

# Transient therapeutic communities: the “living-learning experience” trainings

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – *The purpose of this paper is to describe transient therapeutic communities (TCs) and their value for training.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *This is a descriptive account which includes the findings of two field study evaluations, and direct participant feedback. It is an exploration of the application of TC and group analytic theory to transient TCs.*

**Findings** – *The transient TC format is an excellent training format for creating a powerful and effective environment for learning and personal development in the very short time frame of three days.*

**Practical implications** – *These courses are a very efficient and effective way of promoting reflective practice, enabling environments, and emotionally safe working practices. The trainings are useful for a wide range of people from mental health professions, those working in human resources, and those in senior positions in industrial, commercial and public sector fields.*

**Social implications** – *This paper will raise awareness that target-driven training is insufficient to improve quality of services beyond a certain point. A relational focus of training is needed to deal with issues of complexity which cannot be resolved by simple managerial methods. This experiential training can help to meet the need for inculcating compassion, kindness, and empathy in its participants.*

**Originality/value** – *Although other psychotherapy and group relations courses exist, and are used beyond the mental health field, the focus on generating an experience of belonging, emotional safety and democratic empowerment in the relational field of the course itself – by use of TC methodology – is novel, and could be of considerable value more widely.*

**Keywords** *Organizational change, Therapeutic communities, Reflective practice, Enabling environment, Emotional intelligence training, Group relations*

**Paper type** *Technical paper*

## Introduction

The transient therapeutic community (TC), known as a living-learning experience (LLE), is a residential training course specifically designed to help participants develop reflective practice skills, in the context of a structured programme of activities designed to explore the experience of being a member of a residential programme run as an enabling environment (EE) or TC. It is suitable for frontline and senior staff working in a variety of organisations such as day or residential mental health care settings; forensic mental health settings; TCs; EEs; psychologically informed planned environments; psychologically informed environments; and for other interested professionals and students (Haigh *et al.*, 2012).

These courses have run for 20 years. We have conducted 54 workshops in the UK, 17 in Italy and one in Australia. These have been attended by over 1,200 participants, the majority of whom have been mental health professionals and support staff, although non-clinical managers and administrative staff have also attended. The professions represented have included senior

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psychiatrists and psychologists, nurse managers, doctors, nurses, social workers and social work assistants, occupational therapists, health care assistants, housing support workers, psychotherapy trainees, and other TC staff. They have come from NHS and independent hospitals, prisons, residential schools, hostels for the homeless, voluntary organisations and other settings.

Through a combination of teaching and experience, the course promotes an understanding of processes in groups, and how to harness them to therapeutic benefit. It provides a unique opportunity to experience belonging, agency, social learning and personal development (Pearce and Pickard, 2013; Pickard and Pearce, 2013). It also enables participants to apply knowledge of their own patterns of behaviour in the formation of therapeutic and other relationships; experience and subsequently understand and critically evaluate the nature and impact of intensive group processes; describe the impact of themselves on others, and vice-versa; apply this knowledge in understanding their own emotional development; understand and work therapeutically with the power dynamics common in complex environments and clinical work; and to make links between objective and subjective understanding of relationships. The workshops are mostly held at Commonwork Organic Farm and Study Centre in Kent, although others have been held at different locations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Australia, and also in various locations in Italy.

According to Kennard, “the main purpose of the LLE format was, and is, to give participants the experience of what it is like to be a patient/resident in a TC. All psychodynamic therapy trainings view the experience of being a patient in the model as a crucial part of training, in order to fully appreciate how the model works, and to develop sensitivity to what the patient is going through. The workshop provided this opportunity, albeit briefly, for TC staff. It enabled them, for example, to feel what it was like to “act out” in the resident role in ways they cannot do as staff members – e.g. to walk out of a community meeting” (Kennard, 2014, p. 75).

## History

Kennard and Roberts (1978) state that the first version of a transient TC was set up by the Training Group of the Association of TCs, and was initially designed to improve the training of TC workers, by fostering the feeling of being in a TC. The initial participants at the first weekend training workshop in 1978 included nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, Richmond Fellowship house wardens and a psychiatrist, half of whom were currently working in a TC – this proportion increased over subsequent workshops. Costs were kept low so as not to deter those on low salaries. The workshops were initially held at Lower Shaw Farm, and included community meetings, small groups, seminars, experiential sessions such as psychodrama or art therapy, and structured community time, and were self-catering. Gradually, several interesting and familiar facets emerged, such as anxiety about the meal preparation, rivalry between the small groups, assumptions about gender roles, conflict, irritation with the staff members, and the development of rifts within the group. Feedback from participants suggested they had had a personally meaningful weekend, experiencing painful feelings, and learning about themselves. The most frequently cited benefit was learning how it felt to be “on the other side” – a patient or resident – and to view the staff from this position, and to experience what it felt like when staff appeared not to give answers or provide sufficient structure. Participants felt they had learned about group process – how quickly group identity was established, the significance of lateness, inter-group rivalries, and the value of seminars and creative/activity groups. Kennard and Roberts (1978) concluded that these weekends seemed to demonstrate that it was possible for a strong, cohesive community feeling to develop very rapidly and for a number of learning and therapeutic experiences to develop out of this. Kennard and Roberts (1980) then went on to follow up participants in the first training weekend one year later, particularly in response to critics in the field, who questioned whether this experience resulted in any change in the participants’ style of work, once they returned back to work (Whiteley, 1978). Although the response rate to their request for feedback was poor (12 out of 22, but including only four of the 12 TC workers), they identified recurring themes: some people found it a confusing and bewildering event; others said it enabled them to understand what it might feel like to be in a client’s position of dependency, and to empathise with the client’s experience and feelings, and that it drew them into a more

emotional involvement with their work; while some commented that better preparation might have helped them gain more from the weekend. Several participants recalled the heightened feelings, warmth and closeness of the weekend, and saw the weekend as part of a continuing learning process. The TC workers who did respond said they felt the workshop had brought about a new perspective on their own work. Many participants appreciated the introduction to a range of group methods. For several participants, the weekend appeared to enhance present training or prepare them for other training. Kennard and Roberts (1980) concluded that a short experiential weekend does have an effect on their work for some participants. Kennard (2014) said that the success of this initial workshop led to it becoming an annual event in Swindon, and later also in Leeds, continuing until the late 1980s, usually attracting around 30 participants with six staff members. After that, numbers began to decline, perhaps linked to the launch in 1986 of the ATC/RCN one-year certificate course in TCs, and the workshops had ceased by 1990.

In 1995, these training workshops were revived and re-developed as LLE workshops, with a different format, by Rex Haigh and Jean Rees. Haigh and Rees were both Steering Group members of the Association of TCs, and were aware of the demise of the original TC training workshops, but felt the time was right, and the need was there, for another practical way of training staff in the TC approach. Because they felt uncomfortable with the “Tavistock/Bion/Cassel programme” model which was originally envisaged, they decided to rewrite it. The new workshops they devised were not based on the preceding “Learning from Experience” ones – rather, they set up a residential workshop using TC principles, and the practical ideas (such as the clinical timetable, including community meeting agendas) that they had developed together at Winterbourne TC over the previous year (Knowles, 1997; Haigh, 2007; Haigh and Lees, 2014). These new workshops were still intended for people wishing to learn what a TC is like, directly from the experience of being a member. For the second and subsequent workshops, they also changed the title from “Learning from Experience” to “LLE”, which has continued to this day, as have the workshops. The workshops have always been facilitated by group analysts and TC workers from Britain and abroad. The encouraging feedback from workshop participants justified continuation and growth, over the last 18 years, from twice to several times per year (Lombardo, 2014). Following Haigh and Rees’s redevelopment of the workshops, the steering group of Living and Learning have continued to review and refine the content and format, in the light of participant feedback, and participant observer research.

Anonymous quotes from routine participant feedback questionnaires:

“I really found the weekend to be a wonderful experience of how it might feel to be part of a TC. It was also very challenging”

“It was an intense and exciting experience which was also fun and felt nurturing”

“It didn’t matter what background we came from, we all experienced the same frustration, jubilation and celebration of being together as a TC”

“A course that made me go through a process rather than just learn content”

“It has deepened my awareness of the difficulties and profound benefits of being part of a TC and I hope will inform and support my work with clients”

“I have gained healing through the experience of living within a community that cares for, accepts, shares, and supports one another”

“I have gained a lived experience of a TC”

The format and structure of these workshops, and their theoretical underpinnings, will be discussed below. These workshops are now provided every year by Living and Learning (part of Growing Better Lives CIC), who offer a weekend workshop each Spring (Friday late morning to Sunday afternoon); a midweek workshop each Autumn (Tuesday late morning to Thursday afternoon); several others as part of established courses; and bespoke courses by prior arrangement for teams, organisations, networks or other groups.

## Theory

Although initially the “Learning from Experience” workshops reflected Rapoport’s (1960) four themes of TC practice – democratisation; permissiveness; confrontation; and communalism, as a theoretical basis for the work, following the publication of Haigh’s “quintessence” paper (Haigh, 1998, 2013), the “LLE” workshops have increasingly incorporated these therapeutic principles in their practice, alongside other TCs. These five principles, seen as an approximate developmental sequence, are attachment, containment, communication, involvement and agency. The experience of attachment is established in the milieu as a “sense of belonging”; psychological containment is the fundamental requirement of “emotional safety”; the “culture of openness” required for authentic communication relies on the first two (preverbal and more unconscious) principles. Involvement is a more social activity, concerned with members “finding their place amongst others”; agency is developing one’s personal capacity for operating in and on the world – increasing personal confidence, and experiencing the empowerment offered in a TC. Some of these principles have been researched and elaborated, for example “belongingness” and “responsible agency” (Pearce and Pickard, 2013).

Anonymous quotes from routine participant feedback questionnaires:

### Attachment

“I have felt connected with people and bonded in a way that I did not expect and that felt quite moving”; “I have gained a huge amount from this course! I have felt a real sense of belonging and acceptance”

### Containment

“I will take away an image of feeling safe, of the struggles of others, of the value of being heard, of expressing, of feeling looked-after, of the importance of boundaries, of the feeling of community”

### Communication

“I realised I don’t have to make things comfortable and ‘better’, but that a certain level of discomfort can shift things”; “The collectiveness and support of each other highlighted the safe environment to discuss delicate and distressing subjects”; “seeing how my feelings affect others and influence a person”

### Involvement

“I have gained a much deeper understanding of [...] being part of a group that is open and honest with each other and how hard that might feel”; “I understand more about the way I am in relation to others”

### Agency

“I believe it will give me the confidence to challenge group members as I have been able to do that here, so can apply it in a TC”; “This was an opportunity to experience the power difference between a ‘participant’ and ‘staff’ in a TC and time to reflect on how this might influence my clinical practice”; “I really value the emphasis of agency and encouraging our residents to take responsibility for their behaviours”; “I will make more of a conscious effort to break down any hierarchy”

In the past, the work of some TCs, such as Francis Dixon Lodge in Leicester, was based on Bion’s ideas about “work groups” and “basic assumption groups:” (Bion, 1961), and the Tavistock tradition of group relations (Bierer, 1944; Bridger, 1946; Eziel, 1950). The transient TCs which Living and Learning provide are based more on the work of Foulkes, and the principles of Group Analysis (Foulkes, 1984, 1990, 2012; Foulkes and Anthony, 1965), as well as the sociotherapy and social learning of Maxwell Jones (1953, 1968). The intention was to produce a workshop where the total responsibility for the participants’ experience of the event was given to

the community, and the depth of learning from social processes was given at least as much priority as that from the psychological ones. The only fixed structure is the timetable of large and small groups, and the agendas for the community meetings.

Other group relations courses are specifically concerned with issues around authority and leadership. The LLE course focuses on the creation of a therapeutic and enabling environment. Although, like the previous Learning from Experience events, the current course aims to provide an experience of “being on the other side”, with a generally playful and positive ethos, our learning outcomes go considerably further, particularly including the use of depth relationships in clinical practice, and understanding of one’s own “blind spots”. It is the work of the staff group to understand, analyse and contain the dynamics and processes occurring during the course, without interrupting the natural flow and process of the community (Haigh and Lees, 2014, p. 76) Within this framework, the projective processes and transferences that arise naturally are worked with by the whole community, rather than by staff artificially inducing them, or over-analysing them.

The learning outcomes for the Living Learning Experience transient TCs are:

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| <p>Practical and transferable skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ knowing how any organisation or psychosocial environment can be made more compassionate and “enabling”;</li><li>■ confidence in using relationships effectively at work;</li><li>■ establishing and using reflective practice in work settings;</li><li>■ being able to function more effectively within authoritarian hierarchies;</li><li>■ having confidence to use one’s own and others’ emotional reactions as a valid part of working practice; and</li><li>■ competence in the therapeutic management of risk, for those in clinical practice.</li></ul> <p>Knowledge and understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ understanding unequal power dynamics, and how they are used and misused in organisational settings;</li><li>■ to understand how emotional and physical safety is best established and maintained through interpersonal relationships; and</li><li>■ to apply knowledge of one’s own patterns of behaviour in the formation of working and personal relationships.</li></ul> <p>Intellectual skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ to experience, understand and critically evaluate the nature and impact of intensive group processes;</li><li>■ to describe the impact of one’s self on another, and vice-versa;</li><li>■ to make links between objective and subjective understanding of relationships; and</li><li>■ to apply this knowledge in understanding one’s own emotional development.</li></ul> |
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Lombardo (2014) argued that acquiring a new membership in a democratic setting frees the self from the straitjacket of previous social identities (dictated by the usual working task), allowing for new parts of the personality to meet the new environment and learn from it. The new situation can evoke anxieties, which structured environments and clear rules can contain. It also gives space for introspection about one’s own intimate self, when confronted with group equality. He also stated that there are non-specific effects on becoming a member of a large group when people join a LLE workshop. Intimacy, caring and cooperation tend to prevail among members in the LLE, because of its minimal structure and freedom of choice; both free communication in large

groups, and safety in small introspective groups, promote cohesion. Lombardo proposes that the LLE structure seems more concerned with the creation of a cohesive matrix (Foulkes, 1984, 1990, 2012; Foulkes and Anthony, 1965). For example, in LLE large groups, staff move between positions of being “in the group” as equal members, supporting group members to help one another, and making group level interventions (Foulkes, 1984, 1990, 2012; Foulkes and Anthony, 1965), linked to some area of conflict of a single participant. In LLE small group activities, cohesion is promoted by the attempt to create a matrix of empathy and mutual support (Lombardo, 2014). Lombardo concludes that LLEs “allow for a sense of belonging, and gratitude for offering participants magnifying glasses and mirrors to see better what goes on, now in the heart, now in the brain and now in the gut of participants exposed to large group living. Both can be strengthened by reciprocal inputs of know-how, expertise and activities developed through years of practice” (Lombardo, 2014, p. 9).

## Practice

Each Living and Learning Experience workshop consists of three days, although more recently Living and Learning have also been offering some one day bespoke workshops. The format comprises:

- community meetings at the start and end of each day;
- five small groups;
- community catering;
- community time and social activities;
- crisis meetings as required;
- staff briefing and debriefing meetings for all groups;
- formal teaching and structured learning; and
- evaluation questionnaires before and after the workshop.

The membership of the three small groups is chosen by community members during the first community meeting; each group is subsequently facilitated by the same staff member throughout the workshop. Each group, in turn, will deal with cooking together, and with tidying up and cleaning activities, as agreed upon in the first community meeting. The small groups and facilitators meet four times in the same room for spontaneous communication without a set agenda, and once in the kitchen, to prepare a community meal.

The workshop provides three daytime sessions and two evening sessions of “community time”, for community members to decide which issue or activity is of particular interest or relevance for the participants. Topics often voted for are art workshops, psychodrama, music, community walks, exploring the local environment, garden games, and other activities participants wish to offer to the community. In evening community time, the community often opts to play games (which illustrate dynamic processes for later reflection and discussion). There is also space for formal and structured teaching as required, in order to make sense of the theory and practice of the TC, or EE, approach.

The staff team is composed of three group facilitators, with skills in group analysis and organisational dynamics. Depending on total delegate numbers, there can also be up to three other co-facilitators, who are usually in administrative, and trainee staff roles. No single person is in overall charge – rather the community is. Therefore, this course is a unique experience of granting real authority to every member of the learning community. Staff engage in peer group supervision during 15 minute staff briefings and debriefings held before and after all community meetings and small groups. This is useful for staff members as it builds clear shared understanding of what is happening in the community, and helps them to deal with their own emotional responses (Lombardo, 2014, p. 6).

Setting boundaries has always been an integral part of psychoanalytic, group analytic and TC work. LLEs recognise that protecting boundaries is also important in order to safeguard the

function and identity of the whole place of work, here the transient TC. The way in which the LLE transient TCs are structured provides very clear firm boundaries, which contribute to creating an emotionally and physically safe, and enabling, environment.

## Evaluation

The Living Learning Experience was studied by Rawlings, who was commissioned to do so by the then Association of TCs. She joined the May 2004 LLE weekend as a qualitative researcher, sitting in on as many activities as possible and joining in where it was appropriate. She had extensive previous research experience of TCs; her brief for this study was to produce a qualitative description of the LLE, the processes involved, and to provide an evaluation. She joined the weekend at the same time as the staff, and helped with practical preparations. She then took part mainly as a resident, but with access to staff meetings. This gave her a rounded view of events, and she was able to attend community meetings, join one of the small groups, take part in additional group activities, help with the work, eat with the community, and join in with the various leisure activities. Because of the research element, she also recorded field notes from time to time, which she wrote up soon after the course ended.

Rawlings evaluated the weekend both as a TC, and as an experiential learning activity. She reasoned that if the LLE provided an authentic TC experience, then participants would truly experience life as a resident in a TC, albeit a short one. She wrote that "Provided the therapeutic community was in place, then participants could not help but experience it. Their individual experiences may be partially or fully engaged. They may view things positively or negatively. Just as with regular residents in a full-time therapeutic community, there would be all kinds of responses to the experience, but provided the place itself ran as an authentic therapeutic community, then every participant would have an authentic experience, and the course would achieve its aim" (Rawlings, 2005, p. 8). To evaluate the TC, Rawlings referred to the 2004 Community of Community standards (Tucker and Moffat, 2004), which were used to evaluate other TCs which were members of the network.

Rawlings' report describes how the staff, themselves experienced in running TCs and in running previous LLEs, worked together to set up the TC, and set themselves up as a coherent close-knit TC staff team, and how this was transmitted to the participants as they arrived. Activities such as eating, choosing bedrooms, and choosing small groups were all done together by the whole community. Participants were mostly TC staff members, and so understood the environment created, although they had varying degrees of TC experience. They were presented with a set of "givens", such as a daily timetable, a means for sharing out domestic tasks, and a means for choosing the Chair of each community meeting, much as they would have done if they were participants joining an established TC. Rawlings shows how initial politeness changed into wider friendliness as people began to know each other, how small group discussions seemed deeper and more intimate than community meeting discussions, and how participants began to develop a sense of the reality of the community. For example, she writes of the small groups that "Like the participants I wondered about the other groups. Were they different? Were they better? What was it like to work in the other rooms? With the other people? Did they say more than us? Less than us?" (Rawlings, 2005, p. 13).

Rawlings' report describes how over the three days, participants became gradually more critical, and how acts of conflict began to emerge, such as whether participants should drink less alcohol, or discussions about leaving early. Nevertheless, they reflected the kinds of conflicts which emerge in more established TCs, when people have to live and work together. Indeed, Rawlings describes a community meeting on the final day containing accusations and counter accusations about various behaviours, specific issues about relationships between people, and criticisms of the workshop. She writes that "In the small group which followed, there were comments that masks had come off and the 'darker side' of the weekend revealed" and in the final community meeting there were further emotional moments, as well as praise from the participants for the weekend and for the contributions of staff and participants. In her field notes, Rawlings said she had written: "[...] this did feel very much like a "real" community meeting, with anger, tears, and walking out and coming back" (Rawlings, 2005, p. 11).

Rawlings' evaluation focused on three of the seven categories provided by the Community of Communities TC Standards which were current at that time. She described the criteria for each standard, and considered the experience of the weekend against them. For example, she noted that there was indeed a structured daily programme, and that there were indeed many times when members verbalised their thoughts and feelings. There were some definite boundaries, and although these were sometimes transgressed (as in any other TC), there was evidence that these were noted and discussed by the whole group. In other words, both static and dynamic approaches to boundaries and containment were present and functioning. All members could question each other, and managerial information was shared. Basing her comments on the C of C standard covering "organisation, policy and procedures", Rawlings wrote that "Staff and residents shared the day-to-day running of the community, the community was managed democratically, there was space for discussion and reflection on community decisions, and everyone was responsible for maintaining a comfortable environment. That is, the essential processes of resident responsibility for running the community were evident" (Rawlings, 2005, p. 17).

On the negative side, there were no explicit opportunities for participants to identify parallels between TC experiences and life experiences, no special provisions for calling crisis meetings, no contract or treatment plan, no provision for taking complaints out to a wider audience, and very few written policies and procedures. All of these would have been expected in a longer-standing TC, or one in which there was more time to get into the habit of reflecting and discussing. Importantly, there were no senior community members to hand the culture on to new arrivals, and in this sense it was a brand new TC, with brand new participants. By and large though, Rawlings found that the LLE provided an authentic TC experience for participants. Rawlings's ethnographic study concluded that there was good alignment with Community of Communities quality standards for clinical TCs (Rawlings, 2005). A more recent analysis of evaluation questionnaires (Haigh and Clouston, 2012) confirmed that LLEs are successful in this, and increasingly so over the years for which the workshops have been running.

As a learning experience, Rawlings differentiated between this LLE, and other experiential learning models which require the participant to reflect on exercises (Dennison and Kirk, 1990) or act out a role (Rae, 1995). For the LLE, participants were expected to be themselves, as if they had joined the TC as a community member. In this way, the learning was similar to training in psychotherapy, which "often requires the learner to engage with the same process as their clients in a bid to promote personal growth, equip them with the necessary skills, and provide a safe space for emotional exploration (Miller, 1993; Payne, 2002)" (Rawlings, 2005, p. 7).

In the longer unpublished report on the LLE, Rawlings further assessed the weekend in terms of an experiential learning process, and commented on the lack of timetabled opportunity to reflect on what had been learned – "[...] there were no sessions set aside for reviewing action as a learning process. There were no formally designated times for drawing out people's experiences of what was happening now in the workshop, and relating these to what happens for residents in a TC" (Rawlings, 2004, p. 32). Rawlings notes however that people did spontaneously make these links in other groups. In addition, it was hard to see how specified "learning sessions" (except perhaps as "reflective aftergroups" in an already crowded timetable), could have been added. Whilst the organisations from which people came could themselves have provided opportunities for participants to reflect on their experiences and their learning, there was little information about how much this happened. One recommendation was for the LLE to require sponsoring organisations to "provide supervision and debriefing aimed at enabling participants who have been through the workshop to examine and understand their experiences" (Rawlings, 2004, p. 34). However, although the LLE might strive to promote closer links with participating organisations, it could have little control over what may happen after a participant returned from the weekend.

The test of whether the experiential learning provided by the LLE is successful lies in whether the experience afforded the learner is authentically the experience they will meet in "real life". As far as the researcher was able to judge, using the most appropriate tools available, and the subjective experience of a qualitative researcher, the transient TC which emerged over the course of that



weekend, was indeed authentic. Consequently, the researcher recommended that by and large the weekend workshop, run by experienced staff and organised with only a skeleton structure, should continue to run in its current format.

Lombardo (2014) wrote an appraisal comparing two workshop formats, both of which were provided for people involved with, or interested in, TCs, and in both of which he participated as a staff member. LLE was one of these workshops; the other was Learning from Action (LfA). LfAs were set up by Enrico Pedriale and Bob Hinshelwood (Hinshelwood *et al.*, 2010) and, according to Lombardo, were designed to highlight and deal with anxiety-provoking situations arising from staff/resident or inter-group competition, and intragroup dynamics, in order to help TC staff grow in ability, through improved awareness. Lombardo said the format adopted for the LfAs was akin to Harold Bridger's workshop model for organisational consultants, and LfAs are structured to help develop basic awareness of personal challenges to cope with the anxieties of those working in residential or semi-residential communities (Lombardo, 2014, p. 6). Kennard stated that the aim of the LfA workshops is not to replicate the TC experience, as the LLE does. Rather he said the LfA format "focuses on learning at first-hand about group dynamics and authority issues, influenced by the Tavistock inspired Leicester Conference format" and that the aim of the LfA workshops is "to create situations that maximise opportunities for staff to develop and deepen their understanding" and that this approach can be traced back to Bion's style of groupwork at the Tavistock Clinic [...] (Bion, 1961), which was aimed at educating professionals, not treating patients [...]" (Kennard, 2014, p. 75).

Lombardo observed that, during his last 16 years of LLE workshops, he has always been favourably struck by the enthusiasm these workshops evoke in participants, who often state, in feedback, how important this kind of learning has been for them, both as professionals and as people (Lombardo, 2014, pp. 6-7). Lombardo states "This is not a surprise, as new ways of experiencing oneself in roles different from the usual is enriching and adds to the personal awareness of one's own humanity" (Lombardo, 2014, p. 7). Lombardo also commented that his first participation as a member of an LLE in 1998 profoundly influenced the way he subsequently delivered the sociotherapy components of the TC programme where he worked (Lombardo, 2014, p. 7).

Lombardo stated – "I discovered how the group, as Foulkes and Anthony (1965) say, really "is" the actual therapist. I was also happily surprised to appreciate that the staff's holding function, in the here and now (both in the groups and in various other settings), did not interfere at all with the more natural way of being oneself: for example, while sharing cooking or chores or other tasks in daily living with other small group members". Lombardo concluded "The effect large and small groups have on people when their usual professional (or even parental and partner) roles are suspended for a three-day residential workshop is remarkable. In a nutshell, one could say that in the LLE model one replies to the question 'Who am I when I experience togetherness beyond my usual daily working and living roles?'" (Lombardo, 2014, p. 8).

The Living and Learning team have now undertaken further research with the LfA team, to compare the differences in process and outcome between the two different formats that Lombardo describes, and are currently also comparing LLEs in England and Italy (Rawlings, 2016, in progress).

## Conclusions

Transient experiential training courses have been provided for TC, and other professional, staff, and experts by experience, since 1978. More recently, some of these LLE workshops have been modified through the introduction of more direct teaching into the courses. The LLE training has also been provided in a number of other countries worldwide, but particularly over many years in Italy. These workshops are grounded in TC, and group analytic, theory.

The findings of one qualitative participant observation study (Rawlings, 2004, 2005) and one descriptive field study (Lombardo, 2014), together with extensive participant feedback, suggest these transient experiential training courses are effective learning and personal development

tools; use powerful processes which have a positive impact on participants, and their awareness of their own, and others, personal and interpersonal dynamics and behaviour; and produce effective interpersonal and enabling environments:

It was a very moving experience of coming together in a group and experiencing the emotion unfold in such an intense way very quickly. I didn't think this was possible in such a short space of time (Anonymous participant feedback).

Lombardo concluded that "the LLE format promotes intimacy, creativity, introspection and deep empathic interpersonal understanding, which help one cope better with personal uncertainties. LLE offers opportunities to meet others beyond their formal roles and discover what makes people feel connected and close to one another, even at work"; "If we ask what the final output of the TC organisation is, the answer is: change of its participants!" (Lombardo, 2014, p. 7).

These LLE courses have a wide ranging application and can be helpful for staff in any organisation to better understand their personal and working relationships which can lead to more effective teamworking and promote the development of EEs:

Team work and belongingness is very important to bring people together and to have the motivation to make things work (Anonymous participant feedback).

The value of the LLE is confirmed in participant feedback:

Immediately after the course, I felt impressive changes to the way I behave and feel at work (Anonymous participant feedback).

I have become a big fan of the LLE and shout about what a great experience it is, and encourage those who haven't been to go (Anonymous participant feedback).

Although there has been very little critical participant feedback, this belies the hard work and difficult dynamics that all members of transient TCs experience, and from which some painful personal confrontations emerge as part of the learning process. Occasionally, participants have found the experience too intense and have left early, but this is a rare occurrence. On a small number of occasions, people have arrived in a disturbed emotional state, and this has been difficult for the community to manage. Equally, some participants remain well-defended throughout the process and a few of these have reported that it has not been helpful, by giving low-numerical scores on their feedback. Of all the workshops we have run, only one has been problematic; what we learned from this is that we need to ensure that participants are clear beforehand about the sort of training that they are coming to, and particularly that it is experiential.

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### Further reading

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