

Practitioner Perspective

Multiskilled Therapy, Coaching and Supervision

Working ethically, effectively and creatively while integrating multiple skills

By *Eve Menezes Cunningham*



as ethical as possible as well as effective and creative.

Working ethically

When I first joined the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Coaching and the Association of Integrative Coach Therapy Professionals (AICTP), I wasn't thinking, "I want to integrate the different therapies and coaching I'm qualified in ethically, effectively and creatively."

As a student member then full member of BACP Coaching it was simply a delight to meet people integrating different things at network meetings. I was also very involved with the AICTP.

Gill Fennings, then Chair of BACP Coaching coined the term "multiskilled practitioner" (Fennings-Monkman). Gill asked me to join BACP's Coaching Executive as a Specialist for Communications and when she stepped down as Chair a few years later, I stepped up.

My years on the BACP Coaching Executive meant I became immersed in sharing the excitement and home I felt like I'd found with the wider membership. We lost the network meetings that had meant so much to me but organised conferences and CPD days with the support of BACP's Events team. My time with the Executive was a gift in terms of learning from such a wide range of people as well as building my own confidence in my varied

The author reflects on her personal and professional journey from trauma survivor to complementary therapist, coach, trauma therapist and supervisor of multiskilled therapists and coaches. She explores the importance of ethics, training, supervision and professional bodies as well as the joy of bringing your whole self to serve your whole client.

Introduction

While increasing numbers of counsellors and psychotherapists are integrating coaching or offering coaching as well as therapy, it wasn't always that way. In this article, I reflect on the not so distant past when it felt like we were doing something very different and new.

I share some of my personal journey as well as my experience with different trainings and professional bodies. My hope is that readers will feel more secure as well as curious about their own existing or potential multiskilled and integrative practices. I also hope that they'll gain some ideas for ensuring their own practice is

offerings. It helped me feel safe for myself and for my clients as I developed my private practice.

Our ongoing focus was getting the Coaching Competencies developed and released. I lost count of the number of Letters from the Chair I wrote (Menezes Cunningham, 2017) promising the Executive Committee and wider BACP Coaching membership that the competencies were on their way. It took a while, but BACP members can now see where they're already competent to coach and where they need additional training.

My journey and natural love of integration

Writing this in 2024, I understand how my heritage (Indian Irish, London born, UK and partly US raised, now living in Ireland) and neurodivergence (awaiting assessment for ADHD at time of writing) made me multiskilled.

I'd never intended to train in so many modalities but for the first ten years, I was prioritising my own trauma recovery. My seeming addiction to training was partially my curious nature but also, especially in that first decade of my practice, my ongoing quest to save my own life.

I couldn't have articulated it back then, but the interpersonal element of the traumas had meant I was not ready to put my trust in any one therapist. Training in various therapies that felt personally helpful meant I could learn to regulate myself to feel better every day. It was several more years before I was ready to benefit from the essential healing benefits of co-regulation.

I'd been coaching myself and practicing yoga (as pain relief for endometriosis, not yet understanding the mental health benefits) for years at this stage. I had begun to feel that I was doing so much better when actively

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working on myself. This was long before I started using the term self care (let alone Self care – for connecting with and taking better care of the Self, that highest, wisest, truest, wildest, most joyful, brilliant and miraculous part of yourself) it was enormous progress. Still, as soon I stopped this active self care, I was back in the old default self-loathing and despair I'd lived in for so long.

The idea of compulsory counselling (as well as the expense) had put me off training as a counsellor for many years. By 2008, I was ready to bridge the gulf between the new feelings of happiness and the background, incessant self-loathing. I was ready to delve deep into my past and hopefully heal, though I still wasn't convinced that I would.

Even though I only brought the tip of the iceberg over the several years I saw my delightful therapist (continuing long after the mandatory hours had been completed), it was the beginning of my co-regulatory healing.

At the start of my psychosynthesis training, spotting a couple of crystals in the Psychosynthesis and Education Trust at London Bridge meant I felt instantly welcome. But throughout my training, I felt ashamed of constantly trying to understand how ALL my offerings fitted together. The experiential exercises were so beneficial, I knew it was worth it. These simple but powerful

practices gave me hope that my own trauma recovery was possible. Even now, I sometimes recognise things I first became aware of during these practises. I remind myself to drop into my breath and ground myself in order to let my nervous system settle and rest.

It all fits together so well

As well as being influenced by Freud (with whom he'd worked) psychosynthesis' creator, Roberto Assagioli, was heavily influenced by Eastern philosophies including yoga. The time he'd lived in meant that he felt he had to minimise the enormous influence of ancient healing practices and traditions in order not to be written off by the medical community. I still feel uncomfortable about what sometimes feels to me like cultural appropriation, while also understanding that it was a different time.

I'd already trained as a life coach, and I developed what I called Crystal Coaching as my final project back in 2003. I didn't know the term 'integrative' back then but I wanted more for my crystal therapy clients than for them to simply lie back and depend on me or any complementary therapist. Long before I started using the term self care, I wanted clients to know how to use the crystals to support themselves in working towards their goals in between sessions. Whether they believed in the crystals' energies or not, they could still be used as visual and kinaesthetic anchors to remind each client of their focus, intention or goal.

I'd begun the three-year training because the crystals offered me some pain relief. It introduced me to meditation. One early meditation had me fearing that I was having a heart attack as I clutched the rose quartz I'd been guided to hold. I didn't want to disturb the

other trainees so sat quietly until mentioning it afterwards, when I was feeling fine again. “Nothing to worry about,” I was told, “just your heart chakra opening.” It amplified my appreciation of how powerful and scary these stones’ energies could be.

I’d started practicing yoga, again for pain relief and, after endometriosis surgery in 2001, I quit smoking and drinking. I loved the almost medicinal benefits of yoga but the psychospiritual aspect both terrified and appealed to me until I learned how to ground myself more effectively and to regulate my own nervous system.

Years later, I was able to offer some training in simple trauma sensitive yoga tools with yoga teachers in the UK before I moved to Ireland. It’s so easy to integrate basic grounding and resourcing for yoga students and therapy clients as appropriate.

The Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) training I undertook was a revelation. I had been coaching for a few years by that stage. Working hard to reframe everything and to be as positive as possible, the idea of voicing all the negative self-talk to release energy blocks felt horrifying. Yet without voicing them and releasing them, those thoughts and beliefs were having a big impact.

The Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) training helped me to feel like I was creating a little bit of a manual for staying alive. I hadn’t felt actively suicidal for a few years by that stage. Something as simple as learning to set a well-formed outcome (figuring out what I wanted in any given situation), using sensory acuity (letting all my senses feedback to me as to whether my approach was working or not) and flexibility (to adapt my approach as needed) revolutionised my everything.

Being Indian Irish growing up in London, Essex and, for a year, America, I hadn’t understood that the water in which I was swimming was multicultural

By the time I completed the Master Practitioner level training in NLP, I felt I was done with training. I had just been diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after a house fire and I finally had language to express for how I’d always felt with what I later learned was complex developmental trauma). Nevertheless, it was at this point that the psychosynthesis training called me.

After nearly four years of experiential earthquakes and academic challenges, this training left me feeling like I’d survived an emotional washing machine. Then a taster day for yoga therapy for the mind took up nearly two years. Wearing my freelance journalist hat, I’d gone to the event thinking I’d write a feature about it, but it led to my enrolling on a 350 hour trauma-informed yoga therapy for mental health training.

Heather Mason, founder of the Minded Institute in London, had integrated psychotherapy, mindfulness, yoga and neuroscience. Our cohort was fortunate to have as guest lecturers Dr Dan Siegel, who created and popularised the ‘window of tolerance’ model and Dr Patricia Gerbarg, with her amazing work around Coherent Breathing and work with enormous groups of trauma survivors.

Nervous system regulation has been an enormous part of my work ever since.

Deepening the somatic, embodied approach through trauma informed yoga was incredible for

my own trauma recovery – body work you do yourself. After all, 80% of the body’s signals go up, via the vagus nerve, to the brain. It’s MUCH faster and more effective to use our bodies through movement and breath than telling ourselves (especially if further alarming the amygdala by yelling at ourselves) to be more relaxed or confident etc.

Learning how to integrate ethically

Working with the thoughts, feelings, body and the transpersonal (energy work and spirit) gave me the confidence to work more deeply with clients and groups, knowing that while not all of my offerings were appropriate for all of them, they could guide me.

There’s a sweet coaching story about a young fish not understanding what water was because she was so immersed in it. Being Indian Irish growing up in London, Essex and, for a year, America, I hadn’t understood that the water in which I was swimming was multicultural. Similarly, having been integrating therapies and coaching before I knew what that meant made the pioneering new book, *Personal Consultancy: A model for integrating counselling and coaching* (Popovic, N. & Jinks, D. 2014) an incredible read for me. I’d been asked to read and review it for the BACP journals, *Therapy Today* and *Coaching Today*.

I loved the *Personal Consultancy* book and model so much that I signed up for the then brand new integrative counselling and coaching course by the authors (the first post-graduate training of its kind in the UK) at the University of East London (UEL).

The psychosynthesis training had integrated elements from Gestalt and Person-Centred Therapy as well as Psychodynamic. Assagioli’s interest in human potential as well as wounding meant that he pursued a different path from Freud. I was

learning all of it at the same time. It had been integrated for us. I didn't yet know how the different parts had come together or how to integrate ethically.

Around this time, I met Liz Hall, author of *Mindful Coaching* (Hall, L. 2013) through one of the BACP Coaching networking meetings. I interviewed her for a couple of features and she inspired me to begin thinking more deeply about the possibilities of integrating the elements of my practice that weren't just coaching.

The collaborative approach – with clients' selves

Nash Popovic spent a lot of time with us exploring the differences between integration and working eclectically. I learned about collaborating, simply naming the options so the clients (and later supervisees) could choose which of the different ways of working they would like.

Popovic's perspective was that it was unethical to send a client away to begin their story all over if the issue was something the same practitioner could support them with. It was all about contracting and recontracting.

I'd already been collaborating with clients' highest, wisest, truest most miraculous parts but, as a student and newly qualified counsellor, hadn't had the confidence to name as much to make the work truly collaborative with their conscious selves, too.

The transpersonal energy of psychosynthesis – the beyond the person elements – helped me to feel supported enough to hold the space for my clients while knowing that there is something bigger than both of us helping them connect with and honour that innate inner wisdom and knowing.

I ask new clients if they have any spiritual or religious beliefs. No matter what religion or spiritual

That Loving Kindness wish for them to be happy and healthy, peaceful and at ease

practice, using appropriate terminology for their own beliefs helps them connect with that highest, wisest, truest, wildest, most joyful, brilliant and miraculous part of themselves.

I start each morning with a Metta, a Buddhist Loving Kindness meditation. As well as including all the usual elements of Metta meditation, I send Metta to all my clients, supervisees, readers and groups, past, present and future. Especially those I'm working with that day.

With my trauma informed practice, anytime a client crosses my mind, I stop myself ruminating by sending them Metta. That Loving Kindness wish for them to be happy and healthy, peaceful and at ease. To be able to take care of themselves joyfully, with the courage, wisdom, patience and determination to manage life's challenges.

This immediately soothes my own nervous system, helps me potentially make a note suggesting a specific offering for our next session and enables me to let go. It helps me work with the heart's electromagnetic field while staying grounded and resourced. It also helps me enormously when reading or watching the news or talking to anyone who's suffering. It helps me remember that my suffering doesn't help anyone.

Diana Whitmore (who'd set up the Psychosynthesis and Education Trust with another student of Assagioli's, Piero Ferrucci) spoke about a conversation she had with Assagioli about filling the therapeutic space with Good Will. She said a part of her had scoffed

at the idea but he had said to experiment with it. She started doing so and when she forgot one day, she reported that she felt as if she'd been slapped by the client. I use a simple tool from Energetic NLP to energetically clear the space of anywhere I'm working whether it's with clients or presenting or even as a participant. I do this before sessions and often during sessions.

Support from professional bodies and supervision

I've already mentioned BACP Coaching and AICTP. Other professional bodies I joined and got accredited with along the way include being an Experienced Yoga Teacher with Yoga Alliance Professionals UK, the Association for NLP (neuro linguistic programming) ANLP and being an Advanced Practitioner and Mentor for EFT International.

As soon as I started planning my move to Ireland in 2018, I took advantage of the reciprocal accreditation scheme between BACP and IACP and joined IACP. I became Senior Accredited with BACP as a supervisor of individuals to meet IACP's criteria for supervising IACP members while my supervision accreditation was going through their process.

After presenting at the international therapy conference during Covid lockdowns, I was delighted to be asked to design and deliver a 3-hour training for IACP's CPD hub. It's still available and shows therapists how to use EFT to support themselves through a range of issues that might come up. We made it very clear that it didn't qualify them to use it with anyone other than themselves. I also did a live EFT demonstration when I presented at the IACP conference in 2023, shared some psychoeducation around burnout and the nervous system, a yoga

nidra (guided relaxation) and more. In the UK, I presented a few times at BACP conferences and other events, sharing mind body practices, psychoeducation and other elements from my practice. One time, a keynote speaker got ill so I had the unexpected pleasure/challenge of covering the straight after lunch spot. People are often quite sluggish then so I taught some chair yoga while dressed in a maxi-dress.

When integrating the crystals, yoga, NLP and EFT in this multiskilled way I feel like I have to be more vigilant about best possible practice than if I was simply working in the one way in which I'd been trained.

I've worked with different supervisors over the years and my main supervisor, while not trained in all the modalities in which I work, knows enough to be able to support me. I get additional supervision and mentoring in the other elements of my practice as needed by myself or required by professional bodies. I also advertise clearly so that people know what to expect. I have also written a book about self care and this helped me to own all aspects of my multiskilled integrative practice.

Complementary not alternative

An important ethical consideration for me is to ensure that clients know that there are many potential ways to work with their issues and that if a particular modality or tool doesn't work for them, that's no problem at all.

It feels especially important, when integrating counselling with coaching and complementary therapies, to be incredibly grounded and avoid any kind of potentially misleading claims or anything that might leave a client feeling like there was something wrong with them if the tools didn't help. I remember an early piece

I make it very clear when talking about crystal coaching that crystals are not a cure for anything

I wrote about NLP and allergies in ANLP's magazine. One of my experts said that my anaphylaxis allergy to peppers was just a 'limiting belief' and that he could cure me. I adore NLP and the way it's helped me and others in so many ways, but it worries me when people talk about any one thing (including modern medicine) as THE panacea.

I make it very clear when talking about crystal coaching that crystals are not a cure for anything. They helped me enormously with pain relief over 20 years ago and I continue to use them daily in a variety of ways (from supporting sleep to anchoring different goals I'm working towards).

That being said, we know that up to 90% of GP visits are due to conditions which have been exacerbated by stress (Benson, H. 1975) and that relaxing can support the body's natural healing capabilities as we move into restorative rest/digest parasympathetic activation of the nervous system.

Whether I'm integrating crystals, yoga therapy, breathwork, imagery, mindfulness or anything else, I encourage clients to seek appropriate medical advice.

While the Personal Consultancy model begins with deep listening, because I integrate other modalities, I reverted to beginning work with each new client with the in-depth assessment form I've developed over several years. This includes elements from all my ways of working as well as finding out what supports (medical and social) clients have between sessions.

Conclusion

Whether you're already integrating coaching and other therapies or are considering upskilling, I hope you've found this article helpful and that you'll access some of the resources (especially the aforementioned book, *Personal Consultancy*) that helped me learn to integrate more consciously and collaboratively. Supervision is also key, and an increasing number of supervisors are open to supporting wider practice. Let your whole self serve your clients' whole selves. ☺

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Based in Westport, Co Mayo, Eve works mostly online with clients across Ireland and the UK. As well as her trauma informed therapies, coaching and supervision, she's a writer (journalist and author of *365 Ways to Feel Better: Self-care Ideas for Embodied Wellbeing*), host and producer of The Feel Better Every Day Podcast. Eve also facilitates the Embodied with Eve online community and runs a free Facebook group for Multiskilled Therapists and Coaches. You can find out more and get in touch via selfcarecoaching.net

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