

Playing With Power 1: Understanding the System

Participant Summary By Katerina Constantinou

The day's workshop started with a name association game. Each person round the circle began by introducing themselves along with an adjective starting with the same letter as their name - they also had to remember the names and associated adjectives of all those people who had gone before them in the circle. Some examples we had were: caring Chris, serious Steve, Hopeful Helen....

Zeezee then led an overview of various working agreements we had introduced, but not finalised, in the previous workshop and we agreed on a number of collective commitments we could uphold each workshop.

We then got our teeth stuck into a brainstorming session on "What is power?". This started off with us pairing off and sharing with each other a moment when we felt powerful and powerless. We then came together as a group and shared various experiences that came up, trying to tease out some of the main elements of power. Our one-on-one conversations and group discussion really highlighted the complexity and different dimensions of power. We continued to come back to this question throughout the session nailing it down with more personal and practical examples and exercises. To finish off this exercise Helen revealed TTT's definitions as a guideline of Power-over, Power-to and Power-with.

Next we played the seemingly simple 'sweet game' in which each person is given a brown bag with sweets in it and challenged to be the first to gather 4 identical sweets in the shortest amount of time. Once the game was over we came together and discussed our various experiences. It was only then that most of us found out that not everyone had started off with the same amount of sweets. A lot of other interesting points were also shared including how competitive we had been, how seriously we took the game and its rules and how willing we were to help other players.

We then broke down into groups of four or five and brainstormed around the question of 'Why do we obey?' We did this by writing down the different reasons we came up with onto post-it notes and then putting them up on the wall (to be written up and sent round soon)

The next exercise allowed us to use a practical example to unpick the various types of power found in institutions and where power comes from. The question presented to us was 'Who has power in schools?' and we tackled this by first listing all the people we felt had power in schools (far more than I had originally thought). We then picked a few of these people - for example the caretaker - and discussed what power they had and traced where this power came from.

The next exercise attempted to broaden this idea of power from the local to the global. 10 volunteers came forward to the centre of the circle with their chairs and represented the world's population (average 600 million each person) They were then presented with a series of statistical questions concerning the G8 nations (represented by one person) in which the G8 person was asked to occupy the relevant seat(s). We then discussed how the G8 person felt compared to the majority of the people and how the situation could be rectified to make it fairer.

The next exercise then let us deconstruct a project/situation that we are personally involved in at the moment by looking at 'The Powers that Be' in different ways. The premise of this exercise is that no person/organisation/institution is all bad or all good and by moving away from these generalisations and demonisations we are better able to understand and change the aspects we want to. Although most of us didn't have time to work this out through to the end, the activity then allows you to go one stage further and analyse yourself and your group's behaviour in a similar way.

As energy was waning a bit as the end of the day approached it was nice to be given the opportunity to relax and practise our active listening skills as four volunteers read out different stories involving the transforming of various power situations.

The workshop then wound down with a feedback and consultation session from the communications group, an evaluation of the day's activities and all of us coming together in the circle again for a final Whhooooshing.