Some Thoughts after the 2nd National Conference on the Dynamics of Accreditation, Cambridge, June 1992

by Cal Cannon and Sue Hatfield

I want to stand equal with you, my peers and fellow workers.
I want to tell you openly and honestly about my work.
I want to say,
This is what I love about my work,
This is what I am proud of.
I want to share with you those qualities and skills I value in my work.
I want to be with you in an act of witness of my affirmation.
I want to share with you my difficulties, my weaknesses, those areas where I need to develop
my skills and learn more.
I want to say,
Will you help me?
Will you support me in my efforts to take responsibility for my professional development?
And I want to say that if I don't say, will you challenge me?

Introduction

What follows are personal responses to the conference from two members of the planning group. Whilst each piece begins as essentially a personal reflection, we feel they have a bearing on a wider context and inevitably mirror some aspects of the processes of accreditation which the conference was attempting to explore.

Affirmation/Accreditation *by Cal Cannon*

Positions

One of the most significant themes to emerge from the conference for me is to do with position-taking, and the freedom of choice we give ourselves if we relinquish our tendency to hold to a position. However, not to hold to a position, especially when in discussion or conversation, is unfamiliar to me and renders me vulnerable and open in a way I am not usually. Holding a position — and for me it makes little difference what the 'content' of the position is — puts me in touch with a certain sort of energy, a familiar energy, an energy which I experience as quite focused, quite strong (though I think it is actually controlling rather than strong-in-itself), and which carries me forward in a familiar way in dialogue or discussion, usually to closure of the subject discussed, depending on the position the other or others take.

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The desire to defend myself against the unfamiliar vulnerability I experience when I let go of holding a position can drive me into all sorts of extraordinary position-taking, where I find myself ostensibly defending this, that, or the other without any hint of an attack. I think it is the very unfamiliarity of being open to this sense of vulnerability which seems so scary. And in defending my 'position' I of course lay myself open to, and even invite, attack, for every position has a counter-position, and will attract reaction.

Self-Affirmation

On the second day of the conference I was facilitating a group exploring self-affirmation within a communal context. The depth of contact we reached together at times in this group seemed to exemplify for me what can happen if we relinquish our positions vis-a-vis external criteria, and simply affirm ourselves as workers in a peer context. It was also an example of how shy we are of that depth of communication (or communion?), and how we try to flee from it in order to get back to more familiar, if less nourishing and affirmative, territory. In our group we were able to identify this process as it was happening, and share with each other both our acknowledgement of the totally different, almost sacred (yet somehow fully grounded) atmosphere we created, and our mistrust of ourselves and our attempts to flee from it. My own mistrust bothered me, my desire to 'lighten the atmosphere', my fear of being 'airy-fairy', and my reluctance to allow that what was happening was as real and as valid as the familiar ways in which we 'normally' accredit self and other — What's your/my orientation? Where did you/I train?

What was happening was that I was seeing/hearing/experiencing individuals in the group in a way that made me feel interested in them, want to know more about them, and which enabled me to get a real sense of how they might be as workers, how they would work with people/clients. I think I have more of an idea of how those particular individuals really work than I would have had I put them through a rigorously designed accreditation procedure based on the satisfaction of external criteria. I came away from the group aware not only of the common ground I share with other therapists (or people workers) from whatever orientation, but also of the common ground I share with all other human beings.

Shadow

There are often questions in any self-affirming activity, especially where therapists are involved, and they came up in our group — What about the shadow? What about the parts of me/you we don't find acceptable? How not to avoid them? How to bring them to this affirmation of self-as-worker? And yet it seemed to me that when we were in our 'sacred' mode group members were bringing these aspects of themselves naturally.

"Sometimes I feel furious with my clients", "I wish they'd all go away and leave me alone" — these were two of the statements made as part of affirmations.

We seem to have a fascination for shadow material in therapeutic circles, as if we owe it an overbalance of attention because it has been suppressed (or repressed) for so long. It sometimes seems as if we want to make it more important and more real than other

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experiences, to return to it again and again as though the material contained there is the reality, and our present experiences of wholeness and 'allrightness' the illusion. I could personally feel a pull to return to it (it is, after all, familiar), not only during the affirmation group but throughout the whole process of planning and actualising the conference.

Outcomes?
I have come away from the conference feeling that something wholesome and potentially creative happened there, something that could be built on for the future. For me it is around the nature of dialogue, and the bringing into consciousness of our propensities to polarise, to adopt positions and to hold them as if our very lives depended on them . . . when in fact we put ourselves more at risk by doing this. It is also about daring to feel our own insecurities and vulnerabilities as workers, and trusting that it is possible and responsible to affirm ourselves with others, fully including these aspects of self. I came away with a sense of kinship which was nothing to do with shared position-holding, and a sense that if we can explore together in a spirit of 'no-position' then it ceases to be an issue what choices each of us makes in our professional lives with regards to trainings, accreditations, orientations and so on.

Responsibility *by Sue Hatfield*

Reflecting on my experience of the conference I have a sense of a process that leads me to a greater awareness of how I find my own authority. I realise that when I know myself as the source of my own authority, then there is no longer a pull to polarise, to take a stand in relation to accreditation. In the meeting of inner and outer, the middle ground that lies between polarities, I can tap into a source of energy with which to weave my own fabric, select those threads which suit my own personal design. I can become responsible for, and self determining in, my own professional development.

My involvement with accreditation grew essentially from a position of reaction: I didn't like it; I could initially sense no other grounds for wanting it than fear and insecurity; and I felt deeply suspicious of it. What is it that motivates us in wanting to render the possibility a reality within the profession of therapy? I had an immense amount of energy for the subject and became, within the context of a group, deeply engaged in exploring what it meant for me, and attempting to understand the dynamics underlying the process of accreditation at a personal and political level. Out of my need to understand my reaction to accreditation grew a commitment to exploring the process, and to opening the debate to a wider forum. I believed, and still do, that whatever choices we make in life, we have a duty to ourselves, to each other, and to those we work with, to be clear about what factors lead us to make those choices.

Out of this commitment grew the first conference on accreditation and I went on, with a small group of people, to plan the second. For more than two years the subject of accreditation absorbed a lot of time and energy. As my understanding grew, my reactions became less charged, and during the planning stages of the second conference there was a profound shift

in energy for me. I no longer felt that anything new was going to grow out of engaging with the issue of accreditation. It had ceased to be a question of being for or against, of seeking to define alternative methods. But neither did I know what followed on from that. The reaction was gone, but I hadn't made the shift I needed to make in finding a creative way forward. I knew that I hadn't yet found a way to deal with the recurring insecurity around my professional credibility. I knew that it wasn't enough just to own my fear, be clear about my 'stuff' in response to accreditation: there was still a world out there I wanted to be part of, and whence the source of my validation, what replaced the external authority if I rejected it?

By the time of the second conference my commitment had become a responsibility. I felt responsible for the conference being OK, getting it right, doing it properly. I lived that out in an exercise on the first morning which I had agreed to co-facilitate, and this is where the learning began for me. Feeling responsible for the outcome of the exercise I became dependant upon the structure we had set up. When that was broken I felt impotent; I discovered in an instant that I had no authority to shape it as I saw fit. There is a paradox that in the very act of trying to control I had no control. I knew that if I had come to it with authority it would have been quite different and I would have effortlessly held it — as I was to discover at the end of the two days. There is a difference I see between responsibility without authority and authority responsibly held, and there dawns too some sense of the difference between my own innate authority and control by means outside of me.

I experienced a mounting sense of anxiety as the first day wore on, feeling more and more responsible for the whole thing being OK. The more I felt responsible, the more I felt impotent and out of control. Surrounded by what felt like a chaotic dissonance as we moved towards the second day, I felt a helpless victim of what I was part of and attempted to find some measure of control by feeling responsible for it all, but I only succeeded in increasing the level of my anxiety.

Walking to the conference with a friend next morning I shared my experience of anxiety. Yet I knew that at some level there was for me no choice. However much it had become a burden of responsibility, I would honour the commitment I had made in being part of this conference. And then came a flash of insight that began to shift the balance to something more creative which grew throughout the second day. I suddenly knew that I could not assume that my peers in the planning group would stay present; I knew of course that they would be physically there, but they, like me, might at any moment take flight from the anxiety. If I decided to 'absent' myself there was the possibility of no-one being responsible for the day's proceedings, no-one facilitating the process of the whole thing. Individuals would play their part, but where would be the holding and the meta-view to enable that holding, to view the conference as one body and facilitate its movement? The dynamics of our planning group are too complex to go into here, but we had left it open for anyone of us to assume the role of leader and take authority at any point in the proceedings. I had come to distort that into feeling responsible for the conference because I hadn't found the authority in myself. There was a lot of learning for the planning group in understanding how to be truly peers and yet

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not abdicate the call to leadership and authority when it comes — how to take authority and stay peers.

If, as I believed, we had a responsibility for this conference, then it became suddenly clear that I had to commit myself to staying present. I had to find a way to be there as me and as part of the we, the group. With this came a shift in my understanding: I could not be responsible for everyone else, for the outcome of the conference. To believe that would be to lapse into omnipotence — some people would feel let down whatever I did, and some people would get something out of it despite what I did!

I can actually only be responsible for myself, but having claimed that, having taken it into myself, I realise that I can turn it round and be responsible to others and to myself. I can use the responsibility if I own it. As long as I was feeling responsible for my peers, for the conference, I felt anxious, wanting to control, and helpless. For in reality at some level I was projecting responsibility outside of myself. At some level I suspect what that meant was wanting everyone else to take responsibility for me. In that moment of realising that the only creative choice was to stay present and take responsibility for myself, I withdrew my projection. I then felt vulnerable but not anxious.

This highlights a key issue for me. How do I be responsible to/for myself and at the same time responsible to the group? A last minute decision that morning when I was impelled to act without referral to the group threw me momentarily into experiencing the anxiety in a heightened way, and then the balance tipped. Somewhere within all this came a knowing that I had authority, not granted by others but vested in myself. There was no longer a need to find validation, authority, security within the group — yet knowing it in myself I can be affirmed in it by the group.

So slowly I begin to shift. I come to understand more the nature of responsibility; what generates anxiety in me. I come to see how I can be me and we, hold responsibility to both at once; and slowly I begin to find the ground of my own authority. Accreditation begins to fade into the distance as something more creative emerges. Yet somehow in this new-found light I see the shadows more clearly and my struggle becomes how to recognise them. I see how this whole issue of accreditation mirrors so many levels within our personal and corporate psyches. There is a need to understand this, for we have debated long enough and need now to know what we learn collectively from this and move on, find what is creative that comes out of this.

We began the second day with an affirmation exercise, aware how much energy we had put into exploring our 'stuff' around accreditation and owning that — our fear, our rebel energy, our reaction to external authority — we felt a need to open to something else. It was a powerful and moving experience where people shared their vulnerability. Within it there was a sense of something shifting, of a light being cast and a new energy surfacing: the power of the shadow began to ebb and there came a sense of creative transformation. My shadow that demands that I be perfect was transformed into a part of me that requires, asks of me, that I

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do my best by myself; it shifted the focus of my validation from outside of me to in me.

The morning's affirmation seemed to shift the energy of the conference and the afternoon was quite different to the feeling at the end of the first conference. There was a distinct move away from polarisation, from focusing on accreditation. It had ceased to be the shadow. There was a sense of people moving towards some middle ground. As we sat, gathered in a circle, it was as if some energy was held in the space we made, fragile and new, but bringing with it a sense of fertility, that something could grow from this. We were no longer looking for alternatives, to fix or find solutions to this thing called accreditation: it is for each of us to take responsibility and define for ourselves what constitutes our human and professional development, both personally and communally — and for some that may include formal accreditation processes at some time.

For me it was quite a notable afternoon as the process ran its course and I came in a profound way to find the ground of my own authority within myself. Debating with a colleague who should facilitate the afternoon session, tempted to defer to his greater experience, somehow I found the courage to stay with the unfolding process, and stepped, with barely a moment's thought, into the role of facilitator. When the shift came it was easy, I found my authority and it carried me effortlessly with no shred of anxiety, no feeling responsible for; knowing I could be utterly responsible to myself and to the group. The shadow of accreditation is dissolved and I know my validation within myself; my energy is freed to seek creative ways forward, to respond to what is, not react to what I think is.

I am left still with questions unanswered. I struggle to see what is creative in accreditation. I wonder how much it has arisen in some unconscious attempt to eradicate the splits in the profession, rather than find a way to tolerate and trust what is creative in the diversity. How much of our desire for accreditation is born not just of a refusal to take responsibility, but also a refusal to trust our peers? We require proof of their worthiness, rather than trust their ability to know for themselves their worthiness — and trust ourselves to recognise it.

The most significant question I am left with is how not to render accreditation the shadow, how to cease polarising in our debate around pro and anti accreditation. This debate can be a distraction; polarising energy can stop me standing in that middle ground where I don't know what to do. And is there a fear that something needs to shift in our conception of what constitutes therapy? Having created this body are we trying to hold it together and sew up the seams, rather than let it go into all its diverse, rich, sparkling fragments? Are we trying to make it what we want it to be rather than let it be what is is? How much is accreditation a fence to protect the existing crop rather than a tool to dig new ground and plant new seeds?

There is something about spirit in this for me; a danger that we will lose that if we attempt to render therapy a fixed reality; it is spirit which can best underpin the whole movement and carry us in trust and love and creativity.

I feel that waning of energy again, the need to let go the shadow and pick up that creative

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thread and join with others in weaving my own definition of what it is for me to be a therapist. I feel a desire to let go the debate, to find where it is we meet and discover the real issues which concern us all. How do we be as therapists, as people, in a way which fosters the movement and growth of the spirit of love? How do we, all of us, learn to trust, to be responsible and to know ourselves as the source of our authority? How do we stop focusing on the pathology, accept that we're rather lovely and peculiar, but just fine, and focus on what is creative? That's what we need to address, not the pros and cons of accreditation.

Conclusion *by Cal Cannon and Sue Hatfield*

Common threads for both of us are around issues of responsibility and authority. Starting from what was essentially a position of opposition and rebellion when we began working on the first conference in September 1990, we have come to a point where for us it is no longer a question of positions. It is about how to stand in our own authority and be witnessed in a communal context in our lives and our work; and how to best take responsibility for that.

We would like to make contact with people who are interested in exploring these issues in our professional development as workers with a commitment to humanistic principles — perhaps a network of peer groups might form. For us the opening declaration encapsulates what we consider would be the ethos of such groups: we are not interested in looking at alternative forms of accreditation in these groups. It is not about either rejecting or accepting accreditation — that has now become a part of the reality of the profession of therapy — but of meeting and learning together how we both affirm and challenge ourselves and each other in our work. It is essentially about being part of a community of workers, where we use our creative energy to learn to take responsibility and in that to find the source of our own authority.

Anyone interested in the possibility of being part of such a network please contact Sue Hatfield, 33 Beechbank, Unthank Road, Norwich NR2 2AL 0603 505386 or Monica Suswin, 51 The Drive, Barnett, Herts EN5 4JG. 081 440 6276