

The be-coming of a therapist: experiential learning, self-education and the personal/professional nexus

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ABSTRACT *Grounded in a narrative account of the author's own development as a counselling practitioner, it is argued that a programmatic developmental path for therapy practitioners can be singularly inappropriate. Such a route to practitionerhood threatens to interfere with, and even fundamentally to undermine, the necessarily unique idiosyncrasies of practitioner development, and the often ineffable, unspecifiable nature of the therapeutic process itself. Some tensions lying at the heart of the attempt to professionalise the therapy field in Britain are articulated in this personal chronicled history of principled challenge to statutory regulation. The Independent Practitioners Network is introduced as an approach to accountability that strives to avoid many of the worst incoherencies of the 'modernist' bureaucratic institution, and suggestions are made as to how we might enable diverse, innovative practitioner development in Late Modernity.*

Introduction: the 'state of practitioner development we're in'

'Let us search ... for an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict' (Schön, 1983, p. 49).

In this paper I present discursive retrospective reflections on my own particular 'journey' as a developing counselling practitioner, as a vehicle for generating some more general propositions about the future of practitioner development in what is an emerging 'trans-' or 'postmodern' future for our field (House, 2008, accepted). As I have discussed at length elsewhere (House, 2003, pp. 277–280, 305–307), recent trends towards the institutional professionalisation of the field are fraught with difficulty and contradiction, and for a whole host of complex interrelated reasons.

Not least, ‘modernist’ accountability structures which claim to guarantee quality of therapy practice are shot through with internal contradictions, to such an extent that they can routinely bring about the very opposite of their professed intention.

To take just one highly prescient example, in tandem with the inexorable rise of CBT within the NHS (House & Loewenthal, 2008), we are now seeing the ascendancy of the notion of (allegedly articulatable) ‘competencies’, as a vehicle for delivering the regulation of therapy in the UK (see Postle, 2007, undated)—the assumption being that it is somehow possible to specify in a measurable, assessable form what the main requisite competencies are that define the practice of psychotherapy and counselling. Such an assumption implicitly (or sometimes not so implicitly) treats therapy as *commodity*—that is, as a positivistic, utilitarian enterprise that is formulaically measurable, capturable and definable, without remainder, by sense-data and experience, able to be rationally planned and controllable: in other words, a therapeutic *technology* that becomes a means for controlling and manipulating subjectivity rather than one that is enabling of human and spiritual potential development. Yet what if that which is most important in, and the central defining feature of, successful therapy is crucially and intrinsically beyond positivistic specification, beyond the rationalising instinct of the modernist mentality—as the likes of Bion, (the later) Rogers, Winnicott, Jung, Frank, Sardello and a whole host of other giants of therapy’s history would argue?

I offer here a case for practitioner development which is consistent with a view of therapy that is what I term ‘trans-modern’—in the sense that it incorporates yet moves crucially beyond the ideology of Late Modernity and all that goes with it. Such a case will, *first*, need to challenge head on the so-called ‘surveillance and audit culture’ and its poisonous sidekick, the regime of ‘New Public Management’ (e.g. Cooper, 2001; *Parallax*, 2004; Power, 1997) that is arguably doing such untold damage in modern culture in general, and in the therapy and education worlds in particular (witness, for example, the burgeoning hegemony of so-called ‘evidence-based and empirically validated’ practice—e.g. Bohart, 2002; Bryceland & Stam, 2005). Second, it will need to show just how it is essential for the preservation of the therapy ‘baby’ from the professionalising ‘bathwater’ that paths to practitioner development are kept open, pluralistic and innovative rather than controlled, specified and ‘officially’ accredited and certified. In the course of this discussion I will show how the British Independent Practitioners Network is an early prototype of the kind of practitioner development that is apposite in a postmodern, ‘post-professional’ world in which the need for ‘New Paradigm’ thinking and being is becoming increasingly urgent as the uncritical cultural and environmental degeneracy of Late Modernity threatens to engulf us all.

First, I will present a personal description of my own particular path to practitionership, in the course of which I will illustrate the core themes of ‘professionalisation and its discontents’ about which I have written at length elsewhere (Bates & House, 2003; House, 2003; House & Totton, 1997). The recounting of this vocational story within a personal and a cultural context is important, not least, because ‘journeys’ like this one have been becoming increasingly rare as our field becomes ‘sewn up’ by the mono-culturally inclined professional

bodies and bureaucracies which aspire to controlling the richly fertile heritage which is Britain's admirable therapeutic legacy (Gladstone, 1997; Postle, 1997). Gladstone's trenchant warnings of a decade ago regarding the harm being done to the field's levels of creativity and innovative spirit are, if anything, even more relevant today. He presciently wrote:

'[B]ecoming a practitioner is an idiosyncratic process that escapes the market-driven logic and production lines of the institutionalised therapy training industry now emerging ... [T]he route to competence as a therapist passes through vagaries and vicissitudes that can not be legislated for ... We can now look forward to the next generation of counsellors ..., hatched at carefully conserved factory farms from which they will appear bagged BAC/UKCP/BPC/BPS. This will be the kiss of death for the evolution of creative praxis ... Bureaucratic, academic and commercial structures are variously antagonistic to the making of a therapist and will jointly further the corruption of the training market' (Gladstone, 1997, pp. 171, 173–174, 185).

This paper also affords the welcome opportunity to write up in detail the fascinating history of the British human potential movement's reputable and principled struggle through the 1990s and early 21st century against didactic regulation, from the standpoint of someone who has been centrally involved in that oppositional process.

A personal journey towards practitionership

'What is needed ... is a broader notion of inquiry than the pursuit of knowledge of preexistent reality ... including room for the basic idea that inquiry need not follow existing ideas of what it means to engage in inquiry' (Mourad, 1997, pp. 88, 89).

I locate my own practitioner development as part of a lineage that is traceable back to a series of early radical anti-regulation/pro-pluralism contributions, appearing predominantly in the humanistic journal *Self and Society* (Heron's brilliant 1990 article is seminal); through the two National Conferences on the Dynamics of Accreditation in the early 1990s in which I was an active participant and the Norwich Group Process Group originally led by Robin Shohet; to the founding of the Independent Therapists Network (now the Independent Practitioners Network) in 1994; and thence to the publication of Richard Mowbray's scholarly and seminal work, *The Case Against Psychotherapy Registration* in 1995, and of the widely acclaimed anthologies *Implausible Professions* (House & Totton, 1997), *Ethically Challenged Professions* (Bates & House, 2003), and most recently, Postle's authoritative historical survey of the evolving case against the statutory regulation of the psychological therapies (Postle, 2007). (Full documentation of this substantial literature can be found in House, 2003.)

Beginnings: open 'encounter' in 'pre-professional' days

I had always had a strong lay interest in psychology, and had by the mid-1980s amassed quite a collection of psychology books. I noticed a course on 'Post-Freudian and Post-Jungian Psychology' being advertised at the local adult education centre, and so I booked up. The course leader was Tony Storey, who was later to become my first counselling trainer on the Cambridge University Board of Extra-Mural Studies 3-year course in Counselling and Groupwork.

Around that time I was told about a weekend 'encounter' group, which I was strongly encouraged to try, which I duly did—and which act proved to be the start of an extraordinary experiential learning process which was to last for the next 4–5 years, and the effects of which will always remain with me—both personally and professionally. I quite quickly settled into the 'rhythm' of the encounter group experience, and attended some 35 full-weekend groups between 1986 and 1991.

If I am ever asked what has made the greatest contribution to whatever abilities I might possess as a practitioner, my reply is always instant and unambiguous: 'Jill and Tony's weekends' (though I also have sympathy with the view that effective therapists are far more born than made—House, 1996). A number of the group participants went on to become therapists: all entered upon a profound self-development journey, out of which, almost *as a by-product of the experience*, we 'found our way into' working with clients. This is a centrally humanistic, experiential approach to training which has almost become extinct in these assessment-obsessed days of didactic professionalisation, where, seemingly, people decide that they want to be 'career' therapists and only *then* train to be one, rather than their practitionerhood emerging organically from a personal development path. Gladstone (1995, p. 15) has similarly written about what he terms the 'apprenticeship model' of practitioner development, in which 'becoming a therapist is a personally transmitted craft for which no amount of academic course work can substitute' (see also Gladstone, 1997, quoted earlier).

The Halls' encounter groups were open, freeing experiences, and I have an abiding sense of a strong 'community' dimension that the weekends succeeded in creating and nurturing. Of course there were 'transferences' towards the group leaders, but Jill and Tony Hall worked very openly and demystifyingly with these processes, which for me was an excellent model of practice from which I learnt a great deal about simply and *ordinarily* (Lomas, 1981) being with others (with 'presence') and relating from a place of relative openness and mutual respect.

In terms of professionalisation, the question of credentials never even crossed my mind for one moment. I had been fortunate enough to find an enormously valuable therapeutic experience right on my doorstep, and it clearly did not matter to me whether Jill and Tony had formal 'credentials' for what they were doing. I realise now that, without being aware of the process at the time, I was simply trusting my own discernment about whether this was a therapeutic experience in which I wanted to partake. Indeed, had the ideology of 'credentialisation' been paramount in the therapy culture at that time, I think it would have greatly complicated and interfered with my own authentic decision-making process and capacity for

discernment—‘There is absolutely no evidence that emotional distress necessarily implies incompetence or an inability to judge what is helping or hurting in an attempt to alleviate that distress’ (Dawes, quoted in Mowbray, 1997, p. 33).

Questions (and some uncomfortable answers) about training

I referred earlier to my first training in counselling under the tutorship of Tony Storey. Tony was quite a maverick, independent-minded character—and often inspirational; and his so-called ‘skin’ model of carefully designed and explicitly contracted ‘here-and-now’ groupwork, which constituted the core of his training practice, was again an extremely rewarding personal development experience, as well as an excellent preparation for the sometimes raw immediacy of the therapeutic encounter. I also did a 4-year training (1991–1995) in body-oriented psychotherapy with the Midsummer Training, with Margaret Dyson as principal trainer. It was during this training that I was to begin to get a taste of things to come, in terms of the increasingly obsessional preoccupation with accreditation, stringent regulations about personal ‘training’ therapy, and so on.

The therapy field was changing from the open, ‘pre-professional’ milieu in which I was (loosely) ‘schooled’, towards a predominantly (fear-driven?) preoccupation with meeting externally imposed ‘standards’ of training—with most of my training colleagues seeming to exhibit a creeping but anaesthetising apathy, which in turn fostered a sense of unchallengeable inevitability about the whole credentialisation process. This was one aspect of a far wider cultural process that took root in the 1990s—‘the audit society’ (Cooper, 2001; House, 2005a,b, 2007; Power, 1997) and its accompanying accoutrements of the so-called ‘New Public Management’, with its quite unparalleled obsession with accountability and ‘performance’.

Meanwhile, my own disquiet was being deepened through my involvement with the Norwich Group Process Group and the two National Conferences on the Dynamics of Accreditation (1991–1992), which the group organised. Yet colleagues were inhabiting a close-to-intolerable position, as the professionalising bandwagon gained momentum: for if we ignored the seeming inexorability of regulation, then (‘grandparent’ clauses excepted) it might be literally illegal for us to practise; yet by acquiescing in the face of these cultural pressures, we would have done ourselves a kind of inauthentic ‘soul violence’.

The Norwich Group Process Group and the dynamics of accreditation, 1990–1992

The Group Process Group was an experiential group that met regularly to explore the dynamics of the accreditation process. Initially, the group met every month or so, for a day at a time, and we engaged Robin Shohet to facilitate the group. Before long, Robin became a peer member of the group, in which a prominent role was taken by Jill Hall. The original intention was to devise an alternative, specifically *humanistic* accreditation model for group facilitation and therapeutic practice which could in some sense be recognised or validated by the Norwich Collective.

After meeting for well over a year, the group eventually decided to organise a national conference on the dynamics of accreditation. Two conferences were held in which (now Emeritus Professor) Brian Thorne and group consultant David Wasdell played a leading design and facilitation role. A hundred practitioners from all over Britain attended both events combined, and within a few years, at least some of the faces would become familiar colleagues with the inauguration of the Independent Therapists Network in 1994 (see below). These were certainly exciting, heady times for all of us.

On my psychotherapy training, my challenges to the didactic accreditation process were usually listened to politely by my trainers—but there was little if any energy in my training group for looking deeply into the dynamics of accreditation, or for challenging the fundamental rationale for statutory regulation. The institutional ‘madness’ seemed to be infecting everyone in the therapy world: not least, the trainers, who seemed to be continually changing the requirements and boundaries of their trainings in midstream—much to the understandable chagrin of their long-suffering trainees.

One major conflict in my training came about over the question of my personal ‘training’ therapy. I had been working with a therapist for 75-minute sessions fortnightly for 3 years, when my trainers said that I must do 1 year’s twice-weekly therapy to obtain the training’s diploma—thus bringing the dynamics around accreditation into clear and uncomfortable focus. My then therapist took exception to the implication that the quality of the work we were doing was somehow inferior, and an exchange of difficult correspondence ensued between him and my trainers. Despite outlining the arguments and research challenging the view that therapy should be of a certain frequency to be effective, I eventually gave up my (much valued) therapy with my existing therapist (who lived 150 miles away), and entered twice-weekly psychoanalytic therapy for two more years. I now wish I had been sufficiently strong to put my own therapy experience before my fear of missing out on a course credential. Since that time, I have heard of several cases where gifted, experienced practitioners, non-accredited on principle, have lost clients, often in highly distressing circumstances for all concerned, simply because the latter’s training organisations insisted that the client must work with an institutionally registered practitioner. Those responsible for placing practitioners and clients alike in such impossible binds, all in the name of ‘standards’, surely have a great deal to answer for.

I had begun working as a counsellor in a voluntary agency in 1990, and before long I was well established in several local surgeries as a GP counsellor, and with the luxury of doing sometimes long-term therapeutic work in that setting. From a vocational viewpoint, I had been very fortunate to become established just before the accreditation ‘stampede’ got into full swing. I was therefore able to establish myself in the field without having to engage in the credentialised hoop-jumping which those who followed me into the field soon afterwards had to endure. Latterly I did a great deal of one-to-one supervision, founded a private practice, became group supervisor for a Westminster Pastoral Foundation affiliate, co-facilitated many men’s and mixed

experiential groups, tutored on university counselling courses—and spent a lot of time writing papers and letters for therapy journals.

The founding and growth of the Independent Therapists (later, Practitioners) Network (IPN), 1994

When, in early 1994, I read an interesting letter in *Self and Society* (Totton, 1994), I had no intimation that this tentative proposal for a ‘Self- and Peer-Accredited Therapists Network’ would, within a few years, have given birth to a pluralistic nationwide network of therapy practitioners. About 60 practitioners attended the ITN’s inaugural conference at the Open Centre, London, on the 19 November 1994; and since then I have been a member of the ‘Leonard Piper’ IPN practitioner group, with seven therapists who meet for a day every 4–5 weeks to witness, validate, support and challenge each others’ work. We have implemented a rigorous self and peer assessment (SAPA) process (see Lamont & Spencer, 1997), through which we have all ‘graduated’, but not without some considerable difficulty for several of us—which gives the lie to the view that such self and peer monitoring procedures are necessarily collusive, and therefore inferior or procedurally invalid. I discuss the IPN in more detail later.

The publication of Richard Mowbray’s seminal Case Against Psychotherapy Registration, 1995

Hot on the heels of the first ITN conference ‘gathering’ (as our regular weekend meetings soon came to be called), and after a number of false dawns, Richard Mowbray’s long trailored book proved to be well worth the wait when it appeared in 1995. *The Case* very quickly became the ‘bible’ for practitioners in the field who had severe doubts about the whole direction that the professionalising therapy field was taking.

I remember with great clarity the effect *The Case* had on me—like one of those profoundly integrating ‘*a-ha*’ experiences where previously disparate ideas and feelings suddenly cohere into an integral whole. Here, for the first time, was an immaculately documented and thoroughly compelling rationale for all of the unease I had felt since I first encountered the professionalisation/accreditation issue five years earlier. I immediately composed a verbatim summary of *The Case*, drawing on Mowbray’s own text, typing it up and sending it to Richard Mowbray. The summary met with an enthusiastic response, and later become a 16-page booklet entitled ‘Mowbray distilled’, which was circulated both within the Independent Therapists Network and further afield (since formally published; see House, 1996/2004). Certainly, for anyone wishing to acquaint themselves with the history and advisability of therapy regulation, Mowbray’s *Case* is still surely the indispensable starting-point.

The publication of *Implausible Professions*, 1997, *Ethically Challenged Professions*, 2003 and *Therapy Beyond Modernity*, 2003

The book *Implausible Professions*, co-edited with my IPN colleague Nick Totton, was published in 1997. Eighteen months on from the appearance of Mowbray's *Case*, not only had his book met with a largely deafening silence from those favouring regulation, but there had as yet been no real focus for the disparate voices of concern and principled protest (including some very respected figures in the field) who felt uneasy about the institutional rush into accreditation and regulation which was gathering momentum—and which process, we feared, might before long become quite unstoppable. *Implausible Professions* sought to give a coherent form to those previously disparate voices.

In our editorial introduction, we recounted the extraordinary process of finding a publisher for the book (1997, pp. 7–8). We were beginning to understand through this difficult process just what a brave step it would have been for a major publishing house to publish the book. And paradoxically, it was the very refusal of major publishers to take on the book that provided the strongest possible rationale for its publication! Our experience merely confirmed that the professionalisation process is shot through with a combination of acted-out fear, insecurity and material vested interests (both personal and institutional) that have at best only a very tenuous connection with the values of honesty and integrity which should surely be the hallmarks of therapeutic practice and organisation. By 2000 there had been at least 14 published reviews in the literature, all of which had been pretty much unreservedly positive—in stark contrast to the wedge of rejection letters which we received from the major publishing houses specialising in therapy literature.

Implausible Professions contains a wealth of high-quality articles on almost every conceivable aspect of the professionalisation process. Above all, however, it was not only about critique, but about *refoundation*; about showing that there do exist viable, practicable alternatives to didactic regulation which privilege values that are far more in tune with the core values of therapeutic practice than are those of the dominator-hierarchical institutionalised structures that the therapy bureaucracies at their worst represent (Postle, 2003, 2007).

Then, in 2002 I approached the co-editor of *Ipnosis* magazine, Yvonne Bates, with a view to keeping the 'pluralistic flame' alive with another edited anthology, as the various arguments had not only not gone away, but there were signs that the therapy institutions were still pushing for statutory regulation, notwithstanding the wealth of cautionary arguments that had been piling up, unanswered, since the early 1990s. And so was born the anthology *Ethically Challenged Professions* (Bates & House, 2003), which took the arguments expounded in *Implausible Professions* to a deeper level, and included contributions from major practitioner-writers from around the world.

From the mid-1990s onwards, I had found myself becoming increasingly critical of the whole basis of therapy—of its very legitimacy as a healing practice in Late Modernity. This disquiet became manifest as I felt increasingly uncomfortable when actually doing counselling work, and also as my interest in so-called 'New Paradigm'

thinking and ‘the spiritual’ grew. I enthusiastically joined the Scientific and Medical Network, and found there a fertile environment for challenging the assumptions of modernity, and its associated positivistic, materialist, and increasingly discredited world-view (e.g. Lorimer, 1999). I discovered the (until recently) neglected ‘holistic’ scientific studies of Goethe, and the associated works of the much neglected Austrian philosopher–scientist–mystic Rudolf Steiner (I was also soon to train as a Steiner Waldorf class and kindergarten teacher). Within the therapy world I stumbled across the criminally neglected writings of the inspired analyst-cum-healer and contemporary of Freud, Georg Groddeck (see House, 1997b, 2003, Chapter 9).

In 1998 I wrote a paper for a special issue of the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* on critiques of therapy (House, 1999)—which, almost before I’d realised it, had turned into a 25,000-word critique of various aspects of what I termed ‘the Professionalised Therapy Form’ and (borrowing a term from Nikolas Rose’s work—e.g. 1989), therapy’s ‘regime of truth’ (House, 2003, Chapter 2). Once I had put together a book proposal it was only a short time before the proposal was accepted by a major therapy publisher. Though some major revisions were requested of the first draft that were unacceptable to the author, when an updated draft of the text was offered to Karnac Books in 2002, it was almost immediately accepted in submitted form. I suspect that *Therapy Beyond Modernity* did not suffer the publishing ordeal of *Implausible Professions* because, first, it was offered to a specialist publisher not caught up in negotiating potentially lucrative publishing collaborations with the mainstream psycho-institutions, and that the book offered a wider critique of (professional) therapy-in-general, of which the critique of professionalisation *per se* was just one aspect.

Therapy Beyond Modernity duly appeared in 2003, and one of its most notable features was the considerable space given to three major *client commentaries* on, and critiques of, their therapy experiences. And so was born the ‘Client-Voice Movement’ (House, 2006), which has since been taken up and developed by Yvonne Bates both in *Ipnosis* magazine and also in her recent book, *Shouldn’t I be Feeling Better by Now?* (Bates, 2006).

Be-coming a practitioner: the ‘post-professional’ praxis of the Independent Practitioners Network (IPN)

‘[T]he independence, integrity and future evolution of practitioners will depend in large part on whether collegial/associations such as IPN, that are independent of training organisations, can maintain an alternative centre of gravity, counterbalancing the monopolistic hegemonies formed by members of the trainer’s club, and acting as a space for counter-cultural values’ (Gladstone, 1997, p. 184).

Since its founding in 1995, the IPN had been taking its first steps towards an accountability process far more in tune with the most progressive of ‘New Paradigm’ organisational thinking, striving in its organisational ethos and praxis to be congruent with the spirit of empowering therapy work at its best. The IPN attempts to respond

openly and creatively to many of the shortcomings of a 'modernist' institutional approach to training and regulation—a new model of 'post-professional' accountability that aspires to the status of a self-regulating or '*self-generating*' practitioner community (Heron, 1997).

The Network has no hierarchical power structure, and no executive making centralised decisions about what qualifications are necessary or acceptable for effective practitionership. Administration is facilitated in an open, participative way at meetings which anyone can attend. Relatedly, no individual can speak for the Network, as there exists no power structure that could confer such authority on any one individual. The Network thus has a group, *communitarian* ideology, rather than a 'privatised', individualising focus. The Network's collectively written brochure states that the IPN

'makes no distinction between more or less qualified, or "registered" members, as we recognise that there are many routes to being a good practitioner . . . We specifically favour a richly pluralistic and multi-skilled ecology [of therapeutic practice] . . . We are committed to defending freedom of practice and creating a culture of openness and challenge. The Network grows out of the belief that no organisation has the right or the ability to decide who should practise therapy, facilitation or equivalent skills.'

The Network is therefore a form of 'self-generating practitioner community' in which responsibility-taking *participatory ethics* are privileged over didactic, responsibility-eschewing institutional Codes of Ethics (House, 1997a, 2003, pp. 82–90).

The only unit of Network membership is a *practitioner group* of at least five participants, all of whom stand by each others' work through regular face-to-face engagement in ongoing peer-group experience via self and peer assessment (SAPA) and accreditation. The 'standing-by' process means that each and every practitioner has an intrinsic interest in the quality of their colleagues' therapeutic work. The Network's self-regulating participative process of accountability has indeed been quite explicitly fashioned so as to be consistent with the core values of pluralistic, empowering therapeutic practice.

To become a full 'member group', each practitioner group must establish links with two other groups, such that the two link-groups feel able to 'stand by' their work. There has been a great deal of discussion within the Network as to the precise meaning and procedural implications of 'standing by'—a debate which will no doubt continue to unfold and deepen as the Network matures. The overall Network structure is therefore horizontal rather than vertical or hierarchical—rendering it in tune with recent progressive developments in organisational development.

The Network stands for an approach to difficulties or complaints which encourages the willingness to own 'mistakes' in an atmosphere of non-defensive openness (Totton, 1997), and thereby seeks to transcend the regressive 'victimhood', blaming dynamics (Hall, 1993) that dominate conventional punitive, shame-inducing and victimhood-reinforcing complaints procedures.

There are regular weekend National Gatherings (two or three a year), open to anyone to attend, together with occasional Regional Gatherings. Overall, the IPN is founded in the values of creative pluralism (Samuels, 1997) and the celebration of growth and human potential development, rather than in those of infantilising hoop-jumping, 'power-over' hierarchy, ambition-infused institutional intrigue and a preoccupation with so-called 'psychopathology'.

It would be wrong to imply that the Network's strugglings with the intricate and subtle dialectic between radical individualism and communitarian values has not been variously challenging, frustrating, and sometimes exhausting. Not least, the Network arguably attracts strongly individualistic people who stand far nearer to the 'innovation' pole of the adaption/innovation spectrum of creative practitioner styles (Kirton, 1989; Postle, 2007, pp. 71–75). Consensus-making certainly becomes progressively more challenging and potentially conflictual, the more individualistic are the participants. Moreover, it would be straining credulity to deny that at least some of the formative energy driving the IPN has arguably unprocessed, unconscious 'rebel' elements to it, and some participants have over the years repeatedly emphasised the importance of our looking at such 'shadow material' openly and non-defensively. Finally, one should not underestimate the sheer commitment and 'emotional capital' that is required to create a peer practitioner group that is both effective and sustainable in the long run. I have heard more than one conventionally registered practitioner state a strong preference for their own professionalisation accreditation path, once they'd heard the detail of the degree of commitment entailed in being a full participant in IPN.

Yet these 'birth pangs' and growing pains are arguably a *necessary* and unavoidable process with which *any* human grouping struggling towards a mature, operational *social community ethic and praxis* must contend. The extraordinary subtlety and complexity of what is at stake is beautifully captured by Rudolf Steiner in his 'Motto of the Social Ethic', given to Edith Maryon in 1920 (and cited in Lipsker, 1990, p. 60): 'The healthy social life is found when in the mirror of each human soul the whole community finds its reflection, and when in the community the virtue of each one is living'.

There are many interesting philosophical and procedural commonalities yet to be explored between the IPN, on the one hand, and on the other, both the Quaker movement and the worldwide Steiner (Waldorf) educational and Camphill Community movements, founded as they are in Rudolf Steiner's work.

Conclusions: beyond 'competencies', towards being

'Generalizable knowledge about teaching and learning will never fully reflect or be reflected in the individual cognitive framework of practitioners' (Atkinson & Claxton, 2000, p. 4).

A decade ago now, Ernesto Spinelli provocatively wrote that '[T]here exists precious little about therapy that we can say with any certainty . . . therapists really don't know what they're doing—even if they insist upon pretending . . . they are "experts"'

(Spinelli, 1996, pp. 56, 59). I strongly concur with this view, which paradoxically further entails that the more we are able to admit to our ‘ignorance’—albeit in a ‘disciplined’ way, perhaps—then the more likely it will be that we will discover the requisite abilities and capacities really to help our clients sensitively and effectively.

A ‘trans-modern’ world-view (House, accepted 2008) necessitates that we move far beyond therapy as *technology* and a medical-model ‘diagnosis-and-treatment’ approach to care, and embrace instead the often uncomfortable reality that therapy as a hermeneutical healing practice entails many practitioner qualities that are *in principle* beyond rational ‘modernist’ specification—as a number of writers in diverse fields well beyond therapy have argued (cf. Michael Polanyi’s notion of ‘tacit knowledge’ [Polanyi, 1967] and Donald Schön’s ‘reflective practitioner’, for example). As Jerome Frank put it, ‘[P]sychotherapy transpires in the realm of meaning. [I]n contrast to facts, meanings cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed by the objective criteria of the scientific method’ (Frank, 1989, p. 144).

In their excellent anthology *The Intuitive Practitioner*, we find Terry Atkinson and Guy Claxton advocating in their book’s sub-title the great value in ‘not always knowing what one is doing’, and that *intuition* (and, following Rudolf Steiner, possibly imagination and inspiration too) are often the key to effective and successful practitioners in the human caring vocations. Such radical counter-cultural perspectives on therapy in the 21st century clearly have major implications for the be-coming of therapy practitioners and the kinds of training experiences that might be most effective and enabling—and I hope that this autobiographical treatise might help readers to think about practitioner be-coming in quite new and innovative ways.

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