

Colin Martin



29th September 1936 – 7th April 2017

Colin Martin was a significant pioneer of psychodrama in New Zealand introducing many professional people to action methods and their application in organisations. This article is a selection from his memoirs he dictated to his wife Vivienne Thomson and some of his writings and teachings.

“In 1982, I was asked to run a 3 week trainer training course for trainers in government departments. This I did and it was very successful to the extent that the Vocational Training Council (VTC) proposed putting together a National School of Training for Trainers that would provide services for government and private industry. While this was under discussion I ran a second 3 week course for the State Services Commission. However this course was not a success. Trainers selected for the first course were keen to develop their skills whereas trainers put on the second course were those who were failing and not happy in their jobs. They were keen to prove that I wasn’t the right person to train them which they did by playing up in the group.

Nevertheless, although they would not admit it, I ran a good course and they did learn some things. On the last day of the course, Allan Parker from the VTC sat in on the evaluation. During the summary from the trainers, most of them complained about the course not being adequate. In each case, I applied what I had learned from psychodrama. I asked them to expand on their thinking and got them to group with other people who thought the same. Over half the group felt similarly. I then asked the remaining people to comment and they said they had got what they wanted from the course and that it was helpful.

At the time I thought that the VTC would no longer be interested in me but to my surprise the following week I was asked to set up and run training for trainers as a national programme from Wellington Teachers College. When I spoke to Allan some time later I said I was surprised that I was asked to do the course given the feedback from the trainers. Allan said it was the way I handled that session that convinced him that it had to be me running the course."

As an experienced consultant, Allan had never seen anyone work this way and achieve results with such a group. Impressed by Colin's ability as a group worker and sociometrist, Allan also began training in psychodrama and became a member of ANZPA.

Several years prior to this, Colin had been introduced to psychodrama through an experiential workshop led by Dale Herron and soon after that Suzanne Howlett led a workshop at Wellington Teachers College using action methods which Colin was fascinated by. Seeing the potential for application in his work as a lecturer, he sought further opportunities to develop his abilities. His first psychodrama training experience was a week-long residential workshop led by Max Clayton in 1978. For many years Colin attended workshops led by Max attributing much of his success as a group worker to what he learned from Max.

At that time, Colin observed that action methods had a lot to offer commenting, "Currently there is very little guidance for those who train others in groups in commercial, manufacturing or government organisations. While there is plenty of information on group facilitation skills, this approach is different from the trainer focusing on pre-determined goals and performances and keeping to a structured and agreed schedule. In addition, while most writing on groups is on a facilitation basis, there is very little information on directed group learning based on group theory and process."

As well as being involved in AANZPA events, Colin travelled the world meeting authors on group work who had inspired him and provided practical applications of their work. He attended the first mid-west psychodrama conference held in Chicago and ran workshops at several psychodrama conferences in Britain and the USA. Making connections with numerous practitioners he invited Trish Williams, Warren Parry, Ann Hale and David Swink to contribute to the National School of Training for Trainers programme which in turn created opportunities for other events to be organised and introduce people to psychodrama.

Colin's interest in group functioning and his integration of this into the National Training for Trainers Programme led him to record the following:

Application of Action Methods to group training skills

Premise

People learn best in groups. Each person learns individually at their own pace and in their own style; and they learn best in groups. This is a significant paradox.

Trainers need skills to manage groups so that the individual learners develop desired skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Competencies developed from action methods can provide a substantial set of fundamental group management skills.

Trainer competencies

The following 10 competencies represent a framework for developing a group management skills programme for trainers.

1. Ability to build rapport in a learning group

Building rapport encourages group members to function as learners and to take risks as learners.

The initial group rapport building activities should focus on themes for the formation of group rapport, the tasks of the workshop, and the responses of the individual.

Examples:

- Greetings continuum
- Individual expectations and goals
- Identify expertise among group members re workshop topics

- Anticipated outcomes for group and individuals.

2. Ability to focus a learning group on task

For each discrete topic, the group needs to focus on the immediate task (warm-up).

3. Ability to deal with resistance

Resistance can be dealt with by supporting the resister and exploring and expanding the resistance. Learner resistance is a group issue and needs to be dealt with in the group. Resistance is a natural and healthy learner response.

4. Ability to use directives to manage group action

Learning groups need to be managed so that learning action is sustained. Use of directives, and careful use of language, is a key to managing group action. Example:

“Form pairs” is a directive.

“Would you like to forms pairs?” is a question and a careless use of language.

“I would like you to form pairs” is a desire with little relevance for learning action.

5. Ability to make learning practical and active

This refers to practice and rehearsal; the more training is able to duplicate or simulate actual desired performance, the better will be the learning.

Making learning practical and active also refers to the re-designing of static or lecture-style delivery of information so that it has an active component; with a little ingenuity anything can be made active.

(An example of this is the technique of the opinion map that Colin created – a concretisation where each group participant states their opinion on a topic and places themselves in relation to others’ opinions thereby mapping the spread of opinion in the group and opening up further exploration.)

6. Ability to plan training sessions

The trainer must plan; off-the-cuff is seldom appropriate or helpful. Paradoxically, a well-planned and detailed delivery lends itself readily to on-the-spot adaptation to meet emergent issues.

7. Ability to write objectives in performance terms

Training needs competency models and competencies written in such a way that desired performance is clearly understood e.g. criterion referenced.

8. Ability to use role taking as a training tool

All performance is role based and activities are required which enable learners to develop their roles.

9. Ability to evaluate learning

This is a straightforward matter if a competency model is used; trainees are measured against clear performance criteria, preferably on-job when applying the skills and preferably with the trainee's supervisor participating in the assessment process.

10. Ability to facilitate transfer of training

This is a complex matter as it relates to on-job actions. Having trainees apply new skills until they become part of their normal performance repertoire requires much on-job practice, preferably supervised. There are helpful actions to assist with transfer such as coaching or training of on-job supervisors and providing them with guidelines for facilitating transfer, or even showing the trainees how to actively seek and secure on-job supervision. Most failures in training can be related to inadequate post-course on-job practice and lack of organisation support.

Other applications of Action Methods

Colin was the Director of the National School of Training for Trainers for a decade but he was a man of many talents and interests notably drama, language, education, history, relationships and photography which led to him being involved in a multitude of entrepreneurial activities. Colin's natural talent as a sociometrist meant that a central focus of these activities was building community and mentoring people as they developed their abilities.

In the 1980s Colin, along with his wife Vivienne, established a consulting company. He chose other company directors who were also involved with psychodrama making this method a hallmark of the company's identity and practice. The company evolved and continues today as Algate Enterprises. One of Algate's contracts was with the Centre for Post Graduate Pharmacy Education to train pharmacy tutors in Britain necessitating an annual trip to lead workshops for them. On

one of these visits, the remains of Shakespeare's original Globe Theatre were discovered in London and Colin, a keen photographer, was there with his camera photographing the site. He met Sam Wannamaker at the Bear Gardens and shared his enthusiasm for the proposed development of a new Globe Theatre.

Each year for more than a decade, Colin went to London to train tutors and each trip, in his capacity as a Trustee of the Shakespeare Globe Centre New Zealand Trust, he would make a special visit to take photos of the Globe's progress; as a model, a hole in the ground, the basement where the NZ hangings were first on display, construction of the Sam Wannamaker Playhouse and ultimately the building of the Globe Theatre. Once the Globe was ready for operation, Colin photographed many aspects including rehearsals, behind the scenes work of the staff, the latest developments in the Globe and venturing into corners of the theatre not accessible to the public. On his return to New Zealand, Colin donated his many slides to the Shakespeare Globe Centre of New Zealand to use for educational presentations.

Each year, the Globe Theatre in London puts on a special performance and ceremony to acknowledge individuals who have made a significant contribution to the Globe. In June this year, Colin was commemorated for his contribution as the images he captured are now the only records of many aspects of the Globe's construction. Regarded as a valuable resource, these images now reside in the digital archives of the Globe. With a camera always at the ready, Colin also recorded moments at each AANZPA conference he attended and many of his photos can be found in the AANZPA archives.

Back in his home on Waiheke Island, Auckland, Colin spent the last decade managing another of his entrepreneurial ventures involving commercial premises he established with his family. The effects of this business have had a significant positive impact in the community. Although understated about his own success, Colin made a lasting and beneficial impression on people.

Colin was a member of AANZPA for well over a quarter of a century. Psychodrama was a major influence in Colin's life and one that he was very thankful for. He always said he was a better person for having done psychodrama.

