Reflections on Theory in Action

Consulting Wittgenstein

On the Quest to Administratively Regulate Counseling Therapists in Canada

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses an important dilemma for postmodern public administration. The case involves a public clash of modern and postmodern sensibilities around knowledge and rights to participation when counseling practitioner associations with different practice viewpoints attempted to organize in the Canadian province of British Columbia. This topic is important and provides a glimpse into organizing processes as a field of practice moves from informality (e.g., unregulated) to formality (regulated and perhaps bureaucratized). It also addresses what the philosopher Wittgenstein referred to as different "language games" as "forms of life," advancing their proponents' positions during a competitive organizing effort to achieve social validation. It demonstrates how language games are interwoven with power, defined here as the capacity to act in various ways, and mobilized by each group to protect its interests. Several interventions are explored toward achieving greater collaboration and resolving the public dilemma.

BACKGROUND

The practitioner associations in this conflict transparently shared, mostly through their Web sites, their differing positions and conflicts on establishing a provincial regulatory body for counseling therapists. This reflection and analysis is mostly based on documents retrieved from these Web sites over many years of interest in organizing the British Columbia College of Counseling Therapists (hereafter, "BC College").

In Canada, the profession of counseling therapy is, for the most part, unregulated (Gladding, 2004). Since 1998, several organizations have been attempting to collaborate to influence the provincial government to regulate the profession under the provincial Health Professions Act (British Columbia Association of Clinical Counselors, n.d.). Under this effort, the BC College would come into being and regulate practitioners. Similar efforts have been going on in other provinces. The unfolding organizing processes have included social dramas (i.e., public conflicts) between two of these practitioner communities, the Canadian Professional Counsellors Association (CPCA) and the Canadian Counseling Association (CCA). Each of these associations has passionately advanced its own constructions of the right educational standards for new Canadian counselors. The questions driving the conflict are what entry qualifications are required, that is, who can and cannot be a counseling therapy practitioner, and how might regulation affect the careers of those already working in the field.

The topic of this artaicle is dynamic and important for several reasons. First, it provides a glimpse of organizing processes as they might occur when a field of practice moves from informality (e.g., unregulated) to formality (regulated and perhaps bureaucratized). Second, it addresses what the philosopher Wittgenstein (1953) referred to as different "forms of life," everyday language practices that convey different perspectives on the real and good in public life, advancing their proponents' differing positions during an organizing process. Third, it demonstrates how these differing language practices, as forms of life, are interwoven with power (Flyvjberg, 2001; Foucault, 1980; Parker, 1992) and how power as the capacity to act in various ways, including making a difference, is then mobilized by groups to attain their own outcomes and protect their interests.

I write this article as a counseling therapy practitioner who reflects on his own practices and on what informs and shapes his practice. I draw in part from a relational (social) constructionist approach to organizing behavior (Hosking, 2004; Hosking & Morley, 1991; Weick, 1979), a Foucauldian notion of power and language (Foucault, 1980; Parker, 1992), and the notion that speaking and acting "language and the actions into which it is woven" is a "language game," a form of life (Wittgenstein, 1953, aphorisms 7 and 19).

I begin with an example. The language practices of stone builders involve a distinct vocabulary to signify their practice—artifacts, actions, and ranks of expertise—in the contained environment of constructing with stones. Their language game, or form of life, is woven into a culture that revolves around fetching stone blocks and gluing them together with mortar to make walls and other structures. Wittgenstein comments:

> Let us imagine a language. . . . The language is meant to serve for
> communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building
> with building-stones; there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has

to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block," "pillar," "slab," "beam." A calls them out;—B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call.—Conceive of this as a complete primitive language. (1953, aphorism 2)

Wittgenstein argues that "to imagine a language game is to imagine a form of life" (1953, aphorism 19). Likewise, counseling therapists employ language games to carry out their work and to talk amongst themselves about their work (Kavanagh, 2008). However, the artifacts of counseling therapy, distinct from stones and mortar, are for the most part words, sentences, questioning processes, and the stories that are woven with such. What these advanced communicators signify by such language, unlike stone builders, is often intangible and, therefore, unlike bricks and stones, not touchable.

I realize from my training and experience that the language games of counseling therapy operate within a domain of politics and therefore power. Therapists and their referring sources often construct clients as lacking and needing their services to become whole or heal. Paying attention to language and power, Dreier, for example, centers on how client descriptions are interpreted by the therapist and how "these interpretations are, possibly, used to direct the process, including future descriptions . . . in that way clients are construed, even contrived from a 'proficentric' perspective" (1996, p. 106). We could refer to this as a "subject-object relation" in which the client, lacking academic expertise in counseling, is known from the subject's (therapist's) singular point of view and is thus treated as available to be influenced, mobilized, motivated, and directed by the subject (Dachler & Hosking, 1995).

On the subject of therapists' practices with language and power, Madigan and Epston write that therapists have often functioned as agents of power, placing clients under a therapeutic eye or "gazing practices," hoping by developing new practice techniques to become "pre-eminent among their mental health colleagues as looking glass heroes/heroines" (1995, p. 258). The gazing practice has included diagnosis and in some cases observing clients through one-way mirrors. On the organizing of a therapist's knowledge class and practices, Madigan and Epston write:

Tenets of therapy were secured through hard fought struggles at academic, professional, and government levels. Tenets were mediated through policy guidelines that dictated appropriate practice procedure. Since the 1700's not much has changed. . . . Traditionally, the ideology of professional practice viewed clients/patients as not having expertise their own lives. (1995, p. 258)

In counseling therapy processes, when a client accepts the therapist's constructions, he or she gains some limited access to the therapist's language game. Thus, the therapist's language game influences the language game of

the client. Likewise, these subject-object relations may emerge in the language used between BC College participants as some practitioners seek to influence the outcome of regulation according to their own perspective.

This article showcases how the two feuding practitioner communities operate from different language games. In their debate, the CPCA community is positioned as less knowledgeable; its language game does not require that counselors have a graduate degree to be socially certified to practice. The language game of the CCA community, on the other hand, states that a master's degree is required to practice counseling therapy. Yet the CPCA community mobilized an effective argument in its efforts to have its members included in the establishment of the BC College. The CPCA argument deftly constructed the core competency of the counseling therapist as "empathy" rather than the signified value of an academic degree. While promoting a nonacademic approach to counseling therapy, the CPCA argument employed a multiplicity of discursive elements, utilizing as well the social validation of academically advanced individuals to enhance its profile.

I first provide some background on the effort to form the regulatory BC College. I then address the conflict between the two associations and follow that with a discussion on the difficulty of resolving a conflict between two language games that have a common focus, in this case that of counseling therapy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I have actively followed the BC College organizing processes since 1995. For several years, I have also been interested in social dramas that erupt around interests declared to represent the public good. I have spent long periods as a participating observer in related online communities of practice. In such settings, I participated in discussions and reflected on group interactions around topics such as the perceived utility of distance-learning degrees, state closures of private educational institutions, quests to establish certified professions, the perceived value of self-help groups, and family therapy practices in which client and therapist create meaning and change by negotiating their different kinds of knowing.

In such communities of practice I found that social dramas often emerged when someone breached the taken-for-granted conventions of other participants or the dominant group (Turner, 1957), arguing passionately against the dominant view or what some believed was the right perspective or practice. This, of course, has the appearance of two language games engaged in conflict. Thus, one thing I have learned is that as people come together to organize, some advance the position that a certain language game should remain dominant, while others, such as the CPCA, seek to share this space of power and have their views recognized and socially validated. I define "organizing" as any

activity in which persons come together around a project to add value to their own lives or the lives of others (Hosking & Morley, 1991; Kavanagh, 2008). According to Weick, organizing "consists of the resolving of equivocality [ambiguity, uncertainty] in an enacted environment by means of interlocked behaviors embedded in conditionally related processes" (1979, p. 90). These interlocked behaviors coconstruct relational realities as we move through the various organizing processes. By observing the interlocking behaviors (e.g., interlocking language games), we can understand that how we proceed, what Shotter (1980) refers to as "joint action," produces relational outcomes that enhance or impede the project (Kavanagh, 2008).

Examples of organizing include the activities of any organization, the raising of families, the sharing of knowledge in learning communities or nonprofit and governmental projects, and other efforts to influence the public good. It has been said that when organizing, participants will bring their own projects and attempt to influence others (Hosking & Morley, 1991). Such projects, agendas, values, beliefs, or whatever they may be can be thought of as interwoven with the language games of the participants.

I am also a counseling therapist with over 15 years of full-time clinical practice in an agency funded by the provincial government. I am a former full member of the CCA (when it was called the Canadian Guidance and Counseling Association), and I have been a registered member and master practitioner in CPCA from 2002 to 2008. I have recently become a registered clinical member of the British Columbia Association of Clinical Counselors (BCACC). I hold a Ph.D. from Tilburg University related to the practice disciplines of family therapy, organization development consulting, and organizing processes and power relations in professional communities of practice. I am also a member of the Organization Development Network and the Academy of Management and an associate member of the Canadian Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROPOSED
COLLEGE OF COUNSELING THERAPISTS

In 1991, the province of British Columbia proclaimed the Health Professions Act (HPA) to oversee the designation of new health professions; the Health Professions Council (hereafter, "the Council") was formed to review applications for the designation of new health professions. Several counseling therapy associations responded by filing applications for their stated areas of practice, including clinical counselors, professional counselors, marriage and family therapists, and art therapists. In 1995, the Council decided that the separate applications should be merged, and for the next two years, it held deliberations with counselors, the public, and other stakeholders.

In 1997, following deliberations, the Council announced that counseling

therapy was indeed a health profession within the HPA definition and there was public interest in having it be regulated. However, the Council did not recommend the designation of the profession. The reasons given were that there was too much diversity among the associations with regard to education, training, and scope of practice. The Council published the following:

> It is clear that there is no consistent basic standard of education among the applicants. While there are Master's level programs available in counseling at the University of British Columbia, a Master's level entry requirement for a proposed college would exclude many practicing members of the applicant groups.

> These varying educational requirements indicate that there exists a variety of certificate and degree programs for people engaging in counseling practice. Because of the diversity of counseling approaches, philosophies and activities, the Council believes that it would be extremely difficult to set and enforce educational requirements or standards under the college system of regulation mandated by the Act. Further, depending on the standards or requirements imposed, many persons currently engaged in the practice of counseling may be excluded from the proposed college. The result could well be a reduction in available alternatives to the detriment of the public interest. (British Columbia Health Professions Council, 1997, section s.5(2)(d))

The Council also questioned whether the counseling associations would be able to work together effectively and cooperatively.

> The Council believes that establishing a college for the purpose of regulating counseling has the potential to lead to unproductive and unnecessary disputes about who is best suited to regulate the practice of counseling. Indeed, during the Council's investigation two of the applicants engaged in a testy exchange of correspondence regarding the educational backgrounds of their respective members. (BC Health Professions Council, 1997, section s.5(2)(f))

In the above statement, we witness that the Council has more or less signaled that the different language games of at least two of the professional communities would prevent these practitioner communities from collaborating successfully. The phrase "who is best suited to regulate the practice" signals a subject-object power relation in which one community might identify itself as more suited than the other to lead, or participate in, the regulation process. The Council concluded that what is needed is an alternative approach to regulating counseling therapy, one that recognizes the wide disparity in training, qualifications, and various treatment services. It recommended that there be voluntary but automatic registration with no entry requirements and that the

various associations collaboratively organize such a system. The counseling associations disagreed with the findings of the Council and began to organize in a collective effort.

ORGANIZING THE TASK GROUP
FOR COUNSELOR REGULATION

In 1998, several practitioner associations formed the Task Group for Counselor Regulation (hereafter, "the Task Group") to lobby the Ministry of Health to create a college of counseling therapists. This new college would govern the narrow scope of services that only members of this profession would be allowed, should it be licensed, to provide to the public. The groups have been negotiating how the new proposed college will function and how their current members could be grandfathered ("ported") into the new format. What was important to the groups was that the practice of counseling therapy be designated, rather than any particular group of counselors (Bryce, 1998).

Rejecting the proposition that any particular university degree would determine competency, the Task Group conceived to propose that designation of counselors should be based on possession of a predetermined set of competencies (Bryce, 1998) and that this would provide the public with assurances of quality practice. The Task Group then began working on a competency profile. Nevertheless, the Task Group did not explicitly leave out the requirement of a master's degree for entry, and various Task Group member associations do require that potential adherents possess that degree to register with them. The language game of the CPCA is an exception, and in 2004, the CPCA left the Task Group, maintaining its stand that a master's degree should not be a requirement for entry into the new college. The CPCA soon hired a consultant and, with its members, set about creating its own competency profile. The consensus of a meeting between the Task Group and the CPCA in 2006 was that there was "significant overlap in the two profiles, suggesting more common ground than differences."[1]

THE MASTER'S DEGREE AS ENTRY CREDENTIAL

The BCACC offers the designation registered clinical counselor (RCC), and the CCA offers the designation Canadian counseling certification (CCC). Both designations require a master's degree. These are the constructions of these private associations and hold no formal social validation or licensure. However, these associations have the largest number of members, and it is implied that the master's degree is the standard of basic clinical entry into practice across North America.

The CCA is a Canada-wide counseling association. It was formerly known as the Canadian Guidance and Counseling Association, primarily made up of

school counselors rather than counseling therapists. The CCA appointed itself as an accrediting body for university counseling programs in Canada. The CCA and the BCACC actively work with local universities to promote membership in their organizations as a signifier of professional credibility. The BCACC is the dominant counseling association in British Columbia; it appears to have done an excellent job of marketing its members' interests among employers as well as service contract providers such as employee assistance insurance programs. I have found through personal conversations with many BCACC members that they believe the RCC designation is the gold standard, signifying accreditation. Yet, in casual conversations with counselors, I found that many members seemed unaware that this designation, like all other counselor designations in the province, has no legal/licensing status.

Entry requirements for the BCACC and CCA indicate they have formed what we could refer to as a "language game alliance." This means that they already speak the same professional discourse, placing the related master's degree as essential for entry into practice. Of the two associations, the provincial chapter of the CCA seems to have been the most vocal and has in the past posted self-supporting and sometimes provocative documents on its Web site.

The following is taken from the CCA submission to the Task Group on counselor certification in British Columbia:

> It is our position that it is important for all members of the College to meet a basic educational minimum of a Master's degree in counseling or a related field from an accredited university. We do not believe that it is in the interest of the new College to compromise on this basic educational minimum. This is consistent with our national Counselor Certification program, a program that has always held this requirement. It is also consistent with the current requirements for RCC and other jurisdictions in North America that regulate counseling (see Appendix E of the Logan Report). We recognize that not all BC Counselors have a Master's degree and some may have their graduate degree in an unrelated area. The first Board of the new College will be faced with challenging case-by-case decisions at the very beginning, then a somewhat easier task of assessing applicants against published standards once the criteria for membership has been developed, spelled out, and adopted. (Canadian Counseling Association, 2002, para. 7)

The above statement sets forth a preferred set of power relations and reiterates a language game stemming from the academic setting in which many counselors receive their training. But it also refers to other language games that it has networked with (e.g., a language game that situates accredited universities as more valuable for the public good than unaccredited universities or private nondegree institutions). Interestingly, the CCA statement also refers back to the CCA itself as an authority in establishing its standards. Yet, it

never goes beyond the basic claim to demonstrate the professional and ethical considerations that a master's degree should explore. In the many conversations I have had with local counselors who are invested in such language games, the master's degree as entry standard has been reiterated as a standing truth. Yet rarely has anyone discussed with me the difference a master's degree might provide in counseling interactions with clients. The counselors usually state, "I have my master's degree," and it seems assumed that the listener then fills in the blanks. Alternatively, some have implied that academic counselor training creates a power differential (subject-object relation) that must be negotiated between the counselor and the client (Anderson, 1997; Atkinson, 1993; Madigan & Epston, 1995). Reflecting critically, I feel compelled to wonder about the value of the master's degree if its holder is unable to refer to it as other than a symbol of interwoven power and knowledge.

The third association, the CPCA, employs a language game that places an emphasis on empathy rather than academic knowledge, and it publicly disagreed with the BCACC and the CCA preference for the master's degree. While some of its members hold a master's degree or a Ph.D., many others receive certificate training in private nondegree institutions rather than universities. The CCA, operating from its own language game, believes that an absence of university-conveyed knowledge indicates that CPCA members lack readiness to offer counseling to the public. In March 2002, a letter from the CCA was sent to the Nova Scotia minister of health; it spoke negatively about the CPCA and the Counselor Training Institute (CTI), a long-standing private institution that provides counselor education. However, the CCA letter did not mention that under its previous name (Canadian Guidance and Counseling Association), it issued Continuing Education Units certificates to graduates of CTI trainings. The CPCA claimed that the CCA did not inform the CPCA that it had written this letter. The CPCA later received a copy of it and wrote its own response letter, quoting paragraphs from the CCA letter and responding to each. Copies of the CPCA's response letter were then sent to several other provincial health ministries and to the CCA. A condensed version of the letter is shown here (Canadian Professional Counselors Association 2002).

Dear Minister,

This is in response to the letter you received March 14, 2002 in which . . . the President of the Canadian Counseling Association made comments regarding the Canadian Professional Counselors Association. As this letter has only now come to our attention, we make the following responses in bold following excerpts from the CCA letter.

CCA statement: The Canadian Counseling Association, now in its thirty-seven[th] year, is a national and bilingual organization dedicated to the counseling profession in Canada. It promotes policies and practices

for the provision of competent, accountable, and accessible counseling services throughout the human life span and in a manner sensitive to our pluralistic society.

CPCA reply: The Canadian Professional Counselors Association was formed in 1988 to provide accountability for non-university trained counselors which constitute the majority of counselors practicing in Canada. Examples include counselors in churches, transition homes, youth shelters, homeless shelters. . . . The CCA with its MA degree requirement cannot possibly provide any protection of the public what-soever where the majority of counselors is concerned. We therefore advocate a two-tier model of regulation: one level for non-university trained and BA degree counselors and another level for MA degree counselors.

CCA statement: The purpose of the CCA counselor certification service is to identify to the public those counselors who, through a process of credential evaluation, are judged qualified to provide counseling services. . . .

CPCA reply: The CCA certification is lacking a required qualifying examination to ensure their counselors have essential core competencies to practice counseling. . . . At present, no standards exist for counselor education in Canada.

CCA statement: An Accreditation Committee is now advising CCA on protocols and criteria for the formal accreditation of counselor educa-tion programs in Canada. . . .

CPCA reply: The CCA accreditation proposal favors academic uni-versity programs and still does not address the issue of non-university trained counselors who form the majority [of counselors]. The CCA was founded in the interest of school guidance counselors and graduates of university programs for training public school teachers.

CCA statement: I believe that you can appreciate our great concern over the recent activities in Nova Scotia of a private agency called the Coun-selor Training Institute (CTI) . . . [it] provides non-university training for candidates with a minimum of a high school education and encourages its graduates to use the designation of "registered professional counselor."

CPCA reply: The Counselor Training Institute encourages eligible graduates to apply for membership to the Canadian Professional Counselors Association (CPCA) and to the Addiction Intervention As-

sociation as well as other associations having membership criteria for non-university trained applicants. The CPCA adopted the designation "registered professional counselor" in 1989, long before the Nova Scotia Association of Professional Counselors.

CCA statement: It is the position of CCA that an appropriate Master's degree in counseling from an accredited university should be the minimum requirement for professional counselors in Canada. . . .

CPCA reply: The CTI curriculum is presented in two separate certificate programs of 450 hours and 1,000 hours, respectively, followed by a two-year period of clinical supervision. The number of classroom hours approximates or exceeds that of an M.A. program and is instructed by Ph.D. and M.A. degree counselors having at least 6–8 years of professional experience. A review of the website www.counselortraining.com shows the curriculum to be extensive and covering the wide diversity of issues commonly seen in a counseling practice.

CCA statement: CTI appears to have some affiliation with an organization in British Columbia called the Canadian Professional Counselors Association (CPCA). The primary function of this organization appears to be the awarding of the "registered professional counselor" ["rpc"] designation, and it also appears that this status has been awarded almost exclusively to graduates of CTI. . . .

CPCA reply: The CPCA has nearly 200 members and is currently considering the appointment of Directors in all Canadian provinces including Nova Scotia.

CCA statement: The code of ethics available on this site [CPCA Web site] consists of a one-page, fourteen-clause statement and there is no reference to any complaints procedures available to consumers of services provided [by] those "rpc" members of CPCA.

CPCA reply: We believe the CCA Ethics are seriously lacking essential standards, e.g., inappropriate touching. The CPCA Code of Ethics is open to review. It should be noted especially that no legal action has ever been taken against a CPCA member. . . . This record is unmatched among professional counseling associations. . . .

In summary, we make the following points:

Regarding professional preparation, the CPCA has the Qualifying Examination for Professional Counseling Practice, which measures the

competency of the applicant. By contrast the CCA (Canadian Counseling Association) has no qualifying examination but relies upon university degree program requirements which lack standards of practice . . . . Because the CCA criteria are not based upon practical competency but upon academic learning, we believe the public cannot be adequately protected without a strictly competency-based model, i.e., examination and supervised practice.

All CPCA members qualify for and are required to hold professional liability insurance. (Whether or not this is a requirement of the CCA is unknown.)

The CCA has always been heavily supported by school guidance counselors and academics who founded the organization. This associa-tion has therefore always supported the (unionized?) interests of those counselors having a strongly academic background. For the CCA the hidden agenda is therefore market share, not protection of the public. In order for the public to be protected, we believe the regulation of counseling must rely solely upon demonstrated competency and not upon university degrees.

REFLECTING ON THE ABOVE LETTER

The CCA claims to "identify to the public those counselors who, through a process of credential evaluation, are judged qualified to provide counseling services." Yet, the CPCA points out that the CCA lacks a transparent examina-tion to ensure that entry-level counselors possess the needed competencies. The CCA seems to assume that we must take it at its word. The credibility of its pronouncements might be assumed on the basis of its relationships with universities. The CCA believes that a master's degree from an accredited in-stitution is the minimum requirement to practice counseling. Yet, at least one of the non-university institutions provides programs spanning a period equal to the time required for a master's program, and taught by counselors with master's degrees and Ph.D.s. The mention of this by the CPCA indicates to me that it, too, is willing to be socially validated by associating with university-educated scholar/practitioners. The CPCA believes that the real agenda of the CCA is protecting market share that it assumes its members are entitled to and advancing the influence of local universities. The CPCA, on the other hand, says its only interest is to protect the public.

   The CCA attempts to situate itself as a long-standing authority on the prac-tice of counseling. But as the CPCA reply points out, the CCA language game seems only concerned with those counselors possessing master's degrees. Those who participate in the CPCA language game include practitioners work-ing without the CCA's prescribed entry requirements into the profession. As

the Council's report indicated in 1997, these non-master's counselor services are also important for the public good.

The CCA's stance is not unlike that of other associations that rely on the university system to provide a degree as an entry into the profession. The CPCA's stance can thus be seen as a breach with the dominant view. One exception to the required master's degree is addictions counseling, which can be entered without a graduate degree. Locally, there are many addictions counselors with (and without) master's degrees. Yet, addiction counseling is highly specialized, often interfacing with medical practice.

It is understandable that the CPCA broke rank with the Task Group in 2004 over the issue of the master's degree as the entry credential. Several months prior to this, the CPCA sent a notice to members that it was concerned the members' interests needed to be protected, and it now needed to have an attorney present at Task Group meetings:

> The time has arrived for the CPCA to begin continuous monitoring of the B.C. Task Force's proceedings, in order that our membership's (nearing 600) best interests are protected. There still remain two significant differences between the CPCA's initiative and that of the BCACC and the CCA.
>
> The CPCA is proposing an inclusive competency model, which is basically that all counselors should be assessed by their "ability to counsel" and NOT on their "academic standing." The CCA and the BCACC seem to continue to strive for a minimum Master's level of schooling (exclusive approach) which we believe is elitist, protectionist, and not in the public interest.
>
> We now require the services of a solicitor to be present on behalf of the CPCA at these meetings in Victoria. The outcome of these meetings may set a precedence for all Provinces, as to whether or not counseling should be reserved for an academic elite or for everyone that has the competent ability to counsel. (Canadian Professional Counselors Association, 2004)

What is most interesting is that despite having an alternative philosophy on how to educate counselors to enter the profession, the CPCA's own competency profile, arrived at through separate consultations with membership, was similar to the competency profile established by those associations in the Task Group; there was "significant overlap in the two profiles, suggesting more common ground than differences."[2] While the client is situated as the one who benefits from counselors with a university education, what is often left out is how the universities benefit. The fact is that, locally, most university counseling degrees are taught by faculty who are academics rather than practitioners. The exception to this is the master's degree in counseling taught by City University, Vancouver, which strives to use practitioners as adjunct members of its faculty.

It seems inevitable that alignments exist between universities and counseling associations. The Council, in its 1997 report, did imply that some associations might wish to dominate a regulatory college. The CPCA charged that the CCA was representing academic interests. What appears to be good for the public also seems to represent the interests of practice associations and training institutions. These relationships are complex and often out of the public's view. The public good might be achieved by the counseling therapist's ethical practice with clients. However, the power relations between other stakeholders often tug and push, and in these relations, the focus is less on the client than on the variously involved interest groups.

DISCUSSION TOWARD RESOLVING
THE COUNSELING THERAPY DILEMMA

Each of the two language games above offers an argument on how its existence is in the best interest of the public good; each tries to influence the government to recognize its validity. This is an example of the complexity of current times. This complexity has to do with language. First, given that language games are a form of life, they are open ended and not valid or invalid—they just are. Second, the more rigid and dependable meanings of signifiers associated with modernity now coexist with the multiplicity of meanings associated with postmodern life and postmodern thought. Indeed, the dynamics in this case are indicative of what many family therapy practitioners have had to contend with for many years: how to become postmodern in one's practice as life, relationships, family, and work become more postmodern and fragmented, and as clients adopt nontraditional language games and new ways of being related to (Kavanagh, 2000, 2002). We are in a period in which the values, methods, and language games of modernity and postmodernity struggle and dance together.

At the core of modernity there is an emphasis on knowledge; advanced use of scientific knowledge furthers social and economic development, and these activities are controlled and monitored from centers of power and knowledge, that is, "modernity can be characterized by rationalization, specialization, centralization, bureaucratization, and industrialization" (Bogason, 2005, p. 236). In modernity, the bureaucracy and corporation are institutionalized along with the educational establishments. The vision, dominated by coherence and integration, is widely disseminated and accepted. We might say this central language game of modernity is something we have been living in for a long time. It is familiar, places emphasis on socially validated knowledge, and thus, for example, provides some rationale for lobbying the government to start a professional college for practitioners. Such regulation is a means to produce order out of naturally occurring disorder, that is, until we consider the postmodern condition.

Besides being used to describe a form of intellectual analysis or critique, the word "postmodern" is frequently applied as a loose description for contemporary phenomena taking place in our society (Lash, 1990). Sociologist Roger Lowe notes that such experience is "typically described in terms of fragmentation, self-conscious irony and pastiche" (1991, p. 42) . Gergen (1991) refers to the postmodern condition as interwoven with social saturation; our overexposure to the realities of others happens through both interpersonal contact and media discourse. Thus, we are exposed to, and are forced to make meaning with, a myriad of language games.

Such complexity destabilizes any sense of an overarching vision or rationale associated with modernity. As Bogason suggests, "postmodern conditions are characterized by fragmentation: an overarching rationale or vision is replaced by processes of reasoning, and we see trends toward decentralization, individualization, and internationalization" (2005, p. 236). In postmodernity, many want a voice at tables that they could not sit at in modernity (Kavanagh, 2000, 2008). To further add to the complexity, the validity of specialized knowledge, particularly in the social sciences, becomes suspect (Lyotard, 1996). Claims to knowledge, rather than being universally accepted, become associated with various knowledge communities. This is one aspect of fragmentation from a singular overarching view. For example, Chia writes that "acquiring knowledge" is the term that we give our experience of becoming competent as actors within a social collective (1996, p. 14). Thus, we cannot separate knowledge production in any area from the need for approval from the collective and its community of inquirers (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996). What is considered real, useful, and having meaning, especially meaning for action and further steps, is derived from community consensus or the language game of a particular related community (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 167). This complicates developing a signifier to clarify and unify different communities around any vision. As we have seen in the presented case, both associations believe their language game is in the interest of the public good.

An Administrative Model

As we think of ways to move forward, let us begin by consulting Wittgenstein further on language games, for he states that each has its own rules, and it is important to know the rules. "When one shows someone the king in chess and says: 'this is the king,' this does not tell him the use of this piece—unless he already knows the rules of the game up to this last point" (Wittgenstein, 1953, aphorism 33). What is signified here is that each language game has its own rules. In the case presented here, each association is playing the rules of its own language game.

Now let us think of the creation of the BC College as a system of human systems, or what Brown and Duguid (1991) refer to as a "community of com-

munities." Since both professional associations purport to be serving the best interests of the public, the government faces a dilemma of how to tie together the diverse language games into a regulated system for practice. If each language game prefers to not change its rules, then it could be up to the government to administratively find a way for them to coexist in collaboration.

The new model coming on stream in Washington State, effective July 2010, has brought some needed rigor to a similar situation; it is a response to public doubts about the designation "registered counselor." It regulates counselors under several designations, which I have loosely arranged into two categories. First, let us begin with the state's current definition for counseling:

> Employing any therapeutic techniques, including but not limited to social work, mental health counseling, marriage and family therapy, and hypnotherapy, for a fee that offer, assist or attempt to assist an individual or individuals in the amelioration or adjustment of mental, emotional, or behavioral problems, and includes therapeutic techniques to achieve sensitivity and awareness of self and others and the development of human potential. (Viebrock, 2008, para. 4)

In this paragraph, I make reference to two categories of counseling and the educational requirements employed by Washington State. The first category does not require a master's degree, and in this category, the minimum is an A.A. (associate degree) plus additional requirements. For example, a certified adviser requires a minimum A.A. degree in human services plus specialized training and ongoing qualified clinical supervision of practice; and a certified counselor, which replaces the former registered counselor designation, requires a bachelor's degree in human services and ongoing qualified supervision of practice. The second category requires the master's degree to become a licensed marriage and family therapist, licensed mental health counselor, or licensed social worker.

The above designations represent an administrative move brought into law by the State of Washington. It seeks to protect the public and responds to public concerns about the previous "registered counselor" designation, which was alleged in the field as not rigorous enough. "Anyone could be granted the title of 'Registered Counselor (RC)' if they spent $40 and took a 4-hour AIDS training" (Whalley, 2008, para. 2). In such an administrative move, the state signals that it, too, has a language game that revolves around the core signifier of protection of the public, which it must act on.

The College Regulation Model

If we think of each language game, each form of life, as a human system, we discover again that any human system's rules are what bind the system to its current behavior (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). In joint action with others, as a

result of obeying its own rules, a human system continues to produce itself in reoccurring patterns of behavior (Kavanagh, 2008). A related way of looking at this is proposed by McSwite (1997), where relationships are seen as collaboratively grounded in a joint project, interdependence, and joint action. We can think of joint action within a language game's rules as "tool-and-result," in that each association is engaged in processes of both being and becoming (Holzman, 2006). The results at any moment pragmatically establish whatever the truth might be, rather than a preferred truth.

The truth within the BC College process seems to be that each of the associations keeps producing itself in a reoccurring pattern, and the status quo of conflict remains. When we think of a community of communities (a larger system), the pragmatic's view of communication informs us that joint action that produces undesirable results changes only when the rules of the system change (Becvar & Becvar, 2000; Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). In this particular dilemma, there is no evidence that any of the associations will change its language game rules or its behavior without the system being perturbed, nudged to transform in one way or another (Boscolo et al., 1987). The British Columbia government could choose like Washington State and administer regulation, or it could begin a process of perturbing the system, making the community of communities engage in relational processes that force transformation and greater collaboration.

However, it seems that in Canada, the provincial governments traditionally prefer that the counseling therapy field regulate itself through the college system, supported by appropriate guiding legislation. This is evident in the HPA, as health professions must apply to have their field designated as a health profession. In addition, in British Columbia, the field of counseling is not a priority for the government. The following are selected notes from a July 16, 2008, phone meeting between members of the Joint Task Group and members of the British Columbia Ministry of Health:

> [The assistant Deputy Minister] thanked the Task Group and CPCA for their collaborative work on developing a foundation for moving forward with a College of Counseling Therapists (as set out in the April 7th letter), but went on to explain that—given the Ministry's other pressing priorities—it was not looking at this point in time for details on how counseling could be regulated under the HPA. Designation of counseling is not yet a priority for the Ministry.

> [The Government Director of Professional Regulation] also expressed his appreciation for the work on these foundation issues and, in particular, emphasized that the Task Group-CPCA agreement to focus on a competency-based model rather than to make any particular academic

degree a registration requirement is a positive development. While the Ministry is not prepared to move forward with designation at this time, one factor that the Ministry supports is that a Master's degree should not be the academic entry-to-practice standard for the counseling profession once it is designated under the Act.

What is apparent in the above text is that the government does not feel that the BC College is a high priority at this time. Additionally, the government does not support that a master's degree should be the entry-to-practice standard for the counseling profession. Recently I made an inquiry to the CPCA, asking the following question: "I'm wondering if you can update me on some rumors I am hearing in the field . . . that the CPCA has conceded to the Joint Task group that its members will have to have a master's degree." I received the following response by e-mail: "The CPCA would never change its original promotion and mandate for 'competency based' counselors. The traditional belief promoted by those 'credential based' organizations in counseling is fundamentally flawed and illegal, and will be changed to 'competency based' soon."

The CPCA's e-mail response included a letter, dated November 3, 2009, to the British Columbia government from the CPCA attorney. This letter indicated that while the government does not support a master's degree as entry qualification and does support the competency-based approach, that government agencies are either not cooperating or are otherwise making work difficult for CPCA members. Here is the letter, in relevant parts:

> Our client advises us that counselors who are members of the . . . CPCA are still experiencing difficulties with several government agencies and programs. . . . It is our understanding that the BC Government has been working toward regulation of counselors, as has been discussed between your Ministry and the BC Task Group on Counselor Regulation. The CPCA is a member in these discussions, and it would appear that all parties involved are interested and motivated toward the formation of a competency-based college of counselors.
>
> It would further appear, however, that different branches of the government are acting in two different directions. If the Ministry of Health Services is interested in pursuing a competency-based model of counselor regulation, then it should also be supporting endeavors to communicate with the other ministries to foster this change.
>
> . . . Members of the CPCA, who have equivalent training and competence as Master's degree counselors, are being paid at lower rates than Master's degree counselors, and required to submit additional information for compensation. . . . As another example, several CPCA counselors . . . were told that their contracts which expire in March 2010 would not

be renewed solely on the basis that they do not have a Master's degree . . . several CPCA counselors were told that not only do they have to have a Master's degree, but they were required to be members of a different counseling organization in order to re-apply. These counseling organizations appear to be only those that support a minimum Master's degree credential. The CPCA has thus suffered economic damages through losing membership as a result of these actions.

The difficulties and discrimination, which our client and its members are experiencing, appear to be entirely based upon our client's choice to regulate their members under a competency-based model rather than a credentials-based model. It would also seem that members of the government bodies involved in the implementation may be actively involved in counseling organizations which support the credentials-based model rather than the competency model. This is presenting unique difficulties in lobbying these groups to accept and communicate effectively with the CPCA counselors.

It seems from the above CPCA attorney's letter that the college model could very well turn into a provincial court litigation model. If the BC College matter goes to litigation, the courts may have to examine the various state licensing practices in the United States and determine how states include or not non-master's practitioners in their regulations.[3]

The provincial government, at least on the surface, seems to be developing its own language game based on a superordinate signifier of providing an accessible range of services for the public. Master's-level counseling (often referred to as "clinical counseling" or "therapy") might be able to coexist side-by-side with non-master's counseling in much the same way as in Washington State. Administratively, the best approach may be to give non-master's counselors the right to practice under supervision of approved supervisors.

The Possibility of Other Approaches to the Dilemma

Still another possibility also exists for going forward in addressing this dilemma. That possibility involves perturbing the whole community of communities, and a suggestion, again from Wittgenstein, to step outside of our language games. The signifier, in this possibility, is to seek to "go on" with each other in developing a new language game, which fits both the community of communities and the public good. This might involve mediation or conferencing in which generative dialogue is sought by actively engaging each other. It will nevertheless involve a search for something new, and perhaps it could build on what is already working in the BC College process. From an organizational development perspective, it is usually agreed that a group that

creates and owns its results generally fares better. Citing Wittgenstein on such generative dialogical approaches, Shotter argues that:

> to begin to think and to act dialogically and relationally in our practices, then a new, relational paradigm must come to inform our basic ways of knowing and acting, practically. Thus, instead of, as in the past, turning immediately to a study of how individuals come to know the objects and entities in the world around them, we should now, perhaps, attempt to bear quite a different paradigm in mind—one much more to do with the relations between people—and to studying how to play it in our practice. We should focus on how, by interweaving our talk in with the other activities between us, we first develop and sustain different, particular ways of relating ourselves to each other—that is, we should first study our constructing of what Wittgenstein calls our different forms of life with their associated language games. (1997, p. 5)

Wittgensten suggests that we step outside of our language games, enough to understand what we are constructing. A superordinate signifier denotes something that stands outside of the system, for example, terms that might unify, such as god, scientific truth, the good, or the self (McSwite, 1996). Others include the public good or the public interest. But, as we have witnessed, the public interest under postmodern conditions can mean different things to different people, and this is precisely what has occurred in this case. By exploring our values reflexively we can make new discoveries that bring us closer together to cooperating and possibly finding innovative ways to work through differences. Thus, the community of communities can conference and reflexively explore what constitutes its values and methods for bringing the differing parties into closer social action.

Language as a system of signifiers can provide structure. Consider the question, "What are examples of protecting the public?" Two examples of protecting the public are (1) the qualifying examination and psychological test provided to CPCA members and (2) the master's degree requirement of the CCA and BCACC. If we explore using language in a different direction—perhaps with the questions, "What is protecting the public an example of, and what does that produce?"—then new information emerges. Protecting might be an example of professional care or concern for the public good; the new information is that both associations in the conflict have been practicing actions that signify care for the public, and on that basis, both are quite similar in their intent to care. This kind of group inquiry requires being able to deconstruct assumptions and strategic positions and to follow others, which is more important than trying to understand others. Language-centered exploration in an organization development process may be one pathway. Consider this next related statement from Shotter, again quoting Wittgenstein:

> Understanding is like knowing how to go on, and so it is an ability: but "I understand," like "I can go on" is an utterance, a signal (1980, aphorism 875); that it is "particular circumstances, which justify me saying I can go on" (1953, aphorism 154); or, a philosophical problem has the form: "I don't know my way about." (1953, aphorism 154)

Shotter suggests that Wittgenstein, in his investigations, is not necessarily concerned with our understanding each other, sharing agreements, or communicating with each other. These activities, or at least how they are framed, appear to imply a language game played by separate individual, not interdependent, entities and attendant power relations. We must learn to go on within a form of life, and that might mean creating a new language game.

> He is simply concerned with us being able to "go on" with each other (1953, aphorisms 146–155), with us being merely able to make "followable" or "responsible" sense to each other—simply reacting or responding in ways that make it possible to continue our relationships is sufficient for him. . . . Thus, as I see it, his prime concern is to explore the nature of those initial embodied responses and reactions that make it possible for us sensibly, simply to "follow" or to "grasp" the "tendencies" in each other's conduct, to study those circumstances in which we can "go on" with each other in practice. (Shotter, 1994, p. 2)

Shotter seems to be inviting us, as does family therapy theorist Harlene Anderson (1997), to suspend preknowledge and to go farther and suspend our drive toward epistemology, those assumptions about what we can know. Doing this might present us with the collapsing together of both epistemology (learned knowledge) and ontology (lived experience). What then might it take to be able to make followable or responsible sense to each other, to react in such ways as to make it possible to continue and further our relationships? The first quality that comes to mind is relational openness, which allows for the capacity to learn. Below are some language game meta-tools that have worked well for communities I have studied and worked with (Kavanagh, 2008). Meta-tools help us engineer flexibility and reflexivity into our preferred language game, providing us with the tool-and-result skills to follow the actions produced by our language games and to determine its degree of sustainability when we work within larger systems and the public good.

Stances

In any organizing effort, we can adopt stances that signify our interdependency. As Wittgenstein implies, a form of life is joint action. We often come together to accomplish what we cannot accomplish alone. I think most members of the BC College organizing effort will understand this.

Knowing and Community-Based Identity

Every constituent can be considered to bring knowledge and identity from other communities of participation and other language games.

Negotiating with Multiple Forms of Life

We might consider that multiple forms of life and related language games might coexist simultaneously in any organizing effort. How do we find common ways of speaking? Group knowing often occurs when people make an effort, through joint reflection processes, to hear another's perspective. The public interest involves truly open systems that are overlapping and affect us all.

Joint Action Shifts

Noncollaborative joint behavior could change when we reflect together on issues in a nonhierarchical manner. Thus, we must invite such processes.

Tool-and-Result Awareness

Together, we could work to know what kind of community of communities we are producing in our joint action and what enhances or restrains collaboration. This begins with equal voice participation, allowing for multiple local realties to coexist and be in a dialogue.

Power and Hierarchy

We could be cultivating the skills needed to sidestep subject-object relations, and develop language games that flatten hierarchical relations. Subject-object utterances treat others as objects of our knowledge, as if they are available to be influenced, mobilized, motivated, and directed by our claims; this is a move that backfires in post-modernity, which embraces the notion that all local knowledge(s) are valid. Thus, it might be valuable to improve our capacity to know when we are operating in a subject-object style.

Connecting Relationally

We could develop the ability to coordinate with the language game of each community and to learn the rules of each form of life from its proponents. To cultivate a shared experience of trust might depend on each party's witnessing attempts by the other side to coordinate with another's preferred language game. We do this to strengthen our connections and to make following each other possible.

Invest in Not Knowing but Following

We might start with not knowing, suspending our constructions of the other, and we might interview the other to discover something in that situation. While having predetermined social norms could provide a sense of safety and trust, another way is to agree to open generative dialogue as issues arise. As a result, trust could be fostered.

The two communities that I have studied and practiced with successfully worked through their conflict when they went back and explored their own values, using their own practice reflexive approaches on themselves (Kavanagh, 2009). In one of the communities, a large group of organization development consultants had to work through threats and conflict stemming from breached social norms. In another community, a large group of family therapists had to work through conflicts around whether it was appropriate to include clients in its online community of practice.

Another community, containing several different language games, failed in a change project as a result of trying to dominate the other parties. Important reflective inquiries for multifaceted groups such as the British Columbia college community might be how to continue to develop and change, how to form their own knowledge relations, and how to work through conflicts, thereby reaping the rewards of nonhierarchical joint action. Such work would best be described as "whole systems," in that all the stakeholders, including the government representatives, participate with the intent, as Carnevale suggests, "to change the entire system, not just part of it" (2003, p. 12).

CONCLUSION

Organizing processes in the quest to establish a college of counseling therapists in British Columbia have included claims of superior knowledge, acts of counterdiscourse (resistance), and ongoing acts of collaboration and conflict between several communities of practice. Some seek to dominate, while others seek to share and belong in the same field. These can all be understood to be relevant dynamics as the communities involved operate using different language games, based on differing modern and postmodern thoughts.

Perhaps a new language game is required. As Wittgenstein suggests, "new language games, as we may say, come into existence and others become obsolete and get forgotten" (1953, aphorism 23). From Wittgenstein we can determine that the possibility for change and development does indeed exist. But it requires that individuals operating from different language games learn, by practice, to follow each other in working together for the public good.

NOTES

1. E-mail in November 2006 from CPCA regarding the Task Group legal counsel's letter to the Ministry of Health on recent developments concerning the regulation of counseling in British Columbia.

2. E-mail in November 2009 from CPCA regarding the Task Group legal counsel's letter (para. 4) to the Ministry of Health on recent developments concerning the regulation of counseling in British Columbia.

3. In a different case, the postmodern value of allowing a noncredentialed individual to participate at the table of credentialed professionals was successfully realized for a significant period when one client, with multiple personality disorder, was allowed to be a consultant for an online community of Master's-level family therapists. This case was one of several presented in my Ph.D. dissertation at Tilburg University (Kavanagh, 2008). However, it seems that such a move is an anomaly. These were postmodern therapists adhering to a language game of leveling the knowledge hierarchy between clients and therapists, including clients where possible acting as consultants (Anderson, 1997; Atkinson, 1993; Madigan & Epston, 1995).

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