



About Grief

and Creating Emergent Design Curriculum

a newsletter for people who care about self-esteem
Volume 12, Number 4 - Issue 70 - July-August, 1992

Dear Reader:

I had not expected this issue of **WE** to be about grief, but then, the things we grieve are often not expected.

In this **WE** two members of the Northwest Self-Esteem Facilitators group share information about a grief ritual held during a week long Facilitators training workshop. The third morning of the workshop we learned that staffer Marilyn Walby's sixteen-year-old cousin had been brutally murdered the night before. Shock, disbelief, anger, sadness.

What to do? Create an experience to support Marilyn's grief and help others learn more about grieving at the same time. This called for a change in schedule and an emergent design.

Marilyn Grevstad, who had come to the workshop with an assignment from a graduate class to observe an example of an emergent design workshop, recorded the process of the grief rituals. Mia Arends tape recorded and transcribed the guided imagery that was part of the design.

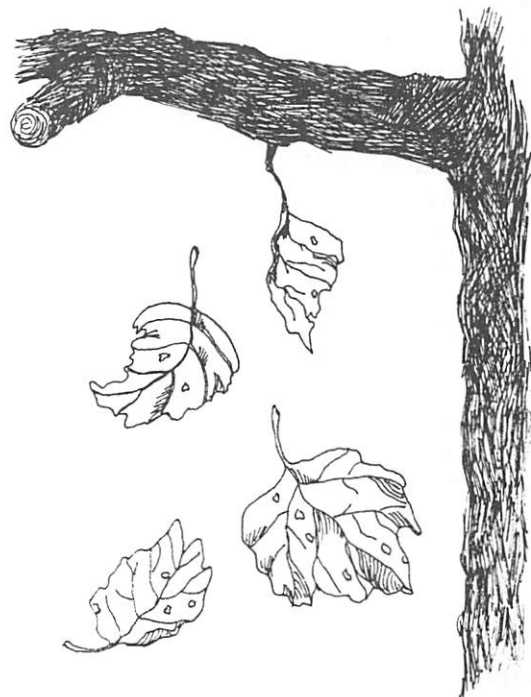
Pamela Searles reported another grief support experience - this one for two boys, ages six and seven, who lost their father.

We are sharing these happenings with you in the hope that you will be stimulated to think about the need for support while grieving, the healing power of rituals, and the many stages of grief - shock, denial, fear, anger, bargaining, sadness, depression, relief, coping skills, acceptance, integration.

The elements used in creating an emergent design are also listed. If you are not familiar with the process, you can look at the elements involved to help you identify the plan behind these emergent designs.

With respect,

Jean Hlsley Clarke





EMERGENT CURRICULUM ON GRIEVING

-by Marilyn Grevstad

On Tuesday night of the week long Self-Esteem Facilitators workshop led by Jean Illsley Clarke, Marilyn W., a staff member, received word that her 16-year-old cousin had been murdered.

The staff was told at our early morning meeting on Wednesday. We were all in attendance including Marilyn. We were shocked. Jean asked us to exaggerate what our bodies were feeling. I clenched my fists hard. Then she went around the circle and asked each of us to describe the emotion that went with our body feeling. Mine was anger. People also expressed fear, confusion, frustration and many other feelings.

Acknowledgment

After allowing us to acknowledge what was going on with us, Jean used the teachable moment for our learning. She explained that we had to be available to support Marilyn and also workshop participants who would be affected by this news. She guided us in making a personal contract with ourselves to take care of our emotions after that days workshop. We closed our eyes to visualize how we would do this. It was a good lesson for all of us about how leaders can honor their own feelings and also put them on hold so they can make themselves available to their students. After this short but effective lesson, we offered our support to Marilyn with hugs and affirmations. Jean appointed a support person to stay with Marilyn and we went on to experience a very intense emergent curriculum.

When the whole group assembled in our big meeting room, there were about 60 of us including participants and staff. Jean announced Marilyn's tragedy to the large group. They too were shocked. She talked about the damaging effects of secrets in groups and the importance of dealing with something like this in an open way.

Jean talked briefly about the way we often discount the need to mourn in our society and asked if any other people had experienced a loss



similar to Marilyn's. Two other people had lost someone by murder. Other people mentioned untimely or violent deaths, children kidnapped by a spouse, suicides and other tragic situations. Jean asked those people to step forward. Of course everyone was aware of the "right to pass" ground rule.

Jean briefly described the activities she had in mind. First she asked the rest of us to cluster around the people who had expressed their personal losses. We formed small groups of three or four or five so the grievors could share their stories in a safe and supportive atmosphere. The grieving person in my group wept and told us of the death of her mother a year ago. She told us how she had become paranoid about losing her six-year-old daughter. We listened and held her hands. Jean spent a brief time in each group.

Gifts

Next the small groups were invited to spend ten minutes making a gift to present to Marilyn to help her with her process of mourning. Some of us went to the materials room to make cards, a paper necklace, a flower bouquet, while others prepared songs and readings. When we had finished our offerings we congregated once again in the main meeting room where each small group presented their gifts to Marilyn. Then she left.

Jean mentioned the importance of rituals but the experiential learning was the most potent aspect for me. I certainly understand now, the importance of rituals to ease families and other groups through tough times and I learned it as a result of this emergent curriculum.

Visualization

Then Jean led us on a visualization. We had the right to pass and staff members were asked to pass on any deep grieving they might do so they could stay present for the participants. People were also given permission to participate on a level that suited them. In relaxed positions in a darkened room, we pictured the loss of someone or some dream. We imagined all the people we might want to support us during our mourning. We pictured these people bringing us offerings to help us through our grief. It was a moving experience and brought up a lot of sadness for some group members. When the visualization was over and our awareness was once more in the present, some members shared insights or learnings discovered during the visualization.

Group Process

At a later time during this memorable Wednesday we talked about the total learning experience from

the standpoint of leadership. Leadership of course was the focus of this workshop. Jean answered any questions people had about the process she had chosen to deal with this very difficult situation. She asked the group to recap the cycles (activities) we had just gone through. Then we brainstormed a list indicating the leadership aspects we had experienced during the morning. The list follows:

- Addressed the needs of the group as well as the focal person
- Enhanced the learning
- Built a solid structure to allow leader to move to meet the needs of the group
- Acknowledged the reality of what was happening
- Acknowledged that each person is in a different place in his personal story i.e. cycles of grieving
- At this point Jean used the teachable moment to mention how mourning is handled differently in different cultures with a story about Hmong people she has worked with
- Acknowledged the secret
- Acknowledged the need to grieve
- Offered a cyclical way to address different levels of grieving
- Offered permission to pass on the activities

Personal Contracts

Jean shared with us her own process in this matter. She told how she had heard about the tragedy and thought about what to do. She stayed in a leadership role by contracting with herself to deal with her own reactions later. She told the staff right away. She led the staff in making the same kind of contract she had made. At this point in her discussion, Jean did a theory piece with the whole group about how the nurturing parent part of us can contract with the kid in us to take care of feelings later. But you must keep the contract you have made with yourself. As a leader if you take care of what comes up for you and are clear about your goals you can still accomplish what you need to.

Rationale

She explained her reasons for choosing this particular way of addressing Marilyn's and the rest of the group's feelings:

- The group was very sophisticated, emotionally stable and self-knowledgeable, and they had bonded well with each other
- It was Wednesday, more than half way through our week together
- It seemed to Jean that dealing with Marilyn's grief and others' unresolved grief was a way we could clear the air and go on with the learning we needed to accomplish

- It could also be useful as a teaching situation about grief, rituals, and leadership in emotional situations

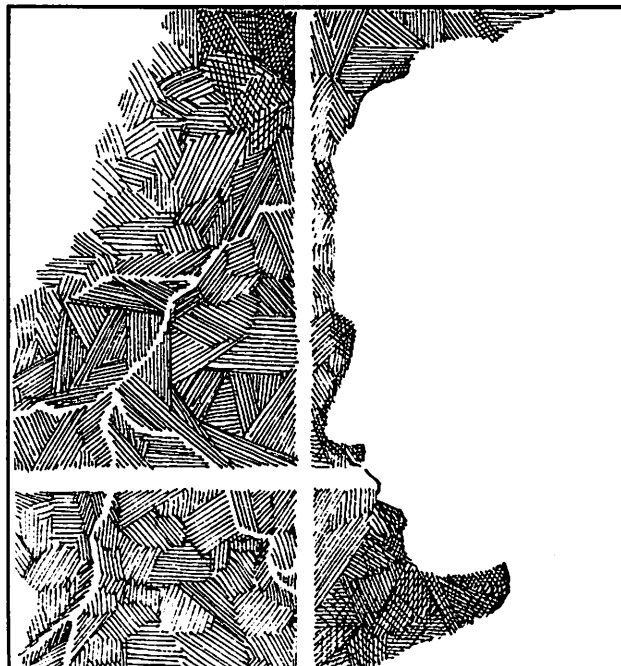
Another choice could have been to contain the issue by giving it less time and by asking people to deal with their own grief later, not in the group setting.

Evaluation

When the time in our session arrived to share resentments and appreciations, Jean made a decision to pass on resentments after all the mourning we had done during our time together. We moved right into celebrations. Many of the celebrations were a direct result of our morning's work. Several people celebrated their ability to think for themselves. Several people reported clearing things up from their personal grieving process and several people mentioned the psychological safety of this environment. Jean asked for the names of good therapists who worked with grieving. She requested that people write the names down on a large piece of newsprint. Thus ended our unexpected class on grieving rituals and leadership.

We will never know if it was the best choice for dealing with this issue, but it seemed a sound decision at the time. It was certainly an excellent example of addressing where the group was at that time in that particular place, and allowing a meaningful curriculum to emerge from participants here-and-now needs.

Participants were asked to include their evaluation of this experience in the written assessment following the workshop.



Guided Imagery

On

Grief

Wednesday,
June 24, 1992
Seattle, WA



*-by Jean Illsley Clarke
transcribed by Mia Arends*

You can
feel all
of your
feelings

As we helped someone else grieve this morning, you may have recalled a time when you had a loss and did not get the support you needed or wanted. This guided imagery will let you create for yourselves an image of what should have happened for you at that time when you first experienced your grief. What I will do in the guided imagery is invite you to first visualize the people you would like to have support you, and then to visualize them coming to you and hearing your pain, and then to visualize the gifts you would have liked to have had. If that feels and seems like something that would be helpful to you, you can have that now, even though you may not have had it earlier.

If some of you don't have a loss or don't care to do the imagery, I invite you to listen and to think about how you can create healing images for people, not necessarily about death. There are many losses, like lost dreams and lost expectations about a child, and lost expectations about our relationships and so forth. There might be some of you who would like to use this time while I'm leading this one to create your own imagery to use in another setting.

Will those of you who are going to do this guided imagery make yourselves comfortable in the way that is comfortable for you? You may want to lie down, you may want to get a cushion.

As you are getting your body ready and closing your eyes and starting to breathe deeply, think about some of the messages that told you not to grieve. Think about times when people ignored your grief need. Think about some of the unhelpful things people said, like "Are you still doing that?" or "When are you gonna be through with that?" or "Well, my loss was bigger than your loss!" or "The statute of limitations has run out on that."

Realize that we live in a culture that, because it doesn't know how to handle grief well, tells us to please not have it. If you ever picked up any of those messages and thought you should believe them, forgive yourself for that right now. Bathe yourself in forgiveness. Then let come into your mind the awareness that there are many stages of grief, and there are some griefs that are with us always, that long years after, we may revisit them for a short time with a poignant feeling. Then be aware that, when we have allowed ourselves to feel all of our feelings, we can get to a time when that poignant feeling is one of brief longing but no longer one of deep pain. Give yourself permission to see that in the future without having to hurry toward it.

And now think of the particular grief you are going to mourn today. Just one. One. And now be in a room like this one, not this one, but a room or some other space that you know and that is large enough and comfortable enough. I will call your space a room. Look around the room. Smell the room. Hear the sounds in your room. And now see there the people whom you want there. Maybe they are people who did support you at the time. You can also put there some people you wanted support from but who didn't know how to give it, because today they will know how. They will be able to come to you fully and give you what you need.

So see your people.

And now from a distance, looking at your room with your people and yourself, hear that you are telling them your story about your grief, and that this time you are telling them all the parts of the story... and that there is enough time... and that they are attending... and that you are telling the things that before you didn't remember to tell... or you thought it wasn't safe to tell. And so look at your room from a distance and see yourself telling with people listening, and notice they are there as long as you need them.

And now see that quite a time has passed, and they have listened to your whole story. You have told your whole story. And now see them make clusters. Different clusters than we made this morning, because all of those people are fully there for you. See them making clusters of three or four. Feel the one person you chose to sit beside you while those clusters go off to decide upon their gifts to you. Feel the comfort of the person beside you. Know deep in your bones that grieving is not to be done alone. Feel that person beside you.

Now notice that the clusters are starting to come back. Some of them have things in their hands that you can't see yet. And now you are standing up and the first cluster is approaching you. See who is in it... take the things they are offering... let the other clusters come in the order in which they want to come.

And now notice whether all of the groups have come to you or whether there are still more groups to come. As you notice that, look beyond your groups and notice that there are more comforting groups out there, more than you could count, more who are there ready to hear your story, and ready to gift you. Many more than you knew were there. More than you can see...

And now know that this is your room and these are your people... and these are your gifts... and you can bring the gifts back here with you... But this is your room, and it will always be there. You can return to it later as many times as you want to, and the people will be there with their gifts. So, know that now the room is yours and you can visit it any time, before you go to sleep at night, when you are on a walk, when you are having some time alone, when you're by a very good friend who will sit quietly by you while you visit your room. You can go there as many times as you want to. You deserve this comfort.

And now hold the gifts, see the gifts, hear the gifts, bring the gifts back here with you as you say goodbye to your room for now and slowly move yourself fully back into this room, with me, Jean, on this Wednesday.

All right. Stretch gently or give yourself a little shake. Move into your adult ego state. Stand up, straighten your back. Tell me as soon as you're ready to answer a few questions.

Grief Support for Young Boys

*-Summer, 1992
Pamela Searles, Facilitator, CAP*

These two boys, age 6 and 7 were members of a chemical dependency prevention group run by Children Are People Support Groups, Inc.

One week Sam and Tim (names changed) came to group and reported that their father was missing. We group facilitators had seen this on the news and we explained to the other children what that meant. "No one knows where he is. The police are looking for him."

We discussed what the children could and could not do to help. We asked how they felt and we named feelings such as helpless, powerless, curious, sad, afraid, mad. Days later the news that the dad's body had been found was reported on the radio. We went to the boys' home bringing gifts - the games **Ups and Downs With Feelings** by Carole Gesme and the book **When Someone Special Dies** by Marge Heegard for Sam and Tim, and **Life is Goodbye, Life is Hello** by Alla Renee Bozarth for mom. We spent time with the children sitting on the couch and looking at pictures of their father - family pictures. The boys told us stories about things they had done together.

We helped the boys write a letter to dad. Tim was very angry. He said, "We don't need a drug addict in this family anyway." Sam showed us the model airplane he had made with his dad and said he wanted to give it to his dad to take to heaven with him. All their feelings were acknowledged, accepted, and validated. We assured them that anything they wrote in their letters would be just for their dad - no one else, not even mom (we had her approval).

At the next support group meeting, the boys told other group members that their dad was dead. Facilitators were prepared with copies from Heegard's book for the children to use for drawing and discussions about death. The children were shocked, curious, scared, empathetic, stunned, and in denial. Some of their comments were, "If my dad died, I would sit by the window every night and wait for him to come back." "He isn't dead, he can't be dead, no he's not." "What happened, how did he die?" "Who found him?" "Why did he go to Chicago?"

We facilitators again accepted all feelings and validated the reality of the death. Other group members were asked about deaths in their lives. They told about grandparents, pets, and other children. The group sat quietly the rest of the evening and drew in Heegard's book and talked.

We facilitators attended the funeral. The boys' mom let the children participate in the planning and the first song, requested by the children, was **Jesus Loves Me**. The children's letters and mementos (airplane, pictures, etc.) were taken to the grave sight and buried with the dad.

The boys did not attend the next two group meetings but did attend the final meeting. Their father's death was an open part of the group meeting, not uncomfortable to talk about, not a secret. We asked the boys if they had ridden their bikes out to their dad's grave. Yes, they had brought flowers with their mom. They were celebrating dad's birthday with peach pie (his favorite) after group that night.

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GAMES

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RELIGIOUS GRIEF RESOURCES

- NATIONAL CHILDHOOD GRIEF INSTITUTE
6200 Colonial Way • Minneapolis, MN 55436 • (612) 832-9286
- RAINBOWS FOR ALL GOD'S CHILDREN
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- MULTNOMAH BOOKS
10209 SE Division Street • Portland, Oregon 97266
(800) 547-5890
 - It Must Hurt A Lot
 - Please Come Home

FOR A CHILD WHO IS APPREHENSIVE ABOUT STARTING AT A NEW SCHOOL:

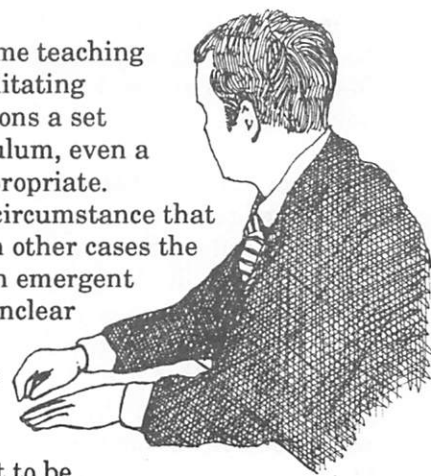
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Creating an Emergent Design Curriculum



For some teaching or facilitating situations a set curriculum, even a

flexible one, is not appropriate. Sometimes there is a circumstance that must be addressed. In other cases the leader chooses to do an emergent design because he is unclear about the goals or experience level of the group. In either instance, creating an emergent design is not to be confused with "winging it" which usually implies lack of preparation. In fact, emergent design takes far more knowledge, experience, and preparation than any set model. Intuition and clear cognitive organization are both involved.



Elements of an Emergent Design

1. Assess the needs of the group.
2. Be clear about the contract - what will be included and what will not.
3. Be clear about what you know and what you don't know.
4. Agree on ground rules.
5. Provide structure for the workshop - create a meaningful learning sequence.
6. Use learners as resources.
7. Use teachable moments.
8. Evaluate the results.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

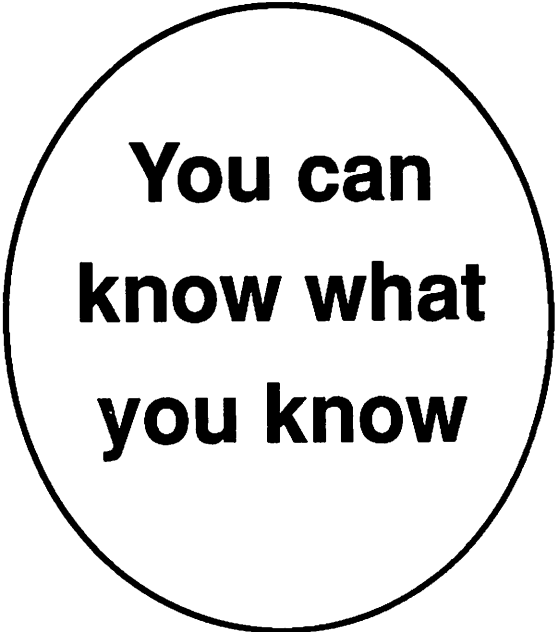
Look at the following article about an emergent design workshop and see if you can identify a reference to each of the eight elements listed above. Then do the same for the two designs on grief.

Who Me Lead A Group?

An Emergent Curriculum Workshop

-by Marilyn Grevstad

"Who Me Lead A Group?" was planned to be an emergent design workshop. There were about 25 participants. Most of us knew each other but had not seen each other for almost a year. We entered the room which was set up with a circle of chairs with refreshments available just inside the door. We immediately engaged in greeting and reconnecting with each other. The leader, who starts her workshops on time, asked the group to sit down. They continued chatting. She asked again. They ignored her. She started making plans out loud. No one listened. She said "I'm going to start the workshop now," and started. No one heard her. Then she walked around to each conversing group and whispered, "Will you whisper?" Everyone started to whisper, heard her ask people to sit down, quickly finished their conversations and sat down. Then she started. The opening exercise allowed us to connect and share with a small group of people.



**You can
know what
you know**

She used this situation later at a teachable moment, telling us what she had tried, discussing our need to reconnect with each other and explaining that being critical of us would not have helped. She recognized our need to talk to each other and also the fact that she was the leader, and responsible for starting. This was a meaningful example of using creativity to provide structure to this particular group at this particular time, and it was effective.

Together we adopted ground rules for our workshop. On a sign was printed:

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY
RIGHT TO PASS
ALL BELIEFS HONORED
MUTUAL RESPECT
CONFIDENTIALITY

The participants were resources to each other when the leader asked volunteers to say what each ground rule meant to them. After asking if there were additional ground rules we wanted to adopt, she asked for our agreement to use the rules in our workshop. We agreed.

Goals were set by the group in true emergent curriculum form. The leader asked members what they wanted from the workshop, and wrote these on a large piece of newsprint. She did mini-teachings on some of the items as they came up because those items could be addressed quickly and probably wouldn't fit well into the design later.

One woman wanted to learn how to add humor to her presentations and the leader clearly stated, "Humor is very important. I can't teach you that." Then she explained how that aspect of leadership was natural to her, but she wasn't able to teach it.

The leader looked at the flyer (which is an informal contract that leaders have with their group) and stated that she would be covering all of the items listed there except the affirmation exercise. She gave us another source for getting that information. She let us know the sequence in which she would teach the other items on the list.

The first item we addressed was the fear or lack of confidence we feel in leading large groups. The leader made a short theory presentation about scripts learned when we were young. Then we participated in small groups and gained understanding of how our past learnings hindered our feelings of confidence and success. In the small groups we acted as resources and teachers to each other.

The leader continued to teach from the goals we had set down at the beginning of the workshop.

We ended with two types of evaluations. People told what things about the workshop were helpful, and what things might be changed. After that we shared our resentments and appreciations. Resentments and appreciations might be direct effects of the workshop or might be of a more general nature. They are all OK to say.

The result was that we not only felt good about what we had learned, but we also felt good about what we already knew.

Opening Activity

For focusing on Grief

- Hand out name tags.
- Choose a partner. Make a name tag for her and ask her to tell you about one way she has offered help to someone who was grieving or one way she wishes someone had helped her when she was grieving.
- Introduce your partner and tell the group one way she has offered help or one way she wishes she had been helped with grieving if she is willing for you to share that information.

GRIEF

Closing Activity

That encourages people to pay attention to the needs of people who are grieving

At the end of the meeting, briefly review the activities of the meeting.

- Ask those people who are willing to tell ways they take care of themselves when they are grieving.
- Ask for Resentments. Listen to resentments, do not defend or explain.
- Ask for Appreciations.

Edited by Jean Illeley Clarke
Designed by Krentz Art/Advertising
WE

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or in support groups.

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