

Hide-and-Seek

We can all remember playing Hide-and-Seek as children, an exciting world where the adult was a stranger and we were immersed in the moment.

When we are running a group there are significant and useful parallel processes to recognise and think about, both at the intellectual and the emotional level. Considering how these link back through time can open up our sensitivity to what is going on in the present. It can help us to be aware of the tension between hiding, feeling safe and keeping quiet as against the desire to be seen and included in the active group, to become one again with our friends.

There was an electric level of excitement and fear that held us enthralled in the all encompassing importance of the game, which was characterised by the movement from hidden to seen, silent to heard, alone to together, introverted to extroverted.

Remember how conflicted we felt between wanting to stay hidden, quiet and unfound, how safe it felt to be tucked away, silent and unseen, but the longer it went on, the more we wanted our friends to find us. Sometimes making small noises to hint at our whereabouts, sometimes even fearing that everyone had gone home, the game had finished and we had been forgotten, turning to terror as that reality became concrete in our imaginations.

And to be found, to be reincluded and active again within the circle of friends was so important, it almost justified the amount of investment in what might appear to the outsider as a non-event.

As facilitators we witness this dynamic being experienced by the adult, moving between the safety of silence and the “risk” with reward of inclusion in participation. Being sensitive to the subverbal reality and hearing the echoes of the past in people’s contributions allows us to pick up on the importance that underlies even the most innocuous contribution and to recognise the dance that is being acted out in front of us.

This is not about better or best but about the power of the experience, how deeply it is felt and how it drives our behaviour, how those early experiences set patterns that configure our present participation.

Watch a pre-verbal infant playing peekaboo, hidden behind hands and out of sight and the look of ecstasy and wonder when the hands are removed and the world is complete again. Both positions hold immense attraction to the infant, the movement from one to the other is where the boundary of wonderment is found, the doorway to learning.

This process is being echoed, however subtly, in the most prosaic events, such as asking people to go round and say their names at the start of a group or as we watch people enter and leave the group discussion.

As facilitators our empathic understanding of participants’ experience is enhanced if we are sensitive to and mindful of the process conversations that happen at this subconscious level, at the same time as attending to the content.

Nick Eve runs The Facilitator’s Development Programme, a four day masterclass in facilitation.

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