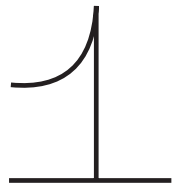




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# The Group as a Means to Restore Community in Teacher Education?

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## Therapeutising Technologies during the “Psycho-boom” of the 1970s in Zurich

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**Abstract** During the “psycho-boom” in the 1970s, there was a strong demand for the group as a multifaceted setting. In the sense of a therapy for “normal people”, psychologising and therapeutising technologies such as group dynamics or talk therapy were widely established in society e.g. in countercultural social movements and in pedagogical contexts. Group formats in general, such as conversational and discussion groups, as well as self-help groups and theatre or environmental groups were considered modern and conducive to pedagogical work. New technologies promised holistic help in finding the so-called true or authentic self at the individual level as well as consciousness at the collective level. It is the narrative of individual and collective processes yielding emancipatory demands. This article thus examines entanglements of psychologising and therapeutising knowledge in the context of teacher education in the Swiss canton of Zurich. Based on

source materials, such as annual reports of teacher training seminars and publications by teachers, we pursue the question to what extent the group was substantiated and used in psychologising and therapeutising ways in Zurich’s teacher education.

**Keywords** group, psychoboom, teacher education, Zurich, 1970s

The group as a tool to “format the social” was not new in teacher training of the 1970s (Engelmeier, Kuchenbuch & Luks, 2019/2020, p. 6). Group settings in connection with the concept of community had been used to structure interaction processes in schools since the first half of the 20th century (e.g. Ragaz, 1920, p. 115; Elberfeld, 2019/2020, pp. 137–142). In this period, psychological knowledge and theories of group interaction “revised religious motifs” of “personal salvation and redemption” (Popkewitz, 2000, p. 85) and superseded utopian imaginations of a new and better society, e.g. Abraham Maslow’s Eupsychia (Grogan, 2013, pp. 110–112).

The “psycho-boom” (Tändler, 2016; Elberfeld, 2020, p. 304) in the 1970s resulted from the powerful scientific management of educational psychologists, at least in the US (Fendler, 2013, p. 59), and also from a strong demand for the group as a therapy for “normal people”. Psychologising and therapeutic technologies such as group dynamics or talk therapies with their “rhetoric of the liberation of the self” were also widely established in civil society, especially in countercultural and pedagogical contexts (Grogan, 2013, p. XI, 97, 143; e.g. in West Germany: Tändler, 2015, pp. 96–97). Conceptions of groups, such as conversational or discussion groups but also self-help groups, at that time included many normative claims: They were to improve the personal growth (“*Persönlichkeit*”) of teachers and students, promote the democratisation of teaching or increase its efficacious performance (Engelmeier, Kuchenbuch & Luks, 2019/2020, p. 7; Reichardt, 2014, p. 788, 794; Elberfeld, 2020, p. 313; Fendler, 2013, p. 67). In particular the strengthening of psychological knowledge in the second half of the 20th century and the assertion, driven by Carl Rogers’ approach to humanistic psychology, that a non-self-actualised life is in need of therapy, called for student-centred teaching and non-directive counselling (Rogers, 2015, p. 66; Illouz, 2009, p. 289). Psychologists such as Rogers influenced popular culture and promoted the tendency to think that all problems were psychological (Snodgrass, 2007, p. 515). Furthermore, Rogers explicitly attempted to reform the education system based on his belief that learning means growth, and only self-discovered

learning facilitated by an authentic teacher could be effective (Grogan, 2013, pp. 146–147).

This article thus examines entanglements of a wide range of psychologising and therapeutising knowledge in the context of teacher education in the Swiss canton of Zurich. By analysing source material such as annual reports of teacher training seminars, publications by relevant teachers and records of the Swiss Pedagogical Association, this contribution explores to what extent the group was substantiated and used in psychologising, therapeutising and technologising ways in Zurich's teacher education of the 1970s. Furthermore, we aim to identify distinctions from and references to older key concepts of teacher education.

Our argument unfolds in three chapters: Firstly, we address group dynamics in the context of the further education of trained teachers, secondly, we focus on references to the concept in a Protestant teacher seminar, thirdly, we examine the group-related discourse of seminar teachers, and in conclusion, we discuss whether the group-/“psycho-boom” in the investigated sources translated into an impetus to enhance society by improving education.

### **Self-observation and Non-directing Activities in Teacher Education – Building on the Precondition for Emancipation?**

A 1970 study on the further education needs of German-speaking Swiss primary school teachers is characteristic of the particular interest of Swiss teacher education in the use of depth psychology, developmental psychology and didactical group work. The study criticised the lack of interest in the topics in teacher training and further education (Kaiser, 1970; Kaiser, “Bedürfnisse Volksschullehrer” 1970, 6, SPV II, 7). In response to this criticism, group dynamics courses were to be implemented at the Cantonal Seminar for Teacher Education in Zurich and in the Swiss-German further training for teachers. To this end, the director of the Cantonal Seminar, Hans Gehrig, was assigned the task of contacting Reinhard Tausch, a renowned professor of psychology in Hamburg, by the Swiss Pedagogical Association (SPA) (Correspondence

Schaefer – Gehrig, 15. 01. 1972, SPV II, 9). As early as 1971, Tausch held the first group dynamics course for primary school teachers in central Switzerland (Gehrig, 1973, p. 79).

In particular Tändler (2015, p. 103) sees self-observation, mutual feedback and self-awareness of authoritarian as well as aggressive behaviour among participants as the basic principles of group dynamics for teachers. Gehrig established a working group for behavioural training at the Cantonal Seminar and emphasised the ability of self-observation as a crucial factor of modern psychology classes. Tausch distinguished three behavioural characteristics of teachers: the emotional, the directing and the non-directing activity. He found that the desirable process characteristics in the classroom are more effectively realised when teachers teach in a less directive way, but rather with more emotional and non-directing activities (Manuscript Tausch “Lehrerverhalten – Schülerverhalten”, 11. 09. 1971, SPV II, 8; Tausch & Tausch, 1977). The course on group dynamics had such a great impact that it was repeated several times, and finally a permanent working group was established (Correspondence members of the board, 22. 11. 1971, SPV II, 8; Correspondence Krapf – Schaefer, 04. 01. 1973, SPV II, 10). Regarding itself as an *avant-garde*, the working group considered splitting into several sections, such as group dynamics training, depth psychology or behavioural training (Members’ letter, 16. 12. 1971, SPV II, 8). This form of mobilising micro-groups by means of disciplined self-training and self-thematisation with the gesture of rejecting similar groups in a shared socio-cultural space is reminiscent of the self-staging of protest movements in the alternative milieu of the 1970s (Sepp, 2019, p. 457; Reichardt, 2014, pp. 18–19).

Based on Rogers’ idea of the encounter group (1974), the group dynamics course sought to offer teachers the learning opportunity they needed in their specific situation. This unknown situation with a “non-directing way of working obviously had to intensify uncertainties and disappointments in the first courses. [...] More or less aggressive reactions could not be avoided” (Interim report Bischofberger, 20. 11. 1972, SPV II, 9). At the Cantonal Seminar, Urs H. Mehlin,



a psychology teacher who used Tausch's concept, reported on students' fears of tests that check their pedagogical suitability (Mehlin, 1973, p. 87; Mehlin, 1974, p. 55). Similar to cultural practices of the anti-authoritarian movement, Tausch's training cleverly mixed rational and emotional elements with technology-like forms of behaviour for teachers. In doing so, he did not focus on the political struggle but rather on working on the self as the precondition for social emancipation (Siegfried, 2014, p. 100). However, as the follow-up survey revealed, these group dynamics courses in German-speaking Switzerland polarised the participants. They frequently criticised "dogmatism, indoctrination and ideological bias", as well as the "elitist attitude" (Evaluation teacher behaviour training, 19. 06. 1973, SPV II, 10).

In 1973, looking back on the first group dynamics courses, Gehrig and the SPA president Paul Schaefer noted in a provisional report that the meetings were dominated by critical voices, conflicts and opposition, which evoked crises and disputes. However, they drew a mainly positive conclusion and emphasised that the "confrontation between different views, tendencies and temperaments" was important for teacher education, because the "simple consumption of 'good' lectures had no effect" (Annual report, 1972/73, SPV II, 10). This positive connotation of conflict and crisis was one of the central topics of social-psychological studies (e.g. by Erik H. Erikson) and may have contributed towards shaping a cultural shift on the way to the dominant culture of discussion in the Western world and especially in Western schools (Levsen, 2019, p. 490). But such interpretations were also said to follow self-attributions and glorifications of social movements (Haraway, 1995, p. 83; Skenderovic & Späti, 2012, p. 187). Group dynamics refers to popular socio-political questions of how modernity could be organised based on methods and procedures if people rejected hierarchical control by powerful authorities (Etzemüller, 2019/2020, p. 42). In general, group dynamics met several expectations of the teachers: anti-authoritarian and hierarchy-free relationships and the management of unpredictable dynamics adopting a concept that was both emotion- and science-oriented. It is not possible to completely clarify the extent to which the boom of group dynamics in teacher education was associated

with de-politicisation, as the Swiss historian Philipp Sarasin (2021, pp. 197–198, 216) recently suggested.<sup>1</sup> The question whether the techniques of self-discovery in the encounter group contributed towards containing social change and political actions or supported completely new politics depends on the understanding of politics assumed.

### **The Protestant Teacher Seminar of Zurich Unterstrass and the “Psycho-boom”: Demarcations and Entanglements**

In contrast to the Cantonal Seminar, the directors of the Protestant teacher seminar of Zurich Unterstrass, Konrad Zeller and Werner Kramer, were rather sceptical about the application of the superficial and stylish “psychologism” in educational contexts and the “psychologists’ disease” (“Psychologenkrankheit”) (Kramer, 1972, p. 21; Zeller, 1948, p. 95). Above all, they tended to disapprove of left-wing notions of capitalist exploitation and the “suppression of the libidinous instinct” as a result of a “repressive education” (Kramer, 1970, pp. 4–5; Sarasin, 2021, pp. 182–183). In the 1960s and 1970s, Kramer did not explicitly refer to famous cybernetic and psychological concepts, and he seemed to ignore assumptions of individual therapy as the precondition to improve society (Sarasin, 2021, p. 183). In the view of Zeller and Kramer, such concepts provoke a moralised impulsive opposition among students against society as well as naïve assumptions of the authentic naturalness of human beings resulting from an idealistic reception of Rousseau (Kramer, 1970, p. 6; Reichardt, 2014, pp. 61–62). According to Kramer, a libertarian “connivance” of human impulses (“Triebansprüche”), especially of the aggression drive, intensifies social disorder, because human beings are not “bound and guided by instincts” like animals (Kramer, 1970, pp. 6–7).<sup>2</sup>

The distance to psychological bestsellers implied that the Protestant teacher seminar saw itself as the sole authorised organisation

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1 Jens Elberfeld (2019/2020, p. 151) disagrees with the depoliticisation thesis and the decline narrative.

2 Here, Kramer’s argument was similar to e.g. the German sociologist Arnold Gehlen’s (1957/2004, pp. 6–7, 64).

for the religious moulding of the souls of future teachers. As already mentioned in the introduction, there were supposable interferences between psychological and religious approaches of governing the soul (Popkewitz, 2000, p. 92; Popkewitz, 2005). And indeed, the Unterstrass seminar was entangled with psychological knowledge circulating in popular culture and counter culture (Marti, 2016, p. 159) – but these entanglements were only implicit. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Protestant seminar’s directors perceived a decreasing mental resilience among the youth and an increasing “incapacity [...], to establish substantial relationships” (Kramer, 1977, p. 11; Kramer, 1980, p. 10). Kramer adopted the dominant “normalisation” discourse (“Normalisierung[s]-Diskurs”) (Elberfeld, 2020, p. 107; Mrozek, 2019, pp. 148–150; Bühler, 2019, pp. 46–47; Castel & Lovell, 1982, p. 193, 229), whereby psychological interventions should generally standardise values of young people and correct disorientation, uncertainty, fear, reluctance, and escapism in times of crises (Kramer, 1980). Referring to the early “psycho-boom” (Elberfeld, 2020, p. 113), the teachers of Unterstrass used their own pedagogical method of polarity (“Polaritätsmethode”), which had been established as early as the 1920s. It promoted a holistic education, which claims to include contradictions and contrasts instead of overcoming them, and promised the optimisation of “self-conquest and toughness on oneself” (“Überwindung und Härte gegen sich selbst”) as well as the strengthening of the students’ community and their “ability to commit” (“Hingabefähigkeit”) (Kramer, 1967, p. 7). It combined outcome-based and experience-oriented teaching. Teachers sometimes took on the role of a “partner”, exposing their vulnerability to the students, and sometimes the role of a severe leader to whom the students are entrusting themselves. According to Kramer, this rather technological and variable setting facilitates “pastoral talks”, which go far beyond “the setting of psychological-pedagogical counselling” (Kramer, 1966, pp. 8–9).<sup>3</sup> But this method also came close to

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3 Kramer pointed out that the students should not perceive the teacher as an opponent but as an open-minded, altruistic partner. Both “chumminess” and out-

a double-bind situation, because the students had to cope with different, paradox, and unforeseeable roles of the teacher (Elberfeld, 2020, p. 161–164). Talks between teachers and students in small groups as well as the ideal of the family and community were significant for the small Christian seminar with its 150 students (W.K., 1962, p. 19). Kramer was convinced that unlike discussions, which insinuate participation but often evoke disputes, talks would facilitate encounters between students and teachers, provided they also consider listening, understanding, appreciation, responsibility and – above all – the Christian ideal of charity (Kramer, 1977, p. 11). Talks could serve as a means of dispute resolution, but as Kramer points out, they could then “be hard, explosive or lengthy” (Kramer, 1967, p. 8). Ideally, the “talk as the basic model” of the method of polarity takes place in theatre and choir groups or in “special group project weeks, during a weekend and during a three-day workshop with older students” (Kramer, 1971, p. 4; Kramer, 1974, p. 8–9). Thus, in Kramer’s opinion, talk facilitated personal growth “in the holistic sense of mind, soul, body” (Kramer, 1980, p. 11). This reference to the Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi was typical for the legitimisation of the psychologisation of teacher education as well as for similar holistic notions circulating in the left-wing and alternative milieu (Osterwalder & Reusser, 1997; Reichardt, 2014, p. 135; Sarasin, 2021, p. 212). So, the Protestant teacher seminar was not explicitly but silently entangled with psychological settings of group and talk therapy, because firstly, it fits in with technological elements of the method of polarity and secondly, it could easily be combined with the seminar’s ideal of the familial community. Similarities included, for example, the ideal of self-optimisation and holistic personal growth, and the significance of the talk in small groups for community formation and the correction of individual maladjustment (Sarasin, 2021, p. 212; Reichardt, 2014, p. 795, 873; Elberfeld, 2020, p. 186).

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moded and rigid distance should be avoided. Rather, a vivid relationship between teachers and students is preferable.

### **Group Dynamics as “New Brooms” – Indifference and Group Concepts in the Discourse of Seminar Teachers**

In a booklet published in 1972, Willi Vogt, a teacher of psychology, pedagogical issues and education at the kindergarten and childcare seminar in Zurich, discusses the group quite ambivalently and by no means as a panacea or solution for every possible challenge: Although in Vogt’s understanding, people are “deeply” dependent on belonging to a group (Vogt, 1972, p. 85), they must also be able to assert their own individuality. Since each group represents a play of forces of harmony and tension, a group can support or inhibit the child in its personal growth (Vogt, 1972, p. 90). This is the reason why children need to integrate into the group and to overcome their desire to always be the centre of attention while also learning to “experience oneself as a being that wants and acts itself and whose wants and actions are noticed and respected by others”. According to Vogt, the kindergarten as a learning group can correct possible dysfunctions in families by offering the children – especially only children or neglected children – the opportunity to find the desired balance between conforming and standing their own ground (Vogt, 1972, p. 87). The questioning of the family as the basic unit of society is typical for the investigation period. As Thomas Etzemüller (2019/2020, p. 38) points out, the democratically organised group is frequently put forward as the ideal alternative to the criticised family to achieve a better socialisation.

In these readings, shared also by Vogt, the group is understood less as an established community and rather as a kind of training ground for diverse social interactions, which should ideally contribute to personal growth, but never breed uniform behaviour. The main point is finding a balance “between cooperation and personal initiative” (Vogt, 1972, p. 90, 92). Thus, in Vogt’s view, the group is not an entirely positive concept but rather an ambivalent learning opportunity, a teaching technology, by means of which children can practise the balance between integration and distinction.

In the group understood as a technology that brings about the opportunity for personal growth, one can find echoes of Carl Rogers’ encounter groups. Rogers indeed saw talk therapy as a means of

personal growth. Non-directive counselling technologies viewed the encounter as a centrepiece of the approach, and most of the self-awareness groups in German-speaking countries were in fact based on Rogers' encounter groups (e.g. the consciousness-raising groups of the women's movement). Alongside group dynamics, they were one of the most widespread "group techniques" and promised to realise the goal of personal growth (Elberfeld, 2020, pp. 189, 310–311).

While by the 1960s, Rogers had become a public intellectual and a "guru" of counterculture (Elberfeld, 2020, p. 189), some proponents of teacher education apparently remained ambivalent or even distanced. When arguing why group dynamics cannot work in classrooms, its opponents – such as the seminar teacher Gerolf Fritsch in an article published in the journal of the Swiss teachers' association – pointed out the fact that two basic requirements for group dynamics were not met in schools: pupils weren't mature, and they couldn't choose their topics freely. Furthermore, therapies should be provided by therapists, and schools should work exclusively on didactically processed subjects (Fritsch, 1980, p. 788). The journal of the male teachers' association, where Fritsch's article appeared, at first refused to publish a warning against group dynamics following the advice of several "competent psychologists" (Redaktion der SLZ 1979, p. 1775). The various journals edited by the teachers' associations appear to have had different approaches to the subject. The discourse in the female teachers' association's journal appears to have been barely affected by the so-called group boom. Its authors tended to discuss the topic in an indifferent or more detached way. Proven concepts such as "personality" and "motherliness" continued to be given preference (Hofer-Werner, 1973, p. 253). In a lavish tribute to the work of Elisabeth Lenhardt, a teacher and author for "Schweizerisches Jugendschriftenwerk", a collection of youth literature that was considered educationally valuable, the author of the tribute follows a similar line of reasoning to the director of the Protestant seminar, emphasising the importance of creating a common ground for teachers and pupils by means of tasks and cooperation under the teachers' guidance. The author quite clearly shows her preference for the familial group concept over group dynamics: "No group therapy,

no group dynamics, no community experiment, no social training and no team method can bring about what rich motherliness in an intimate circle of children [...] brings about in one go” (Hofer-Werner, 1973, p. 253). Furthermore, in a report on a symposium on “character-based leadership at the middle school level”, the group is portrayed as a central tool and alternative to authoritarian leadership. “The pupil today is not very responsive to instruction and encouragement; on the other hand, he is committed to actively tackling a problem. The authoritarian-led class as a big group (“Massenblock”) is barely manageable; therefore, it is necessary to organise the social interior of a class” (Traber, 1972, p. 13). So in the various sources, the group does play a role as a learning opportunity, but it is not elevated to a pedestal in a therapeutic or psychologising way. Similarly, a review of the book titled “Group Dynamics”, published in the same journal in 1973, and a brief commentary on “new words” clearly distance themselves from the alleged group boom. New words such as feed-back-system are described as “new brooms” and thus portrayed on the one hand as promising and attractive and on the other hand as sugar-coated versions of scientific terms, taken from new branches of science such as cybernetics, sociology or group dynamics. According to the author, the adoption of such new terms simply shows the “openness of didactic research to modern branches of science” and leads to the necessity to “make it quite clear in a schoolmasterly way what is meant by the new technical terms” in order to enable the reader to continue to understand future didactic texts (H[ofer]-W[erner], 1973, pp. 105–106). Regarding the findings presented in the monograph on group dynamics, the reviewer merely succinctly states that group work had already become established at all school levels over the last ten years anyway (S[tucki], 1973, p. 272).

### **Conclusion: The Group – Functional or Even Technological Adoptions, Adaptions, Amalgamations and Rejections in Teacher Education**

In the 1960s and 1970s, therapeutic settings of group and talk therapy were thus very present in the discourse of Zurich’s teacher education. In the field of further teacher education and at the Zurich Cantonal

Seminar, group technologies and “gurus” (Elberfeld, 2020, p. 189) of humanist psychology such as Carl Rogers and Reinhard Tausch played an important role, promising the renaissance of an authentic and emancipated self, allegedly enabled to improve society. However, based on the sources, we have been able to outline a tension between ambitions of sleek non-directive talk or group settings and their rather technological procedure or lofty promises, which evoked critical scepticism of these practices and approaches in teacher training.

Both the Unterstrass seminar and the kindergarten and childcare seminar picked up – partially implicitly – elements of knowledge that are also present in contexts of humanistic psychology and its technologies of the encounter and group dynamics, because they fitted in well with traditional and updated ideals of community and personal growth. At the same time, they maintained a certain distance, stressing well-established older guiding concepts of didactics. The Cantonal Seminar appears to have adopted such technologies in a more enthusiastic and comprehensive way, in particular with regard to further education. However, during the “psycho-boom”, therapeutic technologies dominated debates and discourses and, explicitly, implicitly or at least partly, found their way into Zurich’s teacher education. Although there were some semantic interferences between the two concepts “group” and “community”, the group was mostly used as a functional technology to achieve a wide range of goals.

The ambivalent application and partial rejection of group therapies and group concepts in teacher education illustrates the complexity and paradox of every process, that integrates new concepts in existing meshworks of meanings.

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