

## **A GALVESTON DECLARATION**

**FAYE GOSNELL**

Athabasca University, Alberta, Canada

**MARK MCKERGOW**

University of Hertfordshire, UK

**BLAINE MOORE**

Moore Counseling and Wellness, Fort Worth, TX

**TANYA MUDRY**

Our Lady of the Lake University, San Antonio, TX

**KARL TOMM**

University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada

### **PREFACE**

In May of 2016, a think tank gathering was held on Galveston Island, Texas. The two-day event was called *Galvanizing Family Therapy: Reclaiming and Revitalizing Collaborative Practices*. Jim Duvall, Jill Freedman, Gene Combs, and Karen Young organized this event. Harlene Anderson and David Paré acted as facilitators.

To galvanize means “to cause someone to suddenly take action, especially by shocking or exciting them in some way:” (Galvanize, n.d.). The purpose of this cleverly titled event was to galvanize action, specifically, to revitalize collaborative practices, help practitioners re-examine and re-affirm our stance and to encourage others, including the agencies with which we work, to notice and include these ideas in new ways. The organizers’ hope was to renew long-valued commitments and celebrate the birth of a new generation of projects, in part, by addressing political and professional trends that are eroding and stagnating the practice of collaborative, non-pathologizing approaches to working with people. Academics, social scientists, researchers, practitioners, and activists came together at this gathering to address the present state of service delivery and its effects on therapeutic practices. The

first day of the event involved discussions in small groups and in the larger group about various issues of importance to the participants. On the second day of the event, the facilitators asked the participants to identify some salient issues or themes that had emerged in discussions that needed more attention and discussion. Some participants raised their hands and brought forth issues; these participants were asked to facilitate the group discussions on the issues they raised. The remaining participants were asked to join whichever group was discussing a topic of particular interest to them.

The Galveston Declaration presented here resulted from a merger between groups hosted by two of the authors, Mark McKergow and Faye Gosnell. Given that one of the purposes of the event was to renew long-valued commitments, the participants in our group were interested in exploring what our commitments and values actually were. Our discussions led to the realization that family therapy, as well as the various modes of practice emerging from that vein of development (narrative, collaborative, solution-focused, among others), while having their own traditions and norms, all shared a common disposition to professional practice. If this disposition could be articulated, our group reasoned, it might be possible to both share and understand things more easily between various fields of practice, to develop new ways of working, and to engage more effectively with organizational partners in ways that could enhance mutual support.

As the discussion progressed, Karl Tomm noticed that the title *family therapy* might be limiting what has become a huge range of ideas, practices, and contexts for our work. It is not just families we work with, nor is it even exclusively a question of doing therapy any more. We also work as coaches, facilitators, social workers, teachers, medics, prison staff, and many other change facilitators using ideas from our tradition. Musing about ways to illustrate this multiplicity, Karl wondered if a provocative statement declaring family therapy “dead” might attract attention to a breadth of the work being done, as well as open up possibilities for moving beyond any potential constraints posed by viewing this range of activities through the lens (or at least title) of family therapy.

The group discussed why family therapy might usefully be viewed as dead, as well as the question of what exists in its place, if it is in fact dead. The group felt that there is a common thread of shared values emerging among the various modes of practice, like collaborative, narrative, discursive, constructive, social constructionist, and solution-focused work. Through a process of review and revisions with our own group members as well as the wider group of participants, we decided to declare that family therapy is *transforming*, rather than *dead*. We were concerned that overly provocative language use in our declaration might create the conditions for divisiveness, though this would definitely fit the idea of galvanizing.

However, we also believe that death is commonly viewed as a transformation in the state of consciousness, and we would like to share our understanding of the way in which the field of family therapy is undergoing a transformation in its

state of consciousness. While it may seem anthropocentric to attribute a quality of consciousness to a field of practice and inquiry, this field had already undergone a history of transformations that may be viewed as alterations in the position of the observer relative to the observed, including increased awareness on the part of the observing therapist of his or her role in the family system. An example is the transformation from first- to second-order family systems therapies as articulated by Lynn Hoffman in 1985 and 2002.

It would seem to us that another transformation is underway, where the observing therapist is now expected to observe and intervene not just with the family, but potentially also with the constraining forces in the outside world that contribute to families being stuck in pathologizing processes. The call for therapists to act in ways that expose, resist, and even dismantle those forces has gained considerable traction in recent years, and if therapists are to do the work of effecting ecologically sustainable change in larger systems, they will require new understandings and tools. The topic of Faye's initial discussion group at Galveston was what the new understandings and tools might *be*.

As a starting point to answering this question, and as a way of attenuating Karl's concerns about the constraining effects of the title *family therapy*, Mark suggested we endeavor to articulate the shared values between family therapy as it has developed and the broader pool of collaborative practices. Mark also suggested we use the format of the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001) to articulate these values. This format has been used very successfully in the world of agile software development to allow those working in related traditions to stand together by signing the manifesto on a website. This format includes declarations that X is valued over Y, and while there may sometimes be value in Y, we *prefer* X. The Agile Manifesto can be found online and can be signed by individuals who wish to stand by it; thus, it can act as a unifying element in a diverse field. Our hope is to adopt this idea for the purpose of reclaiming and revitalizing collaborative practices as a full-fledged and challenging set of ideas and priorities.

In Galveston, our group worked on a declaration of values. We agree with Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky's (2003) assertion that "practitioners must be forever vigilant about what values they privilege and what values they ignore . . . Striking a balance among values for personal, relational, and collective wellness and liberation is our most pressing task as [practitioners] and citizens" (p. 275). We resonate with this idea because our assumption is that disengaged reason is not enough; it cannot form a sufficient basis for informing our actions. Rather, our choices as practitioners and as citizens should be rooted in values that are consciously chosen and articulated explicitly.

Consequently, we created a document following the event in Galveston that we have titled "A Galveston Declaration" to acknowledge both the place where it was developed and the nature of the declaration. Specifically, this is one possible declaration to emerge from the Galvanizing event. We have tried to be minimal-

ist in capturing key values as a starting point, in the hope that as many people as possible will feel willing and able to support these distinctions. Even so, not all participants will wish to sign their names to this declaration. However, all those who have signed substantially agree with what is written in it, and we warmly invite our colleagues and peers to join this declaration by signing their names to it, or by responding to it in any way that has meaning for them.