

Looking Again at the “Too Wounded” Student: A Response to Margot Hover

William R. DeLong

In my supervisory practice over the years, I have appreciated articles that help make sense of applicants and the way they present themselves for a clinical pastoral education (CPE) residency. I am one of the supervisors that Margot Hover writes about who have accepted a student into a program and eventually regretted the decision.¹ In some ways, this is, as they say in master of business administration programs, the “price of doing business.” This very helpful article, however, raises important questions: What do we mean by “too-wounded”? How does this category frame the broader discussion of the nature and intent of Clinical Pastoral Education which, in my view, is a boundary question on the meta-level: the question of teaching or treating?

Margot Hover’s descriptions of Elise, a composite of several students who are believed to be “too wounded” to benefit from CPE, provide the focus for my exploration. I have relied for a long time on the distinctions about clinical

learning established by Eckstein and Wallerstein, namely the difference between problems about learning and learning problems.² I hope to show that what is considered a “too-wounded” student is, in fact, another clearly identifiable problem with learning—one that can and should be considered in the application process, but also one that, when reframed away from pathology toward an educational assessment, may describe a student appropriate for CPE.

I begin by looking at some of the descriptions Margot Hover provides to determine the degree of wounding this student has sustained. My intent is not to critique the descriptions, but rather to consider how we begin to see a student and how that can become the frame by which we make judgments about their psychological stability rather than becoming curious about a particular learning style that may be being presented. These observations are listed in no particular order:

- Elsie was effusive in her gratitude and excitement at the invitation to interview for a position in the residency group.
- Elsie was insensitive to the usual social boundaries regarding personal space, particularly with authority figures.
- Elsie had a long, tangled, and very confusing history with denominational authorities.
- Elsie also had an extensive history of career changes, albeit with some evidently impressive accomplishments along the way. She was an excellent writer, for example, and several of her short pieces had appeared in trade publications.
- Elsie was very bright, articulate, and quick thinking although the emerging profile hinted somewhat at self-sabotage.
- Applicants like Elsie frequently emit strange, hard-to-define sexual notes, which are or may be experienced as subtle seduction. Frequently, this involved a striking hairstyle, which, while not notably unprofessional, still drew attention.

This listing is sufficient to make my point. Although I acknowledge the inherent bias in presenting selected statements of a larger and clearly more balanced appraisal of Elsie, there is reflected a long standing preference to look at psychological dynamics in isolation from learning styles and learning objectives. I have no doubt that Margot is describing here someone whom she experienced as a difficult student. At the same time, it is important to note how much emphasis is placed upon psychodynamic aspects. I want to hear how this student approached her learning. How might we describe her learning style? In each of the instances provided above, there seems to be a decided

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emphasis on psychodynamics. As a question of boundaries in supervision, I wonder what it might be like to lead with an educational lens.

I do not intend to de-emphasize, or worse dismiss, the role of emotional stability in the evaluation of students and the readiness for learning. I do this to press the boundary question in our admission processes and supervision: What is the predominant lens that informs our acceptance of students? Margot Hover has contributed wisely to this discussion, as she always does. For our practice, it is about seeing the applicants clearly. As we continue to struggle as an organization to distinguish between teaching and treating, is there an assumption that certain psychological dynamics lead to particular learning styles that, in turn, lead to acceptance in a CPE program? Or is CPE devoted to a particular learning style that serves individuals who present with a particular and identifiable psychological constellation? For me, it is a question of boundaries.

NOTES

1. Margot Hover, "Identifying and Educating the 'Too Wounded to Heal' Student," *Reflective Practice* 30 (2010): 171-183.
2. Rudolf Eckstein and Robert S. Wallerstein, *The Teaching and Learning of Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1958).

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Integrative Learning for Ministry: A Case Study of the Presbyterian School of Ministry in New Zealand

Joseph E. Bush Jr. and Twyla Susan Werstein

ORDINATION STUDIES PROGRAM: INTEGRATIVE LEARNING

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand (PCANZ) recently ended a ten-year exploratory program in formation for Christian ministry.¹ From 1997 to 2007, the School of Ministry for the PCANZ conducted a residential two-year "Ordination Studies Programme" (OSP) to better prepare ordinands for the exercise of Christian ministry. The primary emphasis of the Ordination Studies Programme was "integrative learning" as central to a student's formation for ministry. In particular, the program sought to help students to integrate four areas of formation: (1) cognitive learning, (2) emotional maturation, (3) the development of professional skills, and (4) the nurturing of Christian discipleship and spirituality.²

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