Experiences of Personal Development Groups as Part of Counsellor Training

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Why and What?

- Why Research PD Groups?
- What is the purpose of Personal Development Groups?
Research Question

- ‘beyond knowing’ (counsellor and client/PD groups create a level of understanding between them that isn’t spoken of but is very present.)
- My experience, as a facilitator and member of PD groups
- ‘magic’. What causes the ‘magic’
- Previous research of mine with a cohort of Kenyan students
Research Dilemma

How do we get inside and try and understand and explain this amazing process?

- Payne (1999) – little research in the area

My way in:

- asking people about their experience:

  “You may know what I don’t know, but not that I don’t know it, and I can’t tell you. So you will have to tell me everything.”
  (Laing, 1970 page 56)

Does this lose the ‘gestalt’?
Methodology Chosen

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- students studying at Keele if they would be willing to keep a reflective journal of their experience of PD from January to Easter 2005.

- ‘purposive sampling’ - allows the researcher to seek out groups where the process that is being researched is occurring (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).
Returns

- 26 people out of a total of the 39 asked, agreed to take part and 12 people returned their reflections to me.
- Of those, some followed the guidelines and others didn’t.
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

- involves the research in engaging in an interpretative relationship with the data
- double process of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world.
Challenges with IPA

**Language**: is symbolic and can construct reality as well as describe it.

Can I be sure that the reflections of my participants are valid representations of their perceptions? Might they not construct a different reality in order to meet a need either in themselves or in me? Is the meaning they intend to convey the meaning I receive?
Challenges with IPA

- In asking the participants to reflect on the PD experience am I asking them to falsely attribute meaning to one experience by denying other conditions?
Method of Data Analysis

- Looking for themes

- Connecting the themes

- Theme clusters
## Emerging Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Theme</th>
<th>Cluster of related themes</th>
<th>Where found in transcript i.e. 1.16 = page 1 line 16</th>
<th>Key words from extract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>- didn’t know the purpose</td>
<td>Alice 1.2</td>
<td>‘I was really struggling to understand what the purpose of the group was all about’</td>
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Main Themes

- 1. Safety
- 2. Feeling part of group
- 3. Organisation of Group
- 4. Facilitator’s Role
- 5. Physical Surroundings
- 6. Relationships with other group members
- 7. Personal Growth
- 8. Anger
- 9. Indicators of group working well
Major Theme

- Safety
- Other themes seemed to relate to experiences which left the respondent feeling safe or unsafe
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Discussion

- Payne (2001) argues that her respondents believed safety was essential to the success of the DMT group.
- likens the idea of this safety to the Winnicott (1965, page 44) notion of the ‘holding environment’.
Discussion

- Safety transitory
- Emotional Safety
- Environmental Safety
- Facilitators Role
- Group Members Role
- High Support and High Challenge