

**The Interuniversity College for Health and Development –  
Outputs of an Integrated Health Sciences  
Master’s project after 15 years**

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**Abstract**

Starting from a report on an initiative to making the purposes of the medicine-supporting healing arts transparent in teaching and research, within the framework of an EU project, after 15 years this paper makes an analysis to determine: in which areas research was carried out by this institution; which relevant publications exist; and interim conclusions to which these may lead. Attention is also devoted to the evaluation of teaching at the institution itself.

## 1. Introduction

In 2005 the senior author reported on an initiative 2000 – 2005 of the Interuniversity College at Graz / Castle of Seggau, Austria, dedicated to making the purposes of the medicine-supporting healing arts transparent in teaching and research, within the framework of an EU project (Leonardo da Vinci) (Endler 2005). This paper makes an analysis to determine: in which areas research was carried out by this institution; which relevant publications exist; and interim conclusions to which these may lead. Attention is also devoted to the evaluation of teaching at the institution itself.

“Medicine-supporting” was meant to indicate medical procedures which are not normally attributed to the sphere of university medicine. This includes for example physiotherapy, ergotherapy, and psychotherapy, as well as Complementary and Alternative Methods (CAM). The goal was to better integrate these procedures in the health care system, through teaching, research and publication. In this EU project, the existing international network of university institutions making up the “Interuniversity” College was expanded, and the programme “Complementary, Psycho-social and Integrated Health Sciences“, which has now existed since

2000, was established as a Master of Science course of study. An additional Master's course of study, “Child Development”, was created in order to focus in particular on the work with children and to cover not only the health, but also the educational aspect. These programmes, interdisciplinary in their approach, are directed towards persons in various helping and care professions, who already have relevant basic qualifications and professional experience. Generally these people are over 30 years old, and many fill leading public roles. The curricula are modular and oriented to relevant activities and fields of learning. In addition to specialised and generalised knowledge, the consolidation of psychosocial capabilities and the acquisition of strategies for coping with stress and burnout are important, in order to be in a position to deal with this major problem in the helping professions. Students deepen further their ability to initiate their own scientific work and to participate in concrete research projects.

The standard period required to attain the Master's degree is 6 semesters. The study course comprises on-site presence and telecourse participation, plus complementary independent work. Participants meet weekly in virtual small groups (of about 10-12 persons each) via

the internet and at intervals of three months on location, mostly at Seggau Castle near Graz, Austria, but also in other European seminar centres in countries including England, Holland, the Scandinavian countries and Germany. Among subsequent options are the writing of a research dissertation and the acquisition of a doctoral degree.

At the on-site meetings, the activities include groups for practice supervision on the M. Balint model (Pass 2007, Eigner & Pass 2011). The most significant methodological element of the Balint Group work is “free reporting” of case examples. As a rule, group participants recount interactions from their professional environments. The group then investigates together with an analytically trained leader, in collegial discussion and using free association, the recognisable relationship patterns. The insights gained are implemented by the students in their professional contexts. Aside from the general optimisation of the capacity for relationships, and the setting of boundaries in the helping professions, the ability to encounter psychically burdened persons in an adequate and manageable way is developed. The origins of the participants in various helping professions have proven to be not an obstacle, but rather a resource in interdisciplinary networking and

“thinking against the grain” in order to integrate perceptual aspects and forms of intervention. Simultaneously, a general basic competence in group work is developed. Thus, the supervised work supports the general didactic orientation of the curriculum. In the programme's broader didactic context, the work in the supervision groups proves to be a research instrument.

During the entire teaching and learning process at the Interuniversity College, “depth psychology” plays a central role (Roth et al. 2014). The intent is not to make the students into psychotherapists. Rather, psychoanalytic “effect factors” are made usable for the various professional areas. Specifically, these include: “the outsider's view”, with which every person should be constantly perceived afresh, and the known can be experienced as something new and unfamiliar. “The Free Space in Speech and Balanced Attention in Listening” is intended to enable the learner to practice free association and to listen without making value judgments. The phenomena of “Transfer/Countertransference” in both professional and private daily life are made conscious (Pass 2007). Students learn to navigate between “Empathy and Confrontation”, that is, to oscillate between support/proximity and challenge/distance.

“Holding and Containing” describes the ability to compensate and endure the (positive and negative) feelings of the opposite person. One is made conscious of the fact that the very personal presence alone as therapist, educator or teacher, has an effect. “Learning from Your Own Mistakes and Limits” and “Laughter and Humour in the Therapeutic Relationship” are imparted as important professional and private aspects. These effect factors are also viewed reflectively in terms of one's own experience, to be put to use in the supervision- and Balint groups.

Some 500 persons have completed one of the College's programmes. Operational areas in which the graduates are putting their education to use (beyond being able to expand their scope of activities in their original fields thanks to a greater sense of professional satisfaction and creativity) include the assumption of leadership functions, especially in research, teaching and public relations work.

In comparison to standard university conditions, the curriculum development process for the Interuniversity College was carried out in great freedom. At universities this process can be limited by framework legislation and existing curricula, which can make change

processes more difficult. Furthermore the programme's “complementary” concept represents one of its distinguishing characteristics.

One accompaniment of these liberties is that students often propose a research topic for the simple reason that it concerns their own field of work or interest. The common denominator of all research work is that whatever the research question, it must be formulated and approached in a scientific manner. In some cases a topic is processed by successive student generations before being integrated into one of the existing research branches of the College or established as a new branch.

## **2. Methods**

The source was the institution's website [www.inter-uni.net](http://www.inter-uni.net) as of summer 2016, a structured collection of selected Master's theses and dissertations in their full texts, additional Master's theses in summary, as well as articles and/or their abstracts in external professional journals, and articles in the in-house Research Proceedings. These works (about 600 items) were categorised based on generic topics.

Finally the subject areas were briefly described, and the findings and

conclusions from the presented works were qualitatively summarised. Only published papers and abstracts were quoted; Master’s Theses and Dissertations, on the other hand, were not directly quoted, in order not to go outside the scope as designed.

*health work, medicine-related procedures and complementary and alternative medicine, psycho-social health promotion and psychotherapy, and evaluation of didactics.* For summaries or full texts, respectively, see [www.ResProceedingsIUC.net](http://www.ResProceedingsIUC.net).

### 3. Results

As can be seen in Table 1, the items are divided among the categories *general*

**Table 1:** Research areas at the Interuniversity College.

<b>General Health Work</b>
“Civilisation Diseases”
Nutrition, Physical Exercise / Movement
General Health Promotion
<b>Medicine-related Procedures and CAM</b>
Physical Therapy
Ergotherapy, Speech Therapy
Kinesiology
Fundamental Research, Homeopathy
Reliability of Homeopathic Remedy Selection
Homeopathic Initial Aggravation, Remedy Proving
Fundamental Research in Acupuncture / TCM
Brennan Healing Science
Electrosmog & Heart Rate Variability (HRV)
Relaxation, Meditation, Music & HRV
Qigong, Reiki, Therapeutic Touch & HRV
Craniosacral Therapy, Acupressure & HRV
Anthroposophic Process Evaluation
Holistic Oral Medicine
Clinical CAM Studies
Non-controlled CAM Observational Study
"Therapeutic Tertium"
<b>Psycho-social Health Promotion, Psychotherapy</b>
Salutogenetic Orientation, SOC, Div. Interventions
Psychotherapy
<b>Evaluation of Didactics</b>
Learning and Teaching at the College
Learning and Teaching at Schools etc.

### ***General Health Work***

One of the guidelines of the College's research is that lifestyle variables such as physical activity could be preventive measures against diabetes, cancer and dementia. This is the terrain for a project on "*Civilisation Diseases*", e.g., non-communicable diseases (Spranger & Türp 2016), as well as for works on *Nutrition* (Skokan et al. 2007), *Physical Exercise / Movement and General Health Promotion*. On the whole it was found that "imposed" measures, whether with children or adults, show distinctly less or no success in comparison to "self-motivated" measures, possibly including lifestyle changes supported by a peer group. Furthermore, the notion of "typology" (both from eastern and western systems) is important here (Jesch et al. 2007).

In connection with *Physiotherapy, Ergotherapy and Speech Therapy* abilities and coping in children with developmental coordination disorders were investigated; furthermore the possibilities were highlighted for using animal-assisted therapy, therapeutic climbing, and partner-based "Ability, Skill and Task Training" to improve various abilities, general self-image and self-competence (Fridrich 2011, Fridrich et al. 2013, Ruckser-Scherb 2010, Ruckser-Scherb et al. 2013ab). In view of the child's natural development (as a

confounder) and in view of ethical considerations, it was a particular challenge to control these studies correspondingly (Endler et al. 2015a).

With *Kinesiology* it appears that it may be possible both to eliminate learning disorders in children and to aid the elderly in achieving improved cognitive performance (Kampanaros & Weber 2010, Weber & Kampanaros 2015a,b). Suppressing the humane and relationship factors (as above) was of course neither intended nor possible (Waxenegger et al. 2007).

*The studies referred to previously are thus suitable* for illustrating ways of dealing with conceptual problems of practice-oriented research in general. Where, in the following, the subject is not related to research in an everyday setting, the authors have therefore consciously focused on fundamental research. While this has the disadvantage of being at a remove from therapeutic practice, it has the advantage of being well controllable and objectifiable, without the necessity for suppressing human relationships, as would be for example the case with RCTs.

### ***Complementary and Alternative Medicine***

The Interuniversity College sees special significance in *Fundamental Research in Homeopathy*. Overview

analyses on the international status of high dilution research looked at studies which were not only carried out once and published, but also complemented by additional internal laboratory-, multicentre or independent external attempts (confirmed or disproven) (Endler & Schulte 1994 in comparison with Endler et al. 2015b,c). Even if the ratio of “positive” to “negative” replication results, progressing from internal laboratory to multicentre to external-independent repetitions of studies, decreases in general: there is a general preponderance of confirming studies (Endler et al. 2010, 2015d). Following our own approach (Endler et al 2003, Weber et al. 2007, Welles et al. 2007, Kiefer et al. 2012), investigations were carried out through controlled and blind multicentre studies into the growth and development modulating effects of potentised thyroxine on the metamorphosis of highland frog larvae (Endler et al. 1995, Zausner et al. 2002, Endler et al. 2015d), and of potentised plant growth hormone on seeds (Pfleger et al. 2011, Endler et al. 2011, Hribar-Marko 2013, Endler et al. 2015e, Scherer-Pongratz 2015). Factors which proved significant were concomitant conditions such as the organism's origin, time of season, temperature and others. Those lines of research which turned out to be successful were further scrutinised and confirmed; particularly well documented

are inverse effects, i.e. effects of slowing biological processes, caused by hormones in high potency which at physiological concentrations are known to accelerate precisely those processes. There are also works on physical models which could make plausible the information storage in homeopathic high potencies (Schulte & Endler 2015); the line between (quantum) physics and paranormal psychology appears very thin here. The research into inverse effects is currently being continued with low potencies (Kraus et al. 2016).

As regards *Inter-rater Reliability Investigations*, tests were run on various groups of homeopaths to establish the degree to which found and proposed remedies for the same client by these homeopaths were identical (Lothaller et al. 2009, Kiefer et al. 2016). The accordances – which certainly exist – depended, among other factors, on the degree of training and experience in practice. Further emphases involved the *Prediction of Initial Aggravation* (Wagner et al. 2013), as it appears to be present not only in homeopathy, but also in other CAM interventions, the *Prediction of Symptoms in Children* through observation of the mother during pregnancy (Schmitt et al. 2016) and the appearance of typical symptoms in *Homeopathic Remedy Proving* (Kirch et al. 2016, Hoffmann-

Durben 2016), where the suitability of the test persons may be a strong factor.

*Basic Research on Acupuncture and TCM* involved the (blind) measurement of skin resistance at “meridian points”, which changed when the test person was subjected to various (very subtle) stimuli (Muller et al. 2013, Firer et al. 2013). The results appear to depend strongly on the testing person. A further emphasis (“Searching for the therapeutic Qi”) dealt with the capability of acupuncture subjects to determine under blind conditions whether a puncturing needle (under identical temperature and movement conditions) was in contact with an acupuncturist or not (Hochstrasser et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Hochstrasser 2016); the subjects were able to discern the difference more frequently than random chance would indicate.

*On Brennan Healing Science*, basic – aside from observational studies (Schlager et al. 2015, Koren 2016a,b) - studies were carried out on the possibility of ascertaining the mental state of subjects without close or visual contact through emotional resonance (Stephen et al. 2016a), and on influencing the growth of plants by means of mental intervention (Stephen et al. 2016b). In both instances the results suggest that in the case of a person trained in Brennan Healing Science, such an information transfer is possible; a

study of mental influence on plant growth was also successfully conducted by a spiritual healer (Leitner et al. 2012). These pilot studies could also offer explanatory models for other CAM- and related therapeutic interventions.

In order to investigate the effects of *various CAM interventions*, the determination of the physiological *heart rate variability* of subjects was applied. First, various types of devices and different measuring persons on the same group of subjects were compared. The degree of consistency was found to be very good, indicating a reliable measurement standard. Subsequently, different influences were studied, including those of *high-frequency electromagnetic fields, alternating magnetic fields, relaxation, meditation, music, Qigong, Reiki, therapeutic touch, craniosacral therapy and acupressure*. This produced no significant indication of “electro-smog” influence (Ehmann et al. 2014a,b), but positive indications of influence by various therapeutic interventions (Pizzinato et al. 2012, Girsberger 2014, Schoberegger 2014). The optimisation of heart rate variability in the direction of the “healthy” range could thereby be accorded to the general therapeutic setting (general psychological components) and often as well, where the blind study design involved a control group, traced to the specific intervention.



*On the Evaluation of Therapeutic Processes from an Anthroposophic Perspective* a questionnaire was developed which was intended to make possible the application of criteria from anthroposophic medicine by members of other healing professions (Allmer & Warning 2010). Questions primarily involve bodily sensations and chronobiological processes, but also habits, preferences and goal orientations. The combined observation of two linear scales produces in the assessment a four-tiered typological representation. Validation in relation to non-anthroposophical criteria has yet to be achieved.

In response to a group of programme participants from the dental profession, the oral cavity was the focus of works on holistic oral medicine (Hauke et al. 2007, Kehr 2007, Spranger 2014, Türp & Lothaller 2014, Spranger 2015abc).

*Clinical Studies* (Frass et al. 2005a,b,c) and *Non-controlled Observational Studies* (Mager et al. 2010, Mager & Weber 2014, Bachlehner 2014, Stephen et al. 2016c, Keip 2016) round off the picture (Türp et al. 2009, Türp et al. 2010,): the more practically oriented the setting, the greater the likelihood of success, apparently. The authors think it to be an oversimplification, however, to attribute the success of CAM interventions only to psychological-interpersonal

moments. Rather, there appears to be a triangle between therapist, client and the specifics of the intervention.

Observations on *pattern recognition* as a fundamental criterion in CAM diagnostic procedures led to another project (Füß 2014).

Interesting studies suggest that for a good client-therapist relationship it is necessary for the (CAM) therapist to have a *coherent idea of the mode of action of the form of intervention used* (Wintgen et al. 2010). It appears to be less important whether this idea is accurate, e.g., correct in the objective-scientific sense; rather, what is crucial is the “consistency”, in that it is accepted by therapist and client and/or shared in the sense described by M. Erickson, B. Peters and J. Endler (Endler 2015, J. Endler not being affiliated to the College) as “therapeutic tertium”. Again it seems to us too reductive to label the psychological-interpersonal components as the only effective factor – rather these components could be the vehicle for the specifics of the intervention. Scientific (fundamental) research would thus tend to facilitate the integration of the relevant methods into the academic-university worldview, or the expansion of that view, and would be less important for those who practice or take advantage of these methods.

## **Psycho-social Health Promotion and Psychotherapy**

For CAM therapists, as for members of all other helping professions, it is important to be a “*helpful*” (as opposed to a “*helpless*”, see Schmidbauer 1977, Schmidbauer not being affiliated to the College) *helper*. The same applies to clients with regard to their ability to help themselves or allow themselves to be helped. Studies which were conducted related to these competencies, which can apparently be acquired and strengthened through self-reflection. Other works dealt with a general salutogenic orientation (Kiefer 2010; Spranger 2012, 2014), the avoidance of stress and burnout (Bieringer 2005, Fuchs et al. 2009, 2011; Moosler et al. 2010, Straßer et al. 2010, Fischer et al. 2013), the maintenance of a sense of coherence (a sense that our everyday occurrences are understandable, meaningful and manageable) (Binder et al. 2006, Endler et al. 2008, Siber et al. 2009), and with specific psycho-social interventions and psychotherapy. Interaction and communication using examples from various settings (Stötter et al. 2013, Nagy 2015, Kienzer & Roth 2015, Fritz-Hüllen 2016, Koren 2016a,b; Esterl 2016), and forms of psychotherapy (Endler & Bachlehner 2013, Endler & Endler 2013, Maimann 2014, 2015a,b; Neuhold & Paß 2014, Neuhold 2016,

Bader 2015, Endler & Ploner 2014, Endler 2015f) were investigated.

## **Evaluation of Didactics**

One of the tasks incumbent upon an educational institution is the evaluation of its own teaching. This includes the evaluation of theory modules and of practice supervision groups, and their suitability for application by the students in their professional everyday routines, as well as the optimisation of these everyday routines (Jelinek et al. 2010, Mitsche et al. 2013a,b; Mitsche et al. 2014, Roth et al. 2014, Gugler et al. 2016, Huber et al. 2016). On the whole, the common teaching- and learning project, enriched through its aspect as a joint research project, was judged to be thoroughly successful.

At the behest of the parent institution of individual students also aspects of other educational institutions, particularly schools, were evaluated. These works, too, focused on the intersection of psychology and educational theory. Specific features which also characterise the didactics at the Interuniversity College (for adults), such as emotionally-supported learning, the addressing of students' own interest focuses, and encouragement through positive challenge, were found to be helpful here.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Within the project framework, about 500 Master's Theses and more than 100 peer-reviewed publications were developed (summaries and full texts can be found at [www.ResProceedingsIUC.net](http://www.ResProceedingsIUC.net)). As the core of this work, interpersonal relationships, such as those between therapist and client,

are highlighted; these can be supported with specific measures for health work, complementary medical procedures, psychotherapy and didactics. On the whole, the conclusion may be drawn that the relevant research is worthwhile, and that there continues to be a great need for research.

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