cope with. Anything I can do to reduce the risk without removing the challenge will therefore be useful.

A number of strategies are used here. They include reducing the cost of failure, allowing for individual differences, and reducing uncertainty.

Low cost of failure

For every piece of assessment there is either a chance to resubmit, or the possibility of doing make-up work. For someone who works conscientiously the courses are hard to fail. (This is reasonable. As class members have already survived this far, it can be assumed that they all have the ability to handle the work.)

In practical work, and particularly field work, the outcome of a project is often jeopardised by events outside a group's control. In recognition of this, practical components of the courses are assessed not on how well they were done, but on how much class members learned from their experience. It is all right for the project to fail provided the goals were ambitious enough and people have

learned from their disasters. The need to fear failure is thereby lessened. In my own work as a consultant I have often learned most from those activities which have been unsuccessful, provided I could afford to recognise that fact.

Many class members have some doubts about how well their group will function. Their experience in other courses, work, and social life have given them reason to suspect that many groups function very poorly. Keeping them operating consumes a lot of time. I therefore offer my services as consultant to any group requiring them.

To reduce the risks of poorly functioning groups consuming too much time, other steps are also taken. Members of a group may expel any member from the group. I ask only that two conditions are met. They must first have tried to resolve the difficulty with that member. Any person expelled must contact me to make suitable arrangements about assessment. By promising that the person ejected will not be disadvantaged, I remove much of the guilt which might otherwise discourage group members from acting.

A related fear is that one person's grades will be reduced by another person's reluctance to do a fair share of the work. The standard assessment package therefore provides that all group work is ungraded. Instead it is marked either as pass or recycle, or as pass or make up.

Where threat of failure is the issue I find I have to be very careful about my own role. The power I am seen as having may otherwise cause my views to be given undue weight. It is no help for me to be less than open about my views, for this merely increases the uncertainty that people face.

In PY411 (and the postgraduate courses) the apparent risk of my personal bias influencing evaluation is reduced by having both staff members evaluate almost all material that is evaluated by staff.

It probably helps that I am not a judgmental person by nature (though I have been told several times that this is not apparent on early acquaintance). I also direct conscious attention to commenting on the behaviour rather than the person. Whenever possible I provide negative feedback in the form of suggestions for improvement rather than criticisms.

Individual differences

Different people feel comfortable with different levels of risk. Some provision can therefore usefully be made to allow for these individual differences.

This can be done, for example, by having negotiable assessment. In both courses any or all of the assessment can be renegotiated by class, L-group or individual. Someone who feels placed at risk by a piece of assessment can therefore negotiate a less risky assessment.

I mentioned earlier that anyone could return at any time to the standard assessment package. This gives a guarantee that nobody will be disadvantaged by later class decisions. If at a later date the class alters some aspect of assessment, the standard package is there as a safety net. Someone who has overreached herself may also fall back to the safer assessment of the standard package.

It is also true that different people value different things. (Another way of saying this is that you can't please everybody.) Some class members react to the non-graded items of assessment by becoming angry at the amount of work in the courses which isn't rewarded by grades. For others this does not matter as the reward is in the learning.

Those who wish to do so may renegotiate an assessment in which the other work may also count towards their grades. In such circumstances I try to reduce the possibility that one person will elevate or depress another's marks. I require that their assignments and other work includes a clear specification of each group

member's contribution so that the different quality of different work can be evaluated.

Reducing uncertainty

The amount of risk a person is willing to take is partly a function of the amount of uncertainty. If the assessment is clearly understood, a person is more likely to understand how much risk it entails.

Preset assessment criteria are one means for reducing the uncertainty. Class members report that in many classes they do not realise what is wanted of them until it is too late and their graded assignment is returned. This is less a problem in PY338 and PY411, where a renegotiable but initially standard set of criteria is provided as part of the standard assessment package.

An important source of uncertainty is any sense of a loss of control over what is happening. I reduce this by providing almost no compulsion in the courses. For example, attendance for the final evaluation is almost obligatory (I want the evaluation to be based on the comments of a 100 per cent sample). But those who are unable, or do not wish, to attend are provided with an alternative in the form of a written questionnaire.

Assessment in perspective

Despite these efforts one fact remains. I am eventually responsible for awarding grades. (In theory the dean of the faculty awards grades on the recommendation of the head of department, who is guided by the course examiner's recommendations.) I cannot escape this situation entirely no matter how much I would like to do so.

There are some ways, however, in which I can minimise the impact. Some of them have already been mentioned, such as marking criteria, negotiability, and

ungraded marks for much of the work. All work for assessment can be recycled, and rough drafts can be submitted at any time for comment.

More importantly, I can also try to reduce assessment to its proper place in the overall scheme of things. This is done by requiring that class members critique every piece of their own work. They are encouraged to regard their own evaluations as more important than mine except in determining grades. I point out to them that their own critique is what they can take with them after graduation, and use to improve their effectiveness as a practitioner.

This has the fringe benefit that a person's evaluation often helps me to gauge the level of understanding of the material. Additionally, it is a great help in enabling me to focus my feedback and suggestions towards the issues where they seem most needed because our opinions seem to differ.

Costs of democracy

As a final source of anxiety, the consensual and democratic methods of the courses are sometimes very consuming of time. It has been said (I don't know by whom) that the price of democracy is eternal committees. Some class members become frustrated at what they see as too high a price.

From my point of view it isn't a waste. People learn as much from our decision making sessions as they would from whatever else we would otherwise be doing. But our anxieties do not arise from the world as it as, but as we see it to be. It is as well, therefore, that I take their concerns into account. Fortunately there is an easy remedy. I use procedures which are time efficient for decision making, and choose them so that they also serve a wider teaching purpose. They are usually procedures which class members can use in their L-groups, field projects, and (one hopes) their later professional life.

This difficulty is greatest in PY411, where there are more decisions to be made and where I play less of a facilitative role. I am currently searching for ways to

help these people learn an important principle of decision-making: that the larger the group of people, the greater the necessity to structure the process used for decision-making.

Despite these efforts, some anxiety often remains. The next section of the paper discusses some of the ways in which this anxiety can be relieved. It also deals with the importance of developing esprit de corps and high levels of interpersonal support, which both prevents anxiety and makes it easier to deal with.

Managing anxiety

Anxiety and arousal are so closely connected that it is often very hard to reduce one without at the same time lowering the other. Even apart from this there are situations for which I have yet to find an approach that produces arousal with little anxiety. And what is exciting for one person is just as likely to be frightening for another.

Other procedures are therefore needed to reduce or manage the anxiety which still remains. Anything which increases a person's self-esteem, and particularly her competence and confidence, is likely to be useful. Some possible approaches are listed below. They include using self-acceptance based on self-knowledge as a base, developing competence, valuing the person, and giving her some sense of ownership over her classroom environment. Developing a strong sense of community and team spirit is also valuable.

Self-knowledge

I presume that realistic self-acceptance is based on self-knowledge. To paraphrase my friend Phil Harker, know yourself, then accept yourself, and then you can afford to forget yourself. People who have developed an accurate apprecia-

tion of their own strengths and weaknesses are likely to find that they can live with it. The self-accepting person has less need to fear threats to self-esteem, and is more able to look events in the face.

Both courses have a recurrent theme of self-exploration. The environment is supportive enough for most people not to find this threatening. (The lack of compulsion allows those who do find it threatening to substitute other activities.) Many of the L-groups' workshops provide opportunities for self-exploration. There is some emphasis on it in the early weeks of PY411, for example, through life and career planning.

I have also found self-scored instruments a useful aid in this regard, particularly those (like the Myers Briggs and Belbin questionnaires mentioned earlier) which are also seen as serving other purposes in the course.

Competence

Another source of self-esteem is competence, provided it is recognised by the person. A series of features of the course are therefore intended to increase class members' competence, and at the same time to make that competence more apparent to them.

The other staff member and I act in a consultant role. We encourage class members to consult us at important choice points throughout their main activities. We offer to provide as much help as needed, while taking pains to provide no more than this. The early class activities are intended to equip people with the techniques and skills relevant to the activities in which they feel least competent, particularly running workshops, conducting field projects, and managing their own L-groups.

In earlier years it was often the case that people improved visibly in their skills at communication, workshop design, group leadership, and the like. They were often not aware of just how much they had learned. The group assignment now

calls for a critique of their L-group's functioning. There are frequent reviews (particularly in PY411) of our learning goals and our achievement of them. Between them, these activities help to make the learning more visible.

Community groups sometimes ask for our help in running workshops, setting goals and the like. This demonstrates to class members that they do have valuable skills. The approval given to their work by the client groups also greatly bolsters their esteem and confidence.

Valuing the person

Providing recognition for effort and learning (instead of or as well as recognition for performance) is esteem-enhancing. It recognises the person as a worthwhile person quite apart from her performance. The high levels of social support, mentioned shortly, also create a situation in which people feel liked and valued.

Territory

People feel more comfortable on their own territory (physically or psychologically speaking) than on someone else's. High involvement in deciding the content and process will of itself provide a feeling of course ownership.

The use of what amounts to "project teams" develops real ownership within small groups of people for those activities which they plan and conduct. In recent years in PY411 (though not in PY338) most class members belong to a number of different such small groups.

The classroom can be personalised by encouraging class members to move furniture until it suits them. The ever-present urn, tea and coffee introduce a constructively-informal air. There is a limit to how far this can go, as we share the room with many other classes. But at least the room is ours for eight hours each week.

Social support

Above all, though, social support from staff and particularly from peers provides a strong buffer against disabling anxiety. Quite apart from its other benefits, it is probably the most important buffer against unmanageable anxiety. I therefore regard team building as a very important early activity in any setting where participation is to be developed.

Particularly in PY411 where there is more time for it, a lot of attention is directed towards building a sense of community within the class as a whole. In earlier years the class was often small enough for this to happen without conscious attention. There were five people in PY411 when I first taught it, in 1974. By 1983 it had risen almost to 30. In a larger class, people are busy enough to go the whole year without learning everyone else's name, let alone create any sort of relationship. It can no longer be left to chance, but needs specific attention. More recently some external decisions have reduced class numbers once again. Currently numbers fluctuate between about 12 and 30, depending upon changes in the overall fourth year curriculum; at this size, deliberate attention to team building is required, but team spirit then develops easily. Greater use of off-campus venues for some class sessions, and the two field trips, have also helped.

When important decisions are taken by the whole class, a sense of unity begins to develop.

In PY411, time is provided during the first two weeks for people to talk as individuals about who they are and what they hope to gain from the course. As each person speaks, she is encouraged to remind people of her name. I run regular checks in which each person checks out her knowledge of everyone else's name. During whole-class goal-setting, I encourage people to try to set goals which provide for the individual goals of all class members.

I have mixed feelings about name tags, which I have experimented with from time to time. On the one hand they do speed up the process of learning the

names of others. I presume this enhances a sense of relationship. On the other hand they do introduce a note of formality into a class where informality is a strong feature. In 1986 we experimented briefly with a poster which included photos and names of all class members. For whatever reason, everyone seemed to know everyone else within a few weeks of the start of class.

In both classes, each group is asked to nominate a liaison person. Between-group liaison is made the responsibility of groups (for example when they run workshops on related topics). This also contributes to a sense of identity beyond the immediate L-group.

In the workshops which I run early in the life of each class I use a lot of small group activity. I also change group composition frequently. At the start of each group activity I ask people to make sure they know everyone in their group. In PY411 the main purpose of this is to help people acquire the information to select groups wisely. In both classes it also increases people's familiarity with one another.

The use of instruments such as the MBTI or Hogan and Champagne's Personal Style Inventory have a contribution to make. They are self-affirming. They encourage people to regard diversity as valuable. They provide a vehicle and a language for self-disclosure, which has team-building outcomes.

Relationships between teaching staff and class members are clearly important, and constitute a problem of sorts. With a heavy teaching load and several off-campus activities I am not always easy to find. And I have discovered that some people find me hard to talk to early in our acquaintance, though I have been told that this improves over time. I therefore bring this to people's attention, and make a special effort to be approachable.

Support within groups

The most important source of social support is to be found within L-groups. For a majority of the decisions required of class members the L-group is the decision making unit. The members of each L-group spend a lot of time together. They plan workshops and assignments together and in PY411 they jointly conduct a field project. In PY338 the groups tend to be permanent. In PY411 they are temporary, with any one person typically working in perhaps half-a-dozen different groups or more over the course of the year. While changing group composition probably reduces the support within the group, I suspect it improves the whole-group support.

The very structure of the classes therefore helps to reduce much of the anxiety that responsibility and decision making might otherwise elicit. People are not alone in their decision making. They have the other members of their L-group for support. To aid in this process a number of procedures focus the attention of class members on their L-groups, and help to create more constructive relationships within them.

Whether run by staff or L-groups, workshops frequently contain work in small groups. Many of the activities within the workshops help to enhance relationships.

If these activities are too infrequent in the early weeks of a class I include a specific team building activity through which L-group members draw up a list of groundrules by which they agree to operate together. [25]

In both classes the group assignment is an analysis of how the L-group operated. Knowing that this assignment is to be done, L-group members are more sensitive to the dynamics of their group.

25. See the material on climate in my *Helping groups to be effective* (mimeo), 1984.

It is interesting that in PY338 during the end of course review, the class usually passes on a suggestion to the following semester urging people to spend more time in social interaction. The usual pattern is that each class ignores this advice, but then offers it in turn to the next class. In PY411, on the other hand, most L-groups do allow more time for social contact. They don't offer such advice to the following class, presumably because they no longer experience the need for it. This is another example of PY338 serving as an apprenticeship.

The end result of it all is a more enjoyable class. This is what class members report. It is my experience too; I enjoy the class enormously, and have made many friends amongst the various people who have participated in the classes.

Summary and postscript

In retrospect it is clear where many of my ideas have come from. My own interests and activities in the fields of community and organisational change have provided many of them. Although I find the ideas sometimes need modification before they fit the classroom situation, my activities in teaching and elsewhere have grown more similar over the years. The greatest source of ideas, however, has been the class itself.

The learning goals of the courses are such that participative methods and face to face skills are valid course content. The advantages of continuing to experiment might otherwise have been less apparent. My path was also eased by the high levels of autonomy I was (and am) allowed, despite the disapproval some of my colleagues have expressed about the course. Some educational institutions might not provide so benign an environment.

I dare say that my own values have provided a further spur to persistence. I prefer high levels of autonomy and try to extend them to others. I view true equity between people as an ethical value. I see participation as an expression of

it. For me, therefore, participation is a value in its own right. It is not merely a way to higher motivation and effectiveness. (I hope I have been careful, however, not to argue for participation on these grounds. Your values are your concern, not mine.)

These factors of experience, autonomy and values may have helped me to maintain my enthusiasm when the outcomes were sometimes well below my hopes. Participation is often met with resistance and anxiety from those invited to participate, sometimes even when they agitate for it. At seminars during 1984 on classroom democracy in Canberra and Brisbane I have met a number of people who attempted to introduce more democracy into the classroom. Many of them abandoned it because because the early returns did not justify the effort and anxiety. I suspect that many other promising experiments in democracy may have been similarly abandoned.

It is equally apparent that the eventual rewards can be considerable. High levels of motivation and commitment produce high standards of performance. There is a climate of enjoyment and cameraderie and often excitement. These benefits may be worth pursuing even in subject areas far removed from applied psychology and by people with rather different values.

Many of the features of the courses might translate easily into other contexts. The features which stand out for me are ...

- the self-improving nature of the courses;
- the importance of informed self-selection into the courses;
- the careful definition and negotiation of responsibility;
- the contributions of course methods, including metaprocesses, to course effectiveness;
- the centrality of assessment as a source of concern, and the need therefore to take it heavily into account in course design;

- the use of marking criteria and recycling as ways of specifying more clearly the required standards, and providing focussed feedback on the attainment of those standards;
- the two-tier marking system, which removes much of the risk and competition from what might otherwise be risky or chancy aspects of assessment;
- the importance of the overall climate which develops, particularly when comradeship and involvement provide a reward for effort. Hence, the value of goal-setting and team building in the early stages. I have underestimated the importance of this in the past.

Because the courses are structured as self-improving systems, evolution is possible without teaching staff having to make most of the design decisions. This is a continuing example of action research at work in the class room. Each semester or year represents another cycle of the action research process of action planning, implementation, evaluation and review, action planning, and so on. [26] In addition to this semester or year cycle, regular reviews during the courses bring their own improvements.

Each course begins with a design phase (the action planning of the action research cycle) and ends with a review. The generation of information during the review for input into the design phase of the next class gives a continuity which is otherwise lacking. The informal meeting between one year's cohort and the next gives additional continuity in one of the courses.

People often enrol in a course with very unclear ideas of what it is really like. Valid information is therefore important. Two types of information appear to be of particular relevance, the assessment, and the levels of participation that are anticipated. Information, however, is clearly not enough. As argued previously, people often become aware of their real preferences only when obliged to act on

26. Bob Dick and Hollis W. Peter (1978), *Changing attitudes to work: participative survey feedback in the Brisbane Mail Exchange*, Organizational Studies Unit, University of Queensland, St Lucia.

them. Using an earlier course as an apprenticeship for a later course can help with this problem.

A key issue is that of the relative responsibilities of staff and class. Shared responsibilities are the goal. Not all responsibilities can be shared. Only learners can learn. Teaching staff are often the only people in a position to ensure that the class meets conditions imposed from elsewhere. These are wide limits, however. In principle, anything between them can be shared. The sharing is more likely to take place when the limits are clearly defined and the sharing is negotiated and renegotiable.

Course content is not at issue in the courses described here. The more important skills and techniques are learnt through the processes used. Some content areas are a better vehicle for learning than others. But all can serve as vehicles. In any event I have never been given cause for misgivings about the content chosen by classes since I have provided a process to help class members choose the content.

The process is important. It serves its purpose best if it too is decided participatively. For this, processes to decide processes are needed— metaprocesses, I have called them. The abstract nature of metaprocess makes it inherently hard to grasp. It is best approached gradually, via content and then process. It seems that a class is more likely to assume real responsibility for deciding and managing process if the metaprocess is made visible and explicit. Even then it seems that one ought not to expect too much too soon. Most people prefer to experiment safely by taking on a little extra responsibility at a time.

So many anxieties relate to assessment that it profits from being handled in a very supportive manner. An assessment which is seen as a threat may sabotage an otherwise appropriate course design. Many of the specific procedures described earlier are therefore focussed on assessment. Some of the features include ...

- a combination of choice and challenge;

- the use of criteria for evaluation and feedback;
- the provision of recycling and make up work, so that the risk of failure is reduced;
- the use of ungraded assessment for most work;
- the extreme negotiability, by class or group or individual, of the assessment;
- the use of a standard assessment package as a safety net to which anyone can revert;
- requiring a self-critique for each piece of work; this improves quality, allows more focussed feedback, and places assessment by teaching staff in some sort of perspective.

The success of these also depends on the climate within which they are chosen and used. Relevance and challenge are important qualities. Discovery learning is as applicable and as powerful in this context as in other areas of adult (and, I suspect, all) learning. This all takes place most effectively and enjoyably in the context of a high degree of social support from small group, class, and teaching staff.

In fact, it may well be that the most valuable applications of this approach to teaching are in the primary school, before specialisation demands a closer control of syllabus. I have long believed that it isn't just adults who learn best what they choose and discover. The qualities long claimed to be best for adult learning [27] are just as important, I suspect, in other class rooms.

In support, I would claim that the crisis of motivation occurs in Grade 1, when the learners move from the pupil-centred environment of the preschool into the teacher-centred and school-centred and syllabus-centred environment of the primary school. When the class room situation is negotiable, including the relationship between teacher and child, then we have some chance of seeing socially-aware and motivated people emerge from our schooling system.

27. e.g. Jennifer Rogers (1971), *Adults learning*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, UK.

In any event, from my point of view it has certainly been worth the experimentation and the occasional doubt and anxiety. There are evaluations [28] which say it has also been most worthwhile for the class members (a report from the 1986 class is included as Appendix 4).

For you? I don't know. That has to be your own decision.

28. Deborah Johnstone (1984), unpublished honours thesis.

Appendix 1 Feedback on workshop

Theme

Relevance to course goals

Addresses skills through learning by doing

Process

Practically /personally useful

Clarity of goals

Overall control

Presentation and polish

Coordination of segments

Variation of structures etc.

Timing

Evaluation by group

Support materials

Supporting concepts

A/v material and its use

Adequacy of info presentation

Clarity of instructions

Bibliography and handouts

Other

Class involvement:

Interest/novelty/participation etc.

Appendix 2 Assignment feedback

Dear

This is my own obviously imperfect evaluation of your assignment. I have tried to ignore my own biasses and to judge the assignment on its merits. But I doubt that I have been able to do so. Further, I have had to evaluate the assignment on the basis of what you communicated to me. This may be considerably less than you actually understand, perhaps because you were not able to capture on paper as much as you understood, perhaps because I misunderstood some of what you wrote. For several reasons, therefore, the assessment I offer may say as much about me as it does about you and the assignment. This is unfortunate. Personally, I find making such judgments distasteful—if circumstances didn't require it, I would avoid it.

I would like to think that the most important part of the assignment was the learning you derived from doing it. You may or may not agree. In any event, your own critique is more important than mine. While perhaps less than perfect, it is the only evaluation you can continue to use in your future life and work.

I hope, therefore, that you are able to treat my evaluation for what it is: another fallible source of information intended primarily to help you be more aware of what you learned from doing the assignment.

—— Bob

Feedback criteria

1.0 Overall approach and depth

1.1 First principles understanding of individual behaviour (especially within-person behaviour) ...

1.2 ... and of system behaviour (also at a first principles level) ...

1.3 ... applied to an analysis of the mutual effect of the individual on the system ...

1.4 ... and of the system on the individual ...

1.5 ... with the effect of the wider system and culture also considered

1.6 Relates theor- etical concepts and practical examples to one another

1.7 Has used and understood the wider relevant literature (including out- side psychology)

2.0 Theme and scope

2.1 There is an appropriate, explicitly identified central theme ...

2.2 ... involving social science applied to social systems ...

2.3 ... and with theoretical and practical importance ...

2.4 ... with practical implic- ations expressly stated

2.5 In overall research and effort the assignment is of appropriate scope

3.0 Thought and argument

3.1 Evidence of careful thought about the theme

3.2 Identifies key issues or dimensions of the theme ...

3.3 ... which are critically and logically analysed ...

3.4 ... and addressed in logical and coherent argument ...

3.5 ... in a way which displays a good understanding

4.0 Data collection and analysis

4.1 Evidence of careful obser- vation, data collection and/or library work

4.2 Evidence / data / information taken into account

4.3 ... and compared and synthesised and interpreted ...

4.4 ... in a reasonable and common sense way

5.0 Theory and research

5.1 Draws on relevant theory within discipline …

5.2 ... and also from other disciplines …

5.3 ... to illustrate and refine the argument

5.4 Shows by critical evaluation of research …

5.5 ... overall synthesis of concepts …

5.6 ... and by reconciliation of controversies …

5.7 ... that there is good theoretical understanding

6.0 Formal structure

6.1 There is an explicit overall structure …

6.2 ... beginning with theme and overview …

6.3 ... continuing with a carefully structured argument …

6.4 ... and ending with an appropriate summary

6.5 Miniature summaries, previews and linking passages …

6.6 ... and headings and sub- headings reveal the structure

6.7 Tables, graphs and the like are used if appropriate

7.0 Expression and style

7.1 Theme, argument, conclusions effectively communicated …

7.2 ... by short, simple, direct sentences …

7.3 ... and the use of clear, simple English

7.4 Argument is rational rather than or as well as emotional

7.5 Conciseness is achieved and irrelevance is avoided

8.0 Own evaluation

8.1 The assignment has been carefully evaluated

8.2 The strongest features of the assignment, …

8.3 ... and its weakest features, have been recognized

8.4 The evaluation is accurate, neither modest nor immodest

9.0 Overall evaluation and/or other comments (continued overleaf if necessary)

Appendix 3 Major assignment

A practitioner who acts as a consultant within some type of change program (the focus of PY409/411) deals with people and systems. This assignment is intended to provide you with the chance to study and reflect on the key concepts for understanding the work of a consultant—the behaviour of people and systems, and their interaction.

> *First submission*: Choose any topic which enables you to display your first principles understanding of the behaviour of systems (such as families, organizations, social groups, and so on) and individuals in interaction. Accompany your assignment by a critical evaluation of what you have accomplished

The standard arrangement is as follows. The assignment is first submitted near the end of first semester. For those taking PY411, some aspect of it is then further developed in greater depth. This is submitted somewhere near the middle of second semester.

> *Second submission*: Choose from your first submission some aspect or example or situation for analysis in greater depth. Again focus on individual behaviour, system behaviour, and individuals and systems in interaction. Again accompany your assignment with your own evaluation of it

For this second submission, choose some aspect that is particularly illustrative of individual-system interaction. Provided you do this, the more contained the topic, the more likely that you will be able to explore it in depth.

The assignment is supplemented by two or more conversations during the year. These will help you to develop your ideas further. All parts of the major assignment (first submission, second submission, and conversations) count towards your grade. You are also encouraged to talk to us at other times as often as you find it useful.

The conversations are conducted as three-way discussions. We make them as friendly, involving and unthreatening as we can. Each typically lasts between 60 and 90 minutes. We ask you to prepare a two-page summary of the key issues, and talk to your summary for 20 to 30 minutes. We then turn it into a conversation in which we try to open up opportunities for you to display your understanding.

For both submissions, write on your chosen topic in such a way that the depth of your understanding is apparent, including your understanding of ...

- the behaviour of individuals and the reasons why they behave as they do;
- the behaviour of systems and why they behave as they do;
- (most importantly) the way in which the behaviour of each is determined at least partly by the behaviour of the other.

When dealing with systems, give attention to the immediate system of which the individual is part (for example, family, workgroup, clique), and also relate this to the wider organizational and cultural context.

In evaluating the assignment, we will take into account how well you meet the criteria on the assignment feedback sheet. We will give particular attention to how well you demonstrate ...

- a first principles understanding of individual behaviour, systems behaviour, and especially how each of them affects the other in their interactions (this is the most important marking criterion);
- an ability to relate theory and practice to one another;
- a familiarity with the wider applied social psychology literature and other relevant literature from such areas as sociology, organizational change, community development an the like, including both theoretical and practical literature.

In choosing and preparing your topic you will find it useful to take your present understanding as a starting point. In other words, first think. Then develop your ideas as far as you can take them. Then and only then check out your ideas against the relevant literature. Your own ideas are wanted. But you are also expected to argue for them on logical or evidential grounds, and to relate them to the relevant literature.

You may find the following ideas useful in helping you to find a suitable starting point for thinking about this.

> *"When a social system does something, in reality it has been done by some person or number of people. Social systems therefore appear to be collections of individuals. Their behaviour appears to be the collective behaviour of those individuals. Further, those individuals act in ways that are intended to meet some needs of theirs (to achieve some reward or avoid some penalty). To understand the behaviour of systems, it would therefore appear that we need only understand the behaviour of the people who comprise them.*
>
> *"In fact, if the people who comprise or interact with a social system were all to come to believe that the social system did not exist, they would then act as if it did not. And since a social systems appears to be defined only by the behaviour of the people comprising it, the system would then cease to exist. It would appear from this that social systems are just convenient fictions, which exist primarily in the beliefs of the people who comprise them or interact with them.*
>
> *"The behaviour of people is to a large extent determined by the roles they fill. These roles are usually defined by the social system. A person typically behaves in one way in one role, and differently in a different role. The clearer the boundary of the social system (the more formally the social system is defined), the more precisely determined the behaviour of the people within it. An understanding of the behaviour of individuals thus appears to require an understanding of the behaviour of systems.*
>
> *"Individuals, in seeking to meet their needs, determine the behaviour (and hence effectiveness) of systems. Systems, in seeking to achieve their goals, determine the*

needs that individuals are able to meet, and the permissible ways in which those needs can be met.

"This—that individuals create system behaviour, yet systems create individual behaviour—is the apparent paradox that the agent of change must come to terms with, and understand, and make use of in her/his work."

What you are being asked for here is an assignment which demonstrates a thorough first principles understanding of the issues that agents of change face in helping people manage the change process. You may therefore find it helpful to choose for your topic some issue involving a system undergoing change (though this is intended as a suggested possibility, not as a requirement).

We will attempt to judge the depth of your understanding by your ability to analyze issues keenly without having to use 'psychologese' or jargon, and by your ability to relate theory and practice to one another. We suggest you approach it by asking yourself, each time you make some assertion about system or individual behaviour, "Why?". And then ask yourself, in relation to your explanation, "Why that explanation?". And so on, until the issue doesn't seem capable of being pushed back to any more basic explanation.

We suspect that you will find that your understanding can't be hurried. You will most probably get the most our of this assignment if you start thinking about it at the very beginning of first semester, and continue to work on it throughout the year (or semester if you are taking PY409).

You are also being asked at the same time to demonstrate the usual academic skills of being able to use the literature, to review theories and studies critically, and to communicate clearly. The assignment will be assessed (and feedback given) in terms of how well you meet the conditions described above, and the assessment criteria set out elsewhere. The first principles understanding of systems, individuals, and their interaction is the most important part of this.

You are also required to assess your own assignment against the same criteria. The accuracy of your own assessment will be one of the things taken into account in deciding the grade you are given.

It may appear to you that this is a difficult assignment. In many important respects it is.

- It cannot be successfully answered only from your reading, but requires you to think deeply, and at length, about the issues before you begin to read, and while you read.
- It cannot be answered from the psychological literature alone. It requires you to seek out whatever literature, from whatever discipline, is relevant to your argument.
- It expects you to deal with both the theoretical and practical aspects of your topic, and thus to think and read about both.

On the other hand, it is the only major written piece of assessment which is graded. You have a whole semester (PY409) or two (PY411) to think about it. Most of what you do throughout the course will be relevant to this assignment.

It is preceded by a group assignment which deals with the same issues. You can therefore help yourself quite a lot by using the group assignment as an opportunity to explore the topic and try out some ideas, within the safety of a pass-or-recycle assessment. Early submission of the group assignment also means we get it at a stage of the year when we have more time to give detailed feedback.

From time to time during the year we will also spend class sessions discussing issues of relevance to it. We believe that provided you begin thinking about it early in the course, you will have ample time to prepare an assignment which is good, and from which you learn a great deal about the behaviour of people and systems in interaction.

You are encouraged to check with us frequently during your thinking about and preparation of the assignment. You will probably find it reassuring to confirm the suitability of your chosen topic before you proceed too far with it, and to let us see early drafts of it as you begin to get your ideas together. (The conversations are in addition to these informal talks.)

It is also a good idea to talk over your ideas with other class members. We are happy for your to do this provided the final write-up of it is your own work, and provided you indicate on the finished assignment which parts of the planning were done by a group.

As usual for PY409/411, you are expected to evaluate your own assignment and to include the evaluation with your assignment when you submit it. This is intended to be a genuine attempt at evaluation (not a superficial gesture). We also hope that if your evaluation shows major shortcomings in your assignment, you will re-work it before submitting it. Remember that the accuracy of your evaluation is one of the criteria we take into account when allocating grades. There are benefits in being realistic, rather than unduly modest or immodest.

The ideas you will deal with in this assignment are complex. If you have difficulties expressing complex ideas in writing, mention it. If you wish, we will arrange tutorial classes in written expression.

Appendix 4—PY411 from class members' view

In 1986 the PY411 class decided to prepare a survival manual for people studying fourth year in 1987. They prepared descriptions and suggestions for many of the fourth year courses within the department of psychology. Here, verbatim, is the extract about PY411 from their survival manual.

"You can get whatever you want from this course. This subject is unique at Uni. The learning is mostly implicit. It is meant to be! If at first you find you are not getting what you want, hang in there!

"The course is living practice of what you are learning and the processes can be generalised to other places.

"Professionalism demands an internal locus of control and this course gives you the opportunity to develop that.

"The key is action, so get involved because it is worth it. Take risks and speak up because this class provides a rare opportunity to do so. It gives you a safety net just in case. It is OK to fail here.

"This is a 28 credit point subject, the same as the thesis, so don't treat it lightly. Start everything early or it will snowball—most importantly, think about everything early and talk to the class.

"The course content differs from year to year because the class members decide what content to include, and actually run the classes—a great learning experience.

"The assessment is basically only on the major assignment but there are other requirements which are graded. These can be negotiated. Of these, the action project provides valuable experience in the field. The mentors enable you to build up a network outside, before you act there. So take the opportunity to meet with a mentor early.

"This is a great course — do it!!!"