

NEWSLETTER from Finland

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Background

To give the readers some idea of how the group psychotherapists in Finland have functioned and worked, we want to describe the background a little.

There are two training programmes in Finland. One with the W.R. Bion and Tavistock tradition the other one building on Foulkes group analytic thinking. The interest in working with groups began, in Finland, already in the 1950s, with Finnish colleagues bringing new ideas from all over Europe. But a group theory did not have strong support at that time. Individual approach was still dominating and group thinking hardly survived until the 1970s.

1. The Finnish Group Psychotherapy Association by Helga Hagman

The Finnish Group Psychotherapy Association was founded exactly 40 years ago by several prominent psychoanalysts. In particular Dr. Henrik Carpelan, a psychoanalyst who had studied in Switzerland, was interested in the Tavistock ideas and wanted to start training in Finland too.

In the 1970's Dr. W. R. Bion's book 'Experiences in Groups and other papers', was translated into Finnish and could so more easily be used in the teaching program amongst other literature.

The first training programme in group psychotherapy was arranged in 1973-1975. Group training was then considered to be a continuation of the training of individual psychotherapists. The important elements of training were then and still are: observation in groups, trainee's own psychotherapy for 3-4 years, weekly supervision and integrating theory and practise.

Since the 1990's the Association has had the following basic training programmes: A higher level programme for group psychoanalysts (4-6 years), a three year lower level programme for professionals working with adults and a separate three year programme for professionals working with children and adolescents. There has also been a possibility to continue training for three more years to achieve a higher level degree after the lower level. From 1996 onwards there has been a training programme for group psychotherapy trainers as well.

All training is based on object relations theory and different group dynamic theories with focus on group-as-a-whole, unconscious part object and transference levels, on therapist's interventions, reactions and counter transference feelings, as well as on the visible interaction in the group.

The Finnish Group Psychotherapy Association has also organized shorter introductory seminars in group psychotherapy, a continuation of trainings for people working with groups in crisis and trauma therapy and a training programme in supervision.

Many prominent group specialists have visited Finland lecturing in yearly workshops, among them Yvonne Agarazian, Göran Ahlin, Richard Billow, Robi Friedman, Earl Hopper, Eric Miller, Anton Obholzer, Malcolm Pines and several others.

The Association has published three books on group psychotherapy, one on the basics, another on theory and practise and the third on short term trauma and crisis treatment in groups.

2. The Group Analytic Society (Finland) by Ulrika Segercrantz

Group analysis in Finland and as a separate training, celebrates its 33 years anniversary this year 2012. In the beginning the activities were quite modest, and the development went through many different phases. It is not until recent years group analysis in Finland has got organized and has found its place.

The first group analytic seminar was arranged in Finland in 1979. The one week seminar was held in Jyväskylä in central Finland and it was attended by about twenty persons. The idea to this seminar came from the Finnish psychiatrist Anneli Sorri. Main consultant was Dr. Alice Ricciardi-von Platen, from Rome. She was, in her turn, attending groups of Dr. S. H. Foulkes and Dr. Malcolm Pines, arranged by the Group Analytic Society of London (Salminen 1997).

The seminar grew bigger and another consultant was invited. Group analyst Liesel Hearst from the Group Analytic Society, London, recommended Tom Hamrogue, also a group analyst, in whom she trusted and whom she liked very much as a person. So we in Finland had the pleasure to experience and get to know Tom very well over time, first in Hauho, inner Finland, and then, when he, after a break, continued as a consultant in group analytic training in Helsinki.

This new phase within the group analytic training started when a small group of people in the beginning of the nineteen nineties, with the confidence in Dr. Heimo Salminen in the lead, wanted to seek other ways to treat people in groups than the Tavistock (Bion) way.

It was however difficult to find associates, who would be ready to collaborate in the training process. An organisation with an already functioning system was needed. The Finnish Association for Mental Health is an organization, which still has many training programs, mainly in family therapy, but also in other forms of psychotherapy. So the group analytic programme fitted their concept then and was accepted as a training. The first basic course in group analytical training begun on November 19, 1993 (Arhovaara 2009).

While the early seminars held in Hauho in the seventies and eighties, described above, were arranged only twice a year over a few days, there was now a course available, who met on a continuous basis over a longer period of time. Because the experience from the group analytic training within the Finnish Association for Mental Health was good, the training programme was developed and extended and the group of trainers were later complemented with others. At this time Heimo Salminen wrote the first group analytic book in Finnish. Together with international literature it was used as material in the training.

The Large Groups

The trainers gathered frequently to discuss, plan and develop the training programme, and the international material was thoroughly utilized. There was an air of excitement around the training courses then. Also international conferences were attended. Large groups played already from the early beginning an important role in the training. These, beside the actual training programme, were held twice a year and were compulsive, and still are, to the trainees. The large groups were English speaking and were held from Thursday or Friday evening to Saturday or Sunday afternoon, with small groups in between conducted by Finnish group conductors. In the small groups it was also possibilities to participate as an observant.

Because of the earlier seminars in Hauho the only natural thing seemed to invite Tom Hamrogue to these seminars as a conductor. He also functioned as a consultant regarding the training. From him, the teachers learned a lot, although they wanted to keep their own independence and way of doing the group analysis and did not take the whole complete training package from London. Maybe something was lost on the way, but maybe something was won too.

After the introductory courses and the first three year's mid level course, training continued with the demanding level.

After Tom Hamrogue we needed to learn from other styles in conducting the large groups so Jörg Burmeister, from the German Group Analytic Society, was invited in year 2000. Teresa Sommaruga-Howard, Group Psychotherapist and Architect from London functioned as consultant and large group conductor from 2001 to 2002. The large group seminars developed more and more into mainly large groups. It was an interesting experience to leave the small groups out and process everything only through large groups.

Gerhard Wilke, organisational consultant, group psychoanalyst, who was a conductor of the large groups and a training consultant for some years, had his last session in Finland in September 2009. In 2011 group analyst, chair of GAS International Robi Friedman was the conductor of the large group. Finnish speaking large groups have also been arranged two times, the last one in 2010.

The training

Beside the large groups, where the society is analysed and studied, the training programme has the same structure on every level of training. Everything happens in and through the group. The trainees meet at least once a month, or sometimes more often, for two days of block training. During the two study days there are theory seminars for six hours and four hours of supervision. The theory contains material from self psychology, object theory, different group dynamic theories and psychiatric diagnostics. Ethic questions are also stressed. The trainees are all in their own group therapy process and have their own group analysis groups. Last middle and demanding course, which graduated in December 2011 worked together in a supervision group, so making it possible for younger students to learn from advanced ones. Also some middle level theory seminars were held by the students from the advanced level under supervision of a teacher, to let them have some teaching experience. The training has so far been three plus three years.

The Society

We did not have any own group analysis society before 1998 in Helsinki. With many training programmes behind and many ahead, there was a need to find a forum for graduated group analysts. On October 10, 1998 a meeting was arranged where it was decided to establish a society. But the idea dried out and it was not until January 8, 2003, that the goal was reached. Group analytic training is held apart from the society's activities, but is arranged in cooperation with The Finnish Mental Health Organisation until 2013. Nineteen persons participated in the establishing meeting, all trained group analysts. The society has today near hundred members most of them trained in group analysis. The policy is however also that persons merely interested in groups can become a member.

The goal for the society is to develop knowledge about group analysis, to participate in arranging post-gradual seminars and to support group analytic and scientific activities. We now have group analysis as treatment, but also group analytic activity within the work with children up to elderly people and in all kinds of hospitals and organisations.

Hoping to awake more and lasting interest in the field, members of the Group Analytic society published a book on Finnish group analytic practice in November 2009, reflecting the current plurality and richness and possibilities of group analytic life in Finland. A new book is under work and will probably be published 2013.

Bibliography

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3. New Challenges for all Psychotherapy Trainings in Finland

All psychotherapy trainings in Finland are, however, undergoing a huge change. According to a new law universities have to take over the training of all psychotherapists at a level of 60 so called study points, which is the same as 3-4 years of post gradual training. This is just a start for further development of the training programmes on an even higher level. From the beginning of 2012 there have been negotiations with all universities in Finland with a medical or psychological faculty about taking over and arranging the psychotherapy trainings. In the start the trainings are arranged in collaboration with the earlier training institutions. The idea is to make the training programmes more comparable, to facilitate the training and to make the process more transparent. Beside this the changes will create better qualitative research programmes. But the process and many questions are still open. At this point it is difficult to say what this change will mean in the future. It might be a possibility for some training programmes but it can also exclude some others. If this happens it is an alarming trend, because it may mean that just some ways of doing psychotherapy is accepted, which will narrow the way of thinking.

Different societies and associations can continue with their earlier training programmes by themselves, if they started before the end of 2011. When these trainings are completed the societies have, however, to start to arrange the training only in collaboration with the universities. Nobody knows the role of the associations and societies in the future and all the universities have not yet decided which psychotherapy trainings they will accept in their study programmes. But we hope for the best and maybe we can tell more about these new winds blowing in Finland when we write the next newsletter for EFPP.

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