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We are one and we are many. . .

Dear Rachel and Julie (Editors of Reformulation)

I am saddened to hear that you have resigned as editors. I have valued the richness and quality of Reformulation over the years to which you both have made a big, voluntary, and sustained contribution. Reformulation has held the multiple voices within the world of CAT well. It has worked the texture between big picture and small detail, mainstream and side stream. I like the images of CAT that it has conveyed. Your resignation has left me with pause for thought about how we encourage peer-to-peer communication among members.

If I may freely misquote Shelley's famous poem to the people of Manchester: 'We are one and we are many.' We are 'one' in the sense that ACAT has been an excellent custodian of the CAT way of working and we have a well-established and very well run organisation. An organisation has to have its own leadership group and governing voice and we need to pull together to support it.

But I suspect that we are only at 'one' as long as we can also be 'many' in the number and type of affiliations, imaginations and other loyalties that we bring to CAT. We are a pluralistic crowd compared to many other organisations. I calculate well over thirty distinctive communities with their own voices and aspirations for promoting and developing CAT. These are voices from different countries, different professions, different trainings and different special-interest groups. To hold this diversity together and, more importantly, to engage with and learn from its creative variation in the use of CAT, we need an open network approach to our communications as peers.

Our very first ACAT constitution had as its principle object the relief of distress and it placed CAT very distinctively as a means to an end not as an end in itself. The founding principles of CAT are pluralistic, integrative and relational. Think of the common language paper. Or of reformulation as a sign-mediated, transparent and dynamic activity. Think of the elegant integration of procedures and reciprocal roles in the now dialogic understanding of reciprocal role procedures. Think of the Vygotskian view of other to self, self to self and self to and from other. All these dimensions of relational thinking offer an integrative and versatile approach not just to therapy but to mental health more widely. In the past ten years I have had the privilege of teaching and learning from a great variety of CAT groups all over the UK and internationally. As I travel, I see such a rich variety of ways of applying CAT. In this sense we are enthusiasts not for a model of therapy but for a way of thinking relationally. And we are only just at the beginning of developing this relational and dialogic paradigm. It is such an exciting time theoretically to be practising psychotherapy with the overlapping and dialogic developments in neuro-science, trauma dynamics, infant development and the therapeutic mechanisms of change.

Of course we must be of one mind in our business strategy, our ethics and our training plans but we must be a little careful not to lose our diversity and creativity to a corporate culture. What I find missing as a counter balance in this respect is the peer to peer conversation among members and across membership groupings. This is alive and well in various localities and in some special interest groups but it is not as alive as it could be not withstanding our excellent annual conferences.

Years ago in the early days of ACAT we had a double headed structure of a training division and a membership division. The training committee and the membership committee met independently the latter having responsibility for conferences, CPD and all manner of membership issues included the earlier incarnation of Reformulation as the ACAT Newsletter. When I was Chair we dropped the idea of a membership committee because we didn't have the resources and the priority was to build the training committee. Now with such a well-established and at times overloaded training committee and exam board structure it might be time, in the age of social media to revisit the idea of a membership committee as a container for all the concerns and interests that members have.

Yours sincerely

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