

# CONSTRUCTING OUR PSYCHOANALYTIC ETHOS: HOW AND WHAT WE TEACH—IMPRESSIONS

by Robert Quackenbush

“What is psychoanalysis?” That question was asked several times on Saturday, the first day of a two-day December conference on the future of psychoanalytic education. It was asked in two panel discussions following a keynote address by Jurgen Reeder, Ph.D., a member of the Swedish Psychoanalytical Association and Associate Professor at the University of Stockholm, Sweden. In his address, Dr. Reeder stated that the spirit of psychoanalysis is ethos, which contains all the theories, ideas, and practices that characterize psychoanalysis. “It is what psychoanalysis is all about,” he said. Thus, he opened the door to explore the true meaning of psychoanalysis with all its changes in our modern world.

The question was asked at the first panel discussion that followed the keynote address on Saturday morning. The discussion was titled *Educating Psychoanalysts in Today’s Regulated World: Licensing and Other Matters*. The question was asked again during the second panel discussion under the title *What Do We Educate For? The Role of Psychoanalysis in the Age of Psychotherapy*. The speakers of both panels agreed that psychoanalysis is a valuable gift to our culture that should definitely be accepted as a science and is more than ever necessary in our uncertain times. However, it was not until the third panel discussion *Constructing Our Psychoanalytic Ethos: How and What We Teach* that an answer to the question “What is psychoanalysis?” became clear. The answer was right in plain sight from the moment everyone in the audience was welcomed to the conference by Jane Hall of the New York Freudian Society, who cochaired the conference with Arnold Richards of the New York Psychoanalytic Society. Before introducing the keynote speaker, Hall had everyone in the audience reach out to someone they didn’t know. “Think how the world might be if everyone truly listened to each other,” she said. Then she added, “Take one idea away with you.”

This reporter took away a definition of psychoanalysis that is a summation of what this conference was about. Psychoanalysis is a kind of education in which a person chooses to find out who they are so they can master emotional conflicts that prevent them from realizing their full potential in life. How a person in psychoanalysis chooses to do this, with whom, and for how long, is up to the individual because, in the end, we are all responsible for our own education.

This reporter’s answer was confirmed during the third and last panel discussion of the first day at this first conference to explore the future of psychoanalytic education. The panelists were: Carmela Perez, PhD, candidate, NYU Psychoanalytic Institute; Sandra Buechler, Ph.D., training analyst at the William Alanson White Institute; Vicki G. Semel, Psy.D., executive director of the Academy of Clinical and Applied Psychoanalysis; Isaac Tylim, Psy.D., ABPP, faculty and supervisor at the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research; and Heather Pyle, Psy.D., candidate at the Tampa Bay Institute for Psychoanalytic Studies.

The panelists spoke about their own experiences as candidates, directors, and faculty members at

various psychoanalytic training institutes with different schools of thought and how what they were doing might influence the future of psychoanalytic education.

Dr. Perez talked about the difficulties of practicing in today's world with all its problems. "We cannot divorce ourselves from the wisdom of our poets and our grandmothers," she said. She called for studies on burn-out because not enough research has been done on this subject. Dr. Semel talked about benchmarks of study for trainees at her institute, which focuses on transference and resistance. These benchmarks include:

- (1) student observation of patients' contact functioning;
- (2) student intervention based on patients' responses;
- (3) student defenses and reactions to the patients' defenses so that students are able to stay with patients' feelings and not act on them;
- (4) student awareness of patients' symbolic communications;
- (5) student awareness of counter-transference and induced counter-transference interference;
- (6) student reaction to supervision;
- (7) student interaction with classmates

Dr. Semel concluded by stressing the importance to students of saying little and encouraging their patients to do the talking. "We limit ourselves and listen to others," she said.

Dr. Tylin talked about the erosion of privacy through cyberspace in today's society. "Privacy must be stressed in the curriculum," he said. "Psychoanalysis is in danger if it is not."

Dr. Pyle talked about her early training as a candidate at a psychoanalytic institute in Florida. Contrary to Dr. Semel's belief of limiting what we say and listening to others, Dr. Pyle's experience was just the opposite. She was not allowed to talk at all, only to listen. "Institutes can become authoritarian," she said. In her third year of training she and some of her classmates formed an alternate institute. "We distanced ourselves from the past," she said.

Thus concluded the discussion on how what and how we teach today in psychoanalytic institutes can be applied to psychoanalytic education in the future.

It is worth noting here the endeavors by Phyllis W. Meadow, founder of NAAP, who strove to declare psychoanalysis as an independent profession. Her efforts finally paid off in 2005, when New York State granted licensing to psychoanalysts. Dr. Meadow might be considered a driving force behind this successful conference, which hopefully will be the first of many on the future of psychoanalytic education. What licensing has done for the profession is to give training institutes greater opportunities for expansion. By the state's provision of uniform guidelines for institutes to follow for licensing, the various institutes can still maintain their individuality and offer, in addition to courses that meet the state's requirements, new programs within their institutions that are in keeping with their various schools of thought.

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