

Establishing Anamnesegruppen Across Linguistic Borders

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This report will focus on the proceedings and special problems we had in introducing Anamnesegruppen in Rennes, France. Anamnesegruppen are so-called "peer groups in history-taking", or groups provided from students for students to train in history-taking. In this history-taking, all aspects such as biological, psychological and social are integrated, as we learned from G. Engel or R. Adler.

The announcement in Rennes for the first Anamnesegruppe in France included a short comic strip from the French cartoonist Binet. It showed a situation in a hospital room; a young assistant introduces a patient by name to a professor who is standing among a group of students. However, the professor is only interested in the patient's illness and asks for more data from the assistant, and then teaches the students. The patient is not involved and only dares to say a shy "hello". Only when the professor asks the patient to fart, which is noted with the exact time, can he affirm the question. This cartoon might be exaggerated, but it shows the intention of the Anamnesegruppen: to speak with the patients and not about them.

How was it that the Anamnesegruppen, originally a German development, came to Rennes in France?

I would first like to illustrate the necessary conditions for establishing Anamnesegruppen at a new university. Anamnesegruppen are a young development and, as a new feature, they exist on the initiative of students. Therefore it is not as easy to establish Anamnesegruppen as it is with other lectures held by a professor. I see two possibilities for a start in a new town:

- 1) a member of an Anamnesegruppe transfers universities and brings his/her own experience along and establishes a new Anamnesegruppe.
- 2) someone hears of the groups and invites tutors of Anamnesegruppen to give a presentation at the university. The presentation may be the catalyst for setting up new groups.

Which conditions are necessary for establishing Anamnesegruppen?

You need:

- i) members for the groups
- ii) tutors
- iii) patients
- iv) rooms
- v) supervision for the tutors

In points iii), iv), and v), support of the students by an institution, usually the university, and individual professors is also necessary. You thus need both: the initiative of the students and the support of professors and/or an institution for long-term success.

In the case of a presentation by external tutors, there are additional conditions:

- 1) the time: students normally haven't got much time besides their lectures for extra activities;
- 2) the foreign language which one must speak adequately; a new problem for us, and
- 3) finances for the trip, because students are not usually particularly wealthy. These were the basic conditions. Why did we choose Rennes?

For many years there has been an exchange program between the University of Erlangen and the Université de Rennes, including an annual exchange for medical students. In the 1987/88 term, A. Freitag, a tutor from Erlangen, had been in Rennes on an exchange. He noticed that in France there was no teaching program comparable with the Anamnesegruppen, where the patient is the focal point. His fellow French students were interested in becoming familiar with this teaching program. And thus the idea to introduce this teaching method in Rennes arose in cooperation with tutors from Erlangen.

Which preparations had to be made in Erlangen?

We first had to find at least one more tutor and additional experienced group members who were not only French-speaking, but who also had enough time for the trip. We therefore asked all the tutors, and asked them in turn to look for interested participants in their groups. We

planned the Whitsun week as a tentative date, since it meant the end of the summer term in Rennes and holidays in Erlangen. At the end of the winter term 1987/88 we had a group of two tutors and eight additional members for the trip.

Our intention for the program was not only to demonstrate the Anamnesegruppen, but also to integrate the French students as much as possible right from the beginning. We therefore got in contact with the French students on exchange in Erlangen. They were spontaneously enthusiastic about the idea of a presentation of the Anamnesegruppen in Rennes.

At a preparatory meeting we discussed the way we could introduce the Anamnesegruppen this time. Normally in Germany the presentation is done by working with a group of members from the new town who are directed by experienced tutors. But it is quite obvious that in Rennes the tutors would be confronted with an additional problem: the foreign language. We thus decided to have mixed French/German groups in variation of the original model, so that the groups would consist of two tutors, two German and four French members. We expected that with two additional German members the linguistic problem would be minimized, and furthermore, being experienced members, they would stimulate the discussion and support the mediation of the specific experience.

Meanwhile we had heard that during the Whitsun week students in Rennes would have to study for their examinations, so they would not have the time for a new program such as the Anamnesegruppen. Another possible date for us was the last week in April, which is the last week of our holidays. The disadvantage of this date was that some members of our group couldn't take part in the trip. But although our group would be smaller, we would still have enough members to undertake the journey.

The above-mentioned conditions of a specific date and knowledge of the foreign language had been taken care of. But what about the finances? In addition to some support provided by the students' association, we were able to get financial support from the university and the Bavarian Ministry of Science. As support for a student enterprise, this was exceptional.

You remember the conditions iii) to v) for the establishing of Anamnesegruppen. To get official support, A. Freitag and F. Donnars, a

French student in Erlangen, got in contact with the Dean of the Medical Faculty and the professor for Medical Psychology. Both welcomed the idea and promised their support.

Later on the students in Rennes were informed about the planned presentation of Anamnesegruppen with posters, handbills and personal information, and were invited to a lecture with basic information on Anamnesegruppen. This lecture took place one week before our arrival.

After our arrival we met with the eight French students interested in Anamnesegruppen. We got to know one another and arranged the groups. With this number of interested students two groups could be established.

For the work with the groups we had expected difficulties in two ways: the language barrier and difficulties based on the different teaching systems in France and Germany. Regarding the language, the German members weren't able to take part in the discussion in the same differentiated way as they would have done in German, and they had to become accustomed to the faster way of talking. However, the French participants were able to deal with these difficulties and took pains not to overtax the Germans. The content of the discussion was thus not affected by the linguistic problems.

In terms of the different teaching systems, in Germany the education is almost entirely theoretical. This means that there are few chances for students to have contact with patients, and even more, that history-taking cannot be learned and trained. Therefore German students have two main motives to take part in an Anamnesegruppe:

- 1) most of the time it is the only possibility to train in history-taking
- 2) it is a possibility to come into contact with medicine and its psychosocial element.

Training of history-taking is not a motive in France. From the fourth year of their studies on, the students are trained daily in systematic history-taking.

When in their first reactions the French students told us that they already knew about history-taking and couldn't see anything new in the Anamnesegruppen, we became quite sceptical. We expected that in the group session, the French participants would perform a perfect somatized history-taking, and that later on they would be

very sceptical about the ideas that the Germans would bring into the discussion.

To have patients and rooms for the groups, Prof. Bourdiniere, Professor for ORL, could be captivated. He provided the possibility to have the groups in his clinic, despite being sceptical about the plan.

The meetings and further developments

At one meeting the interview ran according to our expectations, at the other quite the contrary happened. The interviewer thought that in an Anamnesegruppe only psychological facts had to be asked. He completely neglected the symptom-oriented scheme of history-taking he was used to.

In the final meeting with the participating students after the sessions, most of them showed interest in deepening their practical skills in the Anamnesegruppen. They were interested in taking part in a regular group in Rennes.

As requested by Professor Bourdiniere, we reported the results of the sessions to him. We knew much more about the psychosocial situation of the patients than he had expected. Obviously convinced by that, he saw the possibility to capture a lack of psychosocial education with the Anamnesegruppen. He and the professor for Medical Psychology offered their support for regular groups in the future.

After this positive start in Rennes, both French students on exchange in Erlangen took part in a group at our University. In addition, F. Donnars took part in a training session for Anamnesegruppen tutors. When they went back to

France in 1988 again, former members of Anamnesegruppen were on exchange in Rennes. So together with a German tutor, F. Donnars could arrange a first regular Anamnesegruppe during the past term, and further groups are planned for the future. There will also be additional support for the groups by the exchange of students between Erlangen and Rennes.

One problem at the moment is the lack of supervision (point v), but we hope to solve this problem in the future. Another problem is that there are more examinations in France than in Germany. It seems to us that French students therefore have much less time for activities outside of their regular studies.

The experiment of exporting Anamnesegruppen to France seems to have been successful, and we expect that Anamnesegruppen in Rennes will grow prosperous in the future and be an enrichment to the curriculum.

Why did we choose this topic? At this conference, people who are interested in the medical curriculum have come together. Medicine which integrates biological and psychosocial aspects also needs teaching which integrates these aspects. Anamnesegruppen can build one brick in the wall. I hope that I could bring your attention as teachers or students to this teaching program. Although it is quite obvious that it takes some efforts to introduce Anamnesegruppen to a new university, it is not too difficult to have these groups at a new university. Anamnesegruppen are in fact a students' initiative, but nevertheless they need the support of teachers and the medical faculty, even if these groups already exist in your town.