

# Portfolio approach – response

**JULIE HAY** responds to Liz Jeffries' article in the previous issue, focused on flexible approaches to TA training. Here she outlines options alongside the EATA procedures.

**L**IZ JEFFRIES' COMMENTS in the last issue (Jeffries, 2013) resonated with me because I have long felt that the TA community has been sliding into a narrow approach that not only splits up the different fields of application more than it need but also discourages trainees from getting a broad range of experiences of training and supervision.

Having myself set up university-accredited postgraduate programmes related to TA, I have experienced first-hand the pressures from academia to produce a cohesive programme that seems to provide everything a student might need. However, I have been fortunate in establishing a relationship with a work-based unit within a university, where they recognise that what really matters is that the student demonstrates evidence of competent application – however they achieve their learning. This has allowed me to establish programmes where students can gain the requisite hours from a number of different trainers – and indeed from a number of supervisors, provided one of those supervisors provides enough of the hours to give them a good enough overview of how the student is performing.

An example might make this clearer. Colleagues and I run an MSc in Developmental TA. Students can attend any of our separate training institutes, or workshops and webinars we run outside the UK, and simply add the hours together; they can also include hours done with other PTSTAs or TSTAs. Until now, we have placed a limit on how many hours could be counted for a Developmental TA qualification if the teaching was done by a (P) TSTA in the Psychotherapy field, mainly because we have observed that the approaches to the application of TA are significantly different when one thinks of cure rather than development. However, I see in the latest PTSC Telegram that we are to be allowed to count previous hours against new fields and this has reminded me of a proposal developed by the IDTA on an EATA project some years ago.

In this proposal, we suggested that the CTA exam be run more like the TSTA exam, with one exam to check theory and ethics, followed by other exams that focus on specific applications. Whereas for TSTA these are teaching and supervision, for CTA these could be psychotherapy, educational, counselling, organisational – and we proposed that these could be further subdivided

because they currently encompass so much. For instance, psychotherapists might demonstrate their competence in working one-to-one versus in groups, or maybe the divisions might be aligned to fields of activity such as addictions, trauma, family, children, etc. Educators might demonstrate competence with children or in adult education, or within schools, with parents, with refugees, and so on.

Our thinking at the time was that this would make it easier to qualify in different areas of work, with the emphasis on qualifying meaning that competence had been demonstrated. We envisaged a CTA exam process where the first exam, on theory and ethics, must be passed (just like for TSTA) but then candidates could go on to be examined in as many different applications as they wished (maybe with a maximum at any one exam occasion but the chance to come back and take more when they are ready). Someone who has been providing therapy and working within organisations (as many do) would choose the specific focus within each and take three exams, each lasting about half the time spent now – beginning with theory/ethics, followed by, for example, therapy with children and educational with parents, or family therapy and consulting to small family firms.

For this to work, we need to accept that the competencies of a transactional analyst are the same for all fields. This was also included within the original IDTA project, where we proposed that we all need the same skills but what varies is the evidence. So a competence of 'Maintains and models OKness through respect, awareness, reliability, professionalism and integrity' might be fairly evident in any application of TA, whereas 'Understands socio-economic and political realities, frames of reference, systems and cultures, and how these influence individuals and vice versa' might relate to national, organisational and/or family levels for counselling, government directives and legislation as well as an analysis of the cultures of the systems they work in when providing training within an organisation, or require a strategic level of awareness of the financing of organisations, shareholders, government funding implications, environmental issues, geographical locations and cultural diversity when practising as an organisational consultant.

Although these ideas were not adopted by EATA, it still

means that our competencies map across to the separate EATA fields, and we have used them to establish a flexible, modular approach that has university accreditation. To do this, we took the competencies that we had developed as a synthesis of those for the four separate fields, and mapped these against what the university call their Learning Outcomes. Again, an example will hopefully illustrate this – for the university criterion of Analysis/Synthesis we have: Applies a comprehensive system of assessment and diagnosis based on TA to analyse the situation; Identifies the key requirements of the individual(s) or organisation to ensure appropriate choice of interventions; Is capable of using the collected data to formulate a resource-oriented definition of the problem and communicate it clearly to the client or client-system; Realistically assesses the potential for development and change in the client and/or client system; Shows an understanding of non-TA diagnostic systems used in the professional field in the country of practice; Shows the capacity to make accurate phenomenological observations of clients and to use these as a basis for choices of interventions.

Mapping the competencies has led to university accreditation of a modular programme that is based on the practice that the student actually engages with. Gone are the academic requirements to write essays about topics that seem removed from reality. Instead, students compile portfolios of evidence that contain their working papers, correspondence, meeting notes, recordings, etc, to which they add reflective commentaries that provide their TA-based analysis of the dynamics of the interventions. For Year one (and postgraduate Certificate level) there is a core module of Professional Intervention, which requires evidence of establishing a contract and working ethically and professionally. They then complete two optional modules chosen to suit their own work; topics are individual development, interactions and relationships, group processes, or organisations and institutions. The final requirement is a learning journal maintained over eight months.

For the second year (and postgraduate Diploma) the core module is Process Skills, which again can be applied to any intervention, and includes use of supervision; the optional modules are now related to different contexts and/or activities such as coaching, teaching, consulting. This year also includes a mandatory module on Research. The final year is for those seeking the full MSc, and the evidence for this is based on a significant intervention, similar to that required for Part C of the CTA written exam. You will probably have realised by now that these portfolios also provide the content for the four sections of the CTA Written Exam, which we encourage students to take as an optional extra.

So, to come back to Liz Jeffries' comments about an alternative to a four-year training programme model, we

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expect students to take responsibility for their own personal and professional development. The modular requirements are clearly specified but students decide with whom they train and which workshops they attend – we run open groups so we go beyond Jeffries' pattern of a year per centre – and it is up to the student to make their own arrangements to cover the breadth of TA needed to work competently. Even the 'years' mentioned above are flexible; students may opt to take longer and we credit hours done with other (P) TSTAs before students join our programme. We still operate with one person as a sponsor, just as for CTA, but we expect students to experience other supervisors as well as other trainers.

Jeffries mentions how some students may need the support of a single trainer/mentor. Another factor is the way in which a closed training group may be run to resemble a therapy group. Jeffries points out that a more fluid approach may be a 'schizoid compromise' (p31); to balance that we need to consider the negative impact on the learning process for those students whose therapy issues become the focus during workshops.

#### References

Jeffries, L. (2013) 'A portfolio approach' in *Transactional Analyst* vol 3(3) 30-32



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