

***Bridges, Babushkas and Balaam's Ass:
coordinating and supervising CPE in a multicultural context***

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Abstract

CPE often happens in hospitals, mostly, in the context of Pastoral/Spiritual Care departments. This is obvious; however, I have come to see, in my role as Coordinator of Pastoral and Spiritual Care Services and Director of a CPE Centre, that these two services and roles are not discrete entities, but can be mutually dependent and nourishing. Incorporating my understanding of CPE pedagogical methodology and issues in the context of Public Health, I will explore how these roles and services intertwine. I explore how the dual role of Coordinator and CPE supervisor can be a bridge – a connective agent- on several levels, systemic, professional, interpersonal and even intersubjective, open to two-way traffic.

In *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, Emmanuel Lartey critiques Friedrich Schleiermacher's (1768-1834) image of ministerial development as a tree, with "philosophical theology as the roots, historical theology as its trunk, and applied theology as the 'crown' or fruits."¹ "Applied theology" is predicated on experience not knowledge, Lartey tartly suggests, and all theological surmising actually arises from experience. He thinks the tree needs to be inverted, roots on top/leaves on bottom, to make intuitive sense. I agree, but have further turned the tree – see my painting done congruently with this essay - so that we view it as a bridge. I have done this to emphasise Theresa Snorton's concept of the CPE supervisor's primary role as being a "cultural bridge".² Snorton lists the challenges facing her North American association for CPE (ACPE), including the changing culture of healthcare, and the increasingly intercultural/faith demographic of CPE students, which challenges previously "unexamined concepts" undergirding CPE curriculums, such as "ecclesiastical endorsement", and language such as "pastoral" and "theology." She suggests CPE supervisors need to act as bridges reconciling these diverse cultures and issues (which seem identical to those challenging Australian CPE)³

I resonate with Snorton's suggestion. In my roles I am often acting as a bridge, not just between students in a multicultural CPE group, but between various disciplines and units in my hospital, between my department(s) and various professional and liaison associations, right down to the micro level of individual students' conflicting theology, experience and praxis.

¹ Lartey E Y. *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*. (Wipf and Stock, Oregon) 2006; pp. 78-80.

² Snorton, T. Looking Toward the Future of Pastoral Supervision, in DeLong W (Ed) *Courageous Conversations: the teaching and learning of pastoral supervision* (University Press Maryland) 2010.

³ I will continue to use ASPEA, as the new acronym hasn't officially come into effect. I suspect our neighbour interstate organisations, within ANZACPE, face similar issues too.

While I agree with Snorton’s recommendation to become aware of assumptions about “ecclesiastical endorsement”, and language, my experience in our very multicultural hospital has shaped my view; I can see the value of generic spiritual care, but also the value of spiritual care grounded in specific faith traditions. Bruce Rumbold’s macro-view has also influenced me: he suggests we need to look at the “larger picture” of the past to inform the present and future. Two aspects of the past he highlights are 1) the “collaborative heritage” of faith traditions (fragmented due to our individualistic culture), and 2) healthcare chaplaincies’ traditional utilisation of community networks and resources.⁴ Somewhat radically, he suggests we may be a light to other healthcare disciplines and organizations, because utilising community networks and resources is increasingly the way healthcare managers are turning to reduce costs.⁵ As Pastoral Care managers, we need to build bridges within our organisations, to be accountable and understand “generic understandings and reporting categories”, but also to have faith in our own history and magisterium.⁶ Rather than either/or, a collaborative mix of both generic and faith chaplains may be able to meet the condition of our complex patient populations.

This in turn influences the way I coordinate and supervise CPE.

My predecessor developed a rich network of community faith organisations and people. My interaction with these has also profoundly influenced me: I have fostered relationships with the Orthodox, Islamic and Buddhist councils, and invited the latter two to conduct formal services in our weekly Sacred Space program – to complement our ecumenical Eucharist. I have also increased the practice of mentoring, by Pastoral Care staff for CPE

⁴ Rumbold B. Spiritual Assessment and Health Care Chaplaincy, *Journal of Christian Bioethics* 2013; 10: 1093.

⁵ Ibid p.7

⁶ Ibid p.7

students, and invited them to facilitate educative seminars for CPE students, on subjects such as ritual, end of life concerns, and theological/spiritual reflection.

This emphasis on Spiritual Care that includes religious and cultural care – as the “historical” trunk - and recognition of the boundaries between our disciplines, has built bridges with other disciplines within the hospital. For example, Allied Health requested a seminar on “mindfulness” – I arranged for our Buddhist Chaplain to present, and advised him to include dharma, to show that mindfulness grows out of a religious philosophy that can meet suffering (and is not just a tool for psychologists.) I believe this emphasis more clearly delineates our role and language, so that the boundary between us and other “talking” therapies, such as Social Work, Psychology and even Music Therapy, is less ‘fuzzy.’ It enables dialogue, where we in turn take an active interest in understanding other disciplines’ philosophy and language. Each discipline has its own culture, and as Ausburger suggests, in dialoguing openly with other cultures, we discover “how much that was taken to be reality is actually an interpretation of realities that are seen in part and known in part...”⁷ Taking “context” seriously, as Lartey points out, means recognising people, or in this case modalities of care, are really different, and we need to “listen deeply, and with empathy and interpathy, to the experiences of ‘others’...”⁸ I have found that a core value of pastoral theology, a “healthy respect for the otherness of others”, can be helpful in negotiating professional relationships and boundaries in a ‘secular’ public hospital.⁹

I have included this extensive reflection on our department of Pastoral and Spiritual Care Services, because, congruent with Graeme Gibbon’s belief that a strong department is

⁷ Ausburger D W. *Pastoral Counselling across Cultures* (Westminster, Philadelphia) 1986; p.18.

⁸ Lartey p. 71.

⁹ Ibid p. 71.

necessary to support CPE, I have come to see they are intertwined.¹⁰ As I move now to discussing our “playful” CPE program I will explore what this may imply.

In re-establishing the CPE program again, after a two year hiatus, I was aware of my predecessor’s legacy and honoured that by retaining the core curriculum focus, but updating the language and adding my own stamp to programs. My predecessor’s considerable educational acumen is expressed in the handbook and guidelines she created, offering succinct definitions and a tight program, but with room to move creatively if so inclined. Regarding language, I updated terminology to make the program more palatable to diverse faith applicants, for example, changing *ministry* to *pastoral practice* and *Conversation with God* to *Sacred Conversation*. My own stamp consisted of emphasising the creative aspects even more, encouraging students to utilise other modalities –visual, auditory- in Patient Encounter Reports (PERs) and spiritual reflections, and including Non-Verbal presentations in program.

At orientation on first day, I invite people into informal sand-play during first Open Group then at midterm. This activity encapsulates the purpose of these creative modalities, for students in their learning, and for my stance as a Coordinator and supervisor. Ward suggests that to be “curious rather than condemning, inquisitive rather than assuming” is essential for maintaining a “holding” environment for her CPE students.¹¹ This is essentially my purpose in introducing this activity: it brings us out of our nervous conceptual places into ‘play.’

¹⁰ In his paper *Seasons of a Group’s Life* which I have only in a photocopy with no details of publication

¹¹ Ward M. Power and the Supervisory Relationship, in DeLong W (Ed) *Courageous Conversations: the teaching and learning of pastoral supervision* (University Press Maryland) 2010.

The sand-tray is placed in the centre of the room on the floor, between the surrounding participants. I invite people to choose one or two of the objects – little figurines, shells etc. - representative of themselves and place it in the sand in relation to their peers and supervisors. I advise the group to be spontaneous in choosing; just what attracts them, without over-thinking or censoring. Then I invite silence, a reflective space to contemplate the peculiar diorama. Robin Shohet (in workshops at 2015 ANZACPE conference in Sydney) suggested supervision can be a place to slow down and be playful, and to ask “who am I?” He also said he finds relating dreams helpful in supervision, for both supervisor and supervisee, not in a formulaic way but playfully, to let the dream set the scene. Sand-tray play is a bit like wakeful dreaming (as is theologising): we make everything smaller so we can view it from above. Who and where am I in the shifting sands?

Pentecostal Violet chose a Russian babushka doll and opened out its three selves; and Messianic Jew Miriam placed a heart-shaped stone with a goat on top of it in the exact centre of the tray. I chose a donkey - tellingly, I joked it was going to butt the goat off the heart, taking up the centre. In hindsight I realise I had already sensed that the group would have its difficulties with a strong “intellectual” leader who would dominate and create factions. CPE supervisor Margaret Benefiel advises that “hidden psychological contracts” can surface when “differing assumptions about leadership” clash.¹² In hindsight I can see that my style of leadership – playfully collaborative, leading by example -

Diverging/Accommodating according to Kolb’s model - was incongruent with Miriam’s expectations and more *Converging/Assimilating* learning style. Spontaneously – or so it seemed – I mentioned *Balaam’s donkey*, and how the “string of its tongue” was untied so it

¹² Benefiel M. Immunity to Change: Supervision, Organisational Leadership, and Transformation, in *The Soul of Supervision: Integrating Practice and Theory*. (NY, Morehouse) 2010; pp. 112-14.

could speak, as a metaphor for I knew not what then. Unbeknownst to me, finding their 'voice' would be a major theme for several in the group.

The linking of different aspects of our feeling and thought processes is considered by psychologist H-F Angel to be a key to understanding the psychology of religion. He has utilised the image of the Babushka doll to express what happens during the complex process of starting a "process of believing", thinking about or practicing "religion" or experiencing spiritual intuition. He suggests this "overlap of cognition and emotion in a meta-theoretical sense" can be compared to a "babushka doll that accommodates several figures of the same shape but of different sizes". These "Babushka Effects" or "babs" are "emotionally shaped propositions, such as vague ideas, confirmed knowledge, values, moral claims, and intuitions."¹³ I find this image helpful when working with someone's theological reflection or claims to religious experience, and how this connects to their cultural background and personal inclinations including creativity. If I can visualise the particular "bab" within the Babushka, say an intuition within a vague idea, or a value within confirmed knowledge, I can work with it more usefully, not taking it at face value. As Angel suggests, bab configurations can be reconstituted or modified, and that is what often happens in CPE, where people develop more helpful and healthy babs. This is what occurred for Violet: two units of CPE helped reconfigure her spiritual and professional identity, and the string of her voice was untied, which ultimately enabled her to integrate her creative practice in her pastoral care.

Surveying the figures in a sand tray is a good metaphor for what Jack Finnegan calls a "good metaposition" which he thinks enables a supervisor "to bridge the gap between *discipline-*

¹³ Seitz R J, Angel H-F. Psychology of religion and spirituality: meaning-making and processes of believing, *Journal of Religion, Brain and Behaviour*. 2015; 5: 144.

orientated thinking and *practice–orientated thinking*.” He suggests that not recognising this gap can result in “fragmented” theoretical thinking and praxis, but recognising it can lead to “playful supervision” which is more “interdisciplinary, fluid and contemplative.” Playful supervising also contains something of what Adam Hughes suggests informs his love of pastoral theology - “because it misbehaves.” He means within the strictures of academia, but I adapt it for the hospital environment – within a predominately bio-medical context, the department of Pastoral and Spiritual Care Services and Education is a misbehaving counter-cultural influence.¹⁴

In our PER pro-forma, we ask students to evaluate their *emotional/spiritual affect* (*emotions*). This section originated with my predecessor and I uncritically accepted it while sometimes asking myself what in fact a “spiritual affect” looks like. This idea originates with George Fitchett in his 7x7 model of assessment, and, according to Graeme Gibbons, Fitchett believes that psychological /spiritual emotions are distinct from ‘normal’ emotions. Gibbons discussed this in a colloquium framed by the animated film *Inside Out*, and suggested the issue was still unclear, that many bio-medical psychologists would dismiss it, and flagged this as the possible value of Pastoral Care, because we value emotions and address them. I am wondering if “bab configurations” could be examples of spiritual emotion, “emotionally shaped propositions” including religious belief and practice, linking intuition with conscious thought, and thought with spiritual experiences such as yearning.

I use the image of Balaam’s donkey (Num 22: 21-39) to illustrate this; the prophet riding on top, with his agendas and evangelical urgency, is a metaphor for our conscious thinking minds, the donkey for our “lower” intuitive animal who, aware of the extra-mundane realm,

¹⁴ Hugh A. What Makes Care Pastoral? *Journal of Pastoral Psychology*. 2010; 59:711-723.

“saw the angel”. We are often deaf to our donkey; it can take some extraordinary situation to awaken us. Supervisory modelling is crucial, Krister White stresses, to enable this process in the group. Her hard won ability to “strike a balance between agency and receptivity” models this same dynamic, and can enable “relational mutuality” rather than “one dimensional power” in the form of “feedback” or advice.¹⁵ This enabling of relational mutuality in turn enables students to sit in chaos, listening to their donkey, without employing defensive mechanisms. White describes maintaining a bridge between these “bipolar” contrasts, which models an attitude of humility to the group. Believing similarly, Antiochian Orthodox chaplain David Alexander describes a tiered supervisory relationship, client, pastor and supervisor as a co-pilgrimage where each becomes a “living ear”, without being preoccupied with thoughts and plans. His attitude exemplifies my tree-bridge image - he suggests becoming a living ear produces mutuality and humility because the supervisor is enabled to hear and learn from supervisees, and they are in turn enabled to hear and learn from clients.¹⁶

Often groups develop a significant theological theme, which I learn from as well: in this group, the themes of “strength in weakness” and “finding a voice” were consistent. A major task of supervision, I believe, is to recognise these often unconscious themes (Shohet/Hawkins **Mode 3** of intercultural supervision) and encourage their development by each member, to develop a more rounded and grounded theology which hopefully will be integrated into each person’s praxis. For example, Violet’s theological understanding rapidly developed in this, her second, unit. In Fowler’s integrative spiritual development

¹⁵ White K. Chaos, Mutuality, and Paradox as Pathways to Self-Authorship: A Theory of Supervision. In *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry* 33, 2013.

¹⁶ Alexander D. Co-Pilgrimage and Presence: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective for Pastoral Supervision. In *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry* 33, 2013.

model, which Hawkins/Shohet align with supervision, she seemed to initially be in stage four, *Individuative-Projective Faith*, critically examining her previous Pentecostal beliefs, language and commitments, which caused significant angst and confusion. However, the nonjudgmental and faith-fostering supervisory environment, including the team's mentoring, meant she quickly grew into the *Conjunctive Faith* stage, developing some ability to live with paradoxical complexities, which fruitfully informed her work on her assigned hospital wards.¹⁷

In his opening session at ANZACPE Shohet cited the oft repeated maxim that "supervision is not therapy or spiritual direction" and then critiqued it, asking the rhetorical question "isn't it?" He suggested the borders aren't clear cut because supervision, through focusing on clinical practice, can be both therapeutic and spiritually directive. Especially, I would add, as in Violet's case, in CPE training which involves formation of pastoral identity.

Also emphasising the modelling of mutuality, "characterised by an experience-near, empathic approach", William DeLong suggests CPE supervision is the antithesis of hierarchical transference/counter-transference strategies, because it's a "two-way street."¹⁸ In this he says he has been influenced by non-European theologies, especially Latino which in contrast to European individualistic norms stresses group experience. *Teologia de conjunto* is described by Francis Rivers Meza as "doing theology jointly", with each

¹⁷ Hawkins P, Shohet R. *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, 4th Ed. (Open University Press, Berkshire) 2012; p 118. Weiss Ogden K & Sias S (2010) *An integrative spiritual development model of supervision for counsellors-in -training*, retrieved from http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas10/Article_44.pdf.

¹⁸ DeLong W. From Object to Subject: Pastoral Supervision as an Intersubjective Activity. In DeLong W (Ed) *Courageous Conversations: the teaching and learning of pastoral supervision* (University Press Maryland) 2010.

theologian receiving similar divine thoughts differently and then expressing it differently, enabling a more rounded and grounded theology.¹⁹ Serendipitously, the closest European model for this kind of theology is, according to Meza, Schleiermacher (whose tree I turned for the painting). Schleiermacher considered intuition to be the reception of divine thought, and that people received this differently according to their individual “natures”. This idea, according to Lartey, takes us right back to the upper room on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enabling the gathered to speak the languages of the known world, as if “again to affirm the divine love of diversity”.²⁰ Meza links *Teologia de conjunto* with CPE groups learning theology on the ground from patients and then from each other in the group process. Violet surprised me with her creative blooming, and Mormon Martha opened my eyes to see past her “sect” to the deep faith underlying it and its healing potential for the mentally ill. Messianic Jew Miriam, also, with her difficulties made me understand the “community of selves” with greater clarity, how inner conflict can be paralleled in the group process, and see more clearly my supervisory style, and realise I can’t be all things to all, sometimes there may be too much of a disjuncture between learning styles.

In conclusion, I have come to see more clearly my role as a connecting, facilitative, bridge between the department of Pastoral and Spiritual Care services and the CPE Centre it contains. As I painted my tree, the differences between trunk and crown began to become less apparent - which I initially was going to ignore or change – and kept intruding on my attention until I realised it was telling me something important. Intuitively, the department could be seen as the experienced roots of the tree-bridge and CPE students the crown sending out green thoughts into the hospital. But sometimes the inverse may be true, with

¹⁹ Meza F. *Teologia de conjunto: Not just for Latinas/os Anymore.* in DeLong W (Ed) *Courageous Conversations: the teaching and learning of pastoral supervision* (University Press Maryland) 2010.

²⁰ Lartey p 117

the permanent staff - including me - becoming tired, and the new intake of students become the roots, drawing us back to our passion and purpose, bringing new moisture and freshness. As the trunk, in channelling nutrients from the soil and photosynthesis from the sun, I depend on both root and crown for nourishment, and they in turn depend on me: I connect them across and facilitate growth in understanding and praxis. As the painting taught me, though I look vulnerable and fleshy, not as showy as my ends, I am pliantly stronger and more intentional than I seem, deliberately channelling the nutrients and drawing the ends together for the benefit of all. I manage, coordinate, supervise, and edify my generic and faith community staff and students to benefit the hospital I serve. We ascend and descend the central stairway - and what is a stairway but a vertical bridge - connecting patients and staff with their own spiritual resources.

I believe this essay encapsulates this too – from macro to micro I have attempted to articulate my model of spiritual care and of CPE Coordination and supervision, each informing and influencing the other. As with Lartey’s inverted tree, I have done this from inside out, from experience to philosophy, utilising metaphors from both social sciences and theology. The process of writing the essay has enabled me to articulate ideas which were formerly inchoate – thank you for allowing my donkey to speak.

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