

THE TRAINING AND ACCREDITATION OF PSYCHOTHERAPISTS AND COUNSELLORS

by Richard Sylvester and Sheena Maclean Matheson

There is still an ever growing need to address and take action over the current controversy around the training and accreditation of Psychotherapists and Counsellors. There are also serious issues surrounding the diversity of approaches and the lack of clarity and agreement over this. As things stand at present many excellent experienced Practitioners may give up the field in despair or be driven from it - 'outlawed' - by the present chaos created by attempts to standardise, regulate and 'professionalise' the whole area. The natural creativity of Psychotherapy and Counselling is in danger of being rigidified and restricted by the development of standardised but meaningless rules and regulations. This applies both to the areas of accreditation and training. How can we claim to be helping others to find their freedom when we ourselves are working under greater and greater restrictions?

The whole move towards 'professionalisation' has thrown up many issues which need to be addressed. Many have experienced this as threatening and as bringing up in each other the very inhibiting issues which we are hoping to heal in others - fear, resentment, anger, competitiveness, one-up-manship, judgement, exclusion, elitism, denial, collusion, hijacking, back-stabbing, dishonesty, hostility, lack of recognition, criticism, de-skilling, disempowerment, 'making ourselves right by making others wrong', and the need to conform amongst other things. If we are not careful we may end up doing the very things that we claim and aim to undo.

*"perpetuating the disease
which [we] purport to cure" -*

R.D. Laing.

(Quoted by Anthony Lunt)

It is widely felt that there is currently a growing attempt to 'stitch up' the whole area. Is this in order to 'safeguard' or is it more to do with the self interested efforts of current accrediting bodies to 'professionalise' (in other words monopolise, mystify and increase the status and fees of) the

area? What do Trainings and accreditation actually guarantee if we do not apply the same process to them as we are trained to apply in our facilitation of others? It seems ironic that many established and traditional organisations are now moving more and more towards the process of Self and Peer Assessment and

the Accreditation of Prior Learning and Experience. At the same time the current accrediting bodies in the area of Counselling and Psychotherapy, in their attempts to be seen as respectable and professional do not include these essential 'person-centred' methods in their criteria. They prefer to stay stuck with old, outdated and inappropriate methods instead, whereby a panel of 'judges' determines who shall 'pass' according to criteria which the 'applicant' has had no influence over or say in.

This gives cause for major concern as many of the finest Therapists did their Training at a time, not so long ago, when many (or all) of the best Trainings offered no more than a Certificate of Attendance, despite the commitment in energy, time and money to personal development as well as skills acquisition. Many of these people had great commitment and courage and indeed were 'pioneers' of this field in Britain where minds and hearts were closed for a long time to the whole idea of Therapy and Counselling. Of these people, many are now being told that they do not have the required criteria to be accredited, which is surely an outrage. On the other hand, many feel that they do not wish to comply with a system with which they profoundly disagree. There are also profound problems with the current systems of re-accreditation. There are even attempts to monopolise and rigidify the area of Supervision. Why does this have to be 'institutionalised' and what does this guarantee? There is certainly a natural need for support and feedback which most Therapists will seek out from those they feel in alignment with and trust, albeit informally.

Do we as Trainers and Therapists endeavour to live and model the nature of our work? How can we guarantee 'personal quality' control?

"It is who we are and not what we know that facilitates the growth of another"

Carl Rogers.

The bottom line is that Personal equals Professional development. The two cannot be separated, they go hand in hand with each other and whilst there are undoubtedly many Trainings that are highly committed to and reflect this process it is quite alarming how many do not. Unfortunately there are Diploma Trainings in the field being run where there is very

little if any experiential element and where the emphasis is on learning about others and not ourselves. Theory is of course important but we need to use it, not to let it use us.

"Patients (clients) are there to be treated (supported) not to verify a theory" - Carl Jung.

Self and Peer Assessment involves the process of giving and receiving honest feedback. If more Trainings were really committed and willing to take the risks involved in this process then there would be no real need for accreditation as there would be less chance of someone who was not ready to practice 'slipping through the net'.

If we apply the basic principle of honesty to all of this we need have no fear. Trusting in the power of honesty is indeed a risky business but nevertheless a rewarding one. This may seem over simplified but it is a sad fact that many choose to give up honesty out of fear and those who do speak the truth often get castigated for it.

If accreditation is supposed to safeguard against abuse, sexual or otherwise, then there are many questions that arise out of this. What about the Common Law - surely that protects us to some degree? What about the more subtle manipulative forms of abuse like believing clients are 'ill', and treating them as if they were or needing to be needed by clients? What about the very real institutional abuse that goes on in orthodox Psychiatric treatment?

"I had just turned sixteen and my birthday present was ECT. One human being gave me, another human being electric shocks... There was no escape. I endured 42 electric shocks in all, each shock felt equal to the execution of a feeling." Personal account - The Case for Psychotherapy (NSF News May 1991).

What about the millions of tranquillisers that are dealt out, without question, to those who are ignorant of their damage? Is this part of a conspiracy to keep people

down (sedated) or an inability to deal with emotional problems or is it to line the pockets of the Drug Companies? These are the things we really have to fear and which we need to safeguard against. Surely this is why Psychotherapy and Counselling have become so valuable and why we are committed to seeing it become an accepted and established part of our society.

Part of the danger involved with the diversity of approaches in the field of Psychotherapy and Counselling, which ranges from the 'medical sickness model' to the Transpersonal and Humanistic models, is the confusion and damage this can bring to ourselves, our trainees and clients. There is a need to be clear about which approach we are committed to. There is a vast difference between the pure Freudian approach for example and the Humanistic approach. There is the world of difference between traditional Psychiatric approaches that fully believe in 'mental sickness' (and label their patients accordingly) and the Lain-gian approach which honours the person as an equal human being (providing they are not harming others) or the Transpersonal approach which believes in the unlimited potential for development in any Human Being encouraging free expression of the whole person. On one hand the 'medical sickness model' attempts to 'cure' by drugging or even cutting away parts of the brain, attending to thoughts only and suppressing emotions completely. On the other hand, the Transpersonal and Humanistic models attend to the emotional (this after all is primarily where most damage and 'blocks' occur), the physical, the mental and the spiritual, in other words - 'the Whole Person'.

Where in traditional training is there provision for exploring and expressing emotions? Students go from one end of Psychology Degree Courses to the other without looking at feeling. Counselling and Therapy cannot be learned purely through the intellect. The intuitive and emotional must be developed and integrated. We are often encouraged towards and rewarded for our intellectual development whilst our emotional nature is suppressed and 'frowned upon' or punished. There is surely then a greater need for the area of emotional competency to be encouraged and included in our training, our practice and our lives. When we do not endeavour to own and deal with our own thoughts and feelings this makes our Practices and Trainings breeding grounds for damaging disownership.

"He who bears his own shadow, liberates the Collective"

Erich Neumann.

The core nature of Psychotherapy and Counselling is creative, life enhancing and enabling, not restricting, diminishing and mechanistic. Who are these

people who are setting up these new rules and regulations and judging whether or not we may be accredited as competent Counsellors and Psychotherapists? What has happened to direct communication and trusting in the process? If a Therapist is no good then either he or she will not attract clients or the client will come to recognise that the relationship is not beneficial and terminate it. What are we saying about ourselves and our clients otherwise? It feels like it is time to put our own house in order by addressing these issues, recognising and owning the diversity of approaches and the chaos that is being perpetuated out of fear and struggles for status, power and elitism.

If we are to have a system and a Code of Ethics to maintain standards then let us have a real and meaningful one involving personal contact and communication, negotiation, honesty, congruence, the process of Self and Peer Assessment and the Accreditation and Appreciation of prior Learning and Experience.

"One law for the Lion and the Ox is oppression"

"The Crow wished everything was black, the Owl that everything was white" - William Blake.