

GROWTH FACTORS IN THE GROUP

Beatriz Silvério Fernandes

Clinical Psychologist, founding member and Professor of NESME (Núcleo de Estudos em Saúde Mental e Psicanálise das Configurações Vinculares – Study Group in Mental Health and Linking Configurations Psychoanalysis and SPAGESP (Sociedade de Psicoterapias Analíticas Grupais do Estado de São Paulo - Society of Group Analytical Psychotherapies of the State of São Paulo and co-editor of the book: Groups and Linking Configurations, São Paulo, Brazil.

Abstract

The goal in this article is to reflect upon some factors which generate growth/psychological development within the therapeutic groups under the approach of group analytical psychotherapy. The observations are based on the work with groups in a private practice and writing regarding what promotes growth in groups.

Key-words: Group, Coordinator, Growth Factors, Development

INTRODUCTION

Our current panorama reveals to all an everyday living within a network of differences both cultural and social. The harmony or balance is a wish of life based on relations, mutual acceptance, as on affective linking which has to be cultivated notably everyday. It is necessary to cultivate the harmony between impulses, psychic mechanisms and that what we call “the other real externals”. Puget, quoted by Fernandes (2009) describes the “the other real externals” demonstrating that the presence of a subject affects the other subject, reflecting upon what occurs between patient and therapist in the group disposition.

This harmony has to be built and administered by us every day. It is thinking about these aspects and in group members that this reflection has been written.

A certain day – in a conversation with one of my patients about his development, his quality of life, capability to tolerate frustration, and how he was different, more mature – I started then to reflect and write.

It called my attention when, all of a sudden, with watering eyes, he fixated his look upon me and asked: are you saying you are letting me go?

I confess I was paralyzed, since we were talking about his growth, as a way to compliment him on his achievements. When I could Express this idea and clarify about his growth, he could let his feelings show: “I thought you were saying you’d let me go, now that I am feeling well, that it is good to share ideas within the group, listening to my colleagues and mainly you”.

In another group, a young woman who has a lot of difficulties in dealing with her feelings and all is explained and lived through the name of her “high

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blood pressure” (9-6); that hardly seems to be more interested in her internal world, made a group interpretation which let everyone extremely surprised. During a series of complaints and regrets from other members, she spoke to the group: “wow, I guess what we are talking about might be what is always said to us that are a reluctance of facing our difficulties: of being responsible for ourselves, and for our actions”.

An interesting fact in another group, and my own fault, called my attention: when speaking about resistances, lateness etc., one of my patients who is religiously late twenty to thirty minutes, but is hardly absent, declared something. “I am not sure what to say, but if this is for me, it doesn’t apply”. The group started laughing and making jokes about it and so did he. Right after, he declared: “being here, listening to you, knowing that you accept me along with my lateness, with Bia’s patience, with my anguishing declarations, makes me think a lot... Today I can even stand to be more nervous only as from November (when it is time for end of the year balance and hiring). When that time comes, there is just no way out of it.”

There would be many more examples, but these are, as far as I’m concerned, enough to think about what is important for the growth within groups. I do not like the word healing. Healing is implicit to the existence of illness. I do not see these groups as speaking about illnesses, but of lack of harmony, more or less present.

There is the need to pay attention, persisting in the hope of individual transformation, goal that the group work proposes to all of its workers: whether they are therapists or participants of therapeutical groups. It is a laboring work which one expects that each one does their own small part. With constant work, the change will occur or may begin when each one of us opts out for this criterion.

It is observed that for this goal to be found it is necessary that some principles or directions present themselves. During the months when the theme surfaced within these groups, I always asked the question: “why do you think this process helps? Talk a little bit about it.” Whenever it was possible I kept on making notes, thinking, writing and researching other authors to enhance and sustain what I listened from my own patients.

POINTS RAISED AS A WHOLE AND DIALOGUE WITH THE AUTHORS

A. The first item pointed out from them was “always thinking about affections, instead of trying to stand out or wanting to impose one’s own model. Clarifying also that model would not really be the best word but “cake pan” would be better, which is where one would place the batter for a cake and shape it just as the pan enables it to”.

I have made a dialogue with two authors regarding this topic: Grotjahn and Chagoyán. Martin Grotjahn makes us think about how the coordinator leads a group, which may revert as a growth experience:

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“A work relationship is a relationship of struggle and even so affectionate; the healthy ego of a patient struggles along with the psychotherapist against evil, the demon, sin and disease. “People who do not believe that you can fight along with a friend will have difficulty in understanding the essence of alliance and therapeutical work” (Grotjahn, 1996).

José Luiz Chagoyán, (1987) discussing about the mistakes and failures in Group Analytical Psychotherapy, mainly reports: it is in the capacity of the analyst to receive a manifest material multiplied by x (number of members in a group), in his deductive power to achieve the gestalt of the group, in his deductive understanding and need to understand the unconscious fantasy, along with his synthesis training, to achieve the interpretation, and yet, continue to work and achieve growth.

B. Believing that the good and the fair are possible, in spite of everything, without magic tricks, but that does not always surface within our expected parameters, just as with the children and the patients.

There is the need to recognize that being open is also related to accepting the unknown, the unexpected and the unpredictable, therefore, being familiar with the difficult task of accepting that the other also has the right to ideas and truths different from our own.

Cláudio Neri speaks of favoring the decision for a more active posture, when it comes to the members of the group. It emphasizes the role of the therapist in “evidentiating the elements of differentiation and individuality existing in each one of the participants in a group, their models, thought and personal style” (Neri, 1999,).

Manso Neto and Babo (2000), mention that in group psychotherapy the patients participate in the process of conclusion. All of them offer their evaluations, and that this interaction which the group enables favors elements which reveal its growth.

C. Being able to do something for other or using our attributes as best as we can, and not only as minimally needed.

Freud, in “Remembering, Repeating, Elaborating” writes that the elaboration represents the work which is needed, to be done by the therapist as well as the members of the group, with the goal to overcome resistance to change, due to pulse tendencies to be attached to common patterns of discharge. It is a task which can be added to those of the works required to unveil the conflicts and resistances.

Zimerman says:

“Psychic life is constituted by structures composed by anti-ethical pairs (love x hate, psychotic parts x non-psychotic parts etc.) which, dissociated and projected, are fused and confused... Elaborating, in summary, is the processing of an integration and harmonically synthesis of these decomposed elements” (Zimerman, 2000).

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D. Looking to belong and participate, instead of frenetically wanting to “appear”. Being able to be in a nice mood, in a warm and welcoming environment.

Here the dialogue was with Kaës and Bion. Kaës has shown that the group has the capacity to be kind of a “Psychological Hostel”, with the function of being this psyche or even welcoming and caring for its ill bits, enabling the surfacing of something which hasn’t been formed. Therefore, the group is the place where the words could already have been said, all the unexplained prohibitions can be announced if you open up a path (Kaës, 1988, quoted by FERNANDES, 2003).

Bion always helps us in relation to the therapist when he speaks of the qualities of the analyst as a person, which are decisive to the analytical process. The analyst’s emotions should allow the articulation of the projections in a way that is possible to think about them and establish the link of knowledge. Patient plus therapist with the capacity to *rêverie* and of containment of doubt situations will make it possible for better mental development.

E. Trying to be a little less blind, deaf and arrogant and, who knows, being able to start to see then the world with real eyes, listening to different conversations and being able to put a new order within the internal world.

Foulkes and Anthony speak of the group-analytical situation and the development that it enables and they underline:

“It is about the opportunity that this situation presents to the exploration of what can be named as social unconscious. The feelings and reactions of each individual reflect the influences exerted on him by other individuals of the group and by the group as a whole, however little conscience he may have of this fact” (Foulkes and Anthony, 1967).

Sara Ferro in her work describes that:

“One indicator of the “analytical cure” points out that for the decoding of unconscious fantasies, with the respective pulses and anxieties, and for a work which directly pertains the functions of the ego, taking care of the development and the procedures which enable the transit of the psychoanalytical process by the psychotic cores and the area of narcissism of the patient” (Ferro, 2005).

FINAL DISCUSSION

I believe that these five points raised along with the patients reveal something meaningful for our understanding of what is really important for the group to be able to collaborate in the overflow of changes and growth for all of us. It isn’t enough to just understand the authors who guide us; there is the need to be bold enough to take into account what we produce in our everyday. Together, therapists and patients can do a lot for each other’s understanding of this process.

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Reflecting upon my role in different groups, I think that I have had, most importantly, the element which enabled the creation of a space of anguish containment, and of surfacing of hope, and not of that of magic tricks. Hope in the sense that it is possible to live with a better quality of life, with each one's reality to boot.

The same can be said about me, both as a therapist and a person. Living with different groups, I have, to some extent, kept to myself my goals and wishes, I survived, and I can say that certainly I've grown a lot. I could realize that models are models and that there's nothing in the world that can be done to prove that a certain model is better than the other. What is mainly needed? There is the need to love the truths (as mentioned by Zimerman), enjoying what you do, and also liking the patients.

Growth starts from the acceptance of being in the groups, living with the different colleagues, of different origins, beliefs and professions; after that, the listening starts to exist on behalf of everyone, being there the possibility to accept the unwanted.

Being able to relive in the group its stories, anguishes, human misery, benefits and progresses, all can live with their concrete problems, since not running away from them, a fugue which would make us ill; but being able now to live more comfortably, although with some suffering inherent to difficult situations in life.

Being in the coordination of a therapeutical group creates fear? Of course it does. There are so many suppositions without answers; there are so many unforeseen moments, so many sudden bursts that leave us unable to predict where the tide will take us. I believe today that I should accept the movements of the tide, but up until the point where I do not drown. It means to be able to let oneself go until one can see that the movements of the tide are there, and to be able to clarify them, knowing, controlling and using the countertransference.

The union of a welcoming environment, with a coordinator who can contain, listen, tolerate, introject and return to the participants something in reference to what was discussed, results in enabling growth.

Besides those factors: being present, able to listen to each other after many rehearsals, listening about their progresses, just like their regressions, and being accepted by the therapist, by themselves and by their colleagues, I realize that something else occurred. Besides the group being considered the recipient of a little of everything in our lives, I think that their participants are able to find themselves socially too, being able to laugh, and sometimes even have fun.

The group process seems to be something new and different to all the members of the group, including the coordinator. For those who don't have any rules, it is possible to find them; for those too "uptight", there is a moment of thought about the possibility of breaking the rules. The same way, breaking idealizations and also creating ideals which without one doesn't live, relive conflicts, and, who knows, just as with a seamstress, being able to seamlessly join all the torn fabrics, registering the brand, but also using them properly.

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Groups evolve, just like their participants, and that is clear, with each one on their own pace, and their capacities. Living with the instinctive ambivalence underlined by Freud, Klein, Zimmerman and Néri, being able to get in touch with the group work, with pain, frustration, and as pointed out by M. Bernard (1996) when mentioning imagination and fantasies, they have important roles as group organizers.

In my view, what promotes growth is being able to live through all that through the internal evolutive structures, the social environment, the family environment, professional and the lack of it, and most magically of it all, in the group and through the group.

To all those issues seen as whole here, I add this verse by Fernando Pessoa, greatly associated with this theme:

My look

*My look is as clear as sunflower
I am used to walking by the roads
Looking to the right and to the left
And, every once in a while, looking back...
That is what I see every moment,
It is that, which I had never seen before,
I know how to perceive it really well...
I know how to have the essential surprise
The one that a child has if, when being born,
Noticed that the birth really did happen...
I feel reborn every moment
To the eternal novelty of the world.*

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Beatriz Silvério Fernandes

Adress: Rua Turiassu, 143/134 – 05005.001 - São Paulo – SP- Brasil

Email: bibitriz@terra.com.br