

# New Language for New Times Moving to post-professional Practice

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*This is a lightly edited version of an editorial from the eIpnosis web-site, now in its tenth year.*

*Its brevity and somewhat prescriptive style are a testament to this internet origin. I hope it will be read as a work in progress, notes for a possible future. If the self-generating culture that it points to appeals to you do get in touch.*

The Names that we give, to what we see, to what we do, to what we believe, matter a lot.

This is especially true when the State is seeking to discipline and control the psychological therapies. The mainstream accrediting bodies, not long ago united in opposition to state regulation, have moved to collaboration, and even enthusiasm.

This article seeks to build a transition. A bridge that would give us a path away from these professionalized priorities, towards a more fruitful destination. One where the values that are being compromised by association and integration with the State's agendas, can be affirmed and consolidated.

What might building such a bridge require?

Previous eIpnosis articles have touched on existing non-mainstream accountability processes<sup>1</sup>, theoretical orientation<sup>2</sup> and the wider context of peer to peer mutuality.<sup>3</sup> Missing as yet has been an attempt to define what a post-professional psycho-practice would entail.

If it is to take root, and diffuse out into the wider culture, I believe that new language will be needed. This article outlines some proposals for it.

Keep in mind that what follows is intended to be suggestive rather than definitive. However, this enterprise has direction, it leans towards regeneration, and refreshment; the re-assertion of existing values and the discovery of new ways of working with the troubles and delights of the present, as it unfolds in us.

I hope you might see this as the planting of a seed, out of which a manifesto, even a movement, might grow.

Let's look at some new language that might support this. I'll begin with a handful of generalities.

### **Human Condition Work**

I propose *Human Condition Work* as a viable generic name for 'post-professional' working alliances with clients and others.

*Human Condition Work*, as the name implies, includes any form of engagement with the whole range of human experience, from delight to affliction. With the proviso that the criteria set out below are sufficiently honoured.

### **Psycho-practice**

I propose 'psycho-practice' as a way of referring inclusively to the whole range of the rich variety of ways of working with the human condition.

### **Post-professional**

'Post professional' names emerging forms of psycho-practice, including layers of existing practice, that seek to contradict, and/or avoid, the damage that State, or centralized regulation entails. The task is to find ways of stepping away from reaction to Health Professions Council toxicity, and into forms of psycho-practice that ring true for us ethically.

### **The Psychological Commons<sup>4</sup>**

The *Psychological Commons* reminds us that there is a vast array of public psychological knowledge about the human condition, and its delights and frailties. *Human condition work* is closely allied to the *Psychological Commons*, and makes a significant and distinctive contribution to it.

Following these generalities, for clarity and simplicity, and as a way of bringing felt responses to the surface, I'll present the remainder of this new language as injunctions, or calls to action.

## Relations with clients

### *Love*

I propose we adopt *Love*<sup>5</sup> as a benchmark for working alliances with clients.

Love is defined here as seeking and facilitating the flourishing of the Other.

The presence, either explicitly, or implicitly, of coercion, duress, or force, eliminates love, and amounts to abuse.

Adopt zero tolerance of exploitation and abuse.

### *Co-enquiry.*

Frame client work as *Co-enquiry*. This implies a move away from professionalized, hierarchical, expertise-driven relations with clients, towards peer to peer working alliances.

### *Education of affect*

Favour the *Education of affect* and its valuing of emotionality, embodiment and the imaginal.

*Education of affect* seeks to redress the over-emphasis on intellect and the analytical in higher education, through giving attention to emotional competence.

### *Disputes*

Re-frame as *Disputes* any difficulties that arise between practitioner and client.

Seek to resolve, or progress *disputes*, at least initially, via some form of *mediation*.

*Dispute* as a replacement for complaint has the virtue of honouring the complications of difficulties in human relationships. It is bi-directional. A *dispute* is between people. *Dispute* unhinges blame, and if they are appropriate, probably makes apology, restitution and forgiveness easier.

*Dispute* as a label can be more easily nuanced in its application, than 'complaint'; from minor disputes over mistakes and misunderstandings, to major disputes that involve abuse, or exploitation.

A 'complaint' by contrast, is likely to be uni-directional, i.e. to be lodged by a subordinate against a superior. And the processes

through which 'complaints' have been handled, and the frequent dissatisfaction with their outcomes, often reflects this power bias.

So let us see if we can drop the use of the word 'complaint'.

### **Validity in Human Condition work**

#### *Capability*

Value practitioner *capability* in preference to 'qualifications' (but not to the exclusion of them).

Define and value *Capability* in terms of life experience, presence, being, and *mêtis*<sup>6</sup>, plus aural and embodied practitioner skills.

This valuing of *capability* will probably work best if psycho-practice is embedded in a culture of peer validation that includes full disclosure.

#### *Presence*

Adopt the notion of *presence* as way of valuing the galaxy of qualities that we bring to work with clients.

#### *Research*

Install as an essential first line of *human condition research*, practitioner reflexivity about the desires and obstacles in their own lives.

Recognize that self-directed enquiry into the human condition, shaped by an urge towards self-realization, is a valid form of *human condition* research.

Frame all work with clients as *human condition research* using a participative, collaborative enquiry<sup>7</sup> paradigm, that is validated by the client experience.

### **Civic responsibilities**

Adopt *Civic Accountability*, as a collective name for the task of holding 'duty of care' and other ethical obligations to clients.

Favour institutional forms of *civic accountability* that honour the *mêtis*/aural/embodied nature of practitioner/client relationships.<sup>8</sup>

Withdraw support from accountability institutions that tolerate or propagate coercion or duress such as unitary standards and adversarial fitness to practice 'courts'.

Disallow, interrupt and contradict use of the word 'Regulation' (of the psychological therapies). 'Regulation' legitimates an imposition

of discipline and control through claiming that *human condition* practitioners pose a threat to clients.

#### *Formative spaces*<sup>9</sup>

Client interests are best sustained by ongoing practitioner peer-review.

Join or create '*Formative spaces*' where vulnerabilities and potentially problematic bias in *Human Condition Work* can be shared, or declared.

A strong version of this would include full disclosure by practitioners about the scope and content of their work, and also any significant personal agendas as they unfold.

#### *Client experience*

Pay attention to, and value, *client experience*.

#### *Education*

Contribute to the *psychological commons* (value contributions to the public media and professional journals as perhaps being equally important).

#### *Political engagement*

Try to keep the politics (power relations) of *Human Condition Work* in view.

Be vigilant about influences and agendas that seek to impose external discipline and control, or build self-interested empires, or that restrict the kind of work we can offer clients.

It is tempting to see this vision of possibilities take the form of an organization. But rather than facilitate creativity and mutuality this is likely to generate obstacles. More realistic is the growth and nourishment of a horizontal layer of practitioners threaded through existing commitments. A network of affinities, sharing commitment to the principles outlined here and a common desire for ethical virtue. Such a network might thrive through conferences, seminars, gatherings, 'formative space' groups, and the use of social media.

Apart from short-term local hierarchies of focus and resource, putting love at the heart of such a network points to it becoming and remaining a community with power relations based on mutual respect.

How will we know when this community has come alive? Look out for the aroma of freshly baked bread!

## References

1 *THE INDEPENDENT PRACTITIONERS NETWORK: civic accountability for psychological work - a peer to peer network approach* <http://ipnosis.org/pages/P2P&IPN.htm>

2 *Protecting the Client Experience: A Catastrophe Theory Map of Civic Accountability in the Psychological Therapies* <http://ipnosis.postle.net/PDFS/SRCTMapFINAL.pdf>

3 *Honouring the Psychological Commons: Peer to Peer Networks and Post-Professional Psycho-practice* <http://ipnosis.org/pages/P2PIntro.htm>

4 'Psychological commons' refers to a psychological space where people can find support for enquiries into their particular experience of the human condition. It is a space informed but not dominated by the hundreds of thousands of articles, journals, books, tapes, cd's and DVDs about psychology, the hundreds of varieties of psycho-practice, plus survivor groups, user groups, help lines, self-help manuals, twelve step programs, Balint groups, infant massage, 5 rhythms dancing, agony aunts, radio chat programmes, meditation, co-counselling, re-evaluation counselling and so on.

5 Love - I prefer the word unadorned by qualifications such as 'non-possessive' which is subsumed under the varieties of domination - love's antithesis. Alternatives such as agape have historical baggage through leaning towards adoration. See [livingfromlove.org](http://livingfromlove.org) for more on this.

6 Mêtis - a highly disciplined capacity for situational improvisation, such as flying a glider, piloting a ship or playing in a jazz group.

7 Collaborative-cooperative research. This takes at least three forms which may be interleaved:

1st person enquiry: me and myself.

2nd person enquiry: you and I.

3rd person enquiry: us.

Reason, P., Rowan, J. eds., *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research Sage 1981*

8 An example would be the development of Practitioner Full Disclosure Lists such as the one being piloted in Bristol. For a demo of how such list might work see <http://thelist.eu>

9 'Formative spaces' derives from a report on research into the impact of regulation on UK healthcare by Michael Fischer and Gerry McGivern, Kings College London. *Statutory Regulation and the Future of Professional Practice in Psychotherapy & Counselling: Evidence from the field* October 2009 [www.kcl.ac.uk/content/1/c6/06/35/90/StatutoryRegulation1.pdf](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/content/1/c6/06/35/90/StatutoryRegulation1.pdf)