

The Brief: be brief, thought provoking and inspiring, passionate, informal and even opinionated! Convey your commitment and passion for the innovative practice you do.

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### The World Turned Upside Down: Some thoughts about renewing art therapy.



### An Old Chestnut:

'The Chinese ideogram for Chaos is 'Danger' and 'Opportunity'. Well sort of.

- "danger, dangerous, endanger, jeopardize, perilous, precipitous, precarious, high, fear, afraid."
- "suitable occasion, crucial point, pivot, incipient moment, opportune, opportunity, chance, key link, secret, cunning."

危機  
危机

## Adapt or Die? It's in the manual.

Our Standards of Proficiency, uniquely, charge art therapists to:

'understand that ... art therapy has a number of frames of reference, (including) the relevant aspects of **connected disciplines including visual arts, aesthetics, anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, psychotherapy and medicine**' (We should be adding Neurology, and more).

Bigger pictures develop help new, adaptive, practice.

*Which matters because of:*

Standards of proficiency – Arts therapists HCPC August 2012 p 14

## Mass Extinctions.

- In every mass extinction niche- specific species were most vulnerable.
- Let's try and avoid that.
- Mass extinctions promote **very fast** evolution in the surviving species.
- So we better had.



**Well, *Do We* train, (or practice), informed by 'frames of reference, (including) the relevant aspects of connected disciplines?**

- Developing Innovative Practice depends on it.
- Start looking, start finding.
- Bigger Pictures helps us abandon indefensible ground. Niches that are too small.
- To defend therapy space, we need better, more inclusive rationales for practice.
- A colleague recently ran a workshop for NHS staff. She asked them to make an image of how they saw art therapy. She was horrified to see a drawing of a closed door, which was completely supported by the group)

**Extinction alert.**

A colleague recently ran a workshop for NHS staff. She asked them to make an image of how they saw art therapy. She was horrified to see a drawing of a closed door, enthusiastically endorsed by the group.

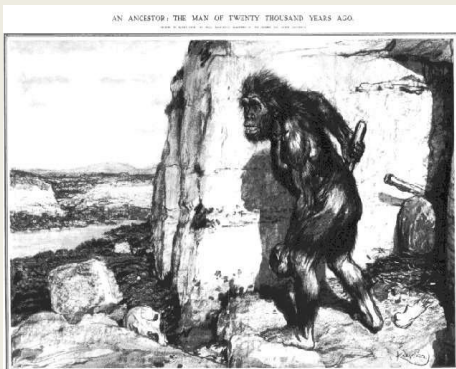


**REBECCA** *Who Slammed Doors For Fun And Perished Miserably* . Hilaire Belloc. 1907

## Recent personal examples that have changed how I work:

- Influences: Communications theory, systems theory, anarchist thought, Buddhism, social inclusion and recovery models.
- E.g. Disability studies: The concept of 'impairment' (my legs don't work) and 'disability' (there is no ramp at the library) forced re-evaluation of **social factors**.
- Resilience Theory has given form to my wondering how people endure the unendurable. It states:
- Making experiences 'Meaningful, Manageable and Comprehensible' is the 'immunological triad' against stress.
- That describes and aspect of art therapy well, **and focusses a set of non-clinical aims.**

## Evolutionary Psychology: how we became who are. Could be relevant.



- Art making has the status of an instinct. It has survival and problem solving value.
- The arts develop 'Cognitive Fluidity'. Metaphor, symbolisation, creativity are central to how human beings solve complex problems.
- The arts develop social coherence.
- The arts therapies are modern forms of evolutionary strategies.
- This is why they work.

Humans care about unfairness.

Humans are born to be attached, and survive losses.

Nobody is trying to be unhappy.

Pathologising the individual is frequently a way of blaming the victim.

Freud when he betrayed his patients with real abuse stories, and discredited psychoanalytic theory, by dismissing and invalidating these stories as fantasies.

## Are we still doing it? 'Borderline Personality Disorder'

### **Trauma, affect regulation and self-harm**

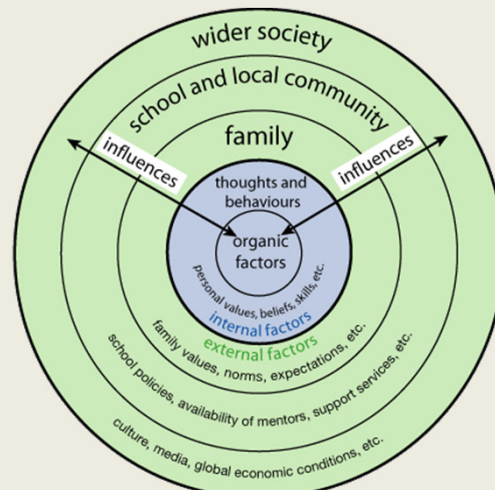
Childhood abuse and neglect are extremely common among borderline patients: up to 87% have suffered childhood trauma of some sort, 40–71% have been sexually abused and 25–71% have been physically abused ([Perry & Herman, 1993](#)).

Perry, J. C. & Herman, J. L. (1993) Trauma and defence in the etiology of borderline personality disorder. In *Borderline Personality Disorder: Etiology and Treatment* (ed. J. Paris). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.

Public Health/ Ecological thinking:  
 'The Microbe is nothing the terrain is everything'

- Individual pathology looks increasingly weak as an understanding of human distress and disturbance.
- The interaction of genetic, early environment and relationships, neurological and bio-chemical, personality, social, cultural and political factors looks increasingly strong.

The ecology of stories



<http://www.embracethefuture.org.au/resiliency>

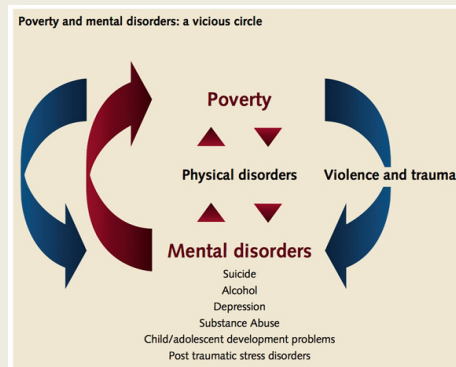
I highly recommend this site, and the related

<http://www.raisingresilientkids.com/>

## We can't keep politics, or oppression, out of this

It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society: Krishnamurti

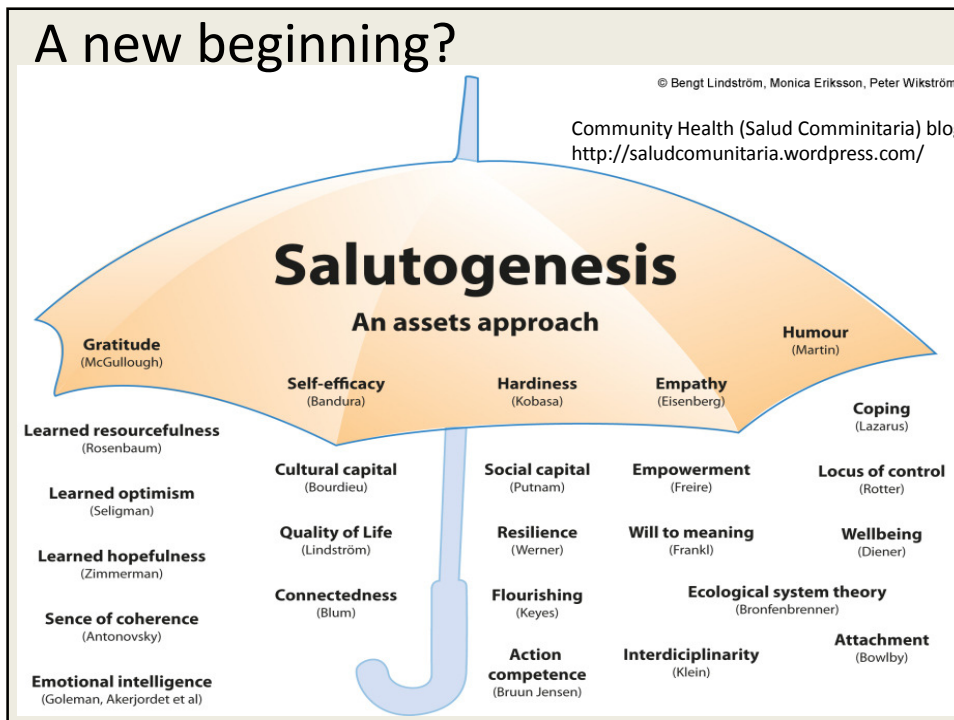
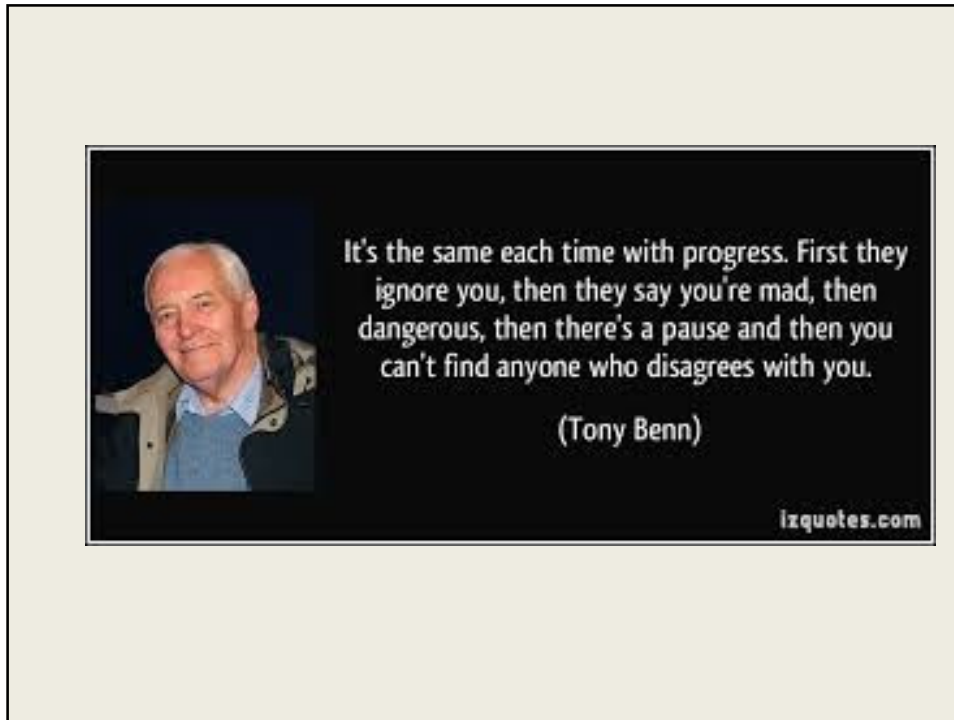
The correlation of inequality and mental health is clear. Essential reading on this: **'The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone'**, Wilkinson and Pickett, Penguin, 2010, and the related website, <http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/>. 'The evidence is hard to dispute' The Economist



Institute for Advanced Development Studies <http://inesad.edu.bo>

This throws into question:

- The disease model of mental illness.
- The location of mental illness in individuals
- All therapeutic theory based on Freud's sexual theories
- Inane 'thinking happy thoughts' therapies are not equally invalidating, and therefore often harmful.





## Are these intended outcomes of art therapy?

Good attachment,	self efficacy,
coping,	empathy,
empowerment,	hardiness,
will to meaning,	humour,
well-being,	social inclusion,
interdisciplinary approach,	increased choice and agency,
quality-of-life,	self esteem,
connectedness, emotional intelligence,	assertiveness,
sense of coherence,	creativity,
learnt hopefulness,	conflict resolution,
learnt resourcefulness,	emotional intelligence...

- These outcomes are congruent with psychotherapy aims.
- The cluster happily under the 'Salutogenic Umbrella'
- They are not pathologising, medicalising, blaming, 'one-eyed'....

## The future

- The world will never be same. Services will never be the same.
- We have an opportunity to recreate an art therapy freed from its always deeply uncomfortable compromise with psychiatry and the medical model. (And to review our relationship with psycho analysis.)
- Theory and evidence is out there to support this.
- We have to start taking neighbouring disciplines theories and practices seriously.

It may be that we are having a lucky escape from losing our souls.

There is hope and renewal in this.

‘We must work like we were living in the early days of a better nation’

(Denis Lee)



## In practice:

- Engage with politicians.
- Engage with community groups.
- Know the economic arguments.
- 46.7 million prescriptions for antidepressants in England in 2011; (9.1 per cent) increase on 2010.
- Costs: £230,000,000. Notional cost of art therapy session: £60 = 3,833,333 sessions. Notional length 30 sessions. Treats 1,277,777 people.
- Numbers of people taking anti-depressants unknown.

## Taking Our Own Medicine

“Rather than letting our negativity get the better of us, we could acknowledge that right now we feel like a piece of shit and not be squeamish about taking a good look.”

Pema Chodron