

The (counselling) house extension

Katherine Porter tours the house containing the many varieties of counselling training, and finds CYP courses in an extension to the ground floor. She describes the thinking behind one such course provision



The House that Jack Built

This is the house that Jack built.

This is the malt that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the cat that killed the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the dog that worried the cat that killed the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built... (tbcl)

I'd like to start this article with two stories: the one at the left and another from life.

The house that Jack built is a cumulative English children's rhyme that sets up a series of small but interlinked steps in the creation of a picture of a place and characters that inhabit it. There is a clear link developing, but on closer inspection we see that what sets up the latter parts of the story is one word regarding the nature of Jack's house, the *malt* that lay in the house. From this, we deduce that this is a place of work, perhaps a brewery or distillery, where raw materials go through a

transformational process leading to a new product for sale. (Bear this in mind as we proceed!) As a consequence of those two facts, that it is a house of work and contains raw materials, we are led to meet a sequence of other inhabitants, each connected in some way, but with a random and gruesome logic, typical of children's rhymes.

I was recently in the staff room of an organisation that offers counselling by both trainees and qualified practitioners and the discussion was around where experience-based and academic knowledge-based trainings had

value in relation to job application success. For one person, experienced-based knowledge had been an important part of their success at interview, so the question arose of the benefits of undertaking an academic programme such as a Master's.

As someone with a Master's who got their last two jobs on the back of holding that level of qualification, I have been through those questions both before and after, and have in my case found a value in holding both, one as a Diploma in Psychotherapy and the other as an MSc. I have met a significant number of counsellors who would say gaining a Master's had been part of the progression they thought they needed to go through in the last decade, when higher education was promoted across all professional trainings. This was to align them with what have been classic professional trainings taught in universities – such as medicine, law or architecture – and the aim was for our work to be recognised on a level with other highly skilled professionals. Obviously, a Master's is a research degree rather than vocational training, for certain demonstrating skills in clinical expertise but through the rigour of research practice. Its aim is to develop the research skills of those who undertake it and it has great value in bringing us into contact with current research on our areas of specialism and supporting a considered, reflective practice by having to explain to others.

For us, who work with children and young people, the opportunity to undertake a Master's in this specialism is quite limited, with perhaps half a dozen available in England, one in Wales and possibly none in Scotland, so those who have a Master's have often had to make them 'fit' rather than find anything tailor-made. Do we need them? Are they the best way forward for our area of work, or, like the student in the staff room, is it the experience we need?

The house of counselling training

If we maintain the metaphor of a house of training, where raw material is transformed and a good result ensues, what is its main purpose, how is the house constructed, who are the inhabitants that have come, and are they connected or random?

In the house of counselling training, we have the main purpose, which is the transformation of practitioners through extension of their knowledge and skills in order to improve and extend the quality of counselling practice offered to distressed clients who come in search of support. The larger part of the house is taken with the training of adult practitioners, but over the last decade there have been built several

extensions and a conservatory. The conservatory holds the courses that need something of a hothouse environment to flourish and grow: higher degrees, the Master's and doctoral programmes. The extension we are interested in is that of specialist courses – in our case the extension for training practitioners who work with children and young people. (There is also now to be, I notice, a virtual canopy in the form of Counselling MindEd!)

Within the main body of the house, there are many rooms connected by landings, stairways and hallway by the professional bodies such as BACP, so that someone may walk through the front door, start in one room and walk to another for training in another area. For example, a humanistically trained counsellor can take up some training in the main body of the house in CBT and Mindfulness rooms or in psychodynamic and person-centred rooms. But I am chiefly interested in those areas that we have needed to 'add on', those that are clearly *attached* to the main house but have aspects that mean that they are not *integral* to it and where one has to return to the main house to move, say, from the Children and Young People's extension to the Higher Degrees Conservatory.

My experience as a trainer

As part of my working life, I tutor on the Diploma in Higher Education: counselling children and young people's (DipHE:ccyp) training run by Simpson House, Edinburgh and accredited through Middlesex University. This course accepts students from generic and specialist certificate counselling courses and provides a training to develop a range and depth of knowledge around theory and practice with children and young people so that they have reached undergraduate level by the close of the course. This begs the question: *why have we just created a Post-Qualifying Certificate course in this specialism?* Why not add on a Bachelor or Master's top-up course? What has constituted the course that means it sits within the CYP extension rather than across the hallway of the main house, in the Degrees Conservatory?

It's down to history

As in all other areas of development and growth, history has a significant part to play in the training courses on offer. For Simpson House, the DipHE:ccyp came first on the scene, and flagged up the value of an initial certificate-level training as a precursor. This Certificate in Counselling Children and Young People (C:ccyp) is a highly experiential course aimed at developing core counselling skills whilst using a wide range of media. Rachel Hudson leads this course and

developed the C:ccyp following on from training she devised when a trainer for Adoption UK. There, she was able to integrate personal experience around adoption with her training as a counsellor and teacher to develop programmes for kinship and foster carers. In 2009, she ran the C:ccyp courses in parallel with those for Social Care and Adoption UK and it was as a result of this that the request came to Simpson House from Dundee and Arbroath for a four-day specialist ccyp course for qualified counsellors who wished for CPD in this area.

Alongside the Arbroath course came feedback and, with it, reflection in Simpson House with their Children's Service, the Sunflower Garden (a service for children and young people affected by drug and alcohol misuse and misusers) around how these were to 'fit together'.

To sidetrack for a moment, each year hundreds of counsellors across the country complete courses and look for work. Some realise that in training to work with adults their interest and inclination is to work with the young, but do not necessarily feel confident in their knowledge of child development or skills to make the transition without a full retraining – for which the time, finance and ability to complete the course demands can seem too much when they have already expended significantly for their adult training. In the current climate, economically and politically, the decision to further invest in training and education has grown even more daunting, with its increased costs and diminished employment possibilities in comparison to five or 10 years ago.

Counsellors are sometimes working in organisations for adults that are seeing a need to create a children and young people's or parent and family service, knowing it may not be a full-time post or that funding a cyp post is more difficult to justify. Everyone is in favour of a well-trained, quality workforce and recognises its importance as part of the children and adolescent mental health services of the country, and there is a broad church within which many different attitudes and ways of working have a place.

So the Arbroath course was very well received and comments came back that this would be welcomed if expanded. It had attracted a wide range of professionals, both English and Scottish: teachers, social care workers, workers from Women's Centres, Children's Panel members and residential care workers.

Through our placement agencies for students on the DipHE:ccyp, a need and want was flagged up for practitioners specifically trained to work in this area. At the time it was originally considered,

it also made sense in responding to the increased accountability requirement from Government when we thought we were potentially to be part of the Allied Health Practitioners register. It was a consolidation of the foundations of the ccyp extension that had been built onto the house.

Development of a new course

So the development of the post-qualifying certificate (PQC:ccyp) is practitioner- and needs-led rather than strategy-led, to fit in with the different legal and social care systems in Scotland. Conversion courses were not popular and were expensive, so we needed to develop a quality, practitioner- and workplace-driven training that gave qualification in the context of Continuing Professional Development. We also needed something that used entry requirements rather than APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) to fit with the organisational structures, and had a timetable that took into consideration the fact that most of those applying would be in work and likely to have more limited funding available. The outcome measurements needed to be manageable, holding a line between 'not onerous' but still 'challenging'. A certificate course structure seemed to be the most appropriate starting place, and in consultation with COSCA, who had accredited the initial four-day, 30-hour course, it was agreed to expand to a 120-hour, four-module course.

For a practitioner-driven course, we were then looking at our own experiences, reflections and desires regarding best practice in the field, along with current evidence-based research and practice. As the entry requirement was set at a diploma level, we could focus less on theoretical constructs and more on a skills base combined with key modules we had found relevant to the practice of counselling in the workplace. There were obvious key areas:

- An emphasis on the use of creative play and materials, as many adult-trained counsellors find that they can be uncomfortable with the transfer into metaphor through play, and wanted a space in which they received supported practice, like they had with their original trainings.
- Infant, child and adolescent development including the physical, social, emotional, behavioural and cognitive spheres, together with integrated knowledge from neuroscience, and consideration of temperament, character and personality styles.
- Legal, ethical, safeguarding and child protection matters, which are inherent, complex, and require space and time to engage with.

It was at this point in our thinking that the nature and style of teaching came to the fore – for this to become a rich and fruitful experience, we knew that we wanted space for those attending to delve deeper by means of their current knowledge, and for this, lectures would be kept to those areas best delivered in this form and the seminar would be the more important part of our pedagogy. Similarly, in order to make a course that was manageable for our trainees and from our experience as trainers and practitioners, it was important that the 'placement practice' component ran concurrently with the course of study. To this end, it was agreed that we would accept placement hours from the student's workplace, and so discussion and decision-making around whether a secondary or external supervisor would be required became foreground.

There was another consideration. Feedback from the first Edinburgh and Arbroath courses was that, in looking at their own childhoods, the participants saw how critical it was to explore this and what they perceived as 'normal'. We can find ourselves caught out occasionally, because counsellors and psychotherapists working in this area take it as a given that exploration and therapy around our own childhood experiences and how this has shaped and impacted on our development is core to any training. This feedback confirmed that personal therapy would be a requirement and validated what can be a controversial decision.

Generally speaking, most counselling services were concerned with the counselling of children in the primary years of education. NHS CAMHS had a clear role regarding medical concerns and those cases where psychiatric involvement was possibly needed. But many potential trainees work with youth groups, and some are in secondary education where the focus is the pre-adolescent and adolescent, for whom sandtray and doll's house work has its place but... This situation requires the practitioner to understand the developmental needs and changes in these years and to adjust their way of intervening in the cases where childhood hasn't

yet been put aside nor adulthood achieved. So the needs and ways of engaging with the adolescent required special attention. For this, we created a half-credit, 15-hour module addressing the key issues teenagers are dealing with in identity, gender and sexuality, as well as the legal, educational and mental health issues that commonly come to the surface at this stage, such as eating and image issues, social anxieties, and substance use and misuse.

Our final area for consideration covered working with systems and agencies around the child. There is particular reference to the skill of assessment, as this is a fundamental area of difference between working with adults and with children, especially for the younger child where the parent or carer has a greater part in the picture, either with or without being alongside the child in the counselling room. Taking time to consider the roles and skills required to navigate the working alliance with the parent or carer and the child, and the ethical and legal dilemmas this can raise for practitioners, seemed a valuable aspect to give time to exploring on a training course.

All this was our thinking as we planned the new course. We know we cannot cover everything in a course of this length and duration. But we hope it will act as a stable scaffolding to assist the practitioner in making the alterations to their own house of professional training and practice.

The house that Jack built

Finally, we return to the original story metaphor. Perhaps (noting the satisfactory ending) it should be 'post qualifying certificates – a new dawn'?

This is the cock that crowed in the morn
That woke the priest all shaven and shorn
That married the man all tattered and torn
That kissed the maiden all forlorn
That milked the cow with the crumpled horn
That tossed the dog that worried the cat
That killed the rat that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built. ●

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Simpson House Training can be contacted on 0131 225 6028. Further information on courses can be obtained from www.simpson-house.org and the Training Administrator, Lesley Orr: lesley.orr@crossreach.co.uk

Reference

1 Counselling MindEd. BACP Children & Young People. 2013; March:20-21.