

# *An Integrative Training: A Student's Perspective*

*'Beth Osborne'*

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I liked what I read in the brochure: the values it expressed were my own, in particular the sentence: 'We recognise and encourage the potential of individuals for becoming more real, in touch with their core or true self, and internally connected'. I had read Rogers, and been in psychodynamic therapy for a year — long enough to appreciate the extent to which the past plays into the present. If I did the psychotherapy training this would mean two foundation stages or years, followed by the Basic Psychotherapy year. I would then do Stage Four, seen as a time of consolidation and practice, which would last somewhere between eighteen months and five years and would eventually lead into Stage Five, the Diploma year.

What follows is a personal account of how the course has been for me; others will have experienced it differently.

On interview day I remember boldly informing my prospective tutor that I was looking for a solid, down-to-earth training with 'no funny business'. Day One came: this clear-headed, vocal woman disappeared, and a small frightened child began her first day at school. Anxious to be seen as a model student I had read every book on the list, ready to be tested on Rogers, Kopp, Ram Dass, Egan and Maslow. Needless to say, no tests. So what was expected of me? I watched the tutors as if they were aircrew on a doomed flight — if I could just read the signs I'd avoid catastrophe by

being first down the escape chute.

The course emphasis on self-development is reflected in the requirement that trainees are in therapy throughout the training. During this first year I felt I was primarily a client, and only secondarily a would-be counsellor/therapist. Humanistic foundations were laid amidst my search for what it means to be a person and to relate to others. Seminars covered basic themes such as values, boundaries, empathy, language, authenticity, and always included an experiential exercise to make the content real. Little was required academically; we were our own material. I would slowly learn that theory was not of great use unless grounded in experience, and equally that experience needed to have some sense made of it.

Counselling skills were practised in trios (client, counsellor, observer). We practised non-directively 'being there' for the client, and experimented with immediacy, an exciting new discovery: 'What's going on now? What are you feeling now?' These were self-conscious shots at instant intimacy which gave us just a hint of what this therapy relationship could be. The tutors visited each group using ongoing assessment forms; part of the process was to learn to give and take feedback, which was modelled by tutors as empathic and non-judgemental. When I sneaked a look at my form and saw the word 'detached' on the

empathy line, it was as if God had spoken!

I associate each year with certain words and phrases. The first year's were 'safe or unsafe', 'allowed', 'uncertainty', 'it sounds like . . .'; above all, 'how do you feel . . .?' and 'I feel . . .', rivers of feelings flowing through the course days. No-one said 'I think' any more.

The course day spun around the axis of the self-development group session. The experiential nature of the training meant that our collective emotional saucepan was constantly on the boil. The group enabled us to live out these dramas, the immediacy of our lives. We tested our absolutes and assumptions: that there is never enough time, but sometimes there might be; that no-one ever understands, but someone just could; that anger has a place, that silence has meaning, that we affect each other. It was hard for me to find my place in the group; I felt everyone wanted too much of me. Mostly I was silent and went home with a headache.

Our need to define the role of the tutors occupied many pub sessions in the lunch hour. Did they have to be so distant, were they our friends, judges, parents, to be trusted or not? It was different for each of us and the differences seemed to depend on the raggle-taggle ends of the past that we brought into the present. I liked to keep them distant; on once finding myself alone in the kitchen with both tutors my grandmother's catchphrase 'What's the matter, Elizabeth, the cat got your tongue?' was never truer.

Towards the end of each year every trainee writes a self-assessment, which is then reviewed and commented on in the large group. The process has a sense of ritual and a rich power to it. I held a up a mirror to myself and described what I saw,

my strengths and weaknesses; I entrusted it to others who met my image and gave it back filled out by their own perceptions. The day came and I felt anxious but brave as a warrior, as if there really is one moment of truth and this was it. If I had ever wondered whether anyone had noticed me throughout this year, cared about me or heard me, here I felt really seen.

At the end of the year some trainees were leaving, most would continue and only one of the tutors would accompany us to Stage Two. As would happen each year, attention was paid to feelings around the group ending; I stayed cynically detached. I could not yet acknowledge the primacy of feelings around separation in my life.

The following September Stage Two began. I had some perspective now on the first year. I felt I'd been turned inside out and back to front, but I'd come through with the glimmer of a new relationship to myself. This year most of us would become student counsellors with a voluntary agency. Stage Two would ask more of me academically. I hadn't been to university; what if I wasn't clever enough?

I was starting to experience the extent to which my inner world interacted with the macrocosm. There were new trainees, intruders who Didn't Know What We Had Been Through. The course had a new mother; adjustments were needed. We had to choose trios to be in for the whole term: how to choose, whom to choose, what if I upset someone, what if, what if. Nothing was simple any more — everything was an issue to be worked with, through, over and under.

Seminars embraced different theoretical perspectives on the self and phases of development. I was becoming aware of the

prejudices that had led me to dismiss most non-humanistic theorists as reductive and non-spiritual; aware that integration is a journey of development crystallised in the word 'process', so prevalent in Stage Two: 'Trust the process', 'It's your process'. A word still mysterious to me, but embodying the movement of life itself. Thus I discovered that learning doesn't just happen, that there is a process to it and that mine is different from yours.

Meanwhile back in the pub, 'good enough' was *not* good enough; we expected perfect parents and it became hard for some of us to accept any fallibility in the tutors. We became rebellious: they were inconsistent — they appeared to leave us but made demands (essays); they had favourites; they wouldn't commit themselves; how could we be expected to manage their dual roles as tutors and facilitators/parents of the self-development group? But that was precisely where my safety lay; I was known, I didn't have to be one thing for one person and something different for another.

Stronger feelings were now expressed in the self-development group. Someone once described the group as a playground, a safe space in which we, the children, and our tutors were playing out primitive feelings of love, hate, envy and competitiveness. I was finding my voice and it could be loud. Approval from the tutors was important; how to show that, particularly to the one male tutor amidst all these devoted handmaidens? The word 'transference' began to have meaning.

By the end of the year I had solid counselling skills and was beginning to be more at ease in my work with clients. These two years had provided me with a facilitating environment in which I had felt enough

held by the tutors and the course structure to explore and experiment with my different selves at my own pace. Everything I would need to know about being with a client was implicit in this experience.

This time the year ending meant much more to me: the male tutor would not be on next year's training; over the two years I had stormed through confusions of love and hate towards my father and this course-father had survived it. I felt flooded by the loss. Issues of separation were becoming more real.

After the foundation years we reapplied and I was accepted for the psychotherapy training which at this point divided off from the counselling course.

Day One, panic-stricken, I said that I didn't know what it meant to be a psychotherapist. I said this to the new tutor, about whom, significantly, I had dreamt the previous night as a Sultan leading a procession of handmaidens (again). He met my anxiety with common sense and gently suggested that it wasn't a course for training therapists who were already therapists. We were all caught in the myth of the ideal therapist. Talk in the pub betrayed our anxieties. Were we supposed to be grown up now, or what? How could this training which had allowed us such free rein in the nursery suddenly make us feel we were ready for university?

Taking clients to the afternoon supervision group was initially difficult (we were now working with three therapy clients). This was where the real judgements would come and I would be exposed as a fraud. We didn't know how to use the group, how to work together; again this was a process — we were learning how to learn from each other, how to take support, challenges and risks.

Deeper and deeper we seemed to go, the learning of the course hand in hand with our own therapeutic journey. The phrase around was 'grist for the mill'. My mistakes, relationship to clients, to myself, all was grist for the mill. This mill got somewhat overloaded: how could I ever, ever be a therapist if I was so overwhelmed by my own neediness? For a while I spilled over everywhere, expecting that at any time the tutors might say, 'Well, Beth, maybe it's just too hard; had you thought of working with animals?' But they didn't, and with relief I began to experience the faint possibility of being able to live with both the fragile me and the strong manager.

I enjoyed and was excited by the theory, and was beginning to use 'I think' as well as 'I feel'. During the year we moved from object relations to self-psychology to Buber, and in the last term integration became a reality in our study of Clarkson's five therapeutic relationships — embodied for me particularly in the co-existence of transference and the real relationship. The essays were my place of reflection and integration; relating theory to both my own and my children's early childhood was incredibly painful, but in the process I worked it through right down to my toes.

By the end of the year I had a clearer idea of what made for a therapeutic relationship. I understood and was more accepting of the ways in which my own needs were met by being a therapist: the vicarious fulfilment that came from healing the child in the other in order to quieten my own needy child; my tendency to use my intellect to avoid helplessness. I now knew that I didn't have to be perfect but that I did have to know myself well and understand the power of intimacy in my life. I was also quite clear that I was doing

the work because I was intensely interested in how the self works.

On Stage Four the pattern changed. There were no weekly course days, just occasional compulsory days, tutorials and optional courses. The aim was to consolidate and integrate past and ongoing learning in the context of building a career and professional confidence. Yearly contracts gave focus to our individual training needs. Peer group and individual supervision were mandatory. During this time adrift from a structured, supportive course group I have learnt to use and value supervision as my professional anchor.

My mental health placement was an ordeal by fire. I met all my ghosts: fear of being unacceptable, suffocation in institutional settings, remote and dismissive experts. Initially I became invisible and disillusioned, identifying with the powerlessness of the patients in a system that has no place for healing relationships. My angst was great, but this time I didn't drown in it. I felt a new responsibility to myself, and the profession, to be taken seriously, and gradually discovered that my voice could be heard, my opinions were respected. It was a time of rich learning in my understanding of the different states of mind that constitute psychiatric illness.

At the end of Stage Three I was very BCPC, with a list of laws as long as your arm about what a BCPC therapist should be doing. Typically I had heard orders where there were suggestions, I had swallowed whole chunks of theory and not yet digested them. I feel that much of Stage Four has been to do with finding my own style and integration (ever ongoing), distinguishing between the necessity for firm boundaries for the client and the inflexibility of rules.

My confidence had a long way to grow, but over the past three years it has, as has my practice. At last I feel I belong in this learning community and am able to contribute to it as well as use it. It feels good to be part of a training that is creatively alive and constantly evolving its theoretical basis.

I am about to start Stage Five; my

understanding is that we will use the year to deepen and develop our style and integration, in working towards submitting for the Diploma. I have heard nothing to suggest this is not the deep end all over again. I am excited; I feel as if I am preparing to go into a subterranean cave peopled by alchemists. I am also extremely daunted — what if...?



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## **Viktor Frankl**

***(26th March 1905–2nd September 1997)***

***Sandie Ritter***

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**V**iktor Frankl, founder of Logotherapy died of heart failure on 2nd September at his home in Vienna at the age of 92. Although I never met him, I heard him lecture at a Logotherapy Conference in California several years ago. He was a very charismatic and inspirational man, who

spoke with courage and conviction in his beliefs. Viktor Frankl was awarded 29 honorary doctorates, and lectured widely throughout his life. He published some 30 books, though not all translated from German, the most well known being *Man's Search for Meaning* (an introduction to lo-

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