

Spanish notes deidentified

Regarding IRT training by Lorna Smith Benjamin for Hestia, Barcelona, Spain: Sept to Dec 2017.

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This is an English translation of wonderful notes from my “students” during the Autumn 2017 workshops in Barcelona. They were skilled professionals who participated with enthusiasm that inspired me to keep on keeping on, despite some challenges of aging.

What I appreciated most, beyond their intelligence, wisdom, skill, kindness and integrity, was the fact that, as often is true of Europeans, they are very interested in understanding assumptions, principles and reasoning. That is a refreshing alternative to expecting to learn about check lists of problems (symptoms) and “techniques” that can be used to suppress, divert, or manage them. They also understand the value of joining the patient’s inner world and knowing how to organize that information according to natural biology. That requires acceptance of the hypothesis that each patient’s symptoms make sense if one realizes they reflect perceived threat based on good faith but misguided perceptions of threat and of ways to be safe. No symptom based in the sympathetic nervous system exists separately from a perception of threat, an affect that perception releases and specific behaviors that affect predisposes. For example: Threat: “I made a mistake.” Affect: Fear of rejection or punishment. Behavior: Self- criticism/ punishment/ avoidance. The approach means the clinician addresses the sequence (C1 = primitive brain perceptions regarding threat and safety, A= predisposed affect, B = predisposed behaviors, C1AB) as cause of a symptom rather than immediately leaning into efforts to suppress or manage it. Asking “What might be making you anxious” and working with the sponsoring inner processes that drive the misguided efforts to be safe comes before: “Here are some exercises that will help you stay calmer.”

Developmental history elicited by specific interviewing skills can reveal details about how and why those misperceptions were installed for a given patient. It also provides information needed to develop an accurate case formulation that can account for complex symptom profiles in treatment resistant cases. The case formulation can guide the choice of interventions that can help the patient move beyond past “programming,” build inner safe base, and repair current significant relationships so that suffering is (symptoms are) reduced and functioning is improved. The result is reconstruction and the process is Interpersonal Reconstructive Therapy, a set of principles about psychopathology and change that helps the clinician chose from any known “techniques” or interventions in ways that can optimize impact at any given moment.

What I learned from this experience:

1. Learning the interview method and how to use natural biology is like learning to play the violin, or developing one’s skills at the Olympic level. Delivering IRT is a complex skill and requires understanding its basic principles and then practicing, practicing, practicing. That includes seeing the skills modeled and then recording one’s own work followed by comments by an IRT trainer. Presently Ken Critchfield is the only Master Teacher of IRT besides myself. I expect Dimitra Doumpiotti will be able to qualify “with deliberate speed.”

2. The experience teaching in Barcelona taught me that the best learning method is experiential. Therapists “became” a very challenging patient and I interviewed them for about 45 minutes. Group discussion followed. That is called IRT Role Play and participants preferred to spend as much time as possible doing it. It allowed them to experience their patients’ world at a level that helped them understand and intervene in new and useful ways.
3. The therapy relationship and process are more important than anything else.

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1 Dear Lorna,

Thank you for sharing your wisdom with all of us. I hope to have grown a little bit as a therapist and as a person in these last months.

I will remember with great tenderness your words about the family in the head"

B

2 "Dear Lorna,

So many thanks for your teachings, for sharing your wisdom, for your willingness to get to know us...

Ultimately, thank you for your great generosity.

I hope to have absorbed a little bit of all th

I F

3 Dear Lorna,

Thank you for the generosity with which you convey your knowledge and (thank you) for your wisdom.

Thank you for the strength with which you believe in your principles.

Thank you for the tolerance with which you contemplate different religions and worldviews and, at the same time, for the intolerance for the lack of care.

Finally, thank you for your theory that has helped me understand the copy patterns and how personality disorders develop.

(signature)

4 "Dear Lorna,

I need to say that you transmit serenity through your clear vision and your ironic smile.

I admire your capacity to work, your curiosity and your excitement with things well done.

I am grateful to have gone through this experience.

I keep with me as a fundamental, the idea of context as a first order variable and to think about symptoms more than about techniques.

I have so many things left to read and to understand.

I am GRATEFUL.

PG

5 Dear Lorna,

It has been a fantastic experience to discover new therapeutic techniques through you and your knowledge. It will be very useful for my art-therapy practise to apply the C1AB formula.

Besides, on a personal level, yourself and your knowledge mean a huge discovery for me and I plan to follow you for a long time.

Thank you for everything!

Sincerely,

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Lorna, many thanks for this experience. I am taking with me so many things from these days! All the understanding, the integration of so much knowledge within the same framework; but, above all, this mix of warmth and firmness, consistency and clarity that you transmit and with which you teach.

Thank you for the experience and for the wisdom. I hope to have this privilege again; to learn from you and from your profound humanity and professionalism. A hug, Berta"

7 Dear Lorna: I want to thank you for the privilege it has been for me to come close to your vision of therapy and your approach of personality disorders. You have made me see the love there is in patients and how therapy works if you offer a secure base within the space where they open their inner world. What has stood out for me about you, is the enormous wisdom and simplicity with which you have opened your line of work. I admire the profoundness and strength of your analysis regarding your work and investigation and even more so the methodology and reconstructive conception of therapy.

It has been a real pleasure to listen to you, understand you, open myself to your work/studies. To me, you are a light that shines in my work giving me a more thorough and assertive understanding. You have shifted transferences and (have made possible) new readings of our copy processes and gifts of love.

Thank you Lorna, your input has been incredibly beautiful and valuable!! A huge thanks!!

P. D. "

8 Thank you, Muchas gracias  
for crossing the ocean and coming  
to share your wisdom,  
your kindness and your  
strength.

I feel very fortunate  
for having shared this  
space (with you).

I keep in my retina  
your firm and affectionate gaze  
and the joy of this  
profession.

A strong hug,

L"

9 "Dear Lorna:

I feel very fortunate for having shared this space with you.

Thank you for being so generous. I take with me a marvellous memory of this training, a very satisfactory inner experience. I feel I have been near a very human, very wise person.

M O

10 "Dear Lorna,

I have been very fortunate to be able to share these months with you and with the group. I feel that I am not fully aware yet of what this will mean for me in the future on a professional level, being initiated to your work by your presence. But I have been able to see in the here and now how much it has helped me, even on a personal level.

There is still a long way to go and great effort and study to be able to carry it all to the clinic, but I have the motivation and the conviction of wanting to do it.

Thank you for the person you are, for your charisma, for the values you transmit that seem to me truly healthy and I wish to be able to incorporate in my work and in my personal life.

I wish you the best and that Trump does not manage to bring any clouds to your days.

A very affectionate hug,

L x"

11 "THANK YOU, for working on a method

that integrates the different planes of the human experience,

through a scientific methodology that is based on facts and reality;

for setting the protagonism of the human (aspect of) being in the centre of therapy;

THANK YOU for making evident that there is no contradiction in accessing truth through faith or science.

They are different ways to access reality.

THANK YOU!!

M"

12 "It has been such an experience to see you work!

Thank you for sharing your work and (thank you) for your teachings...

And for your questions that have made me rethink so many things. You have transmitted passion for what you do, something I share with you.

I also liked and learned from your right to the heart words!

We would love it if you would continue to come from time to time and share learning spaces in order to keep on and consolidate this new path.

A hug and a lot of gratitude!

B"

13 Dear Lorna,

It has been a pleasure to share (with you) these spaces of learning. They have opened for me a new framework of intervention and an understanding of psychology and natural biology. I hope to continue learning from you.

A big hug,

B 2 ¡See you soon!

14 It has been a pleasure to be able to get to know you after having heard so much about you. Thank you for having come to Catalunya for a few months and for sharing your experience and the knowledge of a wise woman... And, above all, thank you for letting me see a little bit of the world as you see it. Being able to be there every Tuesday evening has been a great fortune for me.

We will wait for you to come back.


A hug,

A F

15 Dear Lorna,

These 3 months with you have been a true “gift of love” that will accompany me always in my clinical practise. Your integrative and organising vision of diverse knowledge and areas is still very revolutionary but hopefully IRT will expand around the world and all mental health professionals will be able to work with its premises/concepts.

Despite the complexity of the theory, the result of “wearing the lenses of IRT” is to help see psychopathology in a logic, simple way and with great respect.

 Thank you for everything that you have taught us and for transmitting to us your critical and sarcastic vision. Although I have been hearing people talk about empathy and (active) listening all my life, I think it has only been you that has showed me what this really means.

Thank you with all my heart, Lorna.

I hope to keep within me your questions and inquiries and that your voice will continue to resonate inside me as the “consultant in the head”.

C N

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16 So, here we are, the end of this wonderful, 3 month journey.  
Once again, a big THANK YOU.

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LSB

