

THE PROBLEM OF ACCREDITATION

John Rowan

The AHP is continually approached by people who want a recommended list of therapists or group-leaders - names of people they can go to with confidence, in the knowledge that they are not putting themselves into the hands of inexpert amateurs or exploitative ego-trippers.

And of course it does some damage to humanistic psychology as a movement if ham-handed or harmful things are done in its name. Up to now we have been sending out a list of all the growth centres we know, with a clear statement that we did not endorse any of them, and were merely registering their existence.

To make matters more complicated, it may happen (though at present it seems unlikely) that the Government will bring in a scheme for the registration of psychotherapists, such that no one who is not on the register would be permitted to describe themselves as a psychotherapist. And no one without some form of accreditation would be able to get on to that register.

A further point is that it might be easier for Gestalt therapists, etc., to get into official institutions (such as hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation centres, etc.) if they had some form of accreditation.

For these reasons, it seems that we should at least consider seriously the question of accreditation, and make a proper decision as to where we stand on this. In order to make the issue more concrete, here is one set of proposals as to how the matter might be managed.

THE IAASS METHOD

The International Association of Applied Social Scientists was formed in June 1971, as a professional association made up of practitioners in a variety of helping roles who share an action orientation in working with groups and organisations. It has four divisions and members can belong to one or more of these.

- a.** Organisation development consultants
- b.** Community development consultants
- c.** Laboratory educators, including group relations training consultants
- d.** Personal growth group consultants

There is a separate application process for each division. For each division the applicant must have the following:

1. Sponsorship by an IAASS member.
2. First-hand peer evaluations from at least three professionals who have worked with the applicant during the previous two years.
3. Supervisor/trainer evaluations from at least three professionals who have supervised or trained the applicant as a practitioner (not as an ordinary group member).

4. Client evaluations by at least three clients, covering adequacy of contract, frame of reference as explained, and ethical conduct.

5. Theory statement, defining the theoretical position taken up, and describing how it is applied in practice. Statement of ethical principles.

6. Detailed statement of training and experience.

In addition to these, applicants for the personal growth division 'must have a good working knowledge of psychopathology and the ability to recognise signs of personal distress, to gauge their severity and either to

**I know at least
three people who
have endless
training and
massive
experience, and
are still rotten
leaders**

manage the individuals' distress or to make an appropriate referral.' And evidence of this has to be provided.

An applicant is normally accredited for five years, at the end of which time he has to go through it all again. Young and inexperienced practitioners who appear to fill all the requirements may be accredited for two years only.

The actual accreditation is done by regional boards, so that the possibility of personal knowledge of the applicant is maximised.

Up to October 1972, 142 people had managed to survive this process, 27

of them being members of all four divisions, 52 of three divisions, 62 of two divisions, and the remainder of only one division. So it seems that it must at least be a workable system.

Accreditation of this kind obviously means something, and is eminently covetable in terms of establishment values.

THE CASE AGAINST

But this is precisely the point where some AHP members object. One of the things about humanistic psychology is that it leads one to question establishment values. Do we want to uphold a system where the main function of a professional association seems to be to keep people out? So that is the first objection - that we would be propping up a sagging edifice called elitism, and helping it to survive for another year or two, while it would be better to let it fall.

A second objection is that a procedure like this tends to produce ossification - a theory gets set up as the preferred one; established practices become a standard for measurement; a scientific new becomes a professional property, and challenging it becomes an attempt to take away someone's livelihood. This is what someone once called the disease of *ortodossiapræcox* - and early orthodoxy. This even happened to St. Francis of Assisi, and I don't suppose we are any more saintly than that.

A third objection is a purely practical one - the only reason that IAASS was successful was because it had a powerful base - the National Training Laboratories at Bethel. In this country the nearest equivalent is the Tavistock - and who would want to go in for an accreditation scheme which had the Tavistock at the centre of it?

A fourth objection is to the whole idea of evaluating people. As soon as you evaluate people in terms of some criterion, you reduce them to terms of that criterion. People cannot really be compared and remain persons. The label inevitably takes over, and the world reacts to that instead of to the person. Evaluation takes everyone off the existential hook.

A fifth objection is that even if we wanted to evaluate people, there is no way of guaranteeing that we can actually do it in the relevant way. Any real consultant has some people who like what he does. Surely it's not too hard to dig up three people who will say something nice? And in such a new field it's quite possible for A to be one of B's trainers at the same time that B is one of A's trainers. The roles aren't that neatly separated. And as for training and experience - I know at least three people who have endless training and massive experience, and are still rotten leaders. And going deeper on this one - is it necessarily a bad thing if a group member has a psychotic break? Schutz gives an example (in *Here Comes Everybody*) of a girl who did just that in one of his groups, and found it the best part of the weekend. How do we measure success or failure? Can we judge? How big is our 'grey area' propping up a sagging edifice called elitism, and helping it to survive for another year or two, while it would be better to let it fall.

The sixth and final objection is that accreditation takes the responsibility away from the client and puts it firmly on to the consultant. But one of the most central findings of humanistic psychology is that the client is in control. It is actually the client who determines what problems to produce,

and how deeply he or she wants to work with them. All that the consultant can ever do is to offer a means by which these objectives may be achieved. The advent of co-counselling has made this crystal clear; and once one has seen this truth in such purity there, it becomes very easy to see it also in other, and seemingly more manipulative relationships. Now if this is at all true, it must follow that any form of accreditation will tend to mystify the relationship, and make it appear that all the responsibility can be handed over to the consultant.

Conclusion

So there the debate lies, for the moment. I personally would like to see some sort of feedback operating, by means of which clients could give information, in a systematic way, to the group leader or other consultant, so that the consultant could at least know how things were going and what kind of effects he or she was producing. One could ask immediately after a group - What was the best time for you? What was the worst time? What was the most boring time? Did you learn anything - can you say what it was? Who got the most out of the group? How much do you like or dislike me now? Was I too active or too passive, or just right? Was I too powerful, not powerful enough, or just right? And so on. And other questions could be asked three months later.

We could then publish a list of people who were using this kind of feedback. This would not be accreditation, but I feel it would be useful.

I still think there is a lot to be said on both sides, and that we ought to consider the whole thing most carefully from all angles.