Right Relationship and Wise Speech in Ethical Communication for

HTP Practitioners and Students

by Dr Monica Nebauer, RN, PhD, HTCP/I, QM[1]

Introduction

In addition to the four Level 1, 2, 3, and 4/5 Notebooks with their wealth of knowledge and wisdom within, Healing Touch Program (HTP) has two well-known documents to guide the practice of Healing Touch. These documents are the Code of Ethics and Scope of Practice which are found in each of the workshop Notebooks, as well as provided separately on the HTP website. For many years, these documents have guided those studying and practicing Healing Touch in many diverse geographical and cultural settings. In addition to those documents, more recently, Healing Touch practitioners and students have received additional support and guidance by the provision of the following document found in the Student/Practitioner section of the HTP website: *Healing Touch Program Policy and Procedure for Implementing Healing Touch.*[2] Together, these documents are provided to support and guide practitioners and students of Healing Touch in their understanding of ethical practice within the legal parameters that apply in their geographical location.

While it is one thing to know *what* to do in certain situations, it is not so clear to know *how* to do what is required ethically and professionally. Therefore, this current document now seeks to add to and deepen the available resources by providing a philosophical and theoretical framework that will help practitioners and students know *how* to relate ethically and professionally to themselves, and to others in their healing community.

Ethical Issues Preamble

Ethics can be viewed as **obligation-based** or **relationship-based** (Doane & Varcoe, 2007). **Obligation-based ethics** is the use of universal codes or principles in situations where there is considered to be one "right" answer when viewing a situation of complexity from a distant and objective stance. This view of ethics which uses a linear thinking model (Hover-Kramer, 2011) reinforces professional values, standards (codes of conduct) and duties of the practitioner (Doane & Varcoe, 2007) when determining the right course of action in a complex situation, which may be tube feeding a dying person, or turning off a mechanical ventilator for someone who has suffered brain death. Ethics relies on logical and rational criteria to reach a decision, based upon our values which are attitudes and beliefs about what we consider important and fundamental in life. However, this view often ignores the context and fails to note the conflicting obligations that cause uncertainty. No matter what the decision made in an ethical situation, there is often no perfect solution, as

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[2] Healing Touch Program. (n.d.) *Healing Touch Program policy and procedure for implementing Healing Touch.* Available: https://www.healingtouchprogram.com/content_assets/docs/current/HTP-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf

ethical issues are rarely ever black and white.

Like obligation-based ethics, relationship-based ethics is also based upon the need for professional codes of ethics and duty of care admonitions, as well as on our moral underpinnings (or character), which have a strong social element. Thus, our morals or character give us a compass not only as we deliberate upon ethical issues with a right or wrong answer, but also as we negotiate, support, and strengthen our relationships with others.

We develop morals during our earliest lives. In fact, we are born with a primal status of morality and moral choice (Bauman, 1995). This moral status means we are inescapably faced with *being-for* another person, simply because both we and they are human; therefore we have to make a choice to accept or reject the responsibility of responding to the needs of the other person (Bauman, 1993; 1995). This idea has been developed more recently in an energetic sense by McTaggart (2011, p. 70), when she emphasised the point that we have an "automatic impulse" to connect with others, and "to satisfy our deepest need, which is to merge with others, (because) we constantly seek synchrony." In fact, the need to move outside of our own boundaries as individuals, in order to bond with a group is primordial and a key determinant of our health and life (McTaggart, 2011).

From a **relationship-based ethical viewpoint**, Healing Touch is mostly about how we practice, teach, and relate to each other as practitioners, students, instructors and of course, how we relate to our clients and ourselves. These relationships, particularly those with our colleagues, can become confusing, with unclear boundaries and borders, because of the multi-stranded relationships we experience in our Healing Touch community. Thus, our Healing Touch community relationships can give rise to diffuse and sensitive ethical issues that are difficult to identify, name, interpret and manage. While we have ethical responsibilities to each other, we also have a responsibility to create an ethical environment through our relationships with others wherever we work, practice, study, and live. An ethical environment facilitates human flourishing which is enhanced by healthy and ethical relationships grounded in the collective life (Benatar, as cited in Kunyk & Austin, 2011).

An ethical relationship is one in which we make the choice of *being-for* (Bauman, 1995) another person or group for whom we may be responsible in our Healing Touch practice. This choice to *be for* the other person or group requires:

- that we are available to relate to the other person or group in a heart-centered, sensitive way, taking on their understanding of a situation or context which they may perceive as confusing, threatening or challenging;
- that we have a desire to resolve a situation in the best and highest way possible;
- that we recognise vulnerability in another person or group, particularly when there is a power differential between the parties – for example, between an instructor and a student, between a practitioner and a client; between a person in a leadership role and another who is lower in the hierarchy; or when the context contributes to the vulnerability of the other person or group – for example, a group of students in a new learning situation, or a client who experiences an unexpected and distressing response during a treatment;
- that we relate to the person or group in a concerned, heart-centered, loving way so as to reduce their vulnerability;

- that we always treat the other person or group with respect and ensure their sense of safety, dignity and self-esteem are maintained and enhanced at all times.

Equally, we can make a *choice* not to *be for* the other person or group experiencing threat or challenge, with a resultant sense of vulnerability for them, and a loss of self-esteem which they may experience consciously or unconsciously. At these times, we can choose (consciously, with intent, or unconsciously) to place our own needs above the needs of the other person/group for respect, esteem and dignity.

Ethical Issue Definition

An ethical issue arises when a person (or group), with intent, or without intent, through their actions/non-actions, words/silence, or attitude, creates a sense of vulnerability, fear, discomfort, or loss of self-esteem in another person or group of persons. An ethical issue can also arise as the result of a pattern of behaviour involving procedural or quality performance issues.

As an ethical issue can arise between people in a community through *intent* by one person, it can also arise *unintentionally* by that person. It is very difficult for an observer to determine *intent* in relation to another's actions. This is the challenge for judges and juries when they have to determine if someone *intended* to murder another person. It is a challenge for jurists, because proving *intent* leads to a conviction of first degree murder, whereas not proving *intent* leads to a conviction of manslaughter/second degree murder (this outcome may be different in different countries). The outcome of these determinations could lead to execution (in some US States and various other countries), life imprisonment, or a lesser prison sentence, depending upon *intent* and other factors. Sometimes, judges are swayed to give reduced sentences if they can see remorse as well as actions made by the guilty person to make amends for their criminal behaviour (whether it was intentional or not). So while *intent* is important to establish; outcomes from the actions are equally important to consider.

We cannot *prove intent* in relation to sensitive and fragile ethical issues between people in relationship, because we cannot get into a person's mind and soul to determine motivation and intention. However, we *can* examine the outcomes, and also observe the person's actions *following* the activities of concern to determine if they are ethical, and based upon professional standards and the desire to make amends.   To explore this issue further, we will use the framework originally developed by Janet Quinn in 1989 in which she refers to "healing" as coming into right relationship with self, others (the community), and one's Higher Power/God.

Ethical Issues - Returning to Community

We expect professional people to be reflective; to reflect regularly on what they are doing, how and why they are doing it and whether or not it is ethical in relation to their responsibilities to themselves, the people for whom they care, the community, and their own moral, spiritual or religious beliefs. If regular reflections indicate that the professional person is not in right relationship with self, then that person needs to do further reflection to identify why they are feeling disconnected from their own spiritual purpose. These reflections might indicate that the person needs to engage in further self-development in the form of self-care activities such as meditation, prayer, energy work, change of lifestyle, reflection of beliefs and attitudes, etc., so that the person can come into right relationship with him or herself; in other words - heal the self.

If the person's reflections reveal that they are not in right relationship with another person or with their own community, then the person is required to explore their heart further to determine why, and what needs to be done to restore right relationship with the other person or the community. One may need to seek out the other person, or persons, explore the lack of connectedness, discuss ways to restore relationship or healing, ask for forgiveness, and then take action to promote healing of the relationship(s). If this cannot be accomplished between two people in conflict, help should be sought from an agreed upon third party or mediator to witness, hold space or mediate.

If reflection indicates there is a breakdown in the person's relationship with their Higher Power/God, then they need to determine why, and what they need to do to restore this relationship. This is something each of us has to do personally. However, it is not always possible to find just one of the three relationships (self, community, Higher Power/God) is broken – it may be that all three relationships are broken and require healing for the person to be whole once again.

In a situation where a person unintentionally (and possibly unknowingly) causes a rupture in their relationship with another person or group, and thus, is not in right relationship with them, the onus is on the aggrieved person or group to do what they can to restore right relationship with the other person. This is a particularly challenging situation if the person who caused the relationship rupture is in a more powerful position than the aggrieved person or group. Nevertheless, because we are inescapably faced with *being-for* another person, simply because both we and they are human and we are heart-centered as Healing Touch people; the aggrieved person or group will have to make a choice to accept the responsibility of attempting to bring the other person back into relationship with them so that the whole group can return to right relationship with each other.

The approach is to lovingly, and in a heart-centered way, advise the person of what they are perceived to have done to cause the breakdown in the relationship and request a space and time to discuss the situation, their reactions, and feelings. Once the other person (who may have no idea they had caused a community disruption) is made aware of the disrupted relationship, the onus is also on them to work towards right relationship with the aggrieved person or group as quickly as possible, by heart-centered listening, discussion, and requesting forgiveness where necessary. The person in the more powerful position should appreciate the risk taken by the aggrieved person or group, and respond lovingly, with gratitude, and reassuringly to them as relationship is restored in a heart-centered manner.

After the above process of attempted reconciliation, if the person who has caused disruption in relationship between two people or between a person and a group is not prepared to work to restore right relationship, then the aggrieved person or group may need to contact the HTP Ethics Committee for help with mediation. However, it is stressed that in the first instance, if right relationship needs to be restored, the aggrieved person/group need to approach the other person/group first in a loving and heart-centered way.

Wise Speech: The Ethical Dimensions of Interpersonal Communications

When we are communicating with other members of our community, particularly if we are doing so in order to re-establish right relationship with them, the process we follow needs to include the use of wise speech, which is a useful framework developed by Dempsey (2015).[3] Wise speech can take the form of verbal and

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[3] It is recommended that readers of this document download and watch the You Tube video: Dempsey, D. (2015, Aug. 30). *Wise speech: The ethical dimensions of interpersonal communication* [Video file]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vPx_AuWv5U

non-verbal communication whether one-to-one or in groups; or written communication in all its forms, such as letters, emails, text messages, and social media.

We communicate with another person/s to exchange information, achieve a common purpose, to be understood, and to understand another person or perspective. Wise speech incorporates ethical aspects of communication that require us to call upon our personal and cultural values and express them effectively to ensure right relationship with ourselves and with others in our world. Moral character strengths of integrity, respect, honesty and ethics are required by each of us as well as the ability to reflect upon a communication situation. Our reflection must include our awareness of our own and the other person's physical and emotional state, unmet needs influencing us and the other person, and the commonality of our purposes. Are we able to find common ground, bearing in mind we on the same team, even with different needs, opinions, and personalities?

There are two extremely important considerations in our wise speech preparation – heart-centeredness and timing. We need to reflect then and consider what we want to say – **is it truthful, helpful, kind-hearted/well-intentioned, and is the timing appropriate?** Even if our message is well-intentioned, truthful and kind, if the timing is poor for us or for the other person, our communication can derail. Once we have considered all wise speech requirements, we can reflect upon the vulnerability of ourselves and the other person and make sure our hearts are open to the other person as we take loving action to return to right relationship with that person. The other person then has the choice to respond lovingly and reassuringly so that healing will occur and right relationship between the two persons can be restored.

Conclusion

This document has built on previously published documents of Healing Touch Program including the Code of Ethics and Scope of Practice. The document has sought to define and differentiate ethics issues, while acknowledging that this distinction is not always possible. It has also sought to provide some guidelines regarding how to restore healing and right relationship using wise speech principles. It is hoped that the philosophical and theoretical frameworks in the document will provide an underpinning as to how Healing Touch practitioners and students can ensure they are in right relationship as they relate to each other in an ethical, heart-centered, loving, and professional manner.

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