

Letter from Germany

New Old Questions ...

I told you about the new law governing psychotherapy in Germany: now it has been decided—at least for the foreseeable future: systemic therapy is *not* a scientific endeavour. In the process of legislation, a committee has decided that nothing is going to change—only psychoanalysis, ‘depth psychology’ and behaviour therapy get the scientific cachet and will be reimbursed by insurance companies.

Keep in mind—the committee itself is not a scientific one! So what is going to happen? Many protests, discussions—in the name of and for the benefit of the client as well as for the benefit of the therapist (‘s money), too. I was reminded of Hubble, Duncan and Miller’s words:

A law positioning the relationship between theories and their patronage is holding true: *the tolerance for theoretical allegiance is in direct proportion to the money available to support it* (1999: 3).

Okay, that’s part of the game, not to forget the social context. But it doesn’t help, because I have to earn my income by working systemically. Working this way, with or without labeling it as scientific, and with or without official reimbursement by insurance companies, I have got more and more into looking at the *KundIn* [see earlier Letters from Germany for Jürgen’s rationale for this term] at her/his resources and how this may help him/her to get what she/he needs and/or wants, and how I may be helpful in this process. In this exploration I have learned a lot, and I put it together in a tiny little book—a kind of self help book that is not intended to give the ‘ultimate advice’. This has become a great exercise in summarising my basic ideas about the way I am working in a language that lay people can read *and* understand. And let’s not forget—I even make a little money out of it or (to frame it differently) I find a ‘market niche’.

This has led me into quite a different territory, too. I am asking myself more often what the basic thrust of my work is. There is one issue which my friend and colleague Wolfgang Loth and I will pursue when presenting about ‘intuition’ at a conference next year. These professional and therapeutic strategies may not all be as rational and

cognitive as they may look. All I have learned professionally will go into my strategies and will be incorporated somehow—but I am not sure how. The concept of ‘intuition’ has been one of our efforts to approach this unknown territory. For us it has become important to not be arbitrary, optional or random: we need to be guided by professionalism and by ... what?

This has led to another question: What is ‘effective work’? Symptom reduction, felt satisfaction, the following of professional guidelines, or is it something else again? I think it depends upon who is looking at the work, with what interest in mind. Translating an axiom from communication theory (‘You cannot not communicate’) to a different domain, I word it this way: ‘I cannot not have a personal interest’.

One of my interests, consistent with systems theory, is to keep ‘my system going’, i.e. to earn my income. Thus, I am looking for niches, and I came up with another one: with Helen Zettler, an Australian living in Germany, I produced a book of cartoons about ‘working this way’, calling it *Relativ normal* (in English: *Relatively Normal or: What I have Never been Interested in about Systemic Therapy but What I Always Wanted to Know*). Basically systemic, but employing many different perspectives. No publisher wanted to take it (perhaps they thought it was not serious enough?) so we published it ourselves.

So, back to my earlier question: what is ‘effective work’? Imagine someone with the symptom of bed-wetting. After years of therapy s/he is still wetting the bed *and* *but* doesn’t suffer anymore. Effective work? Someone else is not battering any more—s/he is now drinking. Effective work? Someone with compulsive behavior (hand washing) goes to group therapy for years. His/her symptom still continues *and* *but* s/he feels understood and good. Effective work?

And for me one of the most challenging questions: Who is the one to decide what effective work is? Is there anything like a concept of ‘truth’ in systemic thinking? *Truly* effective work? Question after question arises when I get into these lines of thinking. I have to confess that I like these questions and they help me to be sensitive

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towards what I am doing. They keep my curiosity alive, my being curious, my *being with* the other person—even my being with me.

Believe it or not, you really have survived the year 2000, at least nearly. Thus, I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Wonderful New Year and I hope to see you in 2001 in Melbourne at your conference.

Reference

Hubble, Mark A., Duncan, Barry L. and Miller, Scott D., 1999. Introduction. In *The Heart & Soul of Change. What Works in Therapy*, Washington, DC, APA.

Yours peacefully

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