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Dialogue about CCI



John Heron

Dency Sargent

Introduction

This conversation between Dency Sargent and John Heron, co-founders of CCI, was recorded at the CCI International Workshop, Auckland, New Zealand, January 1997. Joke Stassen and Niek Sickenga transcribed the recording and the transcript has been fully edited and revised by Dency and John.

October 2000



Dialogue about CCI

Dency:

Where do we take co-counseling and CCI? Well, I started co-counseling within Re-evaluation Counseling in about 1970. What attracted me to co-counseling was that it gave me an opportunity to get my own time. In those days I was working full time in the library world, I had a young daughter - who is now not so young - and I was also helping my husband, Tom Sargent, set up a counseling and consulting center. Tom and I were doing training for peer counselors when we came across co-counseling. We read in the paper about this woman who was teaching RC. I went to her class, ostensibly to support the development of our center, but right away I didn't care much what it had to do with the center, I wanted it for me. As I said co-counseling has always been essential for me because it legitimizes my getting my time. And this is still important for me.

Tom and I went to several RC workshops, at some of which John was also present. Very soon I was teaching RC, in fact I was the second teacher in Connecticut. The first teacher was also the area reference person, for those of you who know RC structure. Our local RC community grew very fast. I couldn't teach enough classes, people were banging on the door. It became very important for me and for Tom to develop a community structure that was based on the peer model of a co-counseling session. We were seeking to develop a horizontal, rather than a vertical, model of community, and of course there are very few or no models of horizontal community structure. So a core group of us spent many sessions over weeks and weeks, co-counseling, thinking, writing and developing guidelines to create our community. These guidelines included making decisions by consensus.

As we applied our guidelines, conflict grew between Tom and the area reference person, who was also becoming uneasy about the growth and popularity of our community. And at some point Harvey Jackins had the person who was second in command in RC visit Hartford, Connecticut, where we were based, and basically tell us that we weren't doing it right, that I wasn't doing it right, that there were problems with what I was teaching, mostly in the area of validation, that we could no longer have our community, that I needed to be taking my direction from the area reference person and that my choice was to accept this direction or leave. Well, it was a wrenching, wrenching time, because I and all of us had a sense of belonging and empowerment within RC. It was like being told. It was horrible...

I had a lot of support from Tom and a lot of encouragement to leave RC and we did. We established what we called People's Re-evaluation Counseling. At the same time we noticed that John Heron's name no longer appeared on RC lists, as European regional reference person. We both paid a lot of attention to this and said "Wait a minute, what happened to John?". In that year, 1974, Tom and I went to England and met with John and created the guidelines for Co-Counseling International and we still use those guidelines in CCI USA.

laughter, mini is offered

Well, we started right away with what has since become a pattern for international workshops. We did a first CCI workshop in the United States and I think I am correct that John led it. Then he and I together led the first European workshop in England that same year. That pattern has been maintained, as you know, with an annual CCI workshop in the United States, which our community organizes, and then another annual one in Europe, which now rotates between England, Holland, Hungary, Scotland and Ireland. More recently, New Zealand started another workshop every three years or so, in our winter, your summer. Richard Horobin and Rose Evison came to the second European workshop and then to the United States. They were our first people from England to be a regular part of the United States CCI. They contributed a lot to us and their participation, in addition to the original participation with John, has been very significant for CCI USA.

I trained teachers and they trained teachers and there were little pockets of community around Connecticut. At some point there was a breakdown of community structure following the separation from RC, so I rebuilt the co-counseling community with a structure that was much more tied to the counseling center. The pockets continued in other areas and we all came together every year at the CCI USA workshop.

After Tom and I separated, which was over 10 years ago, I and others put a lot of time and energy into bringing our communities together and now we have a group, representing the whole north-east US, which organizes the CCI workshop every year. One of my goals was to have this group run itself, so that I no longer needed to be part of organizing the CCI workshop. Now it is carried on by others. Our teachers have come together: we have consciously attended to inclusion rather than exclusion, to celebrating our differences, to learning from one another and to increasing our quality of teaching and our quality control around teaching. This has been very rewarding. Now I am one of the two continuity persons for our community, and I am very active in our teachers group.

Co-counseling and my profession in the library world are the two primary commitments of my life. Co-counseling has given me a place to belong with my power and bigness, and a place where I can fall apart, where I can be respected across the whole range of who I am, in a way that I have not found in any of the other arenas of personal growth that I have visited. It is a place where my participation can make a difference, and this is a very big deal for me. Co-counseling by its nature generates community, so what I have now is the opportunity to help create that, and to grow through meeting the many challenges on the way, and through relationship with all of you within the international community. In the United States, in my experience, we tend to be isolated and arrogant; we don't learn other languages. For me to be with you here is a gift and for me to have you visit us in the United States is a gift. So I have a good life and I have set about to create its richness mostly through my work as a co-counselor. I thank you all for your part in the energy of this creation which empowers me and you and all of us to have great lives.

Remark: I'd like a mini.

Question about boundaries between RC and CCI

Dency:

There has not been much softening of the boundaries between RC and CCI. People in our area that want to be involved in RC are still told by RC that they must choose between RC and CCI. RC does not support them being involved in both organizations, so what I do, and what I think others do, is to tell people that although our workshops are open to them, they need to be aware that by attending them they are putting at risk their participation in RC. So we tell them this and they decide how to handle it. Sometimes people are able to get away with being in both for a while.

Question about how the differences between CCI and RC arose

Dency:

Some of you may be familiar with a RC book called *The complete appreciation of yourself*. I took this very literally and built it into co-counseling, so that we used validation for strength building, celebration, not just for discharge. Those early pockets of RC were pretty isolated from the teachings at mainstream workshops, so it was quite a bit later I learned that it was the RC norm to use validation only for discharge. But I wasn't using validation only for discharge, so that was used as part of the reason for telling us to leave RC. I think the real reason was that we had developed a big community of our own which was not inside the vertical hierarchical system of RC, and this was just not acceptable to the hierarchy.

Question about difference around client-centeredness

Dency:

One major difference between CCI and RC is that the RC counselor is asked to be responsible for intervening in what he or she interprets as the client's patterns or distress areas. In CCI we teach that the client is responsible for selecting the area of work and for choosing the contract with the counselor. This is a very distinct and major difference between RC and CCI co-counseling. It is about where responsibility lies for the work done and the way it is done. There are other differences too, but this is a major difference.

The way CCI and RC use validation continues to be a difference, as I explained earlier. We also do a lot with action-planning, goal-setting and creating the belief system that each of us has the power to shape a great joyful loving life and to take active steps towards its manifestation. I don't know where that stands in RC, since I'm so far away from RC - after all it's been over 20 years.

Remark about social activism as an other difference

Dency:

Yes, as Cathy pointed out, RC is far more involved in social activism and issues of oppression and racism, areas that we haven't addressed a lot. It is a matter of time and energy and numbers, so we have not taken that kind of direction.

Question: Did RC change or did you want to change RC by leaving?

Dency:

No, because early on I really didn't know that what I was doing was different from RC. I developed our approach from our counseling center's point of view, with a belief-system all about us as clients, about our own goodness and ability to change and grow. I was isolated and it was only later that I learned how what I was doing could be seen to be wrong from within RC. Basically we didn't choose to leave, we were told to leave or were told to behave differently or leave. So we didn't separate off in order to change RC. As I say, I didn't realize we were different, and that this was such a big deal as it was at the time.

Question about discharge

Dency:

Yes, basically what you said is my experience. In RC the issue was not that you as client got into a certain work area, but that you did so on your own and not through the direction of your counselor. RC says that the counselor is the one who is responsible for directing the client, so if the client goes off and directs himself, that's just not acceptable within RC.

The other thing that was also part of my experience I discovered some time later. It was that people in the RC hierarchy were discussing what had gone on in some of our co-counseling sessions, including the content of the sessions. This information was used to support their view of how it was that we weren't OK. This was an enormous experience of violation. The hierarchy stated that there was confidentiality, but at the same time breached confidentiality in order to protect the purity and safety (or whatever) of RC from anything it judged to be unacceptable behaviour.

Question about you couldn't teach enough courses, I am struggling to find enough people in Sheffield, is there a difference in climate?

Dency:

No, it is worldwide. At the time when I started teaching there was really almost no such thing as personal growth. RC hit Hartford and Connecticut in a growth void, so I raised the flag and there was a huge response. Today I could raise the flag, do cart wheels and send off fireworks and there would not be that kind of response. Since the late sixties and seventies endless personal growth opportunities have become available, everything from twelve steps groups to you-name-it has occurred. So we are competing with all this popularization of personal growth, all the same things that you are competing with. We can no longer just say "here is a class".

It takes a lot of work to get classes going.

Remark: It also really changed how classes go, I mean things that used to be really kind of earth shattering and need to take a lot of time in fundamentals, you know people take up in about five seconds, because it is sort of out in the air now.

Question about how fixed is CCI?

Dency:

I still experience CCI as what we originally said it was, a federation of independent co-counselors and co-counseling communities. We don't even have a structure for saying what it is or what it isn't and therefore what it can become. Already an enormous number of other things have been incorporated, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. I think the development of CCI will be dependent on where we say it will go and to the extent that we say it as a group, then there is a group possibility for that to be. If we don't say it as a group, then it is going to happen a little bit here and a little bit there: we'll come to workshops and say "Ah, what are they doing?" and either decide to learn from it and hope somebody will teach us, or else we'll just keep doing slightly different versions of co-counseling in every community, which is what I think is happening now.

Question: I am sure you are aware that a lot of people in RC are dissatisfied and are thinking about leaving. I guess they might want to join CCI and I wonder what your response to that is, do you see that as a threat, a challenge, something you look forward to, are you helping them?

Dency:

I just got some of their names. I am on email now, so I emailed them and gave them a slightly different version of what I have just said, a more localized version of my history. When I get back, I am going to talk to them and find out more. I think there is a pretty large community of ex-RCers out there. Michael seems very eager to be connected with them and participate more and more in outreach.

Cathy and I just started teaching a weekend fundamentals. I know for you that is the norm, at least it was. A woman from Pennsylvania who has left RC was in that workshop and she posted on the email list some of her reactions to our class. So one of the things I want to bring to the table within our community right away, is just how we are going to prepare ourselves both to be respectful of where ex-RCers are and supportive of that, and also not to be overwhelmed by it, particularly by the healing that may need to take place. It is a lot to take on, as those of you who have been through this will know, and we haven't had this discussion yet about how to prepare ourselves both to take care of ourselves and to build a welcome for ex-RCers participating in our groups.

Question

Dency:

It is beginning to grow. We have right now a lot of energy, and people are popping up with things. A man in our community, who is not a teacher, just sourced a group in a prison and we have four people going there to teach. We couldn't call it co-counseling because there was a RC group there that objected, so we call it something else. We also have some self-run groups popping up and some interest in exploring aspects of spirituality. So things like this are going on, and there is also an interest in the whole area of oppression. I think that as our community evolves we will take on more areas of concern and interest that are meaningful to people. We have one woman who is very interested in environmental issues. We are in a place where there is going to be more space for focusing on those kinds of directions.

Remark about time

Dency: time.....

John:

Ok let's stand and turn around three times and sit down.

My story starts in July 1971 summer, when I attended the annual conference of the British Association of Social Psychiatry in Oxford. In the middle of some interesting and some tedious presentations there was one by Tom Scheff, who was Professor of Sociology at UCLA in Santa Barbara, and also a Re-evaluation Counseling teacher. He gave a very elegant, illuminating account of the basic theory and practice of Re-evaluation Counseling and then did a brilliant demonstration, working with two or three people from the audience. There was a woman called Elspeth sitting beside me, and after Tom had finished I turned to her and said "Let's go and have a co-counseling session". She said "That's a good idea". We went straight upstairs to one of the rooms and had a good session, simply on the basis of Tom's excellent exposition and demonstration. He had given us a simple and challenging theory of the human condition, had showed us what to do about it, and we went away and got on with it and it worked really well. Elspeth later became a Re-evaluation Counseling teacher, about a year after I did.

Tom was in England because he was researching the anti-psychiatry of Laing, Cooper and others. And this meant of course that he was also interested in peer self-help methods of mental health, such as co-counseling. After the conference, Tom ran two RC fundamentals classes in London at weekends. I went to both of them. He combined huge intellectual competence with extraordinary sensitivity, skill and compassion in working with people. He was remarkably balanced and integrated and skillful. If this is Re-evaluation Counseling, I thought, I want more of it. Then he asked me to have a co-counseling session with him, which I did. After the session with him he asked me to be a Re-evaluation Counseling teacher and the Area Reference Person for London. I said "OK, why not". After he returned to the USA, he sent me a document signed by Harvey Jackins, authorizing me to teach "re-evaluation Counseling", and stating that this was a legally registered service mark in the USA.

I didn't meet Harvey Jackins for over a year during which time I taught re-evaluation Counseling in various parts of the UK, in Belgium and in France. Eventually I wrote Harvey "We have been going for a year. You'd better come over and run a couple of workshops". He led two workshops at the University of Surrey in the late summer of 1972, and authorized several other people to be RC teachers. Soon after that he asked me to be European Regional Reference Person. I thought how grand and elevated and I agreed. This meant that I was his first lieutenant outside the USA and first senior leader involved in the worldwide spread of RC. I went to the US to a couple of

workshops and a huge correspondence developed between us. We had a great deal of discussion about what it meant to make RC a worldwide movement, what it meant to take something developed in northwestern USA, with a local folksy flavour, and make it international.

What I discovered through personal conversation and our correspondence was that he was applying within RC a strict neo-marxist, leninist approach. He told me that he had earlier been a member of the communist party and had been busy in the labour struggles in the northwestern USA, and that he resigned from the party because its members were too full of their own unprocessed distress. What he didn't tell me, though it soon became obvious, was that he took from the party the leninist doctrine of firm central control of theory and policy in running RC. He was the sole source of RC theory, edited anyone else's version of it, and controlled the policy of developing the RC communities, appointing and sacking local teachers and organisers. And he was remarkably intransigent in both respects.

He opposed every suggestion I made about policies to develop RC in ways appropriate to the European context. If he had followed some of my ideas there might well not have been the later defection of whole RC communities in Belgium and elsewhere. On the matter of theory, I put it to him that if he really believed in the liberation of occluded intelligence through the discharge of distress, then the sign of true liberation is that people will apply their intelligence awarely, lovingly, creatively and critically to the theoretical assumptions in terms of which it has been liberated. And until they can do this, their intelligence isn't really free. Under the impact of this inescapably powerful view he promised, at a public workshop, to set up the so-called Revaluation Counseling Theoretician, a journal for the open discussion of theory among experienced and mature co-counsellors. He never did set it up.

For some while we aired our differences in public, sending copies of our exchange of letters to all the local RC leaders around the world. Eventually I realized I needed to leave RC: I could not honour my own humanity and remain part of a system that in principle would not have dialogue and debate about the premises on which it is based, a system that was an ideological and political autocracy. In February 1974, I resigned from all my RC roles and started to develop co-counselling on an independent basis. Later in that year I first met Dency and Tom when they visited the UK, and we co-founded CCI.

Two things took me into, and underpin my involvement in, co-counselling. When I met Tom Scheff in 1971, I had just started my interest in democratic research, people researching people, doing research *with* people not *on* them. In 1996 I published, after twenty five years of work on this kind of person-centred research, the first full account of co-operative inquiry, in which people together agree on theory, explore it through their own experience, and review the theory in the light of their continued experience of it. From the outset, co-counselling seemed tailor-made for this way of people doing research with each other. So I ran the first RC class at the University of Surrey, for 20 weeks starting October 1971, as a co-operative experiential inquiry into the theory of RC. From the very beginning my commitment to co-counselling has been based on inquiry. It always has been and it always will be. Co-counselling is ideally suited for participative, shared, conjoint inquiry.

The other fundamental reason I became interested in co-counselling was because I was and am a mystic. I believe deeply in the spirituality of the universe as a multidimensional creation. And I saw in co-counselling an excellent and successful way of making space for the dynamic, indwelling spirit to move within and heal me, flushing out emotional pain through discharge. As a client, I opened to a deep creative principle which, given half a chance, recreated my way of being in the world. That was for me living experiential theology, and always has been. I'll now say a bit more about each of these two interests.

I soon realized that inquiry was not allowed inside RC. I could have nothing to do with this movement with such a prohibition in place. If you create a community with a lot of love about,

but the love is separated from inquiry, then the love becomes fickle and potentially traitorous. It only appears to be liberating, for it turns into its opposite and becomes damaging and destructive toward people who have authentic doubts. This is what happened in RC. As soon as a member disagreed genuinely about fundamental theory or policy, there was no dialogue, the love stopped and he or she was cast out of the fold: in a loving community one day, and out in the cold the next. That's the tragedy. Shared love and shared inquiry need each other.

In the early eighties Peter Reason and I launched co-operative inquiries with groups of co-counsellors. One inquiry was into the prevailing basic map of client states and processes. We went off and had sessions, made notes and diagrams about our work as clients, brought these back to share with the whole group, revised the basic map in the light of the sessions, and went around this cycle several times. We found that the more we engaged with the inquiry, the deeper the sessions became. The more we were concerned to refine the map, the more profound the cathartic work and the deeper the levels we reached.

From the very beginning I have been concerned to find holistic ways of working within co-counselling, so that as client I can manifest myself as a totality of the physical, the emotional, the mental, the psychical and the spiritual. I don't want any part of my being left out. In my first workshops, I introduced the transpersonal (as transpersonal direction-holding), and that has been my continuing commitment.

The spiritual is excluded from RC because RC is born out of the secular trio of Marx, Darwin and Freud. These three great luminaries created a very powerful secular climate, and Harvey Jackins was influenced by all three. RC theory, as he conceived it, is rooted in a humanist and materialist world view. This has rolled on through the years, and my concern has been to try to find a way of making the theory truly cosmic, truly participative, truly engaged with the totality of being. And that's what I am currently busy with. I call it co-creating so that we don't get confusion.

Just to give a hint of my views, let's ask why people hurt people. It can't be explained in terms of innate aggression or we are all in trouble. The traditional RC view is that people hurt other people because of ordinary ignorance - they lack appropriate knowledge and skills. I agree with this, but I think there is also a deeper truth. People hurt other people fundamentally because they have forgotten whence they come.

I believe I am part of, I emerge out of, the free attention of the universe. I don't think free attention is localized, some little aura of consciousness that is around me. I think it is here, there and everywhere, and because of the tensions and stresses of the human condition, we forget that it is our home. Forgetting this, we keep contracting into the subtle pain of such forgetfulness, and it is this kind of alienation which at root underlies alienation between people. So I want the freedom in a co-counselling session to announce, to celebrate and to affirm that I am part of, an expression of, the free attention and living presence of the cosmos; that I am an autonomous being in interconnectedness with all other beings. That is how I want to do co-counselling and I am currently exploring that in an inquiry format and, as I have said, I call it co-creating, so that it doesn't create confusion. Now it is not everybody's cup of tea, so I am happy to be a friendly heretic within CCI, and to be cautious, quiet and restrained about it - and to be in endless inquiry.

Question

John:

Early in 1978 Ros Capper came from Wellington to a co-counselling workshop of mine in Quaesitor, a growth centre in London. She was in London with her husband who was a counselor at the university in Wellington and on a sabbatical in the UK. She said "If I get money will you come to New Zealand". I said "Sure". So she got the Mackenzie Educational Foundation to cover the fare and other expenses and I came to New Zealand for six weeks in September/October

1978 and led a whole number of workshops of different kinds, including co-counselling fundamentals in Auckland and in Wellington and a follow-up workshop which included elements of how to teach co-counselling. After I left, and to my delight and hugely to the credit of your visionary enterprise, co-counselling communities in Auckland and Wellington took off.

Co-counsellors from New Zealand used to pop in and say hello to me in London. I would fish around and ask "Well, any chance of a return visit, to help you out?" They said "We don't need your help, we are getting on with it". In Auckland in those days they were vigorously engaged with the peer principle, with in an interesting kind of peer teacher training, and up to four people co-teaching fundamentals as peers. My impression from the outside has been that the Auckland and Wellington communities each developed a distinctive aroma and character, because of interesting differences in history and other factors.

Question

John:

Harvey is a very remarkable man, and it is a pity he is not a friend. He would be if he wasn't being so stupido, as the Italians say. He also has a remarkable pathology, like so many greats in the growth movement, present company excepted.

Question: Would you like to own that?

Question

John:

The letters between Harvey and me in 1973 circulated to all the reference people all over the planet. Our disagreements grew and he asked me to come to a meeting of all the top leaders in California. And I said "No, this is a setup and I am not going to fall for it". When I got the letter I realized that there was no way I was going to be drawn and quartered by Harvey's remorseless authoritarianism, with which the leaders around him all colluded. I decided that it was no good wasting time in trying to change RC from within, as it was too much in Harvey's grip. The only sensible thing to do was to salvage co-counselling from its relentless authoritarian framework.

From the very beginning of setting up RC Harvey had used the leninist principle of firm central control of theory and policy, but in the early days he kept quiet about the origins of this principle. What he went on to do, once RC got worldwide, was to make his Marxism much more explicit within RC. He rewrote the Communist Manifest of 1848 for the RC communities, putting discharge theory into it. And it is an ingenious rewrite, in which discharging RCers, recovering their occluded intelligence through releasing the pain of being oppressed, become the new vanguard of the proletariat.

He then introduced Marx's theory of class into direction-holding. This is dubious to say the least. Marx himself was inconsistent in his different accounts of class. Nevertheless, RC co-counsellors were taught to use different directions for discharge, according to whether they were owning class, middle class or working class. This business of categorizing RCers into classes did not well up from the grass roots. It was imposed on RC by Harvey's doctrine that the leader thinks on behalf of the communities he leads, just as within RC the counselor thinks on behalf of the client.

This kind of imposition is not good news for the human race. I left RC before the Marxism became fully explicit. I resigned all my roles. This was a solo act. I told all the RC teachers in the UK what I was going to do and why. I didn't try to influence them, since it was their personal decision whether they stayed or left. I realized that they must do their own thing. But I have to tell you that I was disappointed that only two other teachers, out of twelve or so, resigned. I was disappointed that they couldn't see the writing on the wall, or if they could see it, didn't care about it. I was also deeply hurt that all those people who were very close one day, were distant

and rejecting the next. This has been a very painful thing for people to cope with when they leave RC: the love that seemed to be so intense, intimate and powerful proves to be fickle and unreliable and quite unable to honour the fact that a person may have genuine differences. This is a big issue for ex-RCers, because they carry a lot of hurt and need a lot of healing.

Question regarding parallels with Trotsky

John:

That is an interesting way of putting it, certainly. I wouldn't put it in those terms myself, because I don't respect contributions to Marxism. I have too many problems with its fundamental materialism. I prefer to talk in terms of the autonomy of the human spirit. I am writing a book on divine autonomy. The thing about autonomy for me is that its heart is divine. The only way anybody can judge what is divine is by being attentive to their own autonomous judgment. There is no other source of authority for what is divine than our own inner discrimination. And I believe this capacity for autonomous judgment within us is itself divine - an interesting paradox.

The interesting thing about Harvey was that he didn't have a glimmer of an idea about the principle of respect for autonomy. It wasn't part of his universe. But I think it is a fundamental principle. What is inspiring about CCI is that everybody is pioneering the integration of their developing autonomy with the co-operative parity of their peers. This is marvelous. Let's have a little chaos on the way, because out of genuine and authentic chaos, higher levels of order and integration arise - as complexity theory tells us. Controlling systems that always try to control chaos are avoiding the emergence of real order. We should awarely let the chaos run for a bit and sooner or later a new kind of order will emerge in its own good time. In the early days of CCI, certainly in Guilford and surroundings in the UK, there was chaos around as the loam of new development. Nowadays there is in CCI a huge amount of very interesting creative order emerging, for example, in this wonderful workshop. The thought, the care, the discipline, the consideration, that you have put into it, all worked through by a group of peers, this is excellent. It's worth its weight in gold for this planet in my view.

(Long) question

John:

Yes, and my contribution to it is my book 'Co operative Inquiry' published by Sage, last year, September 1996. It is for people who feel and think like you, to help us to form peer groups, and devise ways of inquiring into the fundamental premises of our practice so we can check them out. Then we can develop a manageable inquiry format we can work with, and use responsibly to refine our theory and unfold theoretical change. There will be differences of view, you know, because it is relativistic universe. There is some cosmic given and everybody has a unique co-creative perspective on it. Our diverse perspectives will overlap and interweave to some degree in a shared fabric of thought. But the idea that there would be absolute theoretical unanimity is in my view a nonsense. There will be interesting divergences of theoretical perspective, as well as a common convergence. I feel it is the challenge and the delight of our inquiries to honour these differences and celebrate them. If you have a somewhat different theoretical perspective to me, this may alter slightly the way we co-counsel, but as long as we each understand where we are coming from, you and I, we can still respect each other and we can still do business.

Remark: It is time. So this is question is to both of you.

Question: Can you name six or seven basic fundamental principles of co-counselling that you agree with, that are essential

John:

I'll try, this is off the top of my head, so watch me carefully.

(1) Honouring the wounded being within, and healing the woundedness by discharge and re-evaluation, by understanding how unhealed woundedness distorts behaviour in compulsive ways.

(2) Using the co-counselling format for really imaginative creative problem-solving.

(3) Visualizing the future as a basis for goal-setting and action-planning. I mean actively engaging now with a vision of the future as a basis for planning on a grand scale for tomorrow.

(4) Celebrating my spiritual identity and my participation in the greater, wider cosmos.

(5) Using validation and celebration generically, in every which way.

Remark: adding client in charge, confidentiality in a session

John

I was on a slightly different path. I was thinking of five major areas of client work. What you are talking about is equally important - the basic ground-rules of the method.

Remark about the container in which we do our work, you cant have fear, so that is the ground rule for me that system that takes the fear away in terms of ourselves

Dency:

You and he did that beautifully. Thank you.

Remark about the connection between the source of a community and how that community grows

John:

Can I respond to that? I am just thinking how much CCI has taken up the inquiry principle. Certainly not formally, but it has taken up the inquiry mode very powerfully and informally by meeting and doing and exploring and trying things out.

Remark: where people are tossing out for workshops its inquiry inquiry inquiry

John:

In an email discussion group I once gave a list of all the problems in CCI, challenges let's say, and all the degenerations, sorry, challenges in RC. When I was in RC, Harvey called every other growth method - Gestalt, encounter, etc - junk, and they all went out the window. So many wonderful growth methods simply aren't utilized in RC. CCI goes the other way. It is very open to everything, but the question of how another method integrates with co-counselling practice sometimes doesn't get addressed at all. And that applies to spiritual methods too.

Question about lack of structure, in UK

Dency:

We were actually far more similar to your situation several years ago. Development was very individual, by teachers that were doing their own thing. It was one teacher (not myself because I had already created the original community) who brought the teachers together. The teacher's name is Jenny Dilman. Jenny said, "Dency, I want the teachers to get together, I want the support". And I said to her, "Jenny, I'll support you. I won't source it, because I sourced it the last time and we had so much breakdown, that I feel somebody else should take over". So she called the teachers together. It took us a long time to develop safety and trust. We had to hang in with dealing with the fear that you are going to tell me that I am not doing it right, and the fear that you are offering something that I don't know of but am curious about and want to know how I am going to learn about it. Then there were all those questions of quality control and everything it was going to take for people to build real support for each other. We created for ourselves some guidelines around sexual attractions and relationships. We addressed that in a general sense for the safety of our individual students, but we also had a situation that came up that meant that we had to address it among as ourselves as teachers and authority figures in the community. Establishing our own guidelines around our accountability to each other has been a major breakthrough for us.

Remark: the gong did go off

Dency:

Let's just talk about it for a bit. We only have forty-five or fifty minutes left. What we had planned was that could do a think and listen in pairs: an opportunity for each of us to articulate our own visions, our own questions, our own dreams for the future, what would we like to see. And then do a popcorn sort of thing with all of us, and see what that produces - whether there is something here that we can create for the next move forward. Another possibility would be to continue just as we are with a big group, and maybe shift our thinking a little bit to what I just said about our visions and the future.

A decision is made to give it another ten minutes.

Question about autonomy seen as an alternative for structure, and the possibility to have both

John:

Yes, of course. I must immediately dissociate myself from any view that autonomy and structure are incompatible. I don't think this is so. I have never thought it and I never would think it. I think they are profoundly compatible.

Question around communities

John:

I think it behoves any teacher to explore what pathology motivates - in part - their teaching. I hope it is not too oppressive a thought to suggest that any teacher who is committed to train other people to discharge may partly be driven by some hidden distress, which seeks to get other people to discharge in order to assuage by proxy the teacher's hidden pain. I doubt whether there is any teacher of co-co-counselling who is not running some sort of major or minor unconscious pathology through the role. A peer inquiry among teachers could fruitfully open up and share such hidden pathologies.

Remark about respect for each other

Request regarding workshop facilitated by John and Dency

Dency:

I will do one on life action. But I haven't put up a sign yet, because I haven't thought out how I am going to language it, but I will get something up there.

John:

And I decided I would be cautious and careful and wouldn't do a workshop unless I was asked. So I will be very pleased to respond to your request.

Dency:

I'd like to speak to that. I want us to hear what John said. He is proposing an exploration of a direction that could be quite different and it could be quite easily integrated. What I hear him saying is that he wants to be respectful and cautious and be asked, and not only just in this setting. So there is a way we can take some responsibility for how we are being in relationship with this kind of inquiry. We can care for our own settings and our own communities around asking and then negotiating. So his saying that he is willing to be asked is in a bigger frame than here.

Dialogue about openness to spirituality in co-counselling communities

John:

I would like to reciprocate that respect and encouragement. I am very interested in a CCI, a co-counselling world, in which humanists and people interested in spirituality can deeply respect, appreciate, admire and respond to each other. A purely humanistic model of co-counselling has great importance and virtue in our culture, which still bears the scars of thousands of years of grotesque oppression of human beings by distorted spirituality. We have to face the fact that most of the distress caused on this planet has been in the name of misbegotten religion. Given thousands of years of that kind of stuff, there is a strong case for having available a purely humanistic process which, without talking about anything other than human beings, affirms and releases and strengthens and empowers people. I think someone who is being intelligently sceptical about past spiritual teachings is still playing a very fundamental healing role in our culture. At the same time, we need pioneers to explore spiritual beliefs and practices which are free of the oppression of the old autocratic religions. It would be wonderful if these two strands could flourish side by side, respectfully dialoguing.

Question

John:

Do we allow another ten minutes?

John:

Can I say something? What I said before cuts both ways. You can begin with the past, retaining a strong humanistic focus in co-counselling, which is helpful and healing. But if you think of the future, then something else has started to be happen - and here I think of my son who is now about forty - I think co-counselling without spirituality will be worthless (*snaps his fingers*). Younger generations will look for planetary stewardship and cosmic citizenship. That is my hunch and my sense of it. So I have no resolution of the two views. I just say that both stories have their claim, given this watershed era we are in.

Dency: That was keen ...

Joke.....

Remark about openness to spirituality

Remark about how spirit song is or isn't regarded as co-counselling, depending on what the client wants

Dency:

I'd like that people who haven't spoken before get a chance to speak

Conversation

Dency:

Anyone else that hasn't spoken that wants to speak? This is a great challenge to our free attention

Remark about difference between client directedness, doing whatever you want in a session, and how we present co-counselling, in a pure form

John:

Can I just make a point about the word "pure". It always presupposes a specific theoretical standard and this is dangerous, because it implies a pure standard that is absolute, eternal, and for ever correct.

Remarks about CCI in a wider context, differences with RC, helping the wider society to change

Dency:

John spoke about five things around the session. Then we spoke about confidentiality and the client in charge. Joke spoke about free attention and balance of attention. Niek spoke about respect. I think those were the agreements we were speaking about. We train ourselves in free attention, we know in our own work about balance of attention, we honour ourselves and each other - that is what we are saying about how we are special.

Conversation about spirituality in fundamentals and pain, spirituality, co-counselling and changing the world

Dency: Ah, on that note it is time for our closing circle.