

AN EXPERIMENT IN SELF-DETERMINED FEES

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RESUMO:

Dois workshops de dezesseis dias-residência, na abordagem centrada-no-cliente foram financiados por matrículas (baseadas na possibilidade financeira de cada indivíduo) que foram estipuladas pelos próprios participantes. Embora as taxas variassem de zero até 5 vezes a taxa média, todas as despesas com o workshop foram pagas através das matrículas dos participantes. E ainda mais, estes eram admitidos independentemente do muito ou do pouco que se comprometessem a pagar. São apresentadas as reações dos participantes assim como uma análise, pelo staff, do experimento financeiro. A prática de workshop com taxas auto-determinadas foi considerada viável e vantajosa para financiar workshops para pessoas de uma gama bem variada de meios econômicos. Esta prática continuou, com resultados semelhantes, por uma série de workshops entre 1974 e 1980.

In the summer of 1974, we completed an unusual experiment in the financial support of two seventeen-day residential workshops titled, the Client-Centered Approach: an Expanding Process.* The content and leadership approach of these workshops were new and interesting in themselves, but only the financial approach will be presented here. We believe

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(**) For information on the workshops themselves, see Wood (1984) and Rogers (1977). For recent discussions of fees in psychotherapy, see Yokan & Berman (1984) and Wood (1982).

that our problems, our approach to the situation, our risks, our mistakes, and the generally successful results of the fee-setting experiment, warrant a report to the professional public. Briefly, what we attempted was to have individuals set their own tuition fees in the light of our expressed commitment to having individuals' payments somewhat proportional to their available resources, and with their own knowledge of their income, financial resources and special circumstances. The fact that the experiment "worked" may encourage others to try similar plans.

The problem of the financing of personal growth experiences and other educational ventures, of private psychological and psychiatric practice and the mental health field generally — fields where human concerns are ostensibly more important than financial gain — presents a continuing and perplexing issue. We believe that as finances are generally handled, with set fees (with some scholarships or special discounts), an inequality of opportunity among persons with different levels of material resources is fostered. Such an inequality is often seen as oppressive to those deprived of the opportunities and that is particularly invidious in the fields we have just mentioned. Further, we find such discrimination oppressive to everyone, "rich" and "poor" alike. It prevents an opportunity for human integration.

It was our aim to try to find a workable way to begin now to eliminate the differential treatment of the materially affluent and not so affluent, without depending on outside support or waiting for a complete alteration of the culture's socio-economic system. We wished to act on our belief that material affluence and personal richness are in no way directly correlated.

Two of our staff members had worked with Greenhouse, Incorporated, Cambridge, Mass. — a non-profit organization working toward the integration of personal growth and social change. Their goal is indicated in the statement, "We envision a society where cooperation, interdependence and community replace competitiveness, individualism and alienation." The members of Greenhouse, after much philosophical discussion, had adopted a sliding fee-scale for their activities based on the assumption that payment for

human services should be proportional to one's financial resources.

This experience at Greenhouse which had been relatively successful was an encouragement to us as we worked out a method which goes beyond a sliding scale of fees, a method which makes the fee dependent upon the private calculations of the participant him/herself.

The advantages that we saw in the proposed method were that it was, in the first place, socially just and would help to mitigate the inequalities of the present system. Of equal importance was the fact that we hoped it would automatically make for a wider spectrum of individual participants: young, middle-aged, and older men and women with varied professional and personal values and commitments, "straight" members of society and persons from the "counter-culture." It definitely proved to have that effect.

In consulting with others, we were told that the plan was idealistic but would not and could not work. The major point made by those we consulted was that people have a fairly definite notion of what a thing is worth. If it is "worth" \$100, they're not about to pay \$200 for the experience. To them it seems silly. It is as though the affluent person would be asked to voluntarily pay \$10 for a book, for example, where the less affluent would be told that he/she should pay \$3, where the actual "worth" of the book is \$5. With such advice it was with considerable trepidation that we approached our experiment.

PRACTICAL ASPECTS

In the brochure we sent out to potential applicants, the following statement was included:

"The Fee

"The fee for room and board will be paid directly to the facility which houses the workshop. We have endeavoured to choose accommodations which are comfortable but not 'plush', which provide a special setting but are not difficult to reach.

"With the tuition fee we are attempting something new, but something which is definitely in

accord with the philosophy underpinning a client-centered approach. It also reflects the same concern with social issues that, in part, is the motivation for these workshops. The tuition fee will be based on participants' ability to pay. Some persons will pay up to three or four times the average fee, some will pay much less."

With the brochure were included two application blanks, one asking for facts of background, training and other personal information, the other being a "Financial Statement: Part Two of the Application." Since this is a crucial part of the experiment, it is quoted here in full.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT PART TWO OF THE APPLICATION

This statement is to be mailed to me, Carl Rogers, Client-Centered Approach, 1125 Torrey Pines Road, La Jolla, CA 92037. Mark it **Confidential**. It, your tuition fee, and your check for same, will be seen only by me and my secretary, who is accustomed to highly confidential material.*

If after reading what follows you are out of sympathy with the whole idea, simply write a note to that effect, and I will use my best judgment in setting your fee and notifying you.

Carl R. Rogers

THE RATIONALE FOR THE QUESTIONS

It is expensive to plan, organize, arrange for and implement a workshop of this kind. The usual answer to this dilemma is to charge a rather high fee to all, thus offering learning experiences only to the relatively affluent. We would like to break this pattern. As a part of the whole client-centered approach, we look with respect on every individual, accepting

(*) Carl Rogers had agreed to work for expenses only so the staff considered him less biased in his judgment of the reasonableness of a fee.

him** where he** is. So we want the tuition fee to reflect this view. It has the advantage to the group itself of broadening the socio-economic and educational mix. It enhances the impact of any learnings by making them available to all groups in society, instead of — like private practice — being available only to the middle and upper classes. We hope to cut through the present vicious circle of high training costs, and hence high fees for services.

HOW YOU MAY DETERMINE YOUR TUITION FEE

To keep the Workshop solvent, we must average approximately \$350 tuition per person. If any money remains, it will go toward planning future similar workshops.

There are several questions for you to ask yourself in arriving at your fee.

1. Can my organization pay my fee? Where the organization with which you are affiliated is able to pay your tuition, the question is easy. The tuition fee from an established institution is \$600. If you are paying the fee yourself, read on!

2. What is my total usable yearly income? So that we all use the same data, what is meant here for most of us is total usable income (line 55 of U.S. Income Tax Form 1040) minus your federal tax. But for those who have used "tax shelters" it would be different. Please calculate this total usable income for the past year carefully and fairly. It is the income which is available for all of your expenses (including other taxes), after you have paid your federal income tax.

3. What is my total financial worth? Those who have an ample backlog of financial resources can pay more. Those who have no such resources will be limited to considering their income.

Now consider the following table of what seems to be a fair tuition for the Workshop based on income considerations.

(**) Here we intended the words "him" and "he" to mean "him/her" and "she/he". Since we learned again at these workshops that language can exclude persons as powerfully as lack of resources, in the future, we paid more attention to our written material.

If your usabel yearly income is:	Your fair share of the tuition might be:
\$50,000 and up	– \$1500 – 2500 or more
40,000 – 50,000	– 1200 – 1500
30,000 – 40,000	– 900 – 1200
20,000 – 30,000	– 600 – 900
15,000 – 20,000	– 450 – 600
10,000 – 15,000	– 300 – 450
5,000 – 10,000	– 150 – 300
Under \$5,000	– 50 – 150

STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE APPLICANT

I have given consideration to the above, and have checked the income range in which I belong. I have considered whether my special circumstances make it possible for me to pay more than is asked. I have also considered whether my circumstances are such that I must pay less than suggested.

Having given careful thought to all of the above, I believe I am paying my appropriate share by paying a total tuition fee of \$ _____, which includes the \$100 deposit.

If accepted in the Workshop, I will be prepared to pay the amount over and above the \$100 deposit, either in advance of my coming, or, at the very latest, upon my arrival.

Signed _____

Address _____

Phone(s) _____

Please print your name _____

We would greatly appreciate your reactions to this manner of setting the tuition fee. Please use the space below and/or a separate sheet.

THE APPLICATION PERIOD

Since the Workshop had no support other than fees, the staff was very aware of the gamble we were taking in this

fee policy. We sent out the brochures and applications with apprehension, excitement, and hope about equally mixed. As the weeks went by, our hopes rose and fell with each successive group of applicants. Since we acted on the applications without regard to fees in groups of ten or a dozen as they came in, it was Carl's job to inform the staff of the average fee for those who we had accepted. It started out fairly well. Then, with one group of nine, the average fee was about \$125 and our hearts sank. Then the next group averaged well over \$300 and our hopes went up. Our mixed feelings continued through the whole experience right up to the very end. When six financial statements in a row came in with zero tuition fee, being a very fair fee under the circumstances (according to Carl), it looked as though the experiment might go down the drain. Then, the next applicant set a fee of \$1,000.

By the time we had closed the applications it was clear that we were coming out fairly well. Each time that a person decided, because of illness or other circumstances, to withdraw his/her application, the average would change to some extent. Since we accepted slightly over 130 applicants to the two workshops, our uncertainty continued over a long period.

SOME GENERAL FACTS

1. The reaction to this method of fee setting on the part of the participants was overwhelmingly positive. There were no clearly negative reactions expressed — before, during, or after the workshop.

2. We came out satisfactorily with an average tuition fee of about \$270. This was not quite the \$350 we had estimated we needed, but we discovered that we kept our expenses considerably under our budget, so we were able to end the workshops with a small balance.

3. We were able to make all our decisions on applicants **without any reference to their suggested fee**. All five staff members passed on every applicant. Carl was the only one who even had access to the financial applications. He says that in making his ratings of the applicants, he rarely remembered the fee the individual had suggested. Initially we had thought

that we might be forced to take fees into consideration somewhere along the line in order to balance our budget. This did not prove necessary and the amount of tuition played no part in the acceptance or rejection of any applicant. (The parent of one rejected applicant, who had set a low tuition fee, offered to greatly increase the tuition, but was told that the fee had no bearing on our decision, and would have none.)

4. The financial applications seemed very honest as far as one could tell from internal evidence. This will be illustrated in the reactions given below.

5. The spread of these self-determined fees was very great – from zero to \$1400. It is clear that the participants really responded to the challenge.

THE STATISTICS

Table I shows that the tuition fees paid by participants were sharply skewed toward the lower end. The median fee was approximately \$255, but the mean was \$270. (Eleven of the 130 paid zero tuition and did not make the \$100 deposit.) Clearly the experiment would have failed had it not been for socially minded affluent participants.

The age distribution in Table II shows that the workshops were largely a young group, but the range was from 20 to 67, with a mean and median both falling at approximately age 35. There were very few non-white participants though the number of males and females was about the same. We believe the spread in age and economic status in these workshops was unusually wide.

PARTICIPANTS' PERSONAL REACTION TO SELF-DETERMINED FEES

A. The very positive reactions.

"Really neat – right on !"

"Excellent and equitable."

TABLE I
TUITION PAID BY PARTICIPANTS CLIENT CENTERED APPROACH
WORKSHOPS 1974
N = 13C

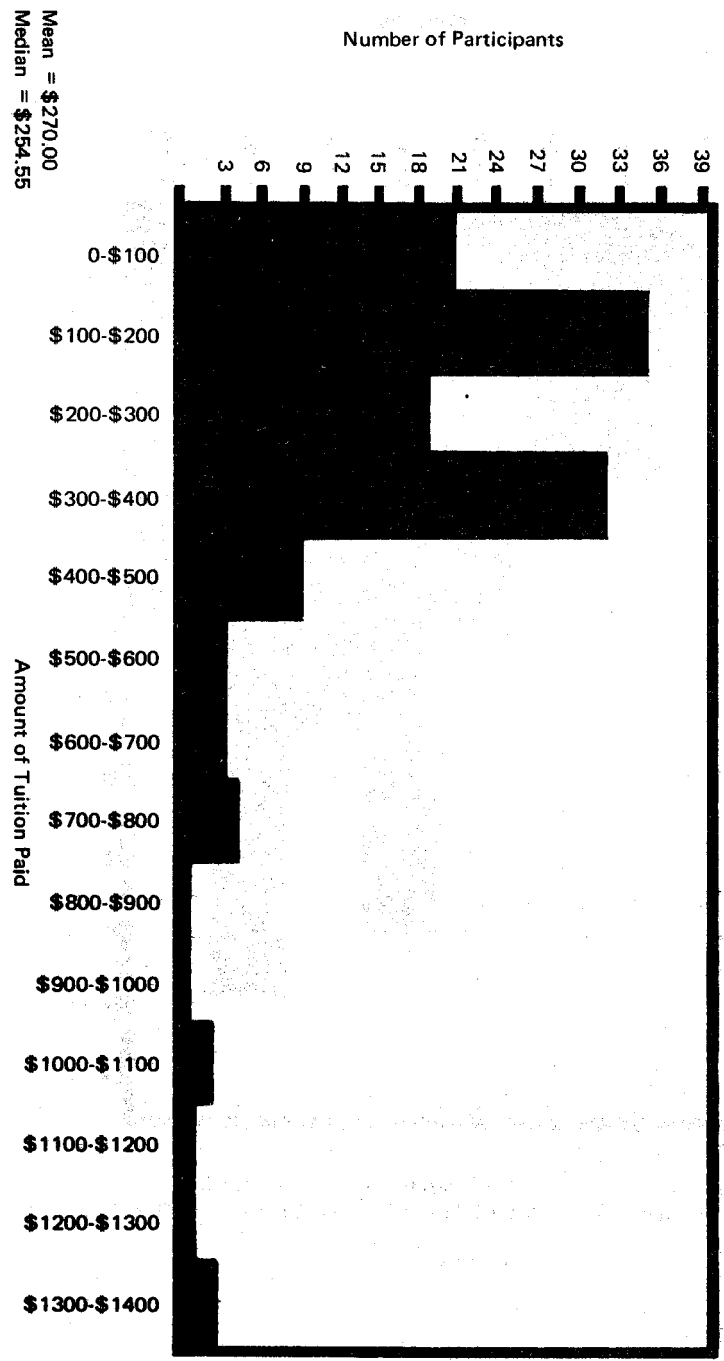
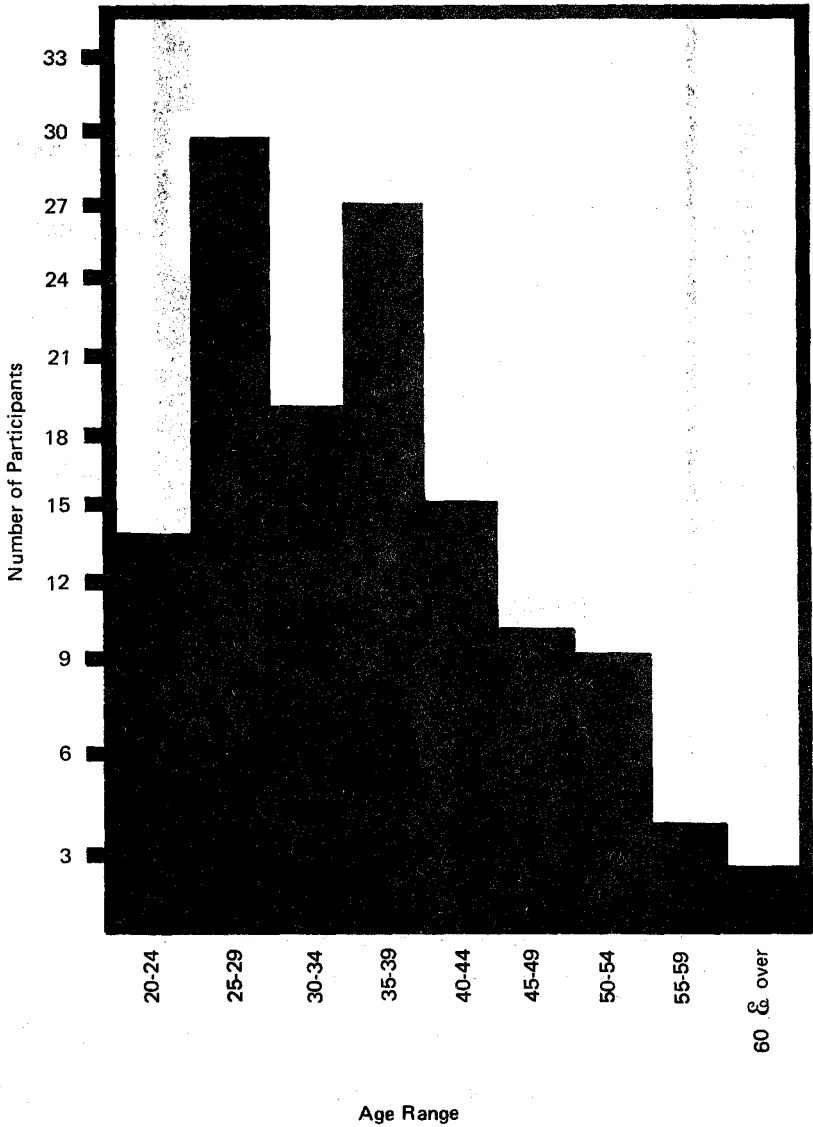


TABLE II

**AGE DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS CLIENT CENTERED
APPROACH WORKSHOPS 1974**

N = 130



"I felt a sense of being trusted and respected as I read the information on fees. The real meaning of the client-centered philosophy and trust in responsibility is present on the page and I feel excited by it."

"Considering attracting the best possible participant mix and the trust I have for the leadership of the workshops, I can readily accept this fee structure. It's also something I would like to see explored by the group."

"It is a very valuable way to open the workshop to those who could not financially afford it otherwise. I wonder why you make it so confidential? Is it shameful to pay very little? I wonder also who will pay \$2500. I hope there will be some."

B. THOSE FOR WHOM IT WAS A WORTHWHILE STRUGGLE.

"I find that I have mixed reactions, both thinking this to be a positive way of respecting each person's circumstance and feeling uneasy with respect to the responsibility for my own evaluation. I am in touch with feelings of wanting to carry my own weight, not to have to be subsidized by anyone else's ability to pay more (pride). The softer side of me feels compassion for both my situation and the needs of the program and the other participants."

"I think this system is a very good one. At the same time, however, I have a strong need of wanting to explain why I have chosen such a small amount to pay. It looks so stingy and poor and this does not correspond to the worth that coming to your workshop has for me. The reason is that..."

"I believe this is the only way to handle a situation like this and though I am not used to it and it hurts to pay more than the minimum that would be established in the conventional manner of charging, I feel good about it. I sure hope that it works and that it allows you to continue operating in this fashion. When writing these lines I had not decided on

the exact quantity I wished to pay and the more I write the higher my thoughts go so I decided to stop now."

"I think this is a tremendously fair approach although I am sure it must be difficult for some to honestly compute."

"I appreciate the plan and the philosophy which it reflects but still find myself somewhat embarrassed at needing to request such a large supplement."

"My first reaction was 'That's great.' Then when I began to figure out, I considered a little dishonesty, then decided on \$ _____ which was the lowest I could pay and stay honest. After two days of thinking (and some squirming) I decided on \$ _____, a larger amount. It was an interesting experience. I feel good about the idea and (now that the decision-making is over) good about the whole deal."

"I've spent several hours examining my values and professional aspirations. In addition I spelled out a written rationale for my circumstances and my decision. Suddenly I had the realization that you asked for a specific rate range but you asked for no explanation or guarantee. I feel your approach is meaningful in the truest sense of the client-centered approach. I feel that you trust me to be responsible for my own actions. You allowed me to choose in a way comfortable for me. I've grown and feel increasingly excited about me simply by applying for this program. Many thanks."

C. THE SPECIAL PROBLEM OF THE PARTNER.

"I agree with your goal of making the workshop available to people from all economic levels but there is one factor which perhaps should be considered also. That is the position of the married woman whose husband's annual income may be fairly high but she may feel that the expense of this workshop is a personal luxury which it is unrealistic to ask that he finance. That is true in my own case and for that reason I am (doing some special things) in order to pay for my tuition. I feel that I want this to be my own experience in every sense and

I think this may be true for other women in the same situation."

Another woman cannot be directly quoted, but she too is wrestling with the problem of what to do when the wife has very little income and the husband has a considerable income.

D. REACTIONS FROM THE MORE AFFLUENT

"I am very impressed with your attempt to allow me to be self-directing. In my case your risk paid off. I hope you have similar success with all your other applicants. I feel good about my part in this."

"I like it very much; indeed I have begun to use it in my own practice."

E. REACTIONS OF THE LESS AFFLUENT

"My reactions to a sliding scale are 'about time' or 'thank goodness' or similar exclamations. Many people like myself see the great value of workshops but unfortunately often times pass up these wonderful experiences because of our financial status. I'm glad to see an attempt being made at solving this unfair dilemma."

Two or three people were unable to pay the average, but suggested monthly payments over the next year or more until the amount is met.

"Fair it is! I value the focus on individual needs and abilities. I don't have to be a member of a certain 'class' to be considered and can be responsible in my transaction with you. Very nice."

"The rationale for the policy makes a great deal of sense in terms of broadening the base of participation. I personally would like to be able to pay the full fee and feel a little uncomfortable about others offsetting the cost of my participation. Perhaps in the future I can do the same for someone else."

F. FROM THE "COUNTER-CULTURE".

Here is an honest comment of a sort which may well be raised even more frequently in the future:

"It makes me uncomfortable. I would prefer to pay about what you estimate is the average per person to keep the workshop solvent. I could earn more money if I were willing to work at some conventional paid occupation but I work until I have a little money ahead, then I live on that while I write or play and when it's gone I go back to work in one way or another. So I earn less than I am capable of earning. However I have a short-lived attention span for the nine-to-five work world."

Finally, there were some reactions that had a distinct element of irony such as this one from an applicant with an income under \$5,000 who was worried about the hardships the guidelines might impose on those with plenty of money ! This person concludes, however, "It seems fair, especially if the persons with high incomes are able to have their business or their organizations pay their tuition."

THE REACTIONS IN THE WORKSHOP

Because we supposed that there would be a good deal of discussion of this rather unusual method of fee setting, a careful report had been prepared for the participants somewhat similar to much of the material given above and including most of the personal reactions quoted. This was distributed on the second day of the workshop.

To the surprise of the staff, fees were never a topic of discussion, either in small groups or in the large community meetings in either workshop, though we certainly encouraged free discussion of every conceivable topic. Related questions regarding economic status and the plight of some who did not have enough money to buy food at the food services were openly and freely discussed.

Two possible explanations have been suggested. One explanation is that participants were thoroughly satisfied with the fee-setting procedure and that the report on the fees had answered any questions they might have had.

Another possible explanation is that this kind of financial topic is so sensitive that the workshop community avoided all discussion. The memo, which the staff released to encourage discussion, then may have helped to bring early closure to the issue. As mentioned earlier, there were very lively encounters among community members (including staff) around the problems of some persons not being able to buy food. In light of this second hypothesis it could be that some of the feelings around the subject of unequal affluence and tuition fees were expressed in the food issue.

Of course, there are many possible explanations and though conjecturing maybe useful, it is our real hope to learn more about the personal feelings of the affluent and the non-affluent regarding self-determined fees, scholar-ships, staff salaries,* and related financial issues as we work more with self-determined tuition programs. We are pleased, for now, to know that a major educational program can be financed in this manner. If such a way of financing educational programs can lead us to better understand some of our feelings and thoughts about money and its use, that will be a worthwhile added benefit.

SOME COMMENTS

Carl Rogers has made a few comments about our experience.

"Part way through the application period, I realized that we had made a mistake by not permitting any amount over \$350 to be made as a gift to the Center for Studies of the

(*) The staff in these workshops attempted to set their salaries in a similar self-directed manner. Though their method of arriving at a figure was not so refined as the fee-setting, the staff accepted salaries based on each one's means and current needs.

Person (a non-profit organization), which would then exempt that amount from income taxes. People who were paying a large fee were so informed when they arrived. For others, the fee could be claimed as tax exempt since it was for professional education, but many of our participants were not professional people.

"I believe that the whole philosophy of the Person-centered approach is one of the major factors that made this mode of fee-setting successful. It was evident in many of the responses that individuals were willing to set what they felt was an honest fee because they believed it was consistent with the whole philosophy of the Person-centered approach. They trusted the staff to operate on that philosophy. I am not at all sure that this mode of approach would succeed if this trust were not present.

"As I went over the financial sheets and the letters which often accompanied them, I came to realize that percentage-of-income is not a suitable yardstick. Persons of low income are often willing to pay 5% or more of that income for a workshop that they want very much. High income persons would undoubtedly be reluctant to pay an equivalent percentage. It is clear to me that percentage is not the way that we really think about such things and yet our guidelines were stated on a percentage basis. I am not quite sure what an alternative approach might be.

"It became clear to me, as I went over the letters, that we had asked a good deal from the participants, especially those who were able to pay more than the average fee. Although they were choosing their own fee, in another sense they were being asked to pay the tuition for individuals whom they did not know and where the only fact available to them was that these individuals wished to attend a workshop of this sort. It called for a great deal of belief in an unknown group and in the worth of individuals in that group for applicants to break the norm of paying a fixed fee and pay an amount higher than average. It is somehow a trust that the group is worthwhile, and hence the workshop is worth more than what most others would be paying.

"Though the financial sheet clearly called for the applicant to indicate the level of his usable income, quite a few did not so indicate and hence I was unable to assess the fairness of their fee. Possibly this was simply an oversight on their part, but since the instructions were quite clear, I suspect that it is due to the fact that people are very reluctant indeed to state their income level. It is my speculation that people would be about as willing to answer intimate questions about their sex lives as to indicate the level of their annual income. With this in mind it seems even more remarkable that wherever the information given was adequate to evaluate, the fee set seemed very fair indeed."

CONCLUSIONS

Most of us on the staff had never participated in such widely diverse groups as those that were assembled in these two workshops. From individuals in sleeping bags who could not even afford board and room to business executives; from social revolutionaries to a department chairman of a medical school; from an individual with experience living in a ghetto to a president of a conservatory of music, the mix was fantastically wide. It greatly increased the scope, the depth and the richness of the individual contributions made in the small groups and in the community meetings. We believe that the fee-setting policy was, in large measure, responsible for this fertile diversity.

We are pleased to present the policies and the methods we used and to report on its success in this instance, in the hopes that it may encourage others to adapt such an approach to their own particular circumstances. It has been, for us, a fruitful attempt to make educational and growth experiences available to more people. We believe that makes the experiences themselves more human, more person-centered.

ABSTRACT:

In financing two seventeen-day residential workshops on the client-centered approach, participant tuition fees (based

on each individual's ability to pay) were selected by participants themselves. Although fees ranged from zero up to five times the average amount, all expenses for the workshops were paid through participant's fees. Moreover, participants were admitted without regard to how much or how little they pledged to pay. Participants' reactions as well as a staff analysis of the financial experiment are presented. The practice of self-determined tuitions was considered viable and advantageous for financing workshops for persons from a wide range of economic means. The practice was continued with similar results for a series of workshops between 1974 and 1980.

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