

Turning the Tide 2011 Year Course Summary of October

A personal account & evaluation plus evening anecdote of nonviolent action from Rowan Tilly

Overview: I found it a useful, often stimulating & generally rewarding day overall.

Welcome & Introductions

Go-round saying names & “**weather report**” expressing how we are feeling about today. People seemed to appreciate this and it works well.

Mingling to rather quiet music in which we all wandered around looking and feeling awkward, some attempted dance. Stopped at intervals to express a word to encapsulate power, e.g. responsibility, belief. Not sure why this didn’t work as it usually does. Perhaps it was too early in the day? I think it can help if the leader names and gives permission to the awkwardness and shyness – gives it space. I also didn’t have a clear sense of who was leading this?

What is Power?

Group ideas-storm looking at what power means.

Personal Power: Feeling powerful & powerless.

Pairs: Relate a time when you felt powerless.

This was a little uncomfortable to recall.

Pairs: Relate a time when you felt powerful.

Interesting to note that some sources of power can be quite unexpected: e.g. feeling powerful when being arrested!

Good to share these stories in a pair as it is personal and may be uncomfortable. The person we paired with became our buddy which was appropriate.

Types & sources of power

In a school:

Listing who has power and what is the source of that power.

An example that everyone could relate to but in which many seemed to have negative experiences! It was a useful example but we spent too long going through it. Could have halved the amount of time spent on this. Also maybe split the group into three small groups to share out the list between them, would have allowed everyone input and cover the ground faster.

Embodying power:

In groups we came up with examples of groups we had been involved with and focusing on how power is expressed. We found it a little difficult to choose a group for our focus but eventually chose a group of anarchists. Discussion ensued relating to whether such groups have no leaders or if it is the case that everyone can be a leader and roles are rotated. We were asked to create a sculpture reflecting the power dynamics of the group. Ours was a circle in which we all collectively levitated an orange from the ground using our fingers. The orange represented power, or the ball, as in “run with the ball”. We also each took turns to take the orange and do

something spontaneous with it in the circle. It was a great example of anarchy when it is working at its best. Other groups came up with interesting sculptures too. From the sculptures we were able to draw out the different ways in which power is expressed: power-over, power within, power with, power to. I really enjoyed doing this and seeing what others did.

Power & Nonviolence: Case study from El Salvadore

This was the most rewarding part of the day for me. Read out the story in turns. Many including me appreciated this excellent example, intense, moving, challenging. Discussion was stimulating, sometimes challenging.
Types of violence: cultural, physical, institutional, emotional, direct/indirect, psychological.
Violence is like an iceberg, most of it is submerged, the direct part is above the water-line.
Even the existence of a military base is a violence, and the fact that it's existence goes unquestioned.
Counter violence: resistance: nonviolent action, empathy, creativity.
Barbara Demming's two hands: one says stop, the other invites to come back to humanity.

Why of power

Sanctions / rewards
Legitimacy
Cultural norms, habits, traditions, desire to achieve, all these constitute a desire for acceptance.
Fear
Control over time, information.
Knowledge & ideas
Lack of alternative to conformity
Economic reality
Desire for personal growth.

Learning Zones

Standing shoulder to shoulder in a circle with a rope which we laid on the floor. Inside rope = comfort zone. Outside rope = progressively uncomfortable. A great way to debrief our evaluation / responses to the various stages of the day. Appreciated the chance to express and hear others.

Evaluation

Pairs to share 3 things: something to share, something we liked, something we could have done without. Stick it notes on the board.

Close

Cant remember, but I liked it!

Evening anecdote on the way home on the train

Rowdy rugby lads were making a nuisance of themselves. I was glad to be travelling with Sue. Recalled how often I have intervened in violent / threatening situations,

usually acting spontaneously. Haven't done anything like this for a several years and am much more wary lately since burn-out. Noticed impulse to intervene and my resistance to doing so – I was tired and the situation was one of annoying over-the-top horse-play rather than really threatening. Having read many of the papers in the resource list on power I was uncomfortably aware of how difficult it must have been for the many people of different races present. As I left the train discovered an American man and Chinese woman hiding in the bicycle area due to previous intimidation from these men. I did intervene at one point, speaking quietly in defence of an older woman travelling alone, when a man sat on the table right in front of her in order to talk to another passenger. The man responded well and immediately moved away. Survived the journey but woke up at 3 am that night, heart pounding, mind turning around possible responses to the situation! I came up with some good ideas... But could have done with more sleep!

Thanks everyone.