

My Passion for CPE

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I have found myself reluctant to begin writing this statement. When I visualize the task, I see a huge tree, perhaps the tree that the mustard seed grows into, but more exactly I see its vast root system that extends its living and writhing tentacle-like branches into every aspect of my journey through life. How can I tell the whole of that story?

There was a time when I judged my ability with words to be the apogee of my accomplishments, but age, time and wisdom have had me learning from the stories of other people, as they have shared with me their experiences in ways other than just words. Their stories have invoked in me a capacity to evoke deep truths about myself, others and God. They have done this through art and music, through poetry and dance. Even without a voice, all nature can speak to us about God. *There is no speech ... no word, yet the voice goes out through all the earth giving glory to God* (c.f. Psalm 19).

I am reminded of some of my CPE students who have found different ways of both understanding and expressing the deep truths of their journey e.g. the sixth-year medical student who presented her CPE Final Evaluation in a song which she composed, played on the guitar, and sang; or the supervisee who struggled with and denied his propensity to block his own growth by being so right about minute detail that he could not leave himself open to further vision. It was not my many words that enlightened him, but rather the insight he gained while praying his way through the Gospel account of Jesus and the Pharisees (Luke 11:37-44). "They were so right about the minutiae of the law that they could not be wrong about anything else: just like me" said that supervisee.

I am also reminded of the poem I wrote about my experience of friendship while walking alone by the sea. It seems to me that, since before I was born, a sense of the holistic inter-connectedness of everything has been part of me. It is the air that I breathe and the ground of my cultural being. I am the second of three daughters, born to my young vibrant parents. My father was a primary-school teacher, the second-to-last of the seven children of their Irish-Australian immigrant parents. Because my grandfather died very young that family was very poor. On the other hand, my mother was the second daughter of an Irishman who, though arriving in New Zealand very poor, had over many years, become very rich. Both my parents were Catholic and very much in love.

We lived in the country in a prosperous little valley where my father was a leader in the community. His prowess in sport brought him easily into the centre of community life. My mother entered whole-heartedly into the domestic concerns of the women of the district and was a leader in inspiring them into dramatic and artistic activities. The village hall echoed with the wild whoops of the community at play and in dancing. My mother's voice could be heard there. Life was about being in the centre of the WORLD.

Our father was also our school teacher. The dual role ensured that he taught us with utmost care making sure that neither we nor the other children of that little district lacked any opportunity to grow and prosper. He also taught us (my sisters and me) our religion. That teaching was holistic and part of the fabric of our lives. To combine our family life, the world of nature that surrounded us, our progress in intellectual development, and our practice in and understanding of our prayer-life and worship came naturally. It was as natural as breathing. There was no sense of isolation or sectarianism.

As we moved out of this family orbit, our father had the capacity to listen to the reports we brought of the ambiguities that life presented us. His patient, quiet, wise listening would bring us to a place of peace and assurance. Later the strange ambiguities of failures and rejections, of the early death of my mother, the brain tumour of my younger sister, all in a short space of time, were overwhelming for him too but he was always there with his quiet patient presence.

To live life concerned with the others' welfare, to seek guidance through supervision and spiritual direction, and to be motivated by faith, love, and hope are to me at the heart of the CPE process. I do not claim to have done this perfectly, but I cannot do anything else but be involved in it. The seeds of this process are part of my earliest being.

My passion for CPE has grown over time. Both my experience and my education have reinforced it. I had a good basic education in my youth. At university I majored in French with accompanying papers in English, History, Education and Philosophy; the outcome of this body of study was a clear sense of the inter-connectedness of all these areas of knowledge. As part of my study for accreditation as a CPE supervisor I chose to do further university studies in Education. Some of my papers were: Adult Education, Decision-Making and Management, Psychometrics, Philosophy of Education, Organizational Effectiveness, Work and Education. I did further studies in Counselling, the Theory of CPE, and Education and Work, and also gained accreditation as a Spiritual Director and a Diploma in Theology. All of these studies have contributed to my professional development, enriched my understanding of the CPE educational process, and augmented my personal life. Moreover they have reinforced my sense of the inter-connectedness of everything.

In all of these things I have been affirmed in my understanding of and passion for the process that CPE affords. It is firmly embedded in my being.

And I am very grateful!