



FROM THE DIRECTOR

What is Systems-Centered Training Anyway?

I am often asked in casual conversation on an airplane or even at dinner with colleagues or friends, “What is systems-centered training?” I have discovered that this is a very good way for me to practice “crossing the boundary” to the larger context and to keep experimenting with how to give short and, hopefully, understandable and informative answers. “Practicing” SCT in this situation means thinking through how to answer in a way that does not introduce too much difference and instead, builds on a similarity. This uses the SCT idea that it is easier to open to a similarity than a difference, and easier to take in a difference once there is an environment of similarity. I have two favorites so far. See what you think.

Very often I start by saying that systems-centered training begins with the idea that the system we are part of has more to do with how we behave in that system than just ourselves. If you accept this idea, it then makes sense to be more deliberate than haphazard about how we influence the living human systems in which we are members. Systems-centered training then introduces tools and skills for influencing and developing the systems we are part of, whether it be our marriage, our family, our work groups, or a classroom or therapy group. Learning these tools and using them helps us actively influence any system we are part of, so that it can work better and have more of the kind of influence on us that we want.

In my “other” answer to “What is systems-centered training?” I start with the idea that differences are the biggest challenge for us as human beings, whether they be differences in opinion, beliefs, ideas, feelings, religion or even the differences we discover in ourselves. At the same time, integrating or digesting differences is what leads to development and to change. (The theoretical statement is “living humans systems survive, develop and transform through the process of discriminating and integrating differences.”) We often respond to differences that are a little too different for us by ignoring them, avoiding them, trying to convert them or scapegoating them, all of which create various and sundry problems. Systems-centered training teaches work groups or therapy groups to work with differences by asking all those with a similar point of view or experience to talk together, and in turn, those with the difference to talk together (the method of functional subgrouping). As each discusses their side with those who see it similarly, small differences emerge within the similarities that eventually provide a bridge to the other side. In this way, creating a context of similarity makes it easier to explore differences, leading to integration and development.

So let me know what you think. Which one resonates more for you, or better still, what do you say?

-Susan Gantt
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SYSTEM-CENTERED® NEWS

is published twice a year by the Systems-Centered Press.

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Submission Deadlines:

November Issue - September 15th
June Issue - April 15th

Please submit articles to the appropriate Section Coordinators.

Display Ads:

<u>Size</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Quarter Page	\$120
Eighth Page	\$ 60

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Members,

The Newsletter is the major vehicle through which we share the cutting edges of our thinking with each other, trumpet our successes, and digest our frustration as a developing organization. This issue of the Newsletter does all of that and more. The following are some of the highlights that are in store for you.

The "Theory, Research and Applications" section offers a particularly succulent feast of members' most recent attempts to cross-fertilize SCT with other fields and apply a systems-centered perspective to their areas of specialty. The section begins with a case study of SCT applied to a business environment by Katarina Billman. This is the second installment of the case study which she began last issue. It reads like an SCT adventure story and will leave you anxiously awaiting her final installment! The next article, by Mark Johnson, gives us his latest thinking on a systems view of attunement. In particular, he integrates the work of another one of our members, Una McCluskey, with SCT. Those of us who have had the good fortune to study with Mark can attest to the incisive clarity and excitement he conveys about his subject matter. The next article is a fascinating vignette by Roelof Langman, which applies systems-centered thinking to a political situation. Roelof's article is followed by an erudite integration of SCT and Mindfulness meditation practice by Larry Ladden, which will be appreciated by members who have long recognized the similarities between SCT and Mindfulness practice. The final article in the section, written by me (Michael Robbins), builds on Larry's work, and integrates SCT, Mindfulness practice and the emerging field of Interpersonal Neurobiology that is being developed by Dan Siegel and others. In summation, this section will definitely stimulate your intellectual juices and give you plenty of thoughtful food to digest this summer!

It is no secret that the licensing process has been a challenge for SCTRI. In this issue of the Newsletter, Yvonne Agazarian addresses this developing process head on. In a "Special Feature" interview (a Newsletter first!), she unveils her emerging and historical thinking about the licensing process. With frankness and clarity, she illuminates her growing pains in grappling with the problems that we have encountered as SCTRI has struggled to create a successful and efficient licensing process that also expresses our values. This interview is paired with a report from Licensing Group V, which has had the most successful licensing process to date. In the next issue of the Newsletter we hope to publish responses from all of the licensing groups and any members that would like to contribute their emotional intelligence to further refining our understanding of the licensing process.

Yvonne has also contributed two short articles. The first is a tribute to the Vassilou's, two of her dear colleagues who contributed enormously to her development as a systems theorist. The other is a protocol for a ten-minute consultation, which is one of our membership benefits.

On the other side of our growing pains, there is a news-flash of two major successes from the SCT research team. Two SCT research articles will be coming out in major jour-

nals soon. In an article called "First SCT Research Published!" you can read about exactly what this means and why it is so significant for SCTRI.

You will also observe that there is something missing from this issue. The Notice Board has left the pages of the Newsletter and can now be found on the SCTRI website (www.systemscentered.com). This will allow us to update the Notice Board with the latest changes in the dates and locations of training events. This change may be only the beginning of transformations yet to come! You will also notice a request to complete a questionnaire, asking you to rate the various sections of the Newsletter in terms of their relevance and value to you, and in terms of how important it is to have them in a printed, as opposed to "electronic," form. As the Newsletter has become longer, it has also become more expensive to print and mail. Coupled with this financial reality, the SCTRI website has become more functional as a conduit by which we can exchange information. Over time, we are thinking of moving some of the sections of the Newsletter onto the website. The questionnaire can be filled out on-line and instructions to get to the survey will be sent out over the listserv. Remember that

this is your Newsletter. Please take up your citizenship in SCTRI and give us your input!

But all of that is for a future issue. In this issue, there are still "Reports and Updates," "Thumbnail Sketches" and the "Members Forum." I hope that you read all of it, that you enjoy it, and that you let us know what you think!

Finally, I want to thank everyone on the Newsletter team for making this issue possible. The Newsletter would not exist without the time, energy and resources that have been donated by many people. Thank you Michael Silverstein, Bettie Banks, Verena Murphy, Fran Carter, Claudia Byram, Yvonne Agazarian, Jan Vadell, Kathy Lum and especially all of you who wrote articles, Updates, Thumbnail Sketches and contributed to the Members Forum. Bravo!

I wish you the very best in every dimension of your lives, as people, as members of the SCT community, and as members of the many contexts in which you love, work and play.

*-Michael Robbins
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EMERGING THEORY BY YVONNE AGAZARIAN

REMEMBERING GEORGE AND VASSO VASSILIOU WITH GRATITUDE

This vignette comes from my visit to the Vassiliou's some twenty-five years ago. I am reminding us of it today, as his Institute of Anthropos has, this year, lost Vasso Vassiliou, who carried on the systems work after George died. Both George and Vasso had a very deep influence on me in my early attempts to formulate systems thinking, and the vignette that follows illustrates how clearly George was able to demonstrate the difference between levels of systems thinking.

George and I were sitting in the sun by his goldfish pond eating hamburgers and talking systems. George said, "What do you see when you look at the goldfish?" Luckily, before I could fumble my way to some kind of intelligent response, George said "watch!" and threw a bit of his hamburger into the pond. Immediately the goldfish all swarmed after it. One, faster than the others, got hold of it in its mouth, but it was too big for him to swallow and he darted off with it with the shoal darting after him, snatching at the hamburger. Pretty soon, lots of bits of hamburger were floating in the pond with the goldfish flurrying around them, all except for the original goldfish who was doing the best he could with what was left.

"See," said George, "from that little fellow's perspective, he has just had his hamburger stolen from him. But if you look at it from the perspective of the shoal, we have just witnessed an effective food distribution system in which all the fish get fed!"

This is a very good example of the difference between taking things personally, as the goldfish probably would if he could talk, and seeing the system, and the role that he played for the system. How the goldfish "felt" would be very different from the two perspectives.

Now, some twenty-five years and a "Theory of Living Human Systems" later, SCT has a lot to say about these two dimensions. In understanding people theoretically, we think of the person system. In a hierarchy of living human systems, it is the person system that provides the energy that enables the hierarchy and every system in the hierarchy, to survive, develop and transform.

The person system, like all other systems in the hierarchy, is a system of three. Like a set of Russian nesting dolls, the person system exists in the context of the system above it and is the context for the system below it. Just as in the group system, the three systems are member (the source of energy), subgroup and group-as-a-whole, so in the person system there is the core source of energy, the various subgroups and the person-as-a-whole. Just as the subgroups in group play different roles, so do the subgroups in the person. (It is easier to talk about the subgroups in the person system if we call them role systems, and name the role systems in group as subgroups. Though the words are different, the structure and function are the same.)

All role systems can be functional or non-functional, depending on the context. In groups, functional subgroups contribute driving forces towards group goals (both implicit goals of survival, development and transformation, and explicit goals that are the designated tasks of the group). For example, the implicit goal of the shoal was to survive - so was the implicit goal of the goldfish. If we imagine an explicit task of feeding the whole shoal, then swimming around with a hunk of hamburger while the shoal distributed it among themselves was a highly functional member role for the goldfish. He was vectoring energy through the role, towards the goal, in the context.

Also true, is the potential for roles to be non-functional. For example, flight or fight subgroups are usually restraining

forces in a developing system, whether it be person or group, but they can also be driving, in a different context. Fight, for example, is a highly functional role in war.

System roles cross the boundaries between systems. Thus the boundary between the person system and the group system is crossed in the role of member. In the real world of people, if a member brings into an SCT group the drive to explore a particular issue, then they are a resource for both themselves and the group. If on the other hand, they bring an emphasis on explaining, their role will serve as a restraining force for both their person system and the group. (Once again, change the context and the role function changes. Explaining as well as exploring is useful for science.)

Functional roles have boundaries that are permeable to the context of the present. Exploring members discover new information and changes occur at all levels, both in the group system and in the person system. Non-functional roles are typically exported from the past. The past is the context. Their boundaries are usually only permeable to any present information that is similar to the past context. To mix metaphors, we could say the system has a closed mind. The tragedy of old roles is that they are an attempt to repeat a success. They were originally functional solutions to difficulties in relationships with highly significant others. The compulsion to repeat, for all of us, is an attempt to repeat a successful compromise. (Parenthetically, it is important to note that in the process of modifying old roles, it is important for us to recognize the pleasure in the compromise, and not just the resentment and pain.)

Non-functional roles are typically personalized. When we personalize we are the context! Unfortunately, we all have a strong tendency to personalize, a tendency to lose the context and to experience the self as the only context (to identify with the goldfish having his dinner stolen by his rivals, rather than seeing oneself in context, with the goal of feeding the shoal as

well as oneself.) SCT calls this citizenship. Citizenship means being able to take up citizenship roles, not only in the contexts around us, but also in the context of the self. It is the difference between being a self-centered person, and a self-centered person system in a systems-centered context. The nice thing about isomorphy is that whatever works in one system will also work on all the others - and it's important not to forget the person system, which we do if we personalize.

WHAT IS THE SCTRI 10-MINUTE PEER CONSULTATION?

Peer Consultation is one of the benefits of SCTRI membership. Anyone, any time can call up for a ten-minute consultation to any member in the SCTRI phone directory who has taken the Intermediate Skills Training.

This short article defines what to expect and how to respond in your consultant/consultee roles.

The role of the Consultee: Your work is to request a consultation from a member who has taken the Intermediate Skills Training, in order to get help undoing a restraining force that you have identified as either anxiety, tension, outrage, depression or one-up/one-down role lock, and which is making it difficult for you to reach your goals in a particular context.

The role of the Consultant: Your work is to check that you have the time, energy and resources to do a ten-minute consultation, and if so, to set a convenient time, provide the structure for the work, keep the time boundaries, center the system, follow the relevant SCT protocol and end with "surprises and learnings" or next steps.

What Peer Consultation is not: Peer consultation is not a consultation that requires moving outside the guidelines for undoing specific defenses. It is not a consultation that lasts more than 10 minutes.

THEORY, RESEARCH AND APPLICATION

FROM FLIGHT TO COOPERATION: A BUSINESS CASE – PART 2

This article is the second of three articles, the first of which appeared in the last issue of Systems-Centered News. That previous article described the beginning of an OD (Organizational Development) consultation assignment in which the client is a management team (subsystem) of a large multinational chemical company (Group-as-a-Whole or GAW). The members of that management team operated from different locations around the world. The article discussed the beginning steps of the consultation process that included initial interviews, problem formulation, goal formulation, and the first two -- out of a planned six -- team development sessions held over the course of ten months. In the role of consultant I had diagnosed the team to be in the fight sub-phase of the authority phase of systems development with some regression into flight, the latter of which was due to the consultant coming in as a new member in the system. In this article I will share

with you the middle steps of the team development assignment, namely the second and third sessions.

Third meeting – Day 3

The third meeting with the team took place in the United Kingdom (UK), six weeks after the second one. In between meetings, the team had worked together in subgroups by mail and phone to plan for the "international kick-off event," described in the first article. (As a reminder, a "kick-off" is a term frequently used in the world of business. It is a gathering of people to mark the beginning of something new; for example, gathering all employees together in connection with a corporate merger, gathering a sales team to mark the beginning of a new year with new challenges, or gathering corporate officers and media representatives to launch a new product brand. In SCT terms it can be described as a boundarying intervention by an organization to its members; clarifying and celebrating a shift to "here and now reality" of something that used to be a "planned future" for the organization.) Planning for this kick-

off event was directly linked to the teams' short-term goal, which was "to successfully plan and execute an international kick-off event for our function in the organization within two months."

I flew to the UK the day before the kick-off event, in which 200 members of the function that the team was managing would participate. Due to the limited time we had to work (less than 3 hours), and my estimation that the group was still in the fight sub-phase of the authority phase, I introduced the meeting with the following words: "Today we are going to focus on what went well during the six weeks since we last met and what is going well right now." This intervention was based on the theoretical assumptions that a) systems in fight have poor access to the spontaneous exploration of their driving forces and, b) exploration of driving forces builds a positive atmosphere in a system and increases building on similarities. This in turn, would increase the likelihood of boundary permeability and allow the system to start exploring differences. Before we began to work, team members named any unprocessed frustration (potential distractions from task energy) and the team agreed to put those on hold until our next meeting.

The team members then subgrouped on goals for the outcome of their presentation at the kick-off. Team members agreed that their goal was to appear as "*a strong and unified team*" in contrast to a set of individuals, which often happens in the fight sub-phase. The team then created a force field of driving and restraining behaviours toward this goal. We then used data from the force field with the explicit goal of reducing restraining forces in the teams' communication behaviour and increasing the driving communication behaviour. The management team then began to rehearse and practice their presentation, with feedback and coaching from me in the role of their consultant.

In SCT terms, the goal of the presentation was to transfer information from one subsystem to another subsystem about changes in the larger context for the GAW, and how this context shift influenced changes in the goals, roles and structure of the subsystems. Translated to business terms, the management team's task in the presentation was to communicate to members of their business unit a contextual shift in the company, and the way this shift influenced and changed the goal, role, and structure of the business unit, including both the management team and members.

Prior to this meeting, team members had distributed tasks amongst themselves with the goal of ensuring that "all voices of the management group be heard during the presentation." As they practiced, the goal was to communicate in a way that each member built on the information from the previous presenter. An implication of SCT theory is that subsystems which close their boundaries to information exchange are more likely to become isolated. So my hypothesis, linked to theory, was that if management group members would build on each other's presentations, and make their own presentation a part of the larger message, this would move them closer to their goal of "appearing as a strong and unified team" and not a set of individuals doing their own presentations.

As the management team practiced, I focused on linking speakers and themes to each other rather than intervening with individual members. In SCT language, I focused on informa-

tion transfer between subsystems by encouraging functional subgrouping. Specifically, I had each presenter immediately build on the prior presenter's theme before referring back to an earlier theme or introducing a new theme.

In this brief preparatory work I also served as a container for the stress and anxiety that was not explicitly dealt with because of time constraints. Afterwards, I wished them good luck for the following two days and took a plane back to Sweden. The management team reported feeling more ready and prepared for the challenging task the following day.

A few days later the team manager reported back to me that the kick-off event had been perceived as very successful both by the organizers (management team) and participants (all members of the function that the team was managing), and by the managerial level above the management team. This was a tremendous relief to the team, including their manager, as they had evidence that their existence was in danger if they did not succeed on this third attempt. (Two previous dates for kick-off events the year before had been cancelled due to communication difficulties within and among different subsystems of the organization.)

Fourth meeting – Days 1 and 2

The team met for the fourth time in September. We met at another location in Europe for a full day of work with me as their consultant. It began with me in both task and process leader roles, followed by a second day in which the team manager took up task leadership and I served as process leader. Since the last meeting, one member had left and two new members had joined the team. With two new members in the system a temporary regression to an earlier phase of group development was expected. We briefly reviewed the teams' goals, roles and structure as well as the actual work accomplished as the team developed. The goal of this review was to recreate a working climate based on clarity, specificity and reality, in order to facilitate integration of the new members into the team and their orientation towards goals and tasks. Since it had now been over six months since the beginning of our work, we reviewed the team development goals. The team was proud to say they had reached their short-term goal: the kick-off meeting had taken place within two months from the first meeting and was perceived as a success. The GAW (management team) rated the success 7 on a 10 point scale, and they were particularly pleased as they recalled the painful experiences and challenges they had had to overcome, including the climate of "fight" both within the group and between the group and the managerial level above it.

For the remaining part of the day, the team subgrouped around trust (linked to their long-term goal) and the effect the kick-off event had on the team's expectations for future outcomes. The members of the team were now having more positive expectations of functional role relationships with each other based on the good experiences they had with each other working on the kick-off event. These positive expectations, based upon tested experience, facilitated further exploration and integration of member's differences as well as differences between their unit and other units of the organization upon which they were functionally dependent.

The team now had the skill to subgroup and their manag-

er was acting less defiant and defensive when challenged by team members. On the second day, as the team had their business meeting, in process leader role, I vectored emerging sub-groups' communication pattern towards making alternative proposals instead of complaints as the team worked on business tasks. This was an intervention to lessen the restraining forces in the fight sub-phase.

Upon finishing our fourth meeting together, the communication pattern of the group was characterised by more green and yellow light behaviours (SAVI). There were still tendencies to go to red light behaviour at times (such as "yes, butting," contradictions, blaming self and others). The system was more able to self-correct towards yellow and green light behaviours, with much less frequent consultant interventions. All voices in the team were heard more often than not, and the gossiping and complaining during breaks, which had been a norm of the group at the beginning of the year, were no longer evident.

At this point we still had two more meetings scheduled before the conclusion of our work together. The system (both the management team and consultant!) was glad and relieved that it had achieved its short-term goal so that it could survive and free up energy for further development and transformation. In the next article I will describe the last two meetings and the outcome of this team development assignment.

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ATTUNEMENT: A SYSTEMS VIEW _____

Recent work by McCluskey (2005) has provided a finer discrimination of the concept of attunement. Recall that in SCT, attunement has been defined as "a physiological resonance synchronized and in tune with another's internal rhythm

and experience" (Agazarian, 1997). (Cf. to Cozolino, 2006 and Siegel, 2007 in reference to mirror neurons.) McCluskey (2005) initially viewed "affect" attunement as "a way of communicating to the other that one has recognized the affect they are experiencing" (p.13). By the end of her experiments, she had dramatically expanded the concept into "goal-corrected empathic attunement." This construct is a clear build on, and join to, SCT's theoretical premise that self-correction is a feature of all living human systems. Now clear that the process of attunement "captured only a fraction of the interactive processes associated with successful care-giving responses," she renamed the construct "empathic attunement." Her work calls for a systems look at the role of attunement at various systems levels.

From a systems view, two points of convergence are quickly evident as well as two questions. First, attunement can be readily seen as information/energy that has crossed the boundary between two (or more) people. Second, attunement is goal-directed, i.e., it decreases, at least temporarily, care-seeking behavior and increases relief. In short, it's 1:1 subgrouping with a goal, which thereby suggests the systems question: What goals are served by attunement for *Person, Member, Subgroup, and Group-as-a-Whole (GAW)*? And next; How do we understand attunement within the SCT phases of development (*Authority, Intimacy, and Work*)?

Goals served by attunement for Person, Member, Subgroup, & GAW

Since we expect survival, development, and transformation to be operative at all hierarchical levels of a system, a grid may help elucidate this question.

	SURVIVAL	DEVELOPMENT	TRANSFORMATION
PERSON	Basic survival vs. failure to thrive	Developmental maturation of body, mind, self	Developmental milestones, e.g., walking, puberty, etc.
MEMBER	Generation or reproduction of attachment style	Learning how relationships work	Dawn of intimacy
SUBGROUP	Naming reality of similarities & differences	Finding differences in the apparently similar & similarities in the apparently different	Integration
GAW	Species survival	Fostering of cooperation	Fostering of change at all system levels

The construct of “goal-corrected empathic attunement” can easily find an appropriate “home” in every cell of this grid. Where don't we need it? Take any cell and imagine an interaction where attunement is clearly present. Now subtract it. How do you imagine the impact on system goals in each case? A more clinical question involves understanding the implications of *not* receiving this key interpersonal form of attention.

The role of attunement in the Phases of Development

The centrality of attunement in development comes clear when we effectively generate a force field of its impact in each of the 3 Phases of Development:

Authority:

Decreases: anxiety, depression/anger, likelihood of role-induction, vagueness in communication

Increases: reality testing, balancing of one-up/one-down, owning one's skills

In short, improved management of the superior/inferior axis in relationship

Intimacy:

Decreases: devaluation, paranoia and over-idealization

Increases: respect for differences *and* similarities without the implicit threat of abandonment or engulfment

In short, improved management of the too close/too far axis in relationship

Work, Love and Play:

Decreases: rivalry, jealousy, and spoiling types of competitiveness

Increases: collaboration, common sense, humor, esprit de corps, work hardiness, and perseverance despite obstacles

In short, improved management of the functional dependence/independence axis.

In sum, it is hard to imagine a more parsimonious driving force for *all* system goals than attunement. It has a positive effect on *every* level of system hierarchy across every phase of development.

In his most recent book, Siegel (2007) notes how interpersonal attunement is the “fundamental characteristic of a secure attachment” (p. 27). In his newest offering, he explores the consequences of directing attention inward in the service of “intrapersonal attunement.” An SCT build might be to consider how we center in order to attune, and then become available to subgroup with ourselves and others.

The next question is, What are the driving forces that support attunement? Besides our genetic predisposition to cooperate, it appears that one of our greatest resources in this domain is our ability to direct and deploy attention. In a subsequent article, attention will be examined with special focus on attention itself as a system and its intimate relationship to attunement.

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CONTAINMENT IN 1958 AND 2007

One function of the SCT group is containment of its members' experiences to provide a safe environment for exploring and communicating these experiences. In this environment, members learn to explore experiences rather than suppress or act on them. When as individual members we come in to support the container function of the group, we take up the container role. To be able to do that, we need to be in contact with both the inner experience elicited by what is happening in the group and with the context that the group is working in, i.e., its phase of development. To develop the capability of doing this, members at the intermediate level can take container training.

Taking this training has been an intense experience for me, which I anticipated as I wandered in the Boston Harbor the day before the training started. As I walked I was struck by the following text, written on the wall of the Boston Municipal Court: “The responsibility of those who exercise power in a democratic government is not to reflect inflamed public feeling but to help form its understanding. Felix Frankfurter, 1958.” This text seemed to me to be about the meaning of containment in a wider social context. My curiosity was aroused. I wrote the text down and took it home with me, where I was able to discover a bit more about it.

As Frankfurter wrote this sentence, he was an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court in the case of *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958). The “public feeling” he was referring to was inflamed by the desegregation of public schools. The Little Rock School Board had started an educational effort to gain public acceptance of desegregation, and had admitted nine black students. Citizens opposed to desegregation threatened to block the school entrance and prevent the nine students from entering the school. The state governor sent in the state militia to support this opposition. Members of the School Board then filed suit, arguing for suspension of the desegregation plan for two and a half years. The decision to grant this suspension by an Arkansas Court was ruled unlawful by the Supreme Court.

The sentence on the wall is from the opinion of Judge Frankfurter concurring to this judgment. In context, it reads: “That the responsibility of those who exercise power in a democratic government is not to reflect inflamed public feeling but to help form its understanding, is especially true when they are confronted with a problem like a racially discriminating public school system. This is the lesson to be drawn from the heartening experience in ending enforced racial segregation in the public

schools in cities with Negro populations of large proportions” Cooper v. Aaron (1958).

In his concurring opinion, Frankfurter highlights the fact that integration of schools had started when the state government intervened. This had not been an easy process, but “by working together, by sharing in a common effort, men of different minds and tempers, even if they do not reach agreement, acquire understanding and thereby tolerance of their differences. This process was under way in Little Rock.” This process was not contained by the government, but “disrupted by the introduction of the state militia and by other obstructive measures taken by the State.”

Frankfurter added his concurring opinion to the judgment to underline what was to him the main point: what was at stake here was upholding a political system in which differences are explored and worked through rather than settled by power. In other words, what was at stake was the capability of the political system to act as a container for social and political differences.

The curiosity about the meaning of containment in a social context is still with me. How do we make the connection between what we learned at the container training and life, in contexts very different and very distant from SCTRI? For me, container training added a new perspective. I already had the one of clearly articulating similarities and differences, similarities first. The second perspective is to see each situation as a chance to contribute to the development of its social context as a container, an environment for work, love and play. The goal is to develop an environment in which we do not suppress or escalate our feelings, but form their understanding and thus, integrate the information they contain, i.e., learn from them.

My experience as a result of the container training is that I’ve expanded my ability to stay with my fellow-members in complex and frustrating situations. I have used my increased sense of the context to develop the connections we need for our task, and worked within the norms of the system I’m in rather than try to impose “my” norms or initiate a disappointed and superior withdrawal. Thanks to the commitment of my fellow members in these contexts, we’ve been able to do a few things that we might not have been able to do otherwise: organize an evening of meeting and discussion for parents at our school and arrange for a farewell meeting of our project team after years of great strain. I’m looking forward to more.

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More background information can be found on the Wikipedia website at Cooper v. Aaron, retrieved April 27, 2007, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooper_v._Aaron

Please note that some wonderful examples of containment can be read in The Tiger, the student paper at Little Rock High School. Issues from 1957 and 1958 are available on the internet at http://www.centralhigh57.org/the_tiger.htm

Reference:

Cooper v. Aaron, 358 U.S. 1 (1958). This text can be found on the internet at the FindLaw website, Cooper v. Aaron, retrieved April 27, 2007 at <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/cgi-bin/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=358&invol=1>

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION AND SYSTEMS-CENTERED PRACTICE

This article discusses similarities between SCT and mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is defined as the “the non-judgmental observation of the stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise” (Baer, 2003, p.125). This non-judgmental observing is usually done in a sitting posture that is aligned and open. Typically the SCT practice of centering is equated with mindfulness practice. While this is an obvious similarity in practice, the theoretical basis of the meditative effort is often missed.

Both systems theory in general and Buddhist philosophy share an appreciation for the construct of interdependence. Taking the “self” out of context and reifying it through thought and emotional reactivity can be understood in both SCT and meditative practice as a cause of anguish. The idea of context is intrinsic to mind as embodied experience, that is, body-mind-environment are in constant interaction. “Mutual causality, as both Buddhist teachings and general systems theory attest, involves the perception that the subject of thought and action is in actuality a dynamic pattern of activity interacting with its environment and inseparable from experience” (Macy, 1991, p.114).

While we benefit from the “practice” of meditation or functional subgrouping, becoming familiar with the underlying view makes it more likely to transfer that understanding into new contexts. What follows is a discussion of centering and mindfulness, followed by two related concepts that are introduced to reveal a deeper structural and functional similarity between meditative and SCT disciplines. The first concept is a model of “time duration” and the second is a discussion of the Sanskrit term “*vikalpa*,” translated as “dichotomizing faculty.”

Centering and Mindfulness

Centering shares many of the principles of mindfulness practice: focused attention; appreciation of physical presence; discrimination among thinking, feeling, impulse and action. In SCT, centering is a way of establishing physical and psychological presence as a basis for exploration. We center into our member role, bring in our experience and join others with attunement (Agazarian, 1997). Depending on the context, the goal can be therapeutic, educational, or organizational development. Work toward a goal depends on available energy, and centering helps organize that energy by facilitating a shift from person to member system, from non-adaptive to adaptive roles. (The term “person system” describes the domain of personal resources and experiences each of us brings to a given situation. The term “member system” is the specific orientation of those personal resources to the context and goal. A non-adaptive role is an over-learned behavioral set without a present-moment context.) During a group, being centered in the mem-

ber system involves being present in the here-and-now. From there we can bring in experience and join others with similar experience or feeling. The contribution of the individual member is brought into a subgroup: a cluster of members exploring a similar experience. A requirement for functional subgrouping to occur is that members must first be related to themselves, which is what centering accomplishes.

SCT techniques facilitate centering. For example, when we enter a group and are distracted, the “distraction exercise” helps us re-orient into the present. This exercise makes a series of discriminations between outside and inside; past, present, and future; thought and feeling; fact and feeling. Similar sets of discriminations are made during mindfulness practice to gather attention into the here-and-now. The group context, however, makes this process more emphatic and in many ways easier. One reason is that in an SCT group there is an ethic that each member’s contribution or energy is important for the group-as-a-whole. Distraction steals that energy, so both the individual member and the group are invested in “getting here.” When we practice on our own it’s up to us. Secondly, in a group, distractibility is obvious in terms of posture, eyes moving everywhere but toward one another, and if our speech is discursive, tangential, or involves a change of subject it will be brought to our “attention.”

After a member is centered in “time and space” there are many ways we may lose our center, most notably by staying in discursive thought. An SCT intervention presented in the early phase of system development is to discriminate between explaining and exploring experience. We know that when we have gotten hooked by our own stories, our attention has drifted to the past and we then project similar patterns on the future. When the leader points out the difference between explaining and exploring, the member can re-direct their attention to the here-and-now. The group then develops by exploring rather than explaining experience.

Similarly, when we practice meditation and notice our mind drift and then return attention to the breath, we are shifting to an attitude of curiosity and openness. When the leader points out a choice between explaining and exploring and we choose to explore we reset attention into the here-and-now. The similarity has to do with this re-setting process rather than exploring as such. During mindfulness practice we don’t elaborate or explore the contents of mind rather we acknowledge the arising, dwelling and ceasing of the content. Also, activity outside the predictability of self-centered activity lends itself to a meditative ethic. That is, we relax the tendency to centralize inward and see more clearly what and who we are and where we are in relation to others, the environment, and a given goal. We sense our body and mind working together so that our speech readily expresses meaning. Once we bring our experience into the group we let go, like the end of the out breath. The information contained in our words is no longer our “property;” others respond, differences arise, they are resolved, and something new arises. When we speak of mind we are essentially speaking of experience; mind is embodied, which means there is a moment-to-moment interaction with sense perception and environment. From a systems perspective, mind is more like a process or a circuit rather than an object. In group life we explore experience “held” in common at the moment: our

interdependent life unfolds in its richness and provocative fragility and strength.

Time Duration

Meditation and SCT place a great deal of emphasis on the present moment. Looking closely at what we mean by “now,” similarities between meditation and functional subgrouping emerge. To do this, a model developed by the late neuroscientist Francisco Varela will be used. Varela (1999) was deeply interested in the relationships among neuroscience, phenomenology and meditation. The model posits three periods of duration. The first (‘1/10’ scale) is “grounded in the intrinsic cellular rhythms of neuronal discharges, and in the temporal summation capacities of synaptic integration” (p.117). This level is outside of awareness and can be observed with the EEG to show brain events that occur in frames of 1/30th to 1/100th of a millisecond.

The second level (‘1’ scale) consists of assemblies of neuronal firings (aggregates of the ‘1/10’ scale) that coalesce into cognitive events lasting anywhere from .5 to 5 seconds. “The relevant brain processes for ongoing cognitive activity are not only distributed in space, but they are distributed in an experience of time that cannot be compressed beyond a certain fraction of a second, the duration of integration of elementary events.” (p.117)

The elementary events at the ‘1/10’ scale become synchronized and then manifest as a moment of experience; thereby the ‘1’ scale is the strict reference or correlation of present-time consciousness. “Nowness...is therefore pre-semantic in that it does not require a re-memorization in order to emerge” (p.118). That is, nowness is not dependent on memory or mental representations. Varela supports this point by drawing on research showing that the human capacity to estimate time declines rapidly after four seconds and that intention movements and spontaneous utterances in many languages last 2-3 seconds.

The third level (‘10’) scale is the level of the descriptive-narrative where self identity is formed. It is built up of many experiences at the ‘1’ scale that constitute a description of the self.

When we subgroup and explore in the present we are taking advantage of this ‘1’ time scale. When we shift from explaining to exploring our experience, we are shifting from the ‘10’ scale to the ‘1’ scale. This is not to say there isn’t a building phenomenon; subgroups do develop over time, however the reference point is “nowness.” To navigate the phases of group development requires an orientation to “now.” When a member, for example, inadvertently makes an “as if” join this can be construed as coming from the ‘10’ scale and is received as out of tune. This is because resonance occurs at the ‘1’ scale. Or when during meditation we “think” about breathing (‘10’ scale) and do not actually sense our breath (‘1’ scale). A single outbreath is about 5 seconds in duration. We can readily notice how difficult it is to be present even for three entire breaths. But the activity of identifying when we drift to story and intentionally returning to the breath cultivates our capacity to stay present. When an individual or a group is centered there is a “holding” capacity that is readily felt. In a group this “holding” helps a member to manage distractibility and, more

importantly, to sense something compelling in the present – the inherent “wholesomeness” or vitality of being alive and of being with one another. The group is not only together in space but comes together “as” this moment in time.

A clinical example that exemplifies returning attention to the present-moment is an application of mindfulness to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), in which repetitive thoughts and actions happen with a dreadful automaticity. A mindfulness inspired application of cognitive behavioral therapy to OCD (Schwartz, 1999) demonstrated that as the patient is able to observe obsessive thoughts and redirect their attention, not only is relief felt but significant changes in Orbital Frontal Cortex metabolic rates occur. The clinical challenge, the author observes, is for the patient to cultivate the quality of effort to redirect attention. In mindfulness training, the body and breath provide access to the ‘1’ scale that exists prior (in time) to semantic, or labeling, activity. The implication is that the labels and their attendant value judgments can be modified most effectively at the ‘1’ scale, before they “stick.”

Another example is gleaned from the work of Reidbord and Redington (Reidbord & Redington, 1995; Reidbord & Redington, 1993; Reidbord & Redington, 1992) who recorded therapist and patient heart rate phase portraits over 28 sessions of psychodynamic therapy. A phase portrait is an emergent pattern arising from all possible patterns of a system. The authors liken a phase portrait to condensing an hour-long videotape of a therapy session to a single photograph! The association between heart rate data over an hour’s time (graphed as scatterplots and then using software that permits rotation in three dimensions) with behavior then shows distinct patterns ranging from random to more or less organized (complex). Analysis of the data show 4 distinct phase portraits within the therapy sessions: the more complex portraits correlated with spontaneous and focused behavior while less organized portraits were correlated with defensive and storytelling behavior. Co-regulation of therapist and patient behavior toward the goal of therapy was congruent or isomorphic with patient self-regulatory processes as measured by heart rate data. From the therapist heart rate data, greater empathy toward the patient correlated with complex portraits whereas concern about the patient correlated with less complex portraits. “We speculate that this affective factor, which seems to vary with heart-rate complexity, may be related to the therapist’s sense of empathetic connection with the patient on a moment-to-moment basis, of ‘feeling with’ instead of ‘feeling about’ (1995, p.541). Empathy, as it is discussed here, is occurring in the strict present (‘1’ scale) whereas “feeling about” or thinking would be the descriptive-narrative (‘10’) scale.

One understanding of the *maitri* or “loving kindness” practice (a frequent component of meditation training) is that *maitri* makes it more likely for the meditator to feel toward self and others rather than discursively thinking about; consequently shifting frames of time duration from the ‘10’ scale to the ‘1’ scale, and so by definition facilitating the energetic qualities of the present.

Conceptuality and the “Dichotomizing Faculty”

The method of functional subgrouping, perhaps inadvertently, reflects the nature of conceptual mind itself. By taking the conflict out of an individual group member and exploring both sides of a conflict, functional subgrouping eases the natural tension between opposing forces. It does this by not elaborating differences prior to developing a stable base of similarities. This, in effect, promotes an environment where differences receive a different kind of consideration.

Functional subgrouping works with the natural tendency of groups to subgroup, usually in stereotypical ways. Similarly the mind has a tendency to split, or bifurcate, wholes into parts. Within Middle Path Analysis, or *Madhyamika*, a Buddhist tradition of philosophical psychology, this “dichotomizing faculty” (*vikalpa* in Sanskrit) is acknowledged. “The dichotomizing faculty (*vikalpa*) bifurcates the two predicates and latches onto one of them in an effort to gain an entity that is serviceable as a conceptual referent” (Fenner, 1994, p.37). In other words, conceptual mind gives birth to this and that, right and wrong, self and other. There is a belief, a blindness even, that the conceptual referent is somehow independent of its opposite. From this belief endless elaboration or fabrication is generated, solidifying the split. The emphasis on exploration rather than explanation in SCT circumvents this problem by not reinforcing the fabrications that come from the conceptual mind. The presence and then the development of the “other” subgroup make it more likely to inhabit a world that includes both sides rather than this or that, us and them.

In some fashion, we deliberately employ *vikalpa* when we utilize the fork-in-the-road technique. Just as functional subgrouping works with the natural tendency for groups to split, the fork-in-the-road works with the natural tendency of the mind to dichotomize. This is executed with a particular intention and with regard for both sides of the split. Exploration invariably reveals an integration of what had appeared as separate. Mindful that there are two sides, we invite exploration of one then the other; this is done without reinforcing dominance of one over the other. We don’t latch “onto one of them in an effort to gain an entity that is serviceable as a conceptual referent” (p.37). This latching on is in large measure how we get stuck. We miss the context of the interdependence of the referent on its opposite: love-hate, self-other, black-white, up-down. So the container provided by the group and subgroup is isomorphic to the containment an individual may develop in sitting meditation whereby this endless dichotomizing and spinning is slowed and resolved into its own nature of silence and stillness. The result of integration by discriminating the fork(s)-in-the-road, as with functional subgrouping, is the precise opposite result of the one generated when the habitual mental, emotional, or behavioral patterns run their course: that is, the proliferation and repetition of stress or anguish.

The *maitri* practice mentioned above also addresses this issue by softening the tendency to place in others what we don’t want to relate to in ourselves. The practice encourages one to take in what is difficult and to give away what we want to keep, thus reversing the stubborn logic and emotional reactivity that artificially separates self and other. One can more readily shift subgroups inside oneself rather than encapsulating

the experiential or emotional information contained therein.

In summary, the concept of specific time durations relevant for understanding nowness bridges meditative and functional subgrouping exploration by situating mind and experience in the present. The process of *vikalpa* suggests that functional subgrouping, by containing the artificial splits between self and other, facilitates the emergence of apprehensive or intuitive knowledge in the “strict present” where we find ourselves. This is accomplished by emphasizing exploration, or by returning attention to the breath, whereby the proliferation of thought/explanation is cut and a glimpse of nonconceptual or apprehensive experience arises spontaneously.

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PSYCHOTHERAPY FROM THE INSIDE OUT : INTERPERSONAL NEUROBIOLOGY AND THE WORK OF DAN SIEGEL, MD. A PRIMER FOR SCT THERAPISTS

In a recent course entitled “Psychotherapy from the Inside Out: The Brain of the Mindful Therapist,” Daniel Siegel puts forth an important understanding that is emerging from the field of Interpersonal Neurobiology: an integrated brain, a coherent mind, and empathic relationships are inextricably

interdependent on each other (Siegel, 2005). We are beginning to discover how the objective world of neuroscience, the subjective world of the individual psyche, and the inter-subjective world of social relationships, each give us streams of information that can be checked and cross-checked against each other. By cross-fertilizing the research and theoretical understandings from each, we can deepen our insight into all three.

The correlation among the objective, subjective and inter subjective world is the seed from which a whole garden of theoretical reflections has begun to sprout. An interdisciplinary approach leads us to the conclusion that a therapist’s or consultant’s most powerful tool may be the integration of his or her own brain. Siegel defines neural integration as the “free flow of energy and information between the differentiated structures and the associated functions of the nervous system” (Siegel, 1999). He also makes the important hypothesis that therapy and consultation harnesses the reparative power of attuned interpersonal relationships to help people achieve a higher level of neural integration (Siegel, 2002). If neural integration translates psychologically into a coherence of mind, and interpersonally into a depth and power of presence and attunement, then by understanding the brain’s structures and the functions of those structures we may better understand how to achieve the goals of psychological and interpersonal healing and integration as well. If these three phenomena are actually the same thing viewed from a different perspective, each perspective can inform and flesh out the limitations of the others.

Our Tripartite Brain - A Simplified Brain Anatomy

To begin with, it is important to have a basic understanding of the structure of the brain and the functions of those structures. In broad strokes, the brain’s anatomy has a tripartite structure. To illustrate this Siegel uses the following user friendly model: fold your thumb under your fingers and make a fist. You have just created a simple three dimensional model of the tripartite brain.

The oldest level of the brain, the brain stem, corresponds to your wrist. The brain stem is the most primitive part of the brain and controls your basic survival mechanisms, such as breathing, coughing, grasping, sucking, your heart rate, and the regulation of your body’s temperature. If this part of the brain is injured, the physical body dies.

The second layer of the brain, the limbic system, corresponds to your thumb, and is essential for your most basic emotional responses, your early attachment systems, memory, motivational, and learning systems. The limbic system “functions at the intersection of the internal and external world where the primitive needs of the organism (brain stem) negotiate with the requirements of the outside world.” (Cozolino, 2002). All mammals have a developed limbic system.

There are two key structures in the limbic system that are important for therapists and consultants to know about. The first is the amygdala, which along with the right hemisphere of the neo-cortex organizes implicit memory. Implicit memories are the memories that we have without words which form the background feeling tone of our lives. The amygdala is also involved with the neural networks that organize early attachment, fear, trauma, and strong emotional experiences. The

amygdala is present at birth and continues to function throughout our lives.

The second structure is the hippocampus. The hippocampus only develops after 18-24 months of age. It organizes explicit memories in collaboration with the left hemisphere of the neo-cortex. Memories cannot be explicitly coded in language prior to the development of the hippocampus. (In the 2006 spring issue of the Newsletter, I wrote an article called "The River of Well Being, Using the Implicit Memory System to Release Old Roles in the Body," which explored the difference between the implicit and explicit memory systems and how we can work with them in therapy and consultation (Robbins, 2006).

The third and most evolved layer of the brain is the neo-cortex, which corresponds to your fingers. The neo-cortex is composed of a left and right hemisphere, as well as a structure called the corpus callosum, which connects the two hemispheres.

The right hemisphere develops earlier than the left hemisphere. It is holistic in its perceptions of the world, responsible for facial recognition, the appraisal of affect, the immediate sense of safety or danger, and contains an internal map of the body. It is through the right hemisphere, in conjunction with the amygdala, that we grasp the emotional, nonverbal part of someone's communication. The right hemisphere is involved with the process of implicit memory.

The left hemisphere does not become fully activated until 18 to 24 months of age. It is responsible for our capacity to think linearly, logically, and to use language. As information travels from the right hemisphere across the corpus callosum (the structure that unites the right and left hemisphere), the left hemisphere helps us to integrate nonverbal, intuitive information into words. The left hemisphere is involved with the process of explicit memory.

There is one other structure in the neo-cortex that is particularly noteworthy. This is the pre-frontal cortex (which includes the orbito-frontal cortex). In our simplified model of the brain, this corresponds to the top of the middle and ring finger. You may notice that anatomically, this area is placed in a very strategic position which touches both the brain stem and the limbic system. Anatomically, it is optimally located for the nervous system to integrate many functions from different areas of the brain. It has been verified by research that the pre-frontal cortex is involved with the following nine functions: 1) the balance and regulation of the body and the autonomic nervous system, 2) attuned communication, 3) emotional self regulation and balance, 4) response flexibility - the capacity to pause and center before acting, 5) empathy with others and insight into oneself, 6) auto-noesis, the capacity to know oneself over time and create a coherent narrative of one's life, 7) fear extinction, 8) intuition, 9) moral judgment and a sense of conscience. All of these functions (except for fear extinction which has only been researched in animals) have been researched in humans. (Siegel, 2007). Wow!

Basic Principles of Interpersonal Neurobiology

Let us start by reviewing Siegel's definition of an "integrated brain." Siegel, defines neural integration as the "free flow of energy and information between the differentiated

structures and the associated functions of the nervous system" (Siegel, 1999). He notes that the brain cannot be viewed apart from the nervous system as a whole, which reaches into every part of our body/mind. By understanding both the functions and the structures of the brain and nervous system, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of how an integrated brain, a coherent mind and empathic relationships are equivalent to each other.

A fundamental principle underlying the emerging field of interpersonal neurobiology is the discovery that our genetic possibilities are constantly being sculpted by our interpersonal interactions. In other words, nature needs nurture. This is particularly true when our brain is young and developing, which coincides with our early attachment experiences. However, the neuroplasticity of the brain and nervous system continues throughout our lifetimes. This leads to the important realization that it is never too late to change! (Siegel, 1999)

The science behind the discovery of our brain's interrelationship with our environment was pioneered by Eric Kandel, who won a Nobel Prize in 2000 for demonstrating the precise mechanisms by which experience activates genes that activate the growth of new neurons. The more impactful and repeated an experience is, the more deeply it is engraved on the brain and nervous system: "neurons that fire together wire together" (Hebbs axiom).

Another principle posited by Siegel is a definition of mental health based on an understanding of Complexity theory. Complexity theory is a mathematical way of looking at open systems that are capable of unpredictable or chaotic behavior. Human beings, as well as clouds and traffic patterns, are prime examples of such systems. According to Complexity theory, systems move towards complexity by balancing two fundamental forces: differentiation and integration. When systems have a balance of these two forces they are flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized and stable. (Siegel is very fond of acronyms and uses the acronym "F.A.C.E.S." to help his students to remember these qualities.) The development of complex systems is bordered on one side by rigidity (which would be too much integration or redundancy) and chaos on the other (which would be too much differentiation or ambiguity). If we apply this understanding to the field of mental health we have a definition of psychological well-being as the river of experience that occurs when we stay between these two banks. Siegel notes that all the categories of psychodiagnosis can be framed as either too much rigidity or chaos (Siegel, 2002). By remaining within the banks of this "river of well being," human systems continue to "survive, develop and transform by discriminating and integrating differences" (Agazarian, 1997). A healthy human system is neither rigid nor chaotic and has this F.A.C.E.S. quality to its development.

A final basic principle from interpersonal neurobiology is the following hypothesis: all healing relationships harness the reparative power of our interpersonal connections to create a higher level of neural integration in individuals and groups.

Now that we have reviewed some basic background information, let's look at the clinical and theoretical implications of the field of Interpersonal Neurobiology.

Dimensions of Integration in the Brain, Mind and Relationships

Siegel addresses nine dimensions of integration in his thinking about how the brain, the mind and relationships interact with each other (Siegel, 2005).

These nine are:

- 1) The integration of consciousness.
- 2) Vertical integration of the three levels of the brain and of the brain with the body. The nervous system in the body is understood as an extension of the brain and a vast resource through which we process energy and information.
- 3) Bilateral integration of the two sides of the brain and their associated functions.
- 4) Integration of the implicit and explicit memory systems.
- 5) Narrative integration, or the capacity to communicate both to oneself and others a coherent story of one's life with insight, using the resources of both implicit and explicit memory systems.
- 6) Temporal integration, or the capacity to maintain a coherent flow of energy and information across time and thus freeing awareness from those distressing events that fixate our attention either actively or potentially.
- 7) Integration of the various "self states" that manage our physical and psychological needs.
- 8) Interpersonal integration and the capacity to maintain empathic, attuned relationships.
- 9) "Transpirational integration" or our capacity to "breathe across" all of these dimensions and to stay connected to something larger than ourselves.

All of these nine dimensions have an objective neurobiological dimension, a subjective psychological dimension, and an inter-subjective sociological dimension.

Let us now examine the first dimension, consciousness integration, and look at how it relates to all of the other levels of integration.

Consciousness Integration and Mindfulness

If we examine the basic architecture of consciousness, there are two fundamental levels that we notice: the observer, and that which is observed. This subject/object split is the fundamental polarity that creates the dynamic tension that results in all acts of creativity. It is also the root of our sense of separation, alienation and suffering. At the highest level of consciousness integration, duality is overcome in what Ken Wilber and many others have called a "non-dual" state of awareness (Wilber, 2003). Although dualistic thinking may have no ultimate reality, it is a "useful fiction" to think of the architecture of consciousness as a dialectic between the observer and the observed. (See Larry Ladden's article "Mindfulness Meditation and Systems-Centered Practice" on page 8 for a more in depth treatment of this "dichotomizing faculty" of the mind.)

To describe this duality, Siegel uses the metaphor of a bicycle wheel (Siegel, 2007). The inner observer sits at the hub of the wheel in a state of great receptivity. When we are centered and fully rested into the hub of awareness, the mind is discriminating and integrating information from the rim with freedom and creativity. This state can be discriminated from

times when the mind is reactive and consciousness is fixated on something in the internal or external world. Whenever consciousness is fixated we are no longer integrating and discriminating information effectively. Our attention is narrowed and it can feel as if we are looking through a small window; the vastness of our possibility feels like it is just a small blue opening in a dark room. In her article on "Role Theory," published in the Spring 2006 issue of the Newsletter, Agazarian used Siegel's metaphor of a bicycle wheel to theorize that a maladaptive role system is a fixation of someone's psychic energy in which attention is trapped in a redundant loop (Agazarian, 2006). Siegel does not explicitly talk about roles, but one can easily make the bridge between his map of the hub and the rim, and Agazarian's theory of maladaptive role systems.

In "The Mindful Brain" (Siegel, 2007), Siegel draws on a variety of spiritual traditions which practice forms of mindful awareness and on his own mindfulness practice to discern the qualities of the receptive hub of the mind. The acronym that he comes up with to crystallize these qualities is C.O.A.L., which stands for curious, open, accepting and loving. C.O.A.L. is the ember that burns in the center of our being. When attention is rested into these qualities, which arise naturally as we practice mindful awareness, we notice everything in our consciousness that needs to be discriminated and integrated without grasping or fixating. In C.O.A.L. we accomplish the function of discriminating and integrating information with flexibility, adaptiveness, coherence, energy, and stability (the F.A.C.E.S. pathway from Complexity theory).

Following the metaphor of the bicycle wheel, Siegel observes that the hub of the wheel is connected to the rim by spokes. The "spokes" of the mind carry information and energy from the rim to the hub and vice versa. Siegel notes four distinct streams that connect the hub and the rim. The first is the five senses of hearing, seeing, touching, tasting and smelling. The second is the images that arise spontaneously, which carry intuitive information for us about our inner and/or outer world. The third is the feelings that arise in our bodies that carry information about our environment and our response to that environment. The fourth is the thoughts, which carry the different maps and models that we are inventing, moment to moment in response to inner and outer events. Siegel uses the acronym S.I.F.T. (sensations, images, feelings, thoughts) to help his students remember the streams that connect the hub and the rim. He encourages his students and clients to frequently stop, center, and S.I.F.T. through awareness to digest, (discriminate and integrate) energy and information. When we are centered, our attention is free to respond to everything with an unfettered flow of creativity and curiosity. When our attention is fixated, our flow is frozen and stuck. This "stuckness" may last a minute, a year or a lifetime.

Siegel then inquires into the nature of the contents of consciousness and comes up with four categories: 1) our senses, including our internal sense of our bodies, 2) the inner observer, 3) the thoughts, concepts and images that arise in our minds, and 4) a non-conceptual, nonverbal knowing that one might call the basic ground of awareness. Siegel invented the acronym S.O.C.K. (sensations, observer, concepts, and knowing) to help his students remember these categories.

In his investigation of mindfulness, Siegel notices that the primary goal of these practices is to free awareness from those automatic patterns that unnecessarily limit possibilities in life. To crystallize this idea, he invented the acronym Y.O.D.A. - "you observe to decouple automaticity." The more we dissolve the automatic patterns and tensions that exist in our bodies and minds, the deeper we are able to rest into the fundamental, impersonal, stream of consciousness itself.

As we deepen our capacity for mindfulness, we begin to "observe the observer." When we start to ask the question "Who is observing the observer?" we start to deconstruct the most basic fixations that are inherent in our conditioned sense of self and begin the journey towards non-dual awareness. In non-dual awareness we experience ourselves as one with the river of consciousness itself, seamlessly inclusive of subject and object and containing the existential paradoxes of life.

So what does all of this have to do with the brain? Let us return to the nine dimensions of integration and see what neurobiology can tell us about the development of our capacity for mindful attention.

Siegel correlates the receptive hub of awareness with the pre-frontal cortex. Remember the tips of your middle and ring fingers in our simplified model of the tripartite brain? This area of the brain is perfectly located at the hub of the brain's structure and functions as a great clearing house for discriminating and integrating the energy and information of the entire brain and nervous system.

The second dimension of integration is vertical integration, both within the brain and between the brain and the body. Siegel observes that the internal organs of the body, particularly the heart, the gut and the lungs, are surrounded by vast neural nets that are constantly processing energy and information. In other words, our internal organs function as a kind of secondary brain. From a neurobiological perspective, it makes literal sense to consult your gut feeling or your heart's response to a situation. The old adage about "the wisdom of our bodies" has an objective, scientific dimension. Isomorphically, inside the brain itself, we also have the energy and information from the brain stem, the limbic system, and the neo-cortex to be integrated.

The third dimension is bilateral. The information and perspectives of the left and right sides of the brain must be integrated if we are going to develop our mindful awareness. If we are imbalanced in either direction, either too linear and logical, or too holistic and intuitive, we will run into problems. We might say that our attention will become fixated on one side or another of our brain and that the corresponding functions, as well as the energy and information of the unused side, will stagnate.

The fourth dimension, integrating implicit and explicit memory systems, builds on the third. The implicit memory system is connected with the right side of the brain and the explicit memory system with the left. Implicit memories exist without words as the background noise of our lives. Explicit memories are conscious memories that we have encoded in language.

The fifth dimension, narrative integration, builds on the fourth. Our capacity to create a flexible, coherent, and energized narrative of our lives sustains a functional sense of iden-

tity across a life time. This narrative is woven from the threads of both implicit and explicit memories.

The sixth dimension addresses our capacity to maintain a flow of information and energy across time without the fixations and distortions that can occur when we have not digested powerful, upsetting experiences. These upsetting experiences can be encoded by the amygdala and re-stimulated when a situation that resembles the past upset or trauma happens in the present.

The seventh dimension involves our capacity to maintain the functional roles or "self states" that manage our different needs and interests, such as our desire for intellectual stimulation, professional success, sexual gratification, creative expression, food and rest. Each of these roles appear in the brain as a cluster of neural firing patterns that are organized around meeting the goal of each role. These different functions must be balanced within our "personality-as-a-whole" if we are to live a full life.

The eighth dimension addresses our capacity for attuned, constructive interpersonal relationships. These attuned relationships use our capacity to accurately create and hold both the narratives and the moment to moment internal world of another person.

The ninth dimension addresses our need to maintain our connection with something larger than the limited personal perspective of our conditioned minds and bodies. This dimension of integration engages our capacity to "breath across" all of the previous dimensions of integration and beyond that into the mystery that holds everything together. Siegel calls this our capacity for "transpiration." This dimension of human experience can never be fully understood as it holds all of the existential paradoxes of life, all of the dualities, together in a space which is neither subject nor object and is both subject and object all at once.

Each of these levels offers a vast and important arena of exploration that is important for us to understand as therapists, consultants and human beings. As we develop our own capacity for integration across all of these nine levels, we deepen our mindful awareness and develop an integrated brain, a coherent mind and empathic, attuned relationships. It is an important hypothesis of the emerging field of Interpersonal Neurobiology that we can harness the reparative power of attuned interpersonal relationships to create higher levels of neural integration in the clients and groups that we serve. By developing our own integrated brain, coherent mind, and empathic attunement to others, we become an environment in which the individuals, groups and organizations with which we work can do the same.

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SPECIAL FEATURES

THE SCT LICENSING PROCESS – AN INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL ROBBINS WITH YVONNE AGAZARIAN

MR: Over the years, I have periodically heard you or Susan Gantt say, “you can’t license an individual, you have to license the group,” can you explain a little bit more what you mean by this?

YA: That isn’t exactly correct. Of course it is not the group that is licensed. However, to create a functional, working SCT group, requires that every member of the licensing group cross the boundary from their “person” to their member system in the context of a task group. This is one of the criteria for licensing. In addition, a functioning SCT licensing task group implies that all of the members of that group have achieved a certain skill level.

The skills of each member enable the group-as-a-whole to maintain the work phase of development. In this phase, the group develops the criteria for its own licensing, the structure it will use, the methods for determining that their members meet the criteria, how to give feedback, and how to support those members who do not yet qualify so that they can meet the criteria. At the heart of this approach is the expectation that by participating in this process, members understand the issue of citizenship in the licensing group, which is isomorphic to understanding citizenship in SCTR I as well as other social systems.

MR: How did you develop the licensing process?

YA: My orientation is to lay the paths only after people have trodden them. This is the orientation that supported the emergence of SCTR I. Thus the licensing process was designed so that each licensing group lays and travels its own path, rather than conforming to a structure imposed from outside. (An imposed structure would almost certainly be easier, although it would also be at the expense of emergence.) This is still my intention in developing the licensing process.

The licensing process is based upon the TLHS (Theory of Living Human Systems) definition of isomorphy. Isomorphy is the idea behind expecting a leaderless licensing task group to maintain the norms that are established in the Authority Issue Group. (Strictly speaking, the licensing groups are not leaderless, as long as they support their task and process leaders.) Functional subgrouping (the process of discriminating and integrating differences) is both the structure and function in which SCT groups are defined.

The difference between task and process SCT groups is the goals and the vectoring of energy. In process groups, “process” is the task. Members explore both their intra-personal and interpersonal experience, and learn how to discriminate between person and member. On the other hand, in SCT task groups, functional subgrouping is used to discriminate and integrate the information relevant to the task goal. This discrimination between task and process groups has emerged clearly in the licensing groups.

If I may review for a moment the fundamental ideas on which the practice of SCT is based. The source of energy and information that fuels the process is in the person system. The energy flows from the person system, through the systems of member, subgroup and the containing-system-as-a-whole and back through the subgroup, the member and the person. In this process, every level of the system is transformed. Ideally, people learn how to become citizens in each of their training group contexts, i.e. they learn not to take things just personally, learn how to bring adaptive roles into their membership, learn how to contain and change the roles that were adaptive in the past but not in the present, and by participating in the discrimination and integration at all system levels, not only survive and develop, but also transform. The person that emerges at the end of this process now has the skills to take up his or her citizenship in any context. In theory, the members are now ready to take on the task of licensing in a licensing group.

That was the theory. In practice, the work in the Authority Issue Groups had to be a sufficient condition to enable the structural norms to be exported into the licensing task groups. The principle was isomorphic. On the one hand the group was to determine the methods and requirements, appropriate to its members, so that its members could be licensed and become citizens of SCTR I. On the other hand, the group itself represented a subgroup in the SCTR I system-as-a-whole, changing as the system changed, so that each group would develop the criteria for licensing that reflected an emerging organization. Thus, just as members became less likely to import old roles from the past into the present, so each licensing group would be less likely to import “licensing roles” that might no longer be adaptive to the present.

MR: What are the major learnings that you had about the licensing process over the years?

YA: Many! Some of my learnings came from the vicissitudes of my leadership, some came from learning from the groups. Remember that it takes a group to raise a leader!

The major change in my leadership was to shift from a process oriented training to building a task group. I began to

understand that if the major focus was on building a task group, the goal of my interventions was to weaken the restraining forces in the process that undermined the groups' ability to focus on task. The shift from a process orientation (my therapist self) towards a task orientation (my organizational development self) developed over all four of the authority issue groups. This also meant that my training emphasis shifted more towards training members and less towards training the person in the member. It was from observing the difficulties that some licensing groups had in shifting from process to task that I recognized that it would be better if this shift were a focus for authority issue groups. The last two groups had the benefit of this shift.

The major difficulty in shifting from process to task occurred in the group that I ended prematurely. One knows, all too well, that when the leader does not contain the authority issue, it is acted out among the members in competition, rivalry and spitefulness. This happened in various degrees in the groups. The signal was the times when the groups followed the letter of SCT methods, but sabotaged their purpose and spirit. (As if SCT!)

MR: As it became clear that one of the Licensing groups was in trouble, what were your responses?

YA: I went through a series of "explanations" of what went wrong. My first explanation was that it was the fault of my leadership. And indeed, after my mastectomy I did end that group prematurely and failed in my attunement. The result was a clear example that it was not the members themselves that were causing the trouble, but the group dynamics manifesting through the members. (Who one is in any group has more to do with the group context than it does with ones' own potential.)

Recognizing that it was the group norms that needed changing so that the members could be released to do their work, the mentors and I agreed to consult to the group at their meetings on the bridge phone line. And we did. At least one of us, and mostly two to four of us were there, consulting to the task and process leaders, every other week for nearly three years. Bewilderingly, although the members of the group seemed to understand and integrate many of our process comments, the shift from a process group to a task group did not get made.

There was much anguish in the group, as well as much bewilderment and anguish among the mentors. I particularly was confronted with the possibility that there was a serious flaw in the theory and that what I had thought it would do it could not. It was in struggling to understand where the theory went wrong that I understood that it was not the theory, but a problem in its application and practice. I understood that the theory of functional sub-grouping was solid. But it was subverted in practice when subgrouping was "as if". All "as if" restraining forces defend against an important underlying issue.

In asking myself what the underlying issue was, I arrived at an insight; I realized that functional subgrouping did indeed make a big contribution. However, I had used the attunement and intimacy that goes along with subgrouping to ignore the underlying chaos and destructive potential in all living human

systems. I had an idealistic belief that the structure of functional subgrouping would solve the problems of virulence, spite, envy and chaos.

Painfully, I recognized that part of my denial was a reaction formation to some of the experiences I had in Tavistock, where I had witnessed the de-compensation of a member into psychosis under the pressure of the virulence in the large group. This reaction formation had occurred in spite of the fact that my major affective learning in the dynamics of groups came from the many weekends and extended conferences that I had attended in the Tavistock method. (And for which I was, and continue to be, very grateful!) Because of my idealism and reactivity, rather than undoing the split between good and evil, as I believed the crisis of hatred would do, I had inadvertently increased it. The question that remains to be answered, and to be explored in the days that come, is whether, in the phases of system development, it is important for the group members to fight each other, as well as to aggress against the leader.

There is, however, a silver lining. I was greatly heartened by the task focus of our most recent licensing group, our Large Group at our 2007 Conference, in which spite was introduced and got a subgroup, and even more heartened by the emerging subgrouping that is exploring good and evil in cyber space by email. All is not lost. We just have some work to do.

MR: What changes did you make in these later groups that facilitated their transition?

YA: I made several changes in leadership, in consultation with my silent partner Susan Gantt, which significantly influenced how AIG (Authority Issue Group) III and IV managed their transitions. In Authority Issue Group III, we introduced a peer evaluation, which the group members embraced with great enthusiasm, doing a rank order of who they felt most and least licensable. In spite of the fact that this task was formidable, it was done in good spirit and led to the giving and receiving of attuned and helpful feedback. Following a similar process in the fourth group, Susan and I made the painful decision to advise some of the members that their difficulty in shifting from person to member was sufficiently serious to make it unlikely that they qualified for licensing at this time. Parenthetically, one of the outside factors in being able to increase the task focus in Licensing Groups IV and V, is the membership composition, in which there are many more OD (Organizational Development) members, and also many more Europeans, whose "citizenship" norms encourage more of a focus on context.

Particularly in Authority Issue Group IV, my leadership was significantly more task focused. I introduced two additional innovations. The first was to encourage the group to review membership at the end of the second year and to make recommendations about who they thought should, and should not, continue on the path towards licensure. Susan and I took responsibility for making the final decision about who would stay or go. The second innovation was to use a seventh meeting in which the group made a transition into their Licensing task group, with Susan acting as consultant to the task leader, and I consulting to the process leader.

MR: Where are you now in terms of your emerging thinking about the Licensing process?

YA: Looking back, there seems to have been an emergence of the licensing process, both an emergence in leadership, and an emergence in the system-as-a-whole. Most recently, the mentors and I discussed the difficulties that groups had in developing the criteria for licensing, and doing work samples. Our most recent decision was to send all licensing groups an outline of what to include in their licensing sample and assessment. We are also discussing what we might build into the mandatory consultation for all intermediate members that might make it easier to manage the difficulty in believing that one's work sample is "good enough."

(Systems-Centered News invites responses from all of the Licensing Groups! We will print these responses in the next issue. Below is a report from Licensing Group V that was written before this interview with Yvonne was published.)

A REPORT FROM LICENSING GROUP V: "PP" POWER

The word plenipotentiary (from the Latin, plenus + potens, full + power) has two meanings. As a noun it refers to a person who has "full powers." In particular, the term is commonly used to refer to a diplomat or ambassador who is fully authorized to represent their government. As an adjective, plenipotentiary refers to that which confers "full powers."

The 17 members of Licensing Group V met at the Conference throughout the week as a culmination of its work to affirm each other as ready for licensure. While the process is not complete, we did manage to get very far toward our goal. We want to share our process with the larger system, knowing that this task has been a challenging one for the system-as-a-whole, and the principle of a group evaluating each other for licensure is at the core of the SCTRI vision.

Although there were a number of factors that were driving for our work, one key element stands out. In the transition from a leader-led group to a self-led, emergent leader, group, the mentors introduced the concept of "plenipotentiary power", affectionately called, "PP" power. This meant LG V would take up our authority to develop the criteria and method for licensing each other. Plenipotentiary power was a driving force for allowing small groups to make decisions for the whole group. Authorizing the small group facilitated an effective pace toward our goal of licensure. For example on our weekly meeting phone calls, those who were present for the call were the ones who made the necessary decisions to keep forwarding the actions of the larger group. As a task group we disciplined ourselves to make consensus based decisions and to not let differences cause impasses. For the most part our process ran smoothly. There were times when we realized, in hindsight, that the cost of holding to a structure with such discipline was that our process may have pushed some members into "person system." We are working to stay aware of these compromises and to surface pieces that have not been integrated.

Along the way, as we took strides toward the deadline (Conference date) we met multiple challenges. The objective

was to present an audio or video sample that met the criteria for demonstrating core competencies defined by the group. We also agreed to provide a transcript, theoretical explanations for our interventions, plus an overall system-centered theoretical analysis of our case. Given time constraints, we recognized that it would be functional to divide ourselves into three smaller groups to evaluate our material. This meant that although we would listen to and read all 17 samples, we were only responsible to evaluate 6 others' individual work. We gave plenipotentiary power to the small groups to fulfill this function. Previously, we had given a small group the task of coming up with an evaluation tool that we would use to assess members samples. The larger group approved of the tool and we were ready to get right to work at the Conference.

We spent our first day at the Conference processing, with Fran Carter as our facilitator. The following 6 days we set about evaluating our work in three small task groups. The agreement was to do an in depth pass through for each individual in small groups, and to bring questions and recommendations to the larger group. We alternated between small group and large group meetings. "P" power allowed each small group to self-organize to fulfill the evaluation function. The last day we assembled as a large group to review what we had accomplished and to decide next steps. We are developing and transforming in ways that have surprised us. There is a team integrity and spirit as we move closer to the goal.

We want to thank the Conference Action Group and the larger community for creating a wonderful climate for us to do this hard work.

-Licensing Group V

NEWSFLASH: FIRST SCT RESEARCH PUBLISHED!

The first two research studies on systems-centered therapy and training have been accepted for publication by scientific journals (references below). In the first article, Larry Ladden, Susan Gantt, Stephanie Rude, and Yvonne Agazarian adapted and applied the systems-centered short-term therapy protocol in three single-case studies. In the second, Rich O'Neill and Michael Constantino compared the process and outcome of SCT weekend training groups to those of American Group Psychotherapy Association two-day Institute groups.

Specifically, the Ladden et al, (2007) project examined the usefulness of SCT methods in reducing the anxiety of three people diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder. These clients received ten sessions of individual SCT treatment over a two-week period. All three subjects showed substantial improvement and no longer met diagnostic criteria, post-treatment. These positive changes were maintained at follow-up, both six months and one year later.

O'Neill and Constantino found that SCT weekend training group's process and outcome compared positively to those of AGPA groups. This was true on a number of dimensions including group climate, the relationships among members, the perception of the leader, and overall learning. Importantly, some of the results indirectly supported the usefulness of functional subgrouping. However, because the research design was

quasi-experimental (not a randomized, controlled design) other interpretations of the results are possible.

Rich O'Neill (personal communication, May 4, 2007), in his role as SCTRI's Research Director, sees it as an important finding that SCT may have effectively reduced anxiety in these three clients. The results are very encouraging and in the expected direction of SCT successfully treating GAD, even though the research design does not rule out other explanations. They suggest the importance of further research on SCT as a viable treatment for Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Larry Ladden and colleagues are progressing nicely with follow-up research (funded from contributions to SCTRI) which will help us see if we can replicate these findings with more clients with GAD.

In addition, Rich states that the SCT and AGPA study results mean SCT methods may create a positive group climate with less avoidance and less conflict than typical AGPA institute groups, generate more positive inter-member relationships, more self confidence in the group members, and may be related to more positive perceptions of the leader. While the results are largely consistent with what is expected in a group using functional subgrouping, subgrouping was not measured directly in these groups and no such causal relationship can be attributed. However, once again, the results are very encourag-

ing. Rich's research on subgrouping in the conference large groups may produce more definitive findings on the impact of functional subgrouping. He thanks everyone involved for their participation and contributions.

All in all, Rich and fellow Research Action Group members, Larry Ladden, Verena Murphy and Jim Peightel are very excited about these positive findings. They are busy designing and implementing the next research steps to answer some of the questions raised above. They want to thank the entire SCTRI community for all of their effort in participating in and completing this research and future projects. Congratulations to us all in the Systems-Centered Training and Research Institute!

-Michael Robbins

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THUMBNAIL SKETCHES

FROM A FIRST-TIME CONFERENCE ATTENDEE

A Conference Diary

First things first. I met with my "buddy." We agreed, based on me not knowing what I didn't know, that I'd call on him as needed.

In the "Pre-Conference" I started basic SAVI and explored my proof positive that it is all my partner's fault, but discovered some of it may be mine. At the end of the two days I had learned a tool for life. How often can you say that?

Large Group Sunday night. A lot of research questionnaires to fill out. As the group progressed and was swimming around sharks, I got interested and then involved. Discussed with my buddy afterwards. Very useful. I later went on my second dinner with people who were making sure new people weren't alone. Very glad of that.

Foundation group each morning. With limited time and quite a few of us in the group, I learned how to contain in a way I'd not done before. Both frustrating and helpful. I enjoyed the challenge SCT got from skeptical members. Also the openness, willingness to explore, and motivation to use the group all made big contributions. I could see stages of group development taking place; it all ended up moving quite fast. Does this process make itself fit the time available?

The Large Group continued every night except Wednesday. One contained a full and frank expression of feelings concerning SCT that could have left groups in many settings ready to fold up and die, but this group seemed to get stronger. Interestingly I'd arrived very angry and discovered

that others, from different contexts, were as well. This gave me space to contain and explore my own anger. I left the group feeling really positive and in the process of exploring a role I take often. There might be something to isomorphy.

The drop-in groups and workshops offered a huge range of things to explore. I'd decided mine in advance but would happily have gone to nearly all. I witnessed many people torn between choices. I did a deal with someone to mutually feed back what we'd done. High points for me were Claude Marchessault's ways of getting people to subgroup without them knowing they were and Merete Brantbjerg's Mind-Body approach which gave new depth and versatility to understanding the expression of emotion in the body. Merete's workshop also transformed the way I center.

The "Seeing Systems" drop-in group with Yvonne Agazarian also stayed in my mind as it explained things I already knew in ways I better understood. She concluded that she'd "like to marry isomorphy if she could." I asked myself if he wouldn't turn out to be the same as all the others.

-Andy Friis

A WONDROUS HAPPENING FROM THE WORLD WIDE WEB

The following are choice sample excerpts from the subgrouping that occurred on the listserv after the Conference

In the continued spirit of cross fertilization, I am moved and filled with gratitude at the bigness of the context we

created for ourselves this last week. There is an ache in my chest and turbulence at the edge of the unknown for what is new in me as I come home.

Thanks to each of you.

-Peter Bernhardt

I miss you all, happy to have brought you back with me in the huge black bag I bought at a store just past the Starbucks on Harvard Street. I love this chance to join with your voices. Making the transition, I work with what I learned in my current context. Sliding down into the world of my reminiscences, I decide to stay in the here and now and make contact. In my Alexander class where I learn to improve my posture (lower back trouble, ouch!) I ask: how is this helping me to be more centered? Discussing an evening for parents of our school, I work with role, goal and context. To irritation, frustration and anger, I respond with curiosity and exploration rather than with defense. I discover that in this way I grow a bit more attached to this new context of mine.

-Roelof Langman

I join with appreciation for the honesty, courage and hard work that we all contributed to create the conference community; in the large group, in the workshops, in the drop ins, in the licensing groups, and in our dancing, laughing, loving, hating, smiling, frowning, giggling, crying, enjoying...

-Michael Robbins

I am grateful for the opportunity to sit centered in large and small groups. It was like returning home and finding much the same and some wonderful differences. I loved the additions of role, goal, and context and the addition of attunement. The Advanced Training Group also began with a centering process, closing our eyes, deepening our breath and settling into our base. It was a very peaceful and centered way of beginning.

I miss the eyes and the centering and the opportunity to drop right into connection and work. I have carried much of SCT back into my daily work as a therapist and am having some delightful discoveries. Some of my clients are clearly doing deeper work. I am staying more centered in much of my life.

It was great to discover that I could still resonate so deeply in SCT. It was also wonderful to have the opportunity to work on many old, yet present, feelings. I feel cleared of so much baggage that I did not know I was carrying.

-Rolland Fellows

I am missing the warmth and support from the sense of community we built at the conference; dancing, laughing, as well as the courage in large group to bring in what was hard and painful. I am remembering that in Large Group the "SCTR-US" was brought in from AIG V, and joined with laughter. I am also holding the "roiling" around the hard work done with roles and defenses. With gratitude for being part of the SCT community that helps to me contain.

-Tomi Dominguez

Through the contributions of others I can feel the structuring and containing power of the large group. This is really important for me now, as I am working further on my licensing submission, and trying to get clear with the negative feedback I got from a part of my Licensing group, so that I can find my leading edges for continuing my work. A big piece of my work is around containing my frustration and not going into old habitual roles such as going "one-down" and isolating myself. It is really helpful for me to see that my work is work also for LG5, and for the whole SCT community as well.

-Attila Grunczeisz

I am noticing an appreciation for the different approaches brought into the conference, especially during the Friday PM workshop, this and last year. I am thinking of the "cross-fertilization" process that was so successful in large group, wanting to continue having workshop sessions that introduce differences with SCT and using the large group to integrate these differences. In integrating with other approaches, we then get an appreciation of perhaps underlying threads in reality (one of the goals of SCT!) as well as balance and integrate work that we are doing within our own system, e.g., the various training tracks. This "balance" may keep us from getting so over involved with our organization during large group that we lose focus on the various areas that we are applying SCT—and by better balancing, reduce the restraining forces to newcomers and other member's interests coming in.

-Ken Frontman

I have the old routes and new pathways. I was at conferences in the past and this group reminds me of the love, honour and respect I have for the work I have experienced at those conferences. Especially since I can have all of me – my blocked, curious, developing and new parts, my dancing, singing and physical parts, my stumbling and ugly parts. I have my hand on my heart and my hand reaching out . . .

-Debbie Woolf

As I read the poetry of this subgroup, I am reminded that we have evolved. Just as Yvonne has had her heart healed physically, we in the system have joined her in healing our emotional hearts too. I have never heard so much passionate truth spoken in large and small groups at the conference. There is a new wind blowing away the cobwebs in my heart and I believe in SCT; it is deepening my connection with you all. A new valuing of deep anger, hatred, spite and spoiling to keep things balanced and honest.

I am vacationing in NYC and I see subgrouping and roles everywhere as I watch Broadway plays. It makes me feel that I must have swallowed the Kool-Aid... – Almost.

-Leighton Hodges

I'm in the healing heart sub-group. I had a heart attack a year ago Sunday. I learned at the conference that my physical heart – with a 100% blocked right coronary artery along with "extensive collateral circulation" that saved my life – is isomorphic with my emotional heart. Both have constriction and openness, with blocked and flowing energy, old routes (roles)

and new pathways. I've been more aware this week of living in my "observer system" and staying centered, which opens me to the fullness of all that is. With a hand on my heart...

-Bill Reynolds

I am missing the openness and closeness I feel with the folks of SCTRI. I am relishing the learnings and discoveries and finding they are available to me in my work with clients and at home with my husband, Sy. The turmoil of some of our work still roils around a bit, but it is in the container of your joins.

-Norma Safransky

THE OTHER SUBGROUP...

So, I wasn't at the conference, having chosen instead to be up to my neck (if not just about over my head) in my second semester of law school.

I'm noticing frustration at having made that choice - in particular, frustration at the reality of not being able to be in two places at once.

Also feeling some irritation and spoiling energy directed at the subgroup that had such a good time. I feel like scowling and rolling my eyes at them, and telling Leighton yeah, you've in fact drunk the Kool-Aid.

-Tony Petro

Ah, yes, I am in your subgroup Tony. I was not at the Conference either, having just moved across country, starting a new job, and all those sorts of things. The frustration of wanting to be in two places at once is, well, frustrating. I felt the pull during registration and now that all these people who went are showing everyone what a wonderful time they had, all the things they learned and blah, blah, blah, I feel enormously sad and some anger. I am sad that my learning with SCT is on hold at this time and angry that I wasn't there and have some wants of spoiling everyone else's fun. So there!

-Sharon Brooks

IMAGES TO REMIND US

Sparkles in the Group

camels of the world: unite!
extol those virtuous cool contained
rugged enduring determined wary adaptations
and penetrating gaze through vile abuse
even so: on burning sands going the distance
and stirrings of that wild original nature
that roams wide deserts and opens horizons
with sparkling sands and breathing air
and rumbling reverberating resonance
anyone else?

Wings

distant meeuwing of seagulls
gliding through air searching
in need, with strong wings raucous
diving-down soaring-up old ones and young
ones, young inspiring old, and serious
spreading of joy and wings of death
in deepening swirls and breath of moment
--winged masters resting on air
flowing from nothing

Eyes

intelligent soft eyes outside
flutters of being inside and
tears in heart, softening circles
cries and purrs from babies
--own baby
tingling and heat in bones now old
--circling heart
and softening infusing this face
with moist eyes to life and growls

-Jan Roggeveen

NEWSLETTER SURVEY!

YOUR FEEDBACK IS REQUESTED.

The Newsletter Action Group is requesting your feedback. We are in the process of reorganizing the structure of the Newsletter and would like your input. Shortly there will be an on-line questionnaire at SurveyMonkey.com. It will take less than 5 minutes to complete.

Details will be forwarded to the membership through the member listserv shortly.

Thank you in advance for your time!

APPROACHING THE SUMMIT DECEMBER 14, 2006

I have to admit there was some "should;" some sense of, as a new "Licensing group V" member, that it is time for me to take up more "responsible" membership in the larger SCT community. The e-mail asking for volunteers peered out at me from my inbox for days as I wrestled with my "should." I waited anxiously for that ever-ready, eager volunteer that would take me off my should hot seat. No such luck.

The day came to face the group with the unanswered question of the empty Atlanta seat at the SCTRI Summit table. The internal (intra-member) wrestling inside me did not yet have a clear winner and I wasn't up for inter-member wrestling. And yet, the feeling persisted with whispers of "it's your turn, Heather." Amazingly, as I watched the internal bids for the old, dutiful, guilt-laden, should role, arise and pass, something new popped in. I discovered the part of me that wanted to tap into

the resources of the other regional centers with the goal of informing and possibly helping our group as we struggle through changing membership. Specifically, we hypothesized that our monthly training group lost energy (and maybe even members) related to un-worked peer dynamics relating to dual membership in various SCT groups (such as being a training group member and an authority group member). Now that I had a goal linked to my want to strengthen and preserve the vitality of my training group, I was infused with energy and curiosity for taking up the summit representative role.

From there, the goodies unfolded. I discovered amazing resonance during our teleconference as the subgrouping landed on pertinent and illuminating themes. First, the group explored the openness, newness, and “Big Me” that can emerge when we drop stereotyped expectations of how one should be or what one should do based on SCT experience or training level. Secondly, the driving force I discovered in myself when I linked up my strong want for a vital local training group with a goal related to the summit context was voiced with amazing similarity by a large subgroup of the summit. Example after example was given of the energy that was infused in local training centers when members connected deeply to their feeling that the local community matters, personally and professionally. Lastly, there was an honoring of the “no.” This theme was explored prior to the summit in several training groups around volunteering for roles and then again in the summit. There was a lot of energy and excitement in discovering that when the no is honored it provides important information that somehow frees up the driving, life-giving energies to manifest. Again the theme: in the doing-nothing, the open space, there emerges life. (See summary of the Summit meeting on page 28.)

-Heather Twomey

MENTOR TRAINING: PHILADELPHIA 2006

We began as a group of individual “person systems” struggling to cross the boundary into the unknown territory of mentor training and ended as a working subgroup of members exploring the experience of skill building and development together! What became viscerally clear to me as I worked through the week of mentor training was that there is no such thing as just *practicing* the art of undoing defenses without actually doing *the work* of undoing defenses. I began the week with many defenses intact. I was there to learn and grow, yes, but I also continued to use the old role of the “jokester” as I joked around, to lighten my mood and pretend that I didn’t care whether I succeeded or not. As I moved with my small working group through the exercises of centering and then undoing anxiety, tension, depression, I began to truly center into the experience and my anxiety and tension lessened, freeing energy and excitement for the work. With the help of my colleagues, their growing skills and their attuned manner, my depression was undone, and then outrage surfaced and was undone. I had new physical, mental and spiritual energy available for me and the work of the group. I began to feel the heal-

ing balm that is SCT in action.

What became abundantly clear as the week progressed, was that this was not an individual, isolated experience. The other members, and the group itself, were also undoing defenses, and together we were developing into a more complex and more emotionally intelligent work group. Lest this sketch become too one-sided, let me assure you, that as the group began to teach and learn together, envy and one-up, one-down role locks surfaced and were contained and worked with as well. Moving in and out of roles and contexts took a great deal of energy, and the work of defense modification, and practice, under the strict and attuned leadership of Fran Carter, gave the group a well-boundaried and affirming container for growth.

The work of the fall 2006 Philadelphia mentoring group has continued via e-mail. Norma Safransky led this effort and we are discovering how to subgroup and support each others’ work by e-mail. This is a satisfying and challenging new context for me in my SCT learning. This winter, as each of our mentoring group members completed his or her force field application for the authority group, an e-mail went out to the group entitled something like, “Another Application In!” Norma reflected the experience of the mentor training week and the e-mail exchanges in her e-mail reply. “It’s like watching the flowers bloom.”

-Meigs Ross

CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDITS (CE’S) FOR SCT TRAINING

SCTRI is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists and offers CE’s for psychologists at the Annual Conference and at Core Curriculum training events (Skills, Mentor and Authority Issue training groups). We also seek CE’s on a local basis for social workers, mental health counselors, and marriage and family therapists in the area in which the Annual Conference is held. Trainers may also provide CE’s for psychologists for training events they lead.

Certificates of attendance can also be obtained for the Annual Conference and Core Curriculum trainings and through individual trainers, with the member submitting these to their professional organization for possible acceptance as CE’s.

SCTRI is interested in providing CE’s for other professions if members are willing to provide the time, energy, and resources (emergent energy) to obtain provider status for offering such credits. If you are interested in further information about obtaining CE’s, please contact Dick Ganley, CE Group Liaison, at dickganley@aol.com or 610-664-5730.

SYSTEMS-CENTERED® TRAINING PROGRAM

SCT TRAINING OVERVIEW

There is a wide variety of training opportunities available at the four levels of training described below, as well as specialty training with SAVI (a communications model) and with SCT applied to couples and organizations.

Systems-centered training combines group work practicum (where you learn by working as a member of a group), theoretical and technical training. You can learn about SCT by attending training events at the level that matches your interest and resources, i.e., time, energy and money. These training tracks range from exploring SCT to making a commitment to formal training. The approach to training is functional with less emphasis on “checking off” certain experiences and more on mastering the theory, methods, and techniques at each level of training.

Levels of SCT Training: *Exploration, Foundation Training, Intermediate Training, and Advanced Training*

Exploring SCT: For Curious People

In exploring SCT you can attend foundation or specialized training events once, or as many times as you find useful. Some find the training group valuable for their own development; others want to learn the theoretical approach well enough to compare it to their own; others use elements of theory and technique in their current practical applications. At this level of participation, you are your own guide, sipping or drinking deeply as your interests and resources permit.

Foundation Training: For Learning SCT

Some people discover enough value in SCT theory and practice to consider making SCT a primary orientation to their work. The Foundation training emphasizes learning to use SCT methods with one’s self and gaining the personal development and training that comes from working in an ongoing training group with sufficient intensity to explore and contain one’s own issues with authority. At a minimum, a training group and some work with theory are foundations to further work in SCT. If you find yourself exploring this shift into more structured training, you should make contact with an SCT Mentor to find out more about the training process.

Intermediate Training

Intermediate training is for those interested in using SCT as their major theoretical orientation and work toward the goal of becoming a licensed systems-centered practitioner. Members apply for Intermediate training experience after having learned to use SCT as a training group member, to understand basic SCT theory, and to understand and con-

tain the dynamics of their own authority issue. The Intermediate level of training introduces more focus on theory, on the technical skills of SCT, on managing role boundaries, and on containing the dynamics of a system. Intermediate training includes the Intermediate Skills Training, the Intermediate Mentor Training, and the Authority Issue Group. The Skills Training focuses on the technical skills of defense modification in Modules I and II. The Intermediate Mentor Training focuses on the management of oneself in relation to changing roles and contexts. The Authority Issue Group is a training group working the issues of Module III in depth. At the Intermediate level, participants also work in a Theory group and in an ongoing Consultation group in addition to their ongoing training group.

Advanced Training

Advanced training activities emphasize integrating comprehensive and apprehensive knowledge in role, and related to goal and context in application settings. One major advanced training track is working as a member of a peer licensing group to build a working group, develop criteria for assessment, and implement a peer assessment process. Joining the Management Group is another context for advanced training. An advanced training track is also offered at the annual conference for post-Authority group members and a special advanced training group is offered each summer. Advanced members also work with mentors to develop training opportunities.

**The Training Notice Board has moved!
For information on SCTRI Trainings
please check the
Notice Board on the SCT website
www.systemscentered.com**

USE OF THE SCT® TRADEMARK

Only licensed practitioners of SCT can call themselves **Systems-Centered** anything!

All others call themselves **systems-oriented** and MUST be careful not to link that nomenclature to SCT or Systems-Centered.

Anyone who wants to use SCT materials or the terms *SCT*, *Systems-Centered* or *Systems-Centered Therapy*, and who is not licensed, must apply for a project license by contacting the trademark holders, Yvonne Agazarian or Susan Gantt (in SCTRI Director role).

SCT PROGRAM NOTES

This section contains official information about the evolving SCT training program. In this issue we answer some basic questions about training and introduce the *NEW website* - www.systemscentered.com - as a place to find detailed information about your training questions.

FINDING THE SCT TRAINING INFORMATION YOU NEED

Where to find the answers to “Frequently Asked Questions” about systems-centered training!!

What is Foundation Training?

Foundation training provides opportunities to build the foundation of understanding systems-centered theory, methods and techniques. So, no matter how experienced people are in other methods, they begin with SCT Foundation level events. For more information, click *Training*, then *SCT Training Program*, then *Foundation Level Training*.

Where is the next Foundation Training?

Find current information in the Training Notice Board by clicking *Training*, then *Training Notice Board*, then *Foundation Level Training*.

How do I know where trainings take place?

Visit the Training Notice Board by clicking *Training*, then *Training Notice Board*, then the city nearest you.

When is the next training in Atlanta?...New York? Etc.

Visit the Training Notice Board by clicking *Training*, then *Training Notice Board*, then the city nearest you.

Who do I talk to about my training?

If you are in an ongoing training group, talk to your training group leader, who is also your training mentor. If you are not in an ongoing training group contact any SCT Trainer and ask for a consultation on your training. To find a trainer to mentor you, click on *Training*, then *Meet the Trainers*.

What is a training mentor?

Since SCT training is a flexible, emerging system we have evolved the mentoring function to help members find their way to trainings that are likely to help move them toward their goals. Training mentors are specifically designated to consult with members who are curious about their training alternatives.

How do I get a training mentor?

If you are in an ongoing training group, your trainer is your basic training mentor. If you are in an area without ongoing training, click on *Training*, then *Meet the Trainers*, and contact some of the trainers listed to find someone who is available to talk with you about your training options.

What is Intermediate Training?

Intermediate training focuses on a deeper understanding of theory and developing skill in applying methods and techniques.

How do I know if I am ready for Intermediate Training?

If you are interested in making SCT a primary orientation in your work, reading about the Intermediate Training level will help you get a sense of your readiness. Click *Training*, then *SCT Training Program*, then *Intermediate Level Training*. And talk to your training mentor about your readiness.

What is the Intermediate Skills Training?

This 5-day training is the major transition into the Intermediate level of systems-centered training. To find out more, click *Training*, then *SCT Training Program*, then *Intermediate Block Training Sequence*.

How do I find applications for events that require them?

Some events at the Intermediate and Advanced level depend upon members having already developed certain skills. Members who think they may be ready for these events consult with their trainer and review applications found by clicking *Training*, then *SCT Training Program*, then *Training Documents*.

What is an SCT Practitioners license?

Since SCT is a registered trademark, people must be authorized to use it. A license to use the trademark is granted to SCT Practitioners who have demonstrated proficiency in theory, methods and their application in context, and their commitment to holding the values of SCT and SCTRI. The website has more information on this as well.

What if I don't want to get a license? Can I still get trained and how?

Yes. SCT training and the SCTRI community welcome people who are interested in continuing training for personal and professional growth.

Why is a license important for some people?

Those who find they want to represent SCT methods formally in their environment, or become SCT trainers are required to complete the licensing process.

Is there any continued training after the Authority Issue Group?

The Authority Issue Group is the final step at the Intermediate level, and members continue in two directions: one is into the licensing process with their cohort. The other is into Advanced training opportunities, designed to provide ongoing, challenging trainings to advanced members.

SCT[®]RI REPORTS AND UPDATES

SCT[®]RI IN A NUTSHELL: THE ORGANIZATION

SCT[®]RI is a volunteer organization. All roles (except Administrators) are filled with volunteer members who have time, energy and resources for the tasks. Working in an SCTRI action group is a learning environment for applying SCT in the service of task goals.

Management Group/Board of Directors: Sets policy, oversees organizational direction, structure and function. This group meets twice yearly; selects, supports and guides the Director; and is made up of members at the advanced training level and beyond.

Director: Carries the organizational vision and values, oversees implementation, represents the organization to the larger world.

Research Director: Develops the research function with goals of fully integrating research into SCTRI and crossing the boundary to the larger world.

Steering Group: Implements policies and links action groups. Selected by and acts with the authority of the Management Group/Board of Directors between its semi-annual meetings; meets weekly.

System Mentors: Keep an eye on the overall functioning of SCTRI and system-centered training with the goal of maintaining the spirit and values of SCT. Mentors consult to members and action groups as needed, and hold the final authority for accepting recommendations for licensing individual members as SCT practitioners.

Action Groups: Small groups of members carrying out specific aspects of the work of SCTRI.

Currently:

- Annual Conference
- Continuing Education
- Curriculum Development
- Electronic Communications/Web
- Fundraising
- Membership
- Newsletter
- Research
- Trainers

Administrators: Carry out organizational tasks under the supervision of the Director and the Steering Group.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT: UPDATE ON SCTRI

Several very significant events have happened this past year in our development as an organization. First, when SCTRI formed, we formed under the auspices of Resources for Human Development (RHD), an organization in Philadelphia

that incubates nonprofits. (Many thanks to the hard work of Yvonne, Fran Carter, Claudia Byram and Anita Simon who contained SCT in our early forming and found such a good home for us with RHD in our early development.) In the last several years, we realized that we had developed enough that we were no longer in need of incubating and that it made fiscal sense to be independent. RHD agreed with us, and a year ago we began to separate from RHD, incorporate independently as a nonprofit, and file for nonprofit 501(c)(3) status with the IRS. This was a very exciting step for us, full of hard work, with bylaws, attorneys, accountants and incorporation papers. Throughout this process we worked hard so that all of what we did maintained our values. We are very satisfied to say that we are now functioning as an independent nonprofit!

Another important milestone was Yvonne's leaving her role as a member of the Management Group last October. As our founder, she had been a member of this group since its inception in 1995. This change signaled Yvonne's confidence that the organization was ready to manage itself without her and also freed her to continue her training, writing and other roles within the organization in the Trainers Group and as a System Mentor.

In April, we had our first Management Group/Board of Directors meeting without Yvonne as a member. (Being incorporated as a nonprofit requires us to have a Board of Directors – see the "ManagementGroup/Board of Directors report). There was both sadness and missing, and much excitement as the whole Board worked to take up its role as a Board of Directors with responsibility for the vision of the organization. We understood that putting SCT into action as a Board meant developing the Board's capacity for vision, as well as continuing to take the responsibility, authority and accountability for managing the organization.

Both of these separations, from RHD and from Yvonne as part of the Management Group, seem right and timely and very much part of our maturation as an organization.

Several other exciting events are important to note. First, it is useful to see the continued emergence of the licensing process, marked most recently by a concentrated and successful effort from our newest Licensing Group (V) who are now close to submitting their work samples to the System Mentors. Licensing Group V had the benefit of the system's learning from the considerable work of Licensing Groups III and IV, which led to an increased emphasis on training for licensing groups that orients to work in a task group. Our licensing process contains the internal development of our organization. Very importantly, in looking at our relationship to the larger world, it is our licensed members that represent SCT and its methods and values as SCT clinicians and consultants in the world. Having SCT more widely represented in the larger world, with more licensed members, seems much closer to

reality now.

In this same vein, thanks to the considerable efforts of Rich O'Neill in his role as Research Director and Larry Ladden in his steadfast commitment to research, SCT now has two research articles coming out in journals (see p. 30 for details). Publishing research on SCT theory and methods is an essential step in crossing the boundary to the larger world and communicating about SCT in a way that its impact can be understood.

-Susan Gantt

MANAGEMENT GROUP/BOARD OF DIRECTORS

From a Management Group to a Board: How We Got There

In April 2007 the Management Group met for the first time without Yvonne Agazarian as a regular member, a major step in the development and transformation of our system. In the initial two-day experiential portion of the meeting, which Yvonne continues to lead as a consultant, the group worked toward the goal of taking up the "visionary" role that Yvonne has largely carried for the organization. As the work progressed, we came to realize that the function of vision can reside in the group, rather than in an individual - an important step in separating from Yvonne. It was exciting to realize that having such functions reside in the group is one of the important norms SCT practitioners can take into the world.

In the process of working at the level of vision, both in the experiential, and in the subsequent day-and-a-half business meeting with Ken Eisold as our consultant, we reaffirmed our commitment to emergent energy - striving to see "what is" and "where it's going," rather than trying to figure out "what should be." We also reaffirmed our commitment to our bylaws: making decisions by consensus, building an organization that contributes to knowledge, research, education and training, and introducing SCT strategies for change into private, public, and clinical settings. As we became aware that we were in transition away from managing and implementing the day-to-day business of SCTRI, and were moving to the level of providing vision for the organization, we realized that we were operating as a Board of Directors. It was in this process that we decided to adopt our new title, while keeping the boundary open to input as to how this fit with the rest of the organization.

In looking at the interface between SCTRI and the outside world as we separate from Yvonne, we came to realize that it is important to be visible and respected, as we have been with her as our leader. Within this context, we were pleased to learn that our Director, Susan Gantt, has recently been made a Fellow within AGPA, a distinction she also holds in APA. Equally significant in crossing the external boundary is the fact that the first two articles to ever involve scientific research on SCT have been accepted for publication. One is by Rich O'Neill, and has been accepted by the *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*; the other is by a group led by Larry Ladden and is to be published in the *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*.

From our perspective of holding the vision of SCTRI, we also took up greater responsibility for the financial health of

our system. In this vein, we were pleased to learn that Nina Klebanoff has accepted the NEW position of SCTRI Treasurer, which means that she will be rejoining the Board. Welcome back Nina! We also carefully reviewed our monetary intakes and expenditures, directed the Membership Action Group to follow up on renewals, and asked the Fundraising Action Group to apply for a grant as a way to begin learning how to tap into external sources of support.

Reviewing and revising the Conference structure was another focus of attention. With Jim Peightel and Susan Karpenko taking up the Co-Director roles for 2008, the Co-Directors will now be responsible for holding the vision of the Conference that has been worked out with the Board, and for building an SCT work group that helps its members focus on role, goal, and context as they get the Conference up and running. By clarifying goals and boundaries, and by starting to develop the system earlier, the Co-Directors will be able to resume responsibility for the programming function that in recent years has had an unclear position within the Conference structure.

In working to review and improve other areas, the Board joined with Michael Robbins to develop a vision for the Newsletter that will be more responsive to members' needs and more economical to print. We also supported the Steering Group's efforts to focus on making linkages within the organization that will facilitate getting things done, while doing less in terms of direct implementation. By the end of our meeting, we came away with renewed vitality, and with the sense that SCTRI is an organization in the midst of transformation, with strong emergent energy for what hopefully will be the exciting things to come.

-Dick Ganley

STEERING GROUP

The function of the Steering Group in SCTRI is to oversee the daily operations of the organization while holding the direction, vision and structure through policy consideration between Management Group/Board of Directors meetings. This is an especially exciting time, as we are now in our first year of operation as an independent non-profit organization.

During the past six months, we have focused on making the necessary legal and financial adjustments that accompany our new independent status. Kathy Lum has researched insurance policies and has developed an operational budget, which we review quarterly. Jon McCormick, who was a member of the Steering Group until last October, continued to consult with us as we prepared the bylaws for ratification by the Board of Directors in April. Much of this work has kept us focused on the boundary between SCTRI and the larger world of legal requirements, state regulations and financial realities. We have remained curious as we have discovered how to navigate our way in this new territory.

We have also been excited about new developments and linkages within our organization. The Steering Group is now the formal linkage between Yvonne Agazarian, in her role as the major holder of the trademark, and the SCTRI Management Group/Board of Directors. We are exploring, with the Research

Director, Rich O'Neill, the most effective way to link this Research role with the Steering Group, and plan to develop a formal link with the new role of SCTRI Treasurer. We continue to host, on the phone bridge, our semi-annual Summit Meetings, which offer members from the training groups throughout the organization a chance to cross-fertilize and to see their training within the context of the larger organization. We have worked closely with the Action Groups, especially the Web Group, the Newsletter Group and the Conference Group. We have allocated funds to the Web Group to continue to develop an infrastructure for the website that will better serve our membership and have consulted to the Newsletter Group regarding changes in the Newsletter format. Also, this year, we have worked closely with Jan Quirl and John Straznickas in their Conference '07 Co-Director roles, as they deftly took up their roles and worked tirelessly to both put on a Conference and manage and identify the gaps in the system that were still in need of development in our Conference structure. Thank you John and Jan Q! We have also met with our Conference '08 Co-Directors, Jim Peightel and Susan Karpenko, and the '07 Directors to link the learnings of this year with next year's Conference. Welcome Jim & Susan! We look forward to our first West Coast Conference!

The members of the Steering Group are Susan Gantt, Dorothy Gibbons, Joy Luther, and Michael Silverstein. We are aware that our work is greatly supported by the commitment of many members who contribute their resources to the various Action Groups. We deeply thank all members who support SCTRI through their ongoing work.

*-Susan Gantt, Dorothy Gibbons, Joy Luther
& Michael Silverstein*

SYSTEM MENTORS

We continue to keep an eye on the functioning of the system-as-a-whole, and especially on the emerging process for licensing SCT Practitioners. Currently, as several licensing groups are getting ready to submit their work samples and recommendations for review, we are introducing a new step in developing trainers and mentors by bringing licensed practitioners into the work sample review process. Four licensed members (Susan Cassano, Nina Klebanoff, Larry Ladden and Susan Lange) will be working with the system mentors to review samples and recommendations. The result will be both to expand the systems' resources and to share the work load. We will keep you posted!

*-Yvonne Agazarian, Claudia Byram, Fran Carter
& Susan Gantt*

CONFERENCE 2007

Aloha everyone! We're back at the dock after our Conference 2007 Boston cruise. What a trip! We are so pleased that we realized our goals of a professional, collegial, creative, exciting, fun and profitable Conference. We were especially proud of the engaging and high caliber Conference and Institute presentations and the efficient on-site operations. The Large Group was truly a place for "cross-fertilization" and

reflected so clearly the Conference environment, which was smooth running, and enjoyable. The Large Group experience continued to develop, as we explored more deeply and openly the virulent and creative energies that are present in our system-as-a-whole. We also had such fun with the dancing and all the planned and unplanned social events that built and renewed our connections with each other.

Special thanks go to our Conference Coordinating Group and our On-site team who brought their skills and energies to make this Conference happen. We especially acknowledge the essential contributions from our beloved co-Administrators, Kathy Lum and Jan Vadell. The whole-hearted support of our Director, Susan Gantt, showed us the flow and possibilities that come from structure working together with function. We could not have done this without everyone's commitment to making this the best (and most profitable!) Conference yet.

Personally, we're still integrating all that we experienced and learned during our year of being Conference Co-Directors. What a trip! We have experienced profound personal growth throughout this professional experience. We truly have gone through a life-changing event. We thank each and every one of our Conference planning members and all of you who attended for this transformative personal experience. We look forward to working with Susan Karpenko and Jim Peightel to make next year's Conference in San Francisco even better!

-Jan Quirl & John Straznickas

CONFERENCE 2008

The 2008 SCT Conference local planning committee held its first meeting in April while enjoying a delicious Italian dinner near the 2008 Conference hotel, the Holiday Inn-Golden Gateway in San Francisco. We celebrated our local planning group launch with SCTRI chief meteorologist and SF restaurant critic Kirk Larson, Susan Gantt, Director of SCTRI, local SCT training group members Bonnie MacBride, John and Katherine Straznickas, Jim Peightel and myself (Susan Karpenko), 2008 Conference Co-Directors.

In our meeting we discovered a common goal - to make specific and effective outreach efforts to potential local 2008 Conference attendees. Our next step is to identify where we can make these efforts. We want to access as many resources as we can in our national and international SCTRI community. We want to encourage and emphasize that anyone can offer to take up a role in assisting the local planning group, not just people who live in San Francisco! We also established that we want to keep our Monday night dinner affordable, within walking distance of the hotel, while keeping an eye out for good food and atmosphere. We want to find a restaurant that lives up to San Francisco's reputation as a city where chefs want to dine.

Jim and I took the next day to survey the Holiday Inn-Golden Gateway hotel, only to find that Susan and Kirk were there minutes before us on a similar mission. Jim and I were able to get a feel for the space and toured several of the conference rooms, inspected the outdoor pool and observed no atrium rooms - which means windows that open to the outside! We were impressed with our 2008 Conference space and the

hotel's location, which is in a central part of San Francisco, near many restaurants and historical sites.

If you are interested in participating in planning for the Conference on any level please email: Susan Karpenko at Susan.Karpenko@med.va.gov or Jim Peightel, jpeightel@comcast.net.

-Susan Karpenko

CONTINUING EDUCATION _____

There is energy and enthusiasm in the CE Group, which seems to reflect broader energy in the SCT system-as-a-whole. We have just completed Conference 2007 and, for the first time, were able to offer continuing medical education credits (CMEs) through the co-sponsorship provided by the Northeastern Society for Group Psychotherapy, and the hard work of Norma Safransky and Fran Rapoport to set this up. Now, just a short time after the Conference, Jan Quirl has already agreed to be the Conference CE Coordinator for 2008 and Tomi Dominguez has agreed to be the On-site CE Coordinator at the Conference. It's great to have these roles filled so early with people who have already demonstrated their competence.

For the 2008 Conference, we have CEs arranged for psychologists, social workers, and family therapists, and are continuing to work on arranging them for other groups. If you are interested in joining a fun group, developing SCT work group skills, and making a meaningful contribution to SCTRI, consider becoming a member of the CE Action Group. We welcome new members. If you would like to discuss this, or have any other questions regarding CE issues, please feel free to contact me at dickganley@aol.com.

-Dick Ganley

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT _____

Since the last Newsletter, the Curriculum Development Group has been working to get our full curriculum up onto the website and easily accessible to everyone. This means keeping abreast of the emergent energy for training and clarifying and amplifying the training pathways that continue to be "tried and true." We are focusing on the development of our advanced training opportunities as well as the beginning of a more formal Trainer's training.

We have also been thinking about how to create training contexts for two groups of SCT members: "outliers," those members who live in areas too far away from an ongoing training group to make attendance practical and Intermediate/Advanced members who do not want to pursue licensing (or are not ready for an Authority Issue Group) and would like to participate in a committed, ongoing group. With these groups in mind, we are considering a 3-year, closed and committed, Intermediate/Advanced Level Group that could be held at the Conference. We asked for feedback at this year's Conference and received positive responses.

The other developmental step we have taken as a group is to increase our linking with other work groups in the system. We have been working more closely with the Trainers Group, Licensed Members Group, Web Group and System Mentor Group both to take in information and to give out information.

We are beginning to have the sense that the whole system is taking a look at our curriculum. It is exciting and satisfying.

If you are interested in getting involved in this thinking, you are welcome to come and observe our group. If you already know you would like to join in, great! You can find our meeting times listed on the web under the Phone Bridge schedule or you can contact any of our members.

-Claudia Byram, Fran Carter, Susan Gantt, Dorothy Gibbons, & Eileen Jones

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS/WEB _____

Our long title means that we look after the website and the email listserv. Our big news is that we are on the threshold of a major change in the underpinnings of the website. As a result of this project, we will be able to set up on-line registration for the Conference, allow Action Groups to look after their own sections, create "private" spaces for works-in-progress, post applications for events on-line, and in general have a more interactive web "home." This will all happen in stages, with the first stage, setting up on-line registration for next year's Conference, underway next month. Keep your ears tuned for more news, and meanwhile, please let us know any little frustration you encounter in using the site. We need to know! And, of course, if you want to come and join or listen in on our meetings, welcome!

-Claudia Byram

TRAINERS _____

The Trainers Group has been meeting every other month to support the work of training in SCTRI, to share training resources, and to track new areas of training that correspond to the organization's development. We continue to be energized in our work by sharing surprises, innovations and discoveries.

One boundary that has been especially useful to clarify, is between the Trainers Group and the Curriculum Development Action Group. We discovered that certain aspects of what we have seen as our work, now more accurately belong in the Curriculum Development Group. It has been a steady training for us to hold awareness of our role, goal and context. There has often been a palpable easing of tension when our boundaries have been clarified.

One example of this interaction between the two work groups is the proposed creation of a new training group opportunity at the Conference: The Trainers and Curriculum Groups worked together to identify a possible need for additional trainings for members who want to continue training beyond the foundation level but do not plan to enter the licensing track, or who do not have access to an ongoing training group. The idea has now gone to Curriculum to evaluate, and will come back to us for implementation.

We have also implemented a new three-year training at the Advanced level, called "Observation of the Authority Issue Group." This group will meet for the full three-year duration of the AIG's sessions to track group development, including the phase of development and corresponding interventions, sub-

grouping development, and leadership behaviors by members. The original proposal from the Curriculum Development Group required all members to participate twice a year (at the Conference and then again in November) for three consecutive years. This turned out to be too difficult for many interested members. The Trainers group spent an entire session exploring in subgroups the various voices. At the end we decided to change the criteria to require a minimum of one meeting per year, so more members could participate. We acknowledged the usefulness of having used criteria that relate to system dynamics and system goals in making our decision. The Trainers Group is excited to be offering this new training context at the Advanced level, building on the AIG training.

Also, in case you missed this announcement: A new training resource is available! Yvonne Agazarian has updated her Skills Training Manual (formerly known as "the Gold Sheets") to include a more comprehensive understanding of how the techniques relate to the theory on the one hand, and implementation on the other.

-Rich Armington

SUMMIT MEETING- DECEMBER 2006

"Making Space for Emergent Energy" became the theme of SCTRI's fourth Summit Meeting held on the phone bridge on December 12, 2006. Twice a year, the Steering Group hosts this meeting for representatives from all the SCT training groups and regional centers. The goal of these meetings is to provide an opportunity for cross-fertilization of the leading edges and learnings in trainings throughout the system.

During our December meeting, members reported that in response to the invitation to this meeting, their training groups explored the members' "no" or reluctance to attend the meeting. By honoring the "no," members discovered that they did not want to attend the Summit based on a "should" or on the expectations based on an old role of "being dutiful." However, as their groups explored the "no," they discovered some energy and curiosity about the experience of being a member of a larger system made up of members from other training groups.

In the Summit Meeting, the group explored how the "no" creates a boundary to keep out what we don't want and can actually be a vital source of energy as it protects and nurtures the undiscovered, not-yet-emergent parts of ourselves or the larger system. By honoring the "no," we are making space for something new to emerge in the system and this something new is always a discovery or a "yes" to some form of energy. The group then explored how this is true in their individual lives, in their work places and in SCTRI. If we don't take up work as part of an old role and we let the task go, then someone else may see the task as an opportunity and pick it up, or the group may discover that the system's energy flow is not currently in the direction of the task. As members subgrouped, they discovered that they were having a group experience different from the idea that they were coming to a task group to "report" on the progress of their training group. As one member stated, "I am not coming to these meetings to report but to be."

Members began to realize, with excitement, that the Summit Meeting functions as a group or a community that is built on and contains the energy of all the training centers. Toward the end of the meeting, members discussed how these meetings help them to view their training groups from a larger perspective and to appreciate that their training groups are part of SCT training-as-a-whole. Several members also stated that based on their experience of connection at the Summit Meeting, they have discovered a want for a more active local SCT community, and that they have some energy to explore building an SCT community in their area.

-Susan Gantt, Dorothy Gibbons, Joy Luther
& Michael Silverstein

ATLANTA

The Atlanta Training Group is in a period of renewal. After putting on the annual Conference for four years and presenting yearly workshops for as many, we pulled back to rest, not necessarily on our laurels, but to catch our breath. A new direction was clearly needed, but just what that direction would be, remained elusive.

Then, in January 2007, our Friday Training Group met after the half-day training for dinner and a talk. We asked ourselves about next steps, about available energy, about areas of excitement and interest. We emerged slowly from our cocoons of inactivity until it seemed we caught fire, and we began to envision what we might become and what we might offer to our community. Knowing that a similar group exists in Philadelphia called the "Philadelphia Round Table," we dubbed ourselves, for now, the "Atlanta Round Table," and started brainstorming.

Coincidentally, the Georgia Psychological Association had just sent out a letter requesting submissions for programs that would meet CE requirements to be given throughout the year. One member of our group hopped onto that and began a dialogue with the powers that be in that organization. We came up with a number of ideas for what we would like to present and what we think might be beneficial to that specific community. There is no finalized outcome as yet, but it is in the hopper.

Heather Twomey was asked to present a workshop on Conflict Resolution, using SCT theory, which would be suitable for clinicians and organizational development folks at the Annual Meeting of the Georgia Psychological Association in May 2007. She graciously accepted the invitation and asked Bettie Banks to join her as co-presenter. Ken Frontman has been making presentations to a number of different groups, and he graciously volunteered to let his material serve as a base from which to draw. These engagements, already in place, were added to the over-all scheme, with other ideas for presentations, informal chats after dinner, and debates included. As the energy rose, all sorts of ideas surfaced which fueled the development of more ideas. We have met on two occasions now and are looking forward to our next meeting after Friday Training in May.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, we are in the process of growing and developing into a more complex system. Two of our members are in Licensing Group V, and two are in

Authority Issue Group V with the expectation that a third member will join AIG V after her Mentor Training in York. Some of our members are not on a specific track, but are deeply involved in the work of the group. The group work deepens with each meeting, and we were especially pleased to welcome back a member who had been absent for a year. The Monday experiential group is also progressing well and includes some folks who are in professions other than the behavioral sciences, a blending that adds dimension to our sessions. Both groups are open to visitors from other centers and would welcome the input a visitor would bring.

-Bettie S. Banks

BOSTON

The Boston group is still basking in the glow of hosting a successful Conference. It was wonderful to welcome you all to our beautiful city, to show you the sites, to host you in our homes, and to work, love and play with you for a week!

We continue to support two monthly study groups and a weekly consultation group as our primary activities. The monthly study group has two levels, - beginning and advanced. In the advanced group, we have had a wide range of topics introduced in the theory section of our group, from SAVI to Attachment Theory to Interpersonal Neurobiology. As a group we feel that we are functioning on a high level in the "work phase" of development. What a delight!

-Michael Robbins

SAN FRANCISCO

Eight times a year, Susan Gantt comes to San Francisco to train us. The training begins on Thursday afternoons and serves as an opportunity for interested professionals to sample SCT theory, get an introduction to basic SCT skills, and participate in an experiential group. There is a nice trend towards more consistent membership on Thursdays with skill and group-as-a-whole development in the group and its members. There is also an optional training now offered immediately after the

group in learning how to think and use phases of group development for leadership interventions.

On Fridays the group starts the morning off with an exploration of theory, followed by consultation and leadership training. This is open to all our members. We have noticed how there is often a theme that threads through the next two sections. In the afternoon we have two experiential sessions with those of us that have been on the training circuit longer. We always learn more about relating to each other and to ourselves and we come away with lots to ponder.

-Roxanne Fuller

STOCKHOLM

The Stockholm training group continues to have a training day every second month, with Ray Haddock as trainer. We are for the moment a "small" group of around 15 members, with different levels of experience. We are using our training day for theory, experiential and skills training, with members who are further down the training track taking up different leader roles. We have also organized a three-day workshop in January, led by Susan Gantt and Ray Haddock, again with an opportunity for members of the Swedish SCT community to take up different training roles in the context of a workshop. The three-day workshop started with a one day workshop that had an OD approach called "How to Work Smarter: Building Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, in Meetings, and in Work Groups" and was followed by a two-day workshop titled "Building a Systems-Centered Group."

We had about 35 participants with attendees from Sweden, Denmark, UK and Portugal. The organization of a workshop has helped us to develop our organizational skills, and our local task group did a wonderful job. The workshop serves as an effective way to introduce SCT to leading Swedish consultants and therapists. At the same time, it is important in developing resources in our SCT community, with excellent training opportunities for members.

With greetings from Sweden to all of you!

-Sven-Erik Viskari



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The complete listing of Conference offerings will be available soon.

MEMBERS FORUM

This is a community forum for posting announcements on related trainings, personal life events, awards, letters to the Editor, and responses to articles that have appeared in our Newsletter.

It is with great sadness that we inform you that Joan Hemenway died on January 31, 2007. Much gratitude is expressed for the joy, vitality and keen knowing that she brought to our community and to those who knew her personally.

AWARDS PRESENTED AT THE 2007 SCTRI CONFERENCE: _____

SCT Hero Award presented to Roelof Langman, for his outstanding contributions to the design and development of the SCT website, and his commitment of time, energy and resources in moving us toward the goal of a functional and user-friendly website.

2007 Award for SCT Leadership presented to Rich O'Neill, for his steadfast commitment to developing SCT research and pioneering the SCT Research Director role.

Additionally, Certificates of Appreciation were presented to: Susan Cassano, Dorothy Gibbons Larry Ladden, Jon McCormick and Michael Robbins.

Yvonne Agazarian was awarded Distinguished Fellowship in the American Group Psychotherapy Association. This is AGPA's highest honor.

Susan Gantt was made a Fellow of the American Group Psychotherapy Association.

Susan Gantt is one of six keynote speakers at the Professional Association of Coaches and Mentors tenth anniversary conference, "Conversations that Shape the Future", being held Oct 5-6, 2007 in San Francisco. Susan's keynote is entitled: ***Making Common Sense Common: A Systems-Centered Approach to Coaching Individuals and Teams.*** For more information, go to <http://www.pcmaconference.com/keynote.html>

SCTRI-A GOES TO THE HOSPITAL!

In Austin, we have had a long-term dream of providing outreach services to agencies and organizations in town. Two months ago, under the auspices of Austin Children's Hospital's Palliative Care Department, I began facilitating the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit's nursing staff's weekly meetings on a pro bono basis. There had been an emotionally and legally difficult case they had been coping with for weeks, and were asking for help in containing their feelings and concerns. Just the chance

we had been waiting for!

After the first week, the physicians and nurse practitioners decided to hire me for two hours a week to help them do the same. At this point, Linda Fontaine has joined me to co-facilitate another unit's meetings. Several other therapists in town are interested in possibly volunteering in the future in this effort to link up the private and public sectors. It feels like a win-win to all of us. We will keep you posted.

-Susan Cassano

Joy Luther has joined the ranks of grandma! Adrian Bailey Luther was born February 28, 2007. He's adorable and grandma loves gazing into his sweet little face. True enchantment!

Fran Rapoport became a grandmother in January. It is unbelievably wonderful.

NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM MEMBERS

Ladden, L. J., Gantt, S. P., Rude, S. & Agazarian, Y. M. (2007). Systems-centered therapy: A protocol for treating generalized anxiety disorder. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, (37)2.

(This article is also available on the SCTRI website at *Readings/Recent Additions.*)

O'Neill, R.M. & Constantino, M.J. (in press). Systems-centered training groups' process and outcome: A comparison with AGPA institute groups. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*.

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