Parker, I. (2011) 'Is Psychoanalysis Teachable Today?', College of Psychoanalysts – UK Annual Conference 'Is Psychoanalysis teachable', London, February 2011.

IS PSYCHOANALYSIS TEACHABLE TODAY?

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This question, 'is psychoanalysis teachable?' will sound very strange to anyone who has been in a public lecture or a clinical seminar, whether that is in a training institute or in a university. By asking the question we are disturbing the frame in which we, most of us, operate most of the time when we try to transmit psychoanalysis. Actually, our problem lies in the fact that, yes, psychoanalysis *is* taught with varying degrees of success and so, yes, it evidently *can* be taught.

We might attempt a little sideways move to circumvent this uncomfortable fact to say, but is this then 'psychoanalysis' that is being taught or is it, in the process, being turned into something else? Then we are caught in a little trap which teaching today is very adept at exploiting to undermine any criticism of it, a little trap that relies on an opposition between, on the one hand 'representation' – the knowledge that can be taught and which circulates as academic material we hook our speech into to make it intelligible to those we want to learn – and, on the other hand 'experience' as the resonance between how we account for what we are doing and how we heard.

We can make a quick detour around this trap, and there are some well-rehearsed phrases around that will help us build a useful by-pass, like this: psychoanalysis is part of a tradition of orally-structured apprenticeship in which the written material is but the pre-text for argument, and it is speech not writing which is the stuff not only of psychoanalysis but of our engagement with it, so we are not at all imagining that we can step outside representation into experience but working with speech as a form of representation. Will this work? This argument seems a little fast, and while it is one of the underlying assumptions we need to make, we should step back for a moment to take stock of how knowledge, including psychoanalytic knowledge, functions today and how it lures us into it, including by way of that opposition between representation and experience.

I am going to talk about universities as giving institutional shape to this knowledge, not because I work in a university department, though one reason I talk about it is because I can see day by day how dangerous that setting is to psychoanalysis. It is because psychoanalytic bodies are increasingly drawn close to universities, seeking accreditation or approval of courses or even made to model their own trainings on higher education, which is one of the aims of the Health Professions Council.

It is a quite explicit aim of the HPC to make our trainings conform to what it calls 'academic standards' and to monitor the quality of our 'teaching', and that is perhaps one of the main threats that regulation poses to our work. It is precisely because of that threat that we should track its internal contradictions and subtleties.

It was suggested at my university that one way to free up library space would be to get rid of all books and journals more than five years old, and that would also ensure we are at the cutting edge of the knowledge-society. So, what I am doing in these early parts of the paper is quite radical in a retro kind of way, and especially in bothering with the relations between psychoanalysis, psychiatry, psychology and psychotherapy, but these relations entail something significant about the nature of psychoanalytic knowledge as something teachable. I will say something about psychiatry as teachable psychoanalysis first, and then move on to psychological and psychotherapeutic versions of psychoanalysis as 'teachable'.

Psychiatry

In the mid-1920s Freud was embroiled in a series of sharp debates over the role of 'lay analysis', that is, psychoanalysis carried out by those who were not medically trained. Psychoanalysis in the United States was controlled by doctors who insisted that a medical training was a prerequisite for analytic training, and this was to have profound consequences for émigré analysts fleeing fascism in Europe. When they arrived in the US, those who were not medically qualified were not able to practice, and even some of the psychoanalysts who were also doctors had to undergo retraining because their medical qualifications were not recognised. Even the title of Freud's key intervention in these debates is telling. The title 'The Question of Lay Analysis', from which the following quote is taken, was originally translated as 'The Problem of Lay Analysis', which made it seem as if he was arguing alongside the US medics rather than against them. Freud says:

> If – which may sound fantastic to-day – one had to found a college of psycho-analysis, much would have to be taught in it which is also taught by the medical faculty: alongside of depth-psychology, which would always remain the principal subject, there would be an introduction to biology, as much as possible of the science of sexual life, and familiarity with the symptomatology of psychiatry. On the other hand, analytic instruction would include branches of knowledge which are remote from medicine and which the doctor does not come across in his practice: the history of civilization, mythology, the psychology of religion and the science of literature. Unless he is well at home in these subjects, an analyst can make nothing of a large amount of his material. (Freud, 1926, p. 246)

We see a characteristic quality of Freud's writing here which we must take seriously if we want to understand psychoanalysis itself, which is that there is a careful rhetorical positioning of his own standpoint against those he wants to persuade. Here we see him posing the possibility of a college that sounds 'fantastic' and in which all of the standard psychiatric topics would need to be taught. Then there is the twist, that unlike standard psychiatric training, psychoanalysis requires something more and so it this something more, an attention to culture, that we are invited to see as the defining elements of an authentic psychoanalytic training.

We should note that in Freud's proposal for a college of psychoanalysis, he does not suggest that there should be a merging of psychiatry, psychology and cultural studies. Instead, he counterposes a knowledge of biological processes as the kind of thing one might gain in a medical faculty to branches of knowledge that include the history of civilization, mythology, religion and literature. His argument, that the analyst must be 'at home' in these subjects, also has to be understood in the context of quite a sharp divide in German-speaking culture between the realm of the natural sciences and the human sciences. Here Freud is working inside psychiatry but at the same time breaking from it. The birth of psychoanalysis required a critique of the forms of knowledge taught in medical schools.

Nevertheless, those forms are still reproduced in a teaching in which the master displays himself, displays his knowledge and sometimes even his patients to the class. There are grotesque remainders of this practice in the public 'case presentations', popular pedagogic forums in German and French psychiatry in which those labelled with different categories of disorder are paraded in the auditorium.

Even Lacan (1980), and some of his followers today, repeat this pedagogical practice, and one can see in the records of such presentations how one patient, who evidently knows who Lacan is, refers to the imaginary, symbolic and real, sending back to Lacan a message

about the character of 'imposed speech' in what was then dubbed a 'Lacanian psychosis'. Such spectacles are not only public events that operate in the register of the gaze – stereotypically psychiatric – but they provide the setting for an operation of 'interpretation' of the classical type. That is, they call for the psychiatrist to display his powers of diagnosis and to take that further, into something approaching psychoanalysis, which claims to change as well as describe distress. It approaches psychoanalysis but it is not psychoanalysis as such.

It is still psychiatric, and what we should note about it here is that it is psychiatry as a form of knowledge that can be taught. This is the point. This is a form of teachable psychoanalysis. The student who is inducted into the position of being a psychiatrist, or let us say, a psychiatric psychoanalyst, is able to learn how to display and 'interpret' the speech of his patients.

Psychology

As psychoanalysis starts to break from psychiatric knowledge as something that is eminently teachable it encounters and becomes tangled up in the emerging discipline of psychology.

What is teachable also changes, so let's turn our attention for a moment from psychiatry to psychology. Psychology at the beginning of the twentieth century became a powerful component of what has been called the 'psy complex' as an apparatus of surveillance and normalisation of populations and each individual member of them. When psychology generously invites each person to speak about their ills to another it serves to bind the individual all the more tightly to the professional apparatus, and it then does seem as if that spiral of confession confirms the operations of disciplinary power (Foucault 1975/1979, 1976/1981). On the other hand, psychology brings the knowledge of the psypractitioners out well beyond the domain of moral improvement aimed at by the more enlightened nineteenth-century 'alienists' (as psychiatrists were then known).

Psychology as the quintessential subjectivising discipline of bourgeois democracy requires the education of its actual and potential clientele; psychology aspired, as Jan De Vos put it in his study of psychologisation in the last century, 'the meta-theory of all the sciences, taking care of the breaches subjectivity causes in the constructions of science' (De Vos 2009, p. 234).

One thing to note about psychology is that it functions whether or not people are actually consciously aware of the principles that underlie it. Time and motion studies and behavioural conditioning procedures, for example, trace the physical movements of workers in different occupations and then trace the preferences of consumers inducted into the activity of making choices between arrays of commodities available to them. In this sense, much early psychology merely reiterates in miniature the social forms in which it is embedded and it reinforces the taken-for-granted second nature of those forms. However, at the same time, more sophisticated versions of academic psychology require reflexive activity on the part of those who make use of it (Giddens 1992).

This is an aspect of psychology in which psychoanalysis comes to play an important role, and which poses some particular dangers in relation to the nature of teaching and how the student is supposed to learn how to be a good psychologist, or we might say psychological psychoanalyst. Psychology operates as a series of techniques which the student needs to know how to navigate and replicate, but while they need to think about what they are doing this reflexive activity must be within the parameters of an established knowledge which they take for granted. It for sure is teachable, and what is teachable about it is the ability to function obediently within knowledge.

So, there is a difference between teachable psychiatric psychoanalysis, in which the student is invited to be a little master, and psychological psychoanalysis, in which they become a good servant, a civil servant.

Psychotherapy

While the HPC, despite the 'health professions' tag which might soon be dropped, seem rather uncomfortable with a medical model of mental distress, and so with psychiatric knowledge, it is much happier, if that is the word, with psychological modes of knowledge and the rather mechanistic kinds of teaching that faithfully reproduce it. But we also have noticed that the HPC wants something more, and this is where psychotherapy comes into the equation.

Then the 'reflexive' engagement that is already expected by good psychologists is intensified, there is a further twist in knowledge as the place of reflexivity in knowledge as something teachable is brought centre-stage.

In psychotherapeutic knowledge, what one knows about others harvested from intersubjective communication is treated as applicable to all the others who should reap this form of truth. The accumulation of what I think we can call 'psychotherapeutic capital' then produces its own particular ideological twist on an already intensely ideological psychologisation of participants, whether of those directly involved in trying to understand themselves who then communicate what they have learnt to others or of vicarious consumers in thrall to media representations of this conception of the self (Furedi, 2003). This ideological double-helix which works its way into the subjectivity of those involved, we can term 'therapeutisation'.

Therapeutisation, of clients and practitioners in different modalities of this increasingly popular approach to self-healing, and of psychoanalysis itself when it is treated as a kind of psychotherapy, becomes all the more potent through the link it forges between empathy and education. The characteristic configuration of subjectivity that psychotherapeutic capital accomplishes as it circulates and encloses the care of the self in contemporary capitalism is evident in training organisations that model themselves on what they now imagine to be 'academic' knowledge.

What should be noticed about academic institutions and organisations patterned upon them today is that there has been a reflexive transformation that makes them compatible with the practice of psychotherapy. We are then faced with a very different problem from that described by Lacan (1991/2007) in his Seminar XVII warnings about the role of the 'university' in the provision of bureaucratised knowledge that would make it seem as if certificates in psychoanalysis could be dispensed as if they were driving licences. We know that critique. It is a useful one, but we now face a different set of problems.

Universities provided an influential home for the discipline of psychology, but the internal privatisation of academic institutions and globalisation of a reflexive attention to the self in teaching and learning have led to a mutation of knowledge and forms of agency sustained by it (Ecclestone and Hayes 2008).

Academic institutions have become places that are now more congenial than ever to psychotherapy and so to psychotherapeutic education, but therefore by the same token even more dangerous places for psychoanalysts. The question here is not whether psychoanalysts should take up university or college positions and use the material resources of the university. We can. One of the advantages of an academic environment is that the reflexivity it promotes can be worked with as a space for exploring limits and possibilities for doing something different. The real question is how we deal with the symbolic and imaginary effects of the new therapeutic academic ethos when it is used as a template for training everywhere else.

One effect of this therapeutic academic ethos is that psychoanalysis comes to circulate outside the clinic. One way it does so, for example, is as what I call generalised transference (Parker, 2011). The extrapolation of clinical phenomena to every social relationship includes and frames the place of the clinic in culture and, as part of this problematic, the place of the clinic for those seeking to 'apply' psychoanalytic concepts. There is a good deal of deference to psychoanalytic clinical work that actually does psychoanalysis few favours, even if it is a deference that may itself be cultivated by some practising psychoanalysts.

We should not take psychoanalytic phenomena for granted and simply see the clinic as a source of wisdom, and there is also an issue here for clinical training organisations that use the notion of transference as an explanatory device and thereby incite something very like it in the identificatory processes that structure the way they work. Instead, it is the place of the clinic itself that needs to be analysed, needs to be conceptually and empirically examined so that its function as a specific apparatus for the construction and deconstruction of subjectivity can be better understood. If it is not, then psychoanalysis will be transformed into a kind of faith which promises to explain anything and everything. It then becomes a moral system, a moralising worldview which turns psychoanalysis into psychotherapy.

What is teachable here, and what is already taught in some University departments is a morally valued stance for the psychotherapist, or we could say psychotherapeutic psychoanalyst. It is its very allegiance to psychoanalytic knowledge that becomes the marker of successful induction of the student, and it is their faith in what they know that becomes the touchstone of assessment concerned with such things as 'personal development'.

Then a version of 'experience' really is counterposed to 'representation' which is assumed to be always alienating bad knowledge.

I don't think there is a way out of this, and more and more reflexivity is going to embed us in this therapeutic version of psychoanalytic knowledge all the more deeply and efficiently. The point I want to emphasise is that psychoanalysis is already teachable in these three forms I have described, and that we need to be able to grasp the different ways in which it functions today if we are to strike any distance from psychiatric, psychological and psychotherapeutic forms of knowledge. It is not only an academic question, even if we ask it in a 'college'.

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