

The Core of an Authentic Psychosynthesis Training

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How to tell if it's a quality psychosynthesis training

In my experience of psychosynthesis training, it is possible for some or all of these core concepts to be not only downgraded or ignored, but even purposely denigrated. The ideal model, for instance, is often excluded, or referred to in a negative light as if it is some quasi-NLP technique, rather than a resplendent way of activating the will. Even the superconscious can be treated with suspicion, and in one training I have encountered, any mention of it is interpreted as some kind of negative avoidance! So perhaps next time you hear someone quoting the 'there is no orthodoxy in psychosynthesis' quote, it may well be worth remembering that despite this, there are core principles that have to be included to make a training truly psychosynthesis.

In the same training statement, Assagioli says that psychosynthesis functions in five main fields: the therapeutic; personal integration and actualisation; educational; interpersonal; and social. So often these days psychosynthesis is seen as a counselling or psychotherapy training and little enough emphasis is placed on its other applications.

Indeed, Assagioli saying that: 'the field of self actualisation and integration being the heart of psychosynthesis' clearly places psychosynthesis primarily as a self help method for personal and spiritual development. Yet so often trainings require their students to work in one field of psychosynthesis alone, the therapeutic.

Also, Assagioli says: 'training in psychosynthesis has no end. At a certain point hetero training (meaning training guided by someone else) is replaced by self training.' Yet some training centres, whilst giving voice to such a statement, require their graduates to continue a training association with their parent organisation, even if under the guise of continuing professional development.

David Platts in his paper 'A basic psychosynthesis model of counselling and psychotherapy' creates a thorough analysis of the requirements of a good training, running to extensive lists of basic strategy; maps and models; principles and practices; methods and techniques, whilst all the time referring back to and including the seven basic principles required at the core of a psychosynthesis training. Platts states that all the techniques presented are not unique to psychosynthesis, and stresses thereby the importance of what is unique and

special to psychosynthesis. This enables students to 'experience the discrete essence of psychosynthesis, free of the common distortion that psychosynthesis is so vague, eclectic and inclusive that it can be anything and everything anyone wants it to be.' Indeed, at the other end of the scale, I have a brochure from a psychosynthesis training running to forty-eight pages that hardly mentions any of these basic core principles. Indeed, it describes psychosynthesis as being a framework for psychodynamic, archetypal, systemic, gestalt, developmental and Jungian approaches, whilst significantly missing out psychosynthesis itself.

In his article 'Psychosomatic Medicine and Bio-psychosynthesis', Assagioli says that the principle aims and tasks of psychosynthesis are twofold: '1. The elimination of the conflicts and obstacles, conscious and unconscious, that block [the complete and harmonious development of the human personality] and 2. The use of active techniques to stimulate the psychic functions still weak and immature.' Of course, we all move on in our understanding of the self and its manifestations, but I suggest to anyone thinking of undertaking a psychosynthesis training that they ask the potential training organisation how they respond to these two statements that Assagioli described as the principle aims and tasks of the work.

In that same article, Assagioli stressing the importance of body, saying quite categorically that: 'the proper name of psychosynthesis is bio-psychosynthesis. In practice it is usually more convenient to employ the word psychosynthesis but it must be understood at all times that it includes the body, the bios, and that it always stands for bio-psychosynthesis.' Yet strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, the body is the area of least concern in some psychosynthesis training. I have met students in advanced training, for instance, who when I ask them to stand up and do a simple body stretch are amazed because it is the first time in the whole training they've been invited to leave their seats!

So, what is a psychosynthesis training? One that adheres to the seven basic principles of psychosynthesis; that is applicable in the five defined areas named by Assagioli, that includes work with body, and that doesn't pretend to be an end in itself. Despite my criticisms above, I feel the majority of trainers and practitioners of psychosynthesis attempt to adhere to the basic principles they are taught. The onus therefore, is on training organisations to ensure they include the core values and structures that distinguish a real psychosynthesis training from an eclectic mishmash of techniques borrowed from elsewhere.

REFERENCES:

- 'Training: A Statement by Roberto Assagioli' (PET, UK, 1980)
- 'Psychosomatic Medicine and Bio-Psychosynthesis' (PRF, USA, 1967)
- 'A Basic Psychosynthesis Model' David Platts, Ph.D. (posted on internet)