

The group reporting role in training contexts

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Introduction

Starting from the question of the report in the psychologist's training, this article uses some theoretical points along with an experience, to investigate the possible dimensions organising reporting in training contexts, where the stress is on the relationship experienced in the training group. Specifically, I will suggest that there can be a reporting process that organises the group and accompanies the production of the written report

Let me say at the outset that as regards training processes, both socioconstructivist and psychodynamic works (Di Maria & Lavanco, 2000; Salvatore & Scotto Di Carlo, 2005), today show that the approach to learning cannot be mediated by models inspired by a logic of linear change that disregards the reciprocal, intersubjective construction of knowledge and the pluralistic interpretation of reality, detaching knowledge from places of experience and from the relationship. This is all the more true if it involves training psychologists in clinical psychology and psychodynamic competences, as in the case I will examine. If these premises are kept in mind, the question becomes which tools and methods should be used in this type of training.

I believe that the report offers the psychologist the possibility of linking theory and practice, using thought categories that enable him to understand the emotionality of the relationship experienced in the intervention (Carli & Paniccia, 2005; Carli, 2007). In this sense the report can be a tool, based on a clinical methodology, that is consistent with training revolving around the intersubjective construction of knowledge.

In this article I will take the standpoint of university training. Here the report can be presented to psychology students as a way of constructing clinical knowledge in the relationship, through the critical elaboration of the experience that the students themselves can have of the university training context when they deal with reporting. It is therefore possible, in university training, to construct a bridge between emotion and thought, between actively experienced training and the goals of the future profession.

To understand why I am proposing the adoption of a tool to produce knowledge in the relationship, one further premise must be stated. In the perspective I am proposing, there is no training without groups and without the inclusion of the analysis of group processes in the training itself. This is particularly true when it is psychodynamic and clinical training in psychology.

Remember that the group can be treated by the person leading it both as a background and as the design. Sometimes the group is treated as an institutional fact, an obvious premise that is prior to what happens in training, and which it is not necessary to think about. Other times, however, the group is used as a tool, a methodological reference point, a parameter of the setting, and it is constantly reflected upon. The risk run in the first case, and which we have been warned about by Carli (1988), and by Carli, Paniccia & Lancia (1988), is that of using the group as if it were an "invariant phenomenon", a "self-referential paradigm", to interpret events, phenomena, and experiences that take place starting from a group uprooted from the contexts of practice that sanction its identity, giving rise to goals and

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questioning. It is a different matter when the group has the form of space where it is possible to analyse the institutional phenomenology underlying it. It then becomes a methodology endowed with polysemous, thinkable meanings, which runs through the training intervention in its nature as a process. If the group is viewed in this perspective, reporting can, as we shall see, assume an important function in it.

What standpoint for reporting in groups?

If the training adopts the group perspective, one cannot avoid considering the elements related to “group work” (Bion, 1948) or to the “operative group” (Pichon Rivière, 1971) in terms of centering on the task, roles and functions. This allows for reflection on the objectives (why one reports) and on the addressees/interlocutors (for whom one reports) ¹.

I would also like to stress the role, and the position from which the report is made, due to some implications that this has in terms of intersubjective dynamics. For instance, in the training space there may be the acting out of an inside/outside emotive dynamic, the mirror image of the dynamic inside/outside the group that is organising the relationship in a primitive way. Remember that the activity of reporting is legitimised by the trainer, who, institutionally, due to the a-symmetrical role with the group, sanctions the educative identity of the “reporter”. The emotional configuration of the training relationship that is established must be considered in terms of the way the teacher introduces the use of the report. I have tried to schematise it in the following way:

- 1) The role of reporting is given to single individuals. They may volunteer, or there may be a roster, giving the report to every individual, equally. It is essentially the individual that is responsible for the report-product, even if it is created in the group; the elaboration of language and thoughts is entrusted to the individual, and it is then brought back into the group. The group dimension, represented in the individual report, can be restored in all its clarity above all when the report is discussed and analysed in the group.
- 2) The role of reporting is given to the group as a whole. The report is constructed collectively by the group. In this case the group does not comment on a report after it has been produced, but shares every step of its creation, from the organising of the individuals' tasks within it – for the person responsible for the writing, for instance, it is a moment of great significance – to the redefining of the aim, and coping with the crises hindering its production.

I have now come to the specific part of my reflection, and I would like to launch it in the form of questions. For example, are the two reporting modalities organised with the same categories? If the report is a language mediated representation, can we hypothesise a specific group language? It would also be interesting to examine in depth another level of the possible articulations between the individual report and the group report. Think, for instance, of how far the individual's report taken to the scientific community reflects a language of membership, a group culture, showing at the same time a dynamic of individual individuation in the group. Essentially, it involves differentiating oneself despite speaking the same language, being at the same time the same and different. In the first case, when the reporting is entrusted to the individual, several configurations, with differences but comparable in certain respects, can be produced in the training process when there is an observer in the groups. The observer, like the reporter in some respects, is characterized by having a role that places him on the edge of the group. On this point I would like to make a small digression concerning the methodology of observation, the drafting of the protocol and the report, in order point out some analogies and differences.

¹ Works on narration (Montesarchio & Margherita, 1998; Montesarchio & Venuleo, 2002; Freda, in press) show the circular relationship of interpretative cooperation inherent in every text that acquires a meaning in virtue of its user.

Report and protocol of observation

I will start with some considerations on observation. If one thinks of observation, the mind goes to the vast use of observation in the field of philosophy of science, the epistemological debate about it, and to the construction of processes of knowledge. Otherwise observation can be seen as a research methodology in psychology and as the observation in the psychodynamic and clinical intervention. The latter differs from other perspectives on observation in that it debunks an assumption, “the illusion of observing” reality objectively and a-relationally (Borgogno, 1978). In historical terms, the interest in psychoanalytic observation started in the 1950s with the work of Anna Freud, and of Isacs (1946). From different standpoints, these works were designed to integrate the direct observation of children with analytical data. It was Winnicott (1941) who discovered the importance of the setting and of the psychoanalytical behavior of the observer. The works of Bick (1964) are remembered for the possibility of considering observation as a training tool, the methodological systematisations of Mahler (1975) for having integrated clinical investigation and experimental methodology. Since then, a series of methodological questions have accompanied reflection on the systematic observation of the child in development contexts, like those concerning the relations between research and intervention, between observed data and reconstructed data, the influence/control of subjectivity and also the problem of the observer’s position in relation to the person observed. The psychodynamic model provides a reading of the phenomena in terms of transference–countertransference relations; the observer is involved in the co-construction of the field observed through the involvement of his inner world. His position is at the same time neutral and active.

Let us now consider the report. The report is a linguistic elaboration of the emotions experienced in the relationship, through clinical psychology categories that enable the meaning of the events to be construed. A theory of the report therefore cannot disregard the analysis of the intervention contexts (Carli & Paniccia 2005; Carli, 2007). Report and protocol have numerous aspects in common. I would like to use the term ‘protocol’ in the way it was used at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and also to refer to a way of organising international agreements. A protocol in this sense is, like the report, a text open to social negotiation.

I can therefore conclude that the report, like the observation protocol, will depend on the theory of reference that conceptually organises both the phenomena one focuses on, and the categories used to interpret them. In particular, I am thinking of the theoretical assumptions that involve a psychodynamic reading of the relationship, or those that exclude it. In this way we get back to groups. Specifically, the group function of reporting, like that of observing, can produce some defensive dynamics. The situation that derives from this will be very different, if the methodology sustaining the group’s activity at least entails the analysis of such fantasies.

It may happen that the person reporting, like the observer in the group, may pick up primitive, unexpected aspects of the group, emotions that may fester, above all when there is no designated space for working on the function of the observer, which is viewed as a task that is taken for granted. This is so with “self-centered” groups, which work exclusively on the group’s internal contents, seen as being split from the context in which the group operates. This is true even when the contexts are particularly dense with structural and symbolic meanings, which are certainly brought into the group. I am thinking for instance of rehabilitation or therapy contexts, or of the case of rehab communities, or halfway houses. In these cases placing the observer in the group often appears to be an element of disturbance. For instance, the silent observer becomes the butt (Bleger, 1967) of persecutory values belonging to the group, which if not analysed can gain the upper hand and lead to thinking being blocked in the whole group.

As for the training group, it is, as its declared purpose states, task-centered. In this case the function of the observer can be seen as legitimate and not persecutory, insofar as it can easily be perceived as serving the objective. Above all, and this is even more important, if the group has a psychodynamic approach, the function of the observer is not only expressed in its aims, but the fantasies that it prompts are analysed. This function is constantly being discussed, thought about, reflected on. The difficulties that the observer sees can be worked on and the problematic aspects elaborated to transform them into knowledge of what is happening in the training process, which is useful for the group. In these cases there is a phase that sees the observer seemingly passive and silent during group activities, and a phase when he appears more active because his position is expressed and discussed. This phase coincides with the work on preparing the group event, it is discussed after it is carried out, and monitored in the breaks.

These questions are also to be considered in relation to the drawing up and discussing of a report. Various phantasmic configurations may define the observer/group or reporter/group relationship, as shown by Scaglia (1976), Corbella (2003), Montesarchio & Monteduro (1984), Margherita (2002). In the observer-group-trainer gestalt there may be splits between thought and emotion. The part of the group felt to be external and extraneous (the observer, but also those with reporting functions) can be delegated to “think” or to “feel emotion” while the group behaves in the opposite way. So there is someone who reports, and therefore thinks/speaks/symbolises, while the group feels emotion; or there is someone who evaluates and someone who defends himself from the evaluation. The person observing, like the one who reports, provides a formal representation for the unthought emotions, those not seen by the group, acting as “spokesperson” (Käes, 2002) through work on connections and bonds. His point of view includes and at the same time differentiates inside and outside, psychic and social, group thought and the individual’s subjective elaboration. There are therefore many possible aspects in common between observer and reporter. However, while the presence of the observer in the group usually presupposes a specific *role*, an asymmetrical position in the group, which triggers particular, at times defensive, dynamics, reporting on the other hand is tied to a *function* that can be distributed equally in the group.

Emerging group reports. An experience.

The psychodynamic literature shows how the group expresses itself by using a particular form of narration, similar to a dream (Anzieu, 1975; Käes, 2002). In these cases communication enables the primitive relational spheres to be manifested (Foulkes, 1975). In groups there is a plurality of discourses and planes intersecting each other simultaneously, the language is that of the emotions, often it is an analogical language, using images.

What I would like to underline is the presence of mental categories that are, so to speak, pre-verbal. Even if the report has not yet been formed because there is no access to language, these categories find other ways towards the symbolisation of emotions, giving meaning and reorganising the relationships. Group work carried out using techniques of representation, such as psychodrama, goes in this direction. What is unspeakable is at times visible. At another level one could say it is dreamable. In training, centering the task, accompanied by the analysis of what is experienced and acted out in carrying it out, enables the group to reflect on the possible difficulties in producing reports. In appropriate settings, like the training setting, the group can also elaborate potential or embryonic reports. Starting from these considerations, it has been hypothesised that the reporting function can be given to the training group as a whole.

I would now like to describe some aspects of the experience of using reporting in a “Group Counselling” workshop, aimed at final year specialist students in Clinical Psychology of the Community at “Federico II” University of Naples, concerning this possibility of group reporting. The central methodology of the Workshop, like the practical traineeship, relates

theory to practice, follows the Course on the Counselling Intervention and is organised in eight 2-hour sessions. First of all, I would like to make some comments on the modality of certification of the Workshop as a fundamental element in the structuring of the training relationship. With the institutional change characterising recent years, an important step has been taken: the Workshops have become optional instead of compulsory. This has important effects on the training relationship. Remember in the past the sensitive moment of collecting signatures. 'Sensitive' because it anchored the training relationship to aspects of control, dependence and regression. Today attendance is no longer the criterion for evaluating the Workshops, other forms of testing having emerged, one of which is the report. From the extreme position focusing on duty, the task, and compulsory attendance, we have shifted towards that of objectives, results, the acquiring of competences. Generally, even without compulsory attendance, the Workshops are very crowded. In one room, which in theory would hold less, there are between eighty and a hundred students (there are a hundred and twenty enrolments). During the Workshop clinical cases are worked on. These are interventions carried out through the group in different institutional contexts, with various typologies both of objective (therapeutic group, training groups, counselling/support group) and of participants (for instance teenagers or parents, monothematic or homogenous groups). The aim of the Workshop is to provide students with a basic approach to theory and group techniques, in a psychodynamic key. This is through the opportunity of trying out, in the training group, the reflection on groupality that does not merely involve the theoretical sides of knowledge. Each session is organised as follows:

1) reading of a case proposed by the teacher.

2) small group work to produce a report constructed collectively.

The students are asked to demonstrate some problems presented by the case (in particular elements of theory of the technique, construction of the setting, intervention stages, models of leading groups) placing themselves in a reflective position as regards the training experience and the ways the knowledge-getting process is constructed in the group.

3) Reading the reports and discussion.

Passing from reading the case to organising the group work involves an enormous effort. The small groups form spontaneously. There are generally seven or eight groups of about ten members. Some students sit on the floor, others ask to sit near the door (on the edge) to be able to concentrate better. There is constant background noise. Some people remain isolated. After about forty minutes the discussion starts. The groups read the reports through a spokesperson. These reports are always full of interesting points, but there are so many and the time always seems too short. My concern is to make sure that they can all read their day's work. I feel that learning is only possible if there is a shared field where the other person can feel his own existence is acknowledged. Everyone must have the right to speak.

But the representation of emotions, as is visible in this first part of the experience, often does not come about through words but comes to rest on the frame, on the container of the process (Bleger, 1967), on spaces and boundaries, on times and on the technique. Think, for instance, of the small groups/large group, thought/emotion division. Often while small groups focus on the task, are productive and bring up interesting ideas, the large group expresses everything that is not representable in words, through actions, such as noises². De Maré (1972) says that the problem with the small group is that of managing to feel emotion while the problem of the large group is that of managing to think. In the group one therefore experiences the ongoing construction of a reporting process, which is marked off temporally by every single session and that leads to the production of a conclusive report organising the various stages of the experience.

As I have mentioned, the report was used as a Workshop testing tool. In this case, too, the students were asked to elaborate a report, working in groups. The aim was to obtain a

² There can be various possible ways of being outside/inside groups; for instance, one may feel outside a small working group but inside the large group where one presents "non reporting" in an attitude like "I am opposed to the task, therefore I exist".

reflection on the experience of the Workshop in its components and overall, linking some of the problematic aspects found in the cases brought by the teacher with the group dynamics that were manifested during training experience. Through the report it was proposed that they would connect their emotional involvement in the training group on the one hand with the way this involvement had been acted out and analysed, and on the other hand, with similar situations found in the clinical cases. In the tiring elaboration of the group report, the students were able to discover that the report, in the sense of a written text, is never finalised, and nor is it comprehensible without an analysis of its origin, often made up more of acting out than of words. They understood that its production as a written text punctuates a process in constant evolution. They understood that this process can be considered reporting underway, work in progress. They were able to see that every report opens up new questions, both in view of what it says, and in the fantasies that continue to accompany its production, revealing itself to analysis and questioning.

The leader, too, uses reporting as a tool to reveal fantasies and to examine them. As regards the way of presenting the test reports, I myself was struck by certain aspects in the evaluation process. I erroneously supposed that the evaluation would be spread over the whole group, but in fact I was amazed to see that while identifying with the group product, each student in the closing stage wanted to point out and separate his own part of the work, distinguishing it from that of the others. It therefore seemed that only individual evaluation could somehow sanction the training identity. If the report is the product of the group, then the question that seems to arise is *who does it belong to?* If the report is everybody's it does not belong to anybody. The emotional dimension acted out regards the fear of losing individual confines, the problem of where my identity starts and where that of the other person finishes. This manifests the question of identities and identifications that underlies the formation of groups, as Freud (1921) had said from the time of "Group psychology and analysis of the Ego".

While initially the contact with groupality may bring a sense of disorientation and lack of boundaries, working with the training group, also in reporting, aims to construct a formalising field where thought and reflective language can develop. If the report in clinical psychology practice is a representation of the intervention mediated by more or less organised linguistic structures that bring back the emotions and affects experienced by the psychologist during the intervention, so from my point of view, in training, reporting represents some of the dynamics specifically organising groupality.

"The Waves" by Virginia Woolf. The polysemic language of the group.

As a metaphor of subjectivity/groupality, individual/group in reporting, I think of Virginia Woolf's 1931 novel "The Waves", which seems to me to be a book about thinking, language, group narration, and also a book on identities that are trans-formed in meeting with others. This text is highly suited to the specific function of Koinonia (Fornari, 1979) or *Ti Koinon*, (Corrao, 1995), which describes the experience of sharing in relations through a "whole". Six characters, three men and three women, Bernard, Rhoda, Jinny, Susan, Neville and Louis, grow and are trans-formed. We follow them from childhood to maturity. Through their games, schooling, secrets, love affairs, envy, unions and separations, thoughts and dreams, there unfold parallel stories, expressed through the characters in monologues and together, in counterpoint with the stages of one day from dawn to nightfall. Like the cycle of nature, so the protagonists' lives flow through different states of identity. The narrative structure of the novel is organised around the alternation of the tale with short lyrics describing a changing seascape. This scene is a prelude but also a frame, a set, introducing the nine sections making up the novel. Everything is in movement. There is the individual time, the group time, the cycle of nature; but there is also time as an entity. Like the characters, the things and the reality are in constant development. The tree, the house, the beach, change in the different light of day, giving different perspectives and viewpoints. And also the protagonists' fragments of life, the experiences, some more, some less organised in their flow through the

mind, merge and fuse, linking up with objects, sounds, noises, and lights. The plot is not in focus, or rather, it has an unusual quality, as it is based on the polyphonic interweaving of voices and thoughts that have the musical quality and the rhythm of the waves. In the text mere words are not enough, the language becomes rarefied, preverbal, sensory, like that of the groups.

<<I see a circle, said Bernard, hanging over my head. It's swinging and hanging in a ring of light>>.

<<I see a yellow blur said Susan, spreading out towards a purple stripe >>.

<<I hear a sound, said Rhoda, cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep, louder, softer>>.

<<I see a hanging globe, said Neville, like a great drop against the side of some hill>>.

<<I see a crimson tassel, said Jinny, interwoven with gold threads>>.

<<I hear something pawing, said Louis. A huge beast chained by the foot. Pawing, pawing, pawing>>.

One could say, but only on the surface, that the characters do not communicate with each other. Everything that seems a soliloquy is in fact the result of the fact that each character is reflected in the other and in the group as a whole, and is constantly forming and dissolving in the eyes and in the words of the other person. The characters' voices alternate in a single "depersonalised" monologue; one often wonders who is speaking to whom. But then in the Babel of languages one recognises a feature, a style, the use of a phrase, or a word that belongs to someone and is the hallmark of his character. The character becomes such only in relation to the ensemble. Relations between the characters evolve and shift to identifications, or to differentiations, in a constant oscillation that seems to be that of the individual-and-the-group. Susan, silent and practical, daughter and then mother, becomes a woman compared to Jinny, with her flights, her flashing colours of a moth seeking the eyes of the world; both of them in movement compared to the paralysing terror of Rhoda, with her furtive, conspiratorial murmuring. Rhoda conspires and so does Louis, crushed by overpowering myths. For him life is a heavy burden in pursuit of success; a success that Neville pursues with order and precision. Lastly there is Bernard, the master of phrase and words, the writer who cannot resist creating a plot, giving voice to stories. It is to this character, the author's alter ego, that the function of "metanarration" is given. In the final monologue she creates links and connections and captures the shared story of the group, as if it were almost an interpretation:

Our friends, how rarely visited, how little known – it's true; however, when I meet a stranger and I try, piece by piece, sitting at this table, to analyse what I call "my life", it is not just one life that I see: I am not just one person, I am many people, in fact I don't know who I am at all. Jinny, or Susan, or Neville, or Rhoda or Louis. Nor could I distinguish my life from theirs.

I decided to use the metaphor of the "Waves" because in reading the text the reader is constantly wondering not only who is speaking, but also what kind of text it is. Is it a novel? Is it a lyric poem? Is it a *play poem* as Woolf called it? The stream of consciousness as a free-association writing technique in this case becomes group polysemy. This is what interests us in the novel, when it continuously offers us a field in which to suspend our old categories and stop as in moments of lull, like those when the wave pauses and then starts again.

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