

Report of the Cambridge Conference

From the AHPP Newsletter, written by Courteney Young

I attended the Norwich Collective's 2nd Conference on the Dynamics of Accreditation in Cambridge and was pleasantly surprised. The previous conference, on Accreditation, had been quite a set-up against accreditation and much more a conference about anti-accreditation. It had also been quite well attended. This was less well attended (a pity) but there was much more on the dynamics of accreditation; what happens to people when they are accredited etc.

What happened was very interesting. In one exercise it was obvious to everyone by the end of the exercise, including the protagonist, that he had viewed the 'accrediting board' in such a way as to totally disempower himself — and then he reacted to that disempowerment. It thus causes me to wonder how much this goes on all the time in our accreditation procedures and who it is we are really accrediting (perhaps the ones who feel good about themselves or who need accreditation to feel good about themselves) and who we are not accrediting, either because they refuse to get accreditation because of their negative view about the accreditation process or perhaps their negative view about us or perhaps their negative view about themselves or a mixture of all three.

I tell you all about this because, as I am involved in re-writing the AH Pguidelines for membership for the board, how we present ourselves is a very topical and relevant issue for me and, as a result of the conference, I feel like adding the paragraphs below into the guidelines that begins to express something of this debate. I and the board would be very interested to hear any feed-back from the membership at large about this perspective.

14. Attitudes to accreditation

All this (application form filling in) may seem a lot, and we thank you for 'wading' through it. Whilst looking at yourself and being looked at in this way can be quite difficult or even traumatic, the accreditation process can also be like an initiation ritual. It can be quite powerfully affirming. These processes and systems have grown organically over the years and are still in a process of change. We feel we have made relatively few mistakes and hope we have learnt from the ones we have made. However whilst we are a professional accreditation body and we feel (from one perspective) that we need to take as many precautions as possible or as necessary to ensure that we are not accrediting people who are unworthy of accreditation, we also are humanistic. We try to apply this to our procedures as well as in our therapy. We hope that nothing in our methods or systems or thinking discredits you or gives you the feeling of discrediting what you have actually done or who you are in any way

whatsoever i.e. “This is not relevant or that is no good”. We are just trying to discover what exactly you have done (or haven’t done) and how this adds (or could add) to your work. The detailed scrutiny is important; it can be positive and informative; it can show areas and aspects that were maybe not considered; it is hopefully not negative.

The humanistic approach to accreditation also means that we place a high value on what you feel about yourself. If you see yourself as ready to work more independently and to be accredited by your peers, this is a form of self-accreditation and self acclamation, and is valid and essential to the process. A negative aspect to yourself in respect to accreditation can create severe difficulties for yourself — and us. It can actually create a sort of ‘them judging us’ situation which is not what is wanted and which does not really work very well and is not what usually happens. In some ways you have to accredit yourself first and claim or acclaim your own power and authority and readiness, before you can be accredited by your peers.

Please bear these points in mind and carry them with you and let them inspire you as you go through the process of accreditation with us.

What also happened at the conference was something else quite surprising. Instead of coming up with new or better ways of accrediting, or even exploring some of the deeper dynamics of the accreditation process and what might happen for people if they *had* to accredit themselves and others in some way, what actually happened was a discovery of a place which was neither pro-accreditation nor was it anti-accreditation but was a middle ground between the two. It was *incredibly* difficult to hold such a space. It was a bit of an ‘I don’t know’ space. It was scary. It kept being disrupted by other aspects or people bringing in ‘irrelevancies’ and it also felt very good.

The anti-accreditation people seemed to feel heard and then could acknowledge there were some benefits to accreditation though they still didn’t like many of the structures and setups that exist and conversely the pro-accreditation people did not feel attacked for selling out humanistic principles etc, or that they had to maintain high standards and really judge potential therapists according to these standards which process removed them from being able to see a person in front of them.

However there was a further point that is worth bringing out into the whole ‘Great Accreditation Debate’. This is that there is perhaps a very legitimate stance (epitomised perhaps by Jill Hall) that *no accreditation* is also OK. That there are ways perhaps to affirm, acclaim, attest, support, check on, discipline each other which do not involve accreditation or an accreditation process. It is a little like the anarchic view that one is neither pro-government, nor is one against government, but that one can survive without it.

In some way this is infinitely more difficult to propound and to find a clear and definite stance, and it is also infinitely more frightening and confusing for any pro-accreditation adherents or anti-accreditation acclaimers.

What any of this might actually look like in real practice is very difficult to say, though think the Norwich Collective itself try.

An Ordinary Punter's View of the AHP Conference, September 1992

by James Mackenzie

Time to set off. It was three o'clock and I really had no excuse not to get moving, get on my way, but hung about reluctant to start. Do I really need to go? Haven't I got enough to do here, jobs unfinished, start of a new term? And what am I going for?

Well I know already what it will be like, and I really value the conference as fun, as a strengthener, as something for me, before I start the year of teaching ahead, with its stresses and commitments to give and give again. But do I really need to go this time, don't I feel strong enough, cheerful, enough, whole enough, do I really want to look into my self and how I relate to others, just now? Well I said I would so I suppose I'd better set off.

Found eventually there were no meetings at work or any body demanding my presence on Friday but still some urgent personal and work jobs to be done so finally left on the 16.30 train. Gratified to find it was non-stop to Stoke, both in theory and practice. Arrived smoothly at Stoke — and came upon John Button and others and so jumped into a taxi with them. First problem solved, how to get there, the driver even knew the way to Lindsay. No particular notices to point us where to go when we arrived but we soon found the Hexagon and thence the Lindsay Cafe Bar, headquarters for the weekend.

Apprehensive and excited. I had looked at the list of workshops; decided they would all be great to go to, choice is a problem. But not really till we settled down much later to listen to Anne Dickson's talk did I really notice the theme 'On the Edge of Change' as important, as a theme to be there for, rather than as just another way of expressing the purpose of humanistic therapy. Now with what she was saying I got to connect, we are/we are not on the edge of change, how do we respond to change, why should we change, how should we change? Also the power of the women's perspective. There can be no more positive point of change than half of humanity asserting itself. So great to have Anne, to have Shona and Ruth's workshop for women. Of course I am still on the edge of change so I wasn't alert enough to ask how this workshop went, or to look out for its impact on the conference. And John's 'Getting