



Training in Pessso Psychotherapy



Over a fifty year career Albert Pessso created a unique and revolutionary body-based method, which combines classical psychology and the latest neuroscience to produce remarkable results.

In his acclaimed *The Body Keeps the Score*, neuropsychologist **Professor Bessel van der Kolk** writes of the striking impact of his first experience of Pessso work:

“I’d spent several years in psychoanalysis, so I did not expect any major revelations.” Then, on the conclusion of his session (called a ‘structure’) he reports a dramatic body-mind event typical of Pessso psychotherapy:

“Instantaneously I felt a deep release in my body – the constriction in my chest eased and my breathing became relaxed. That was the moment I decided to become Pessso’s student.”

Describing the Pessso group process* (also known as Pessso Boyden System Psychomotor, PBSP) van der Kolk wrote, “Protagonists (clients) became the directors of their own plays, creating around them the past they never had, and they clearly experienced profound physical and mental relief after these imaginary scenarios. **Could this technique instil imprints of safety and comfort alongside those of terror and abandonment, decades after the original shaping of mind and brain?**” The answer is yes it can and in so doing it provides individuals with a new internal basis for being in the world – where they live larger and more joyful lives.



Pessso Bodyden Training UK offers a three year professional training in this revolutionary body-based technique that promises powerful results in record time. www.pessoboydentraininguk.com

*Although first developed and used in groups, the Pessso method has been successfully adapted for use in one-to-one therapy.

Pesso Psychotherapy Touches Places Other Therapies Do Not Reach

Cognitive awareness based on verbal interaction stimulates the rational 'left brain' creating awareness and understanding. **However, rational understanding does not change how a life is lived. We live life through our bodies.**

On this topic van der Kolk says, "We can get past the slipperiness of words by engaging the self-observing body-based self-system, which speaks through sensations, tone of voice, and body tensions... **When you activate your gut feelings and listen to your heartbreak – when you follow the interoceptive pathways to your innermost recesses – things begin to change.**" This is exactly the process of Pesso work.

The importance of committed and precise body work - that engages with **the emotional and 'storyline' right brain - is widely acknowledged** not only in the healing of trauma but also in the wider remit of an empowering release of personal potential.

Professor Van der Kolk reflects on the function of the left and right hemispheres of the brain in human interaction and puts Pesso work into this picture: **"According to recent research, up to 90 percent of human communication occurs in the nonverbal, right-hemisphere realm, and this was where Pesso's work seemed primarily to be directed."**

The Structure of the Programme

The programme will comprise 3 teaching modules of 3 days each delivered in flexible combinations of online and in-person modes in response to the circumstances of our world.

Additional seminars and practical workshops will be offered between modules along with student led interactive sessions. These will be outlined in detail as we go forward in the changeable months ahead.

Please see our latest proposed schedule of events for our current planning.

Comments From Students

"Learning the Pesso Boyden Method has enhanced my practice in ways I could not have imagined. I strongly recommend it to all of those who want to learn a cutting edge method of working with deep seated trauma that really works." Matthew Harwood Jungian Analyst.

"This powerful method has deepened my practice substantially. It is creative, safe, and can really shift people who have struggled with deep issues over years. The training is great – the theoretical aspect of the method sits alongside plenty of practice in a supportive atmosphere. I very much recommend it." Sue Lewis, psychotherapist.

About Al Pessso

The Lifetime Achievement Award Al Pessso received from the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy in 2012 recognised him as one of three living masters of body-based psychotherapy. He began his career as a dancer and choreographer, studying under the renowned Martha Graham. In the 1960s, he and his wife Diane Boyden established a unique dance centre with a special focus on helping dancers to more fully express their feeling through deepening their body movement. Al and Diane were amazed at the cathartic outpouring of emotions that resulted from their intense focus on physical movement. This was their first dramatic foray into 'body work'.

New York in the 1960s was awash with exciting psychological thoughts that helped the Pessos make sense of what they witnessed with their students. Gradually they moved into the use of movement and precisely choreographed responses to powerful emotional expression. They began helping not just dancers but people in general to express themselves more fully and creatively in life.

Before long Al and Diane were invited to Europe, where they met Dr Lowijs Perquin, a Dutch psychiatrist. A rich partnership began between Al and Lowijs which located the Pessos' formulation within the framework of developmental psychology. This collaboration continued over four decades during which key concepts from psychoanalysis, object relations, trauma research and latterly neuroscience were blended into a healing framework.

These influences are easily discerned throughout the approach, although the end result is a deeply original and singular model set apart from other approaches in its unique contention that a psyche – perhaps even a physical brain – can be 'rewired' through an act of imagination within a concrete yet ritualised context of a Pessso 'structure'.

The UK Institute Tutor Team



*L-R: Sandy Cotter,
Juliet Grayson
Sally Potter:
The PBSP trainers in the UK
accredited by Al Pessso and
Lowijs Perquin.
Each brings to the task of
teaching a unique history and
decades of working in different
roles developmentally with
people*

A note from the three UK trainers: the tapestry of the Pessso method contains a strong thread of skill and craft. The model is robust and comprehensive and it takes time, discipline – and creativity – to learn to use it. We have successfully devised ways to teach and share this beautiful and effective approach. Give us a purposeful commitment over three years and we will provide you with a resource that will enhance the effectiveness of your healing work and also feed the joy in your life.



More details on Pessso Psychotherapy: www.pessoboydenttraininguk.com

Singular Concepts in Pesso Psychotherapy

MICRO-TRACKING

Learning to read the symphony of emotions that play across a client's face during their hour long session or 'structure' is a central skill in Pesso Psychotherapy. Shifts in the muscles of the face along with subtle changes in body posture, tone of voice and eye gaze are all messages from the unconscious of the client. When tracked precisely, the client feels seen and therefore safe. Within a context of safety and respect, the dialogue deepens and the healing possibility is enriched.

THE WITNESS

While micro-tracking, the Pesso therapist evokes a helping presence whose sole purpose is to reflect back to the client the emotions signalled by changes in their body, many of which are out of their awareness. As the client unfolds their story, 'the witness' acts as a mirror reflecting the ebb and flow of feelings and excitement through noting changes in posture, facial expression, and tone of voice. Accuracy is crucial and powerful. Precision in tracking emerging feeling has an impact on the brain, as van der Kolk points out.

"A neuroimaging study has shown that when people hear a statement that mirrors their inner state, the right amygdala momentarily lights up, as if to underline the accuracy of the reflection."

A STRUCTURE

A structure is a one hour session focused on a single client. With the guidance of the therapist, the help of group members and the use of symbolic objects, the client creates a tableau of present issues. Micro-tracking emotions reveals the connection of current difficulties to past events. Projecting their inner world into the three-dimensional space of a structure helps clients clarify causative connections. The client is then invited to imagine what other, better, indeed, 'ideal' context would have given them an environment where they could have been fully alive and themselves. This ideal setting is an 'antidote' to the wounding scenario - one where the client as a child would have received the 'right response' at 'the right age' from 'the right kinship figure'. This act of imagination - set in the hypothetical past - has a palpable impact on the body-brain. A 'new memory' is produced which may trigger a genuine shift in attitude. This, in turn, can lead to enlivening life changes.

PRECISION

On differentiating Pesso work from drama based therapies, van der Kolk writes, **"... this work is not about improvisation but about accurately enacting the dialogue and directions provided by the client ... every time I conduct a structure I'm impressed by how precise the outward projections of the right hemisphere are.** Clients always know exactly where the various characters in their structures should be located."

A NEW MEMORY

The scene recreated in the structure reveals the internal map and the hidden rules that the client has been living by along with a three-dimensional image of what they have had to face as a child. It then offers a 'possibility sphere' in which to create a different outcome. Van der Kolk describes,

"(the Pesso structure) offers 'the possibility of forming virtual memories that live side by side with the painful realities of the past and provide sensory experiences of feeling seen, cradled, and supported that can serve as antidotes to memories of hurt and betrayal.'"

With focused attention, these 'new memories' can be consolidated into a strong and positive inner framework based in our natural birth right of safety and love – what followers of John Bowlby term an 'earned secure attachment'.

The notion of a 'new memory' is the most remarkable of Al Pesso's contribution to healing. Traditionally psychological repair comprises facing our past and grieving the loss of what we should have had. Pesso Psychotherapy literally installs new memories that generate an inner worldview of secure optimism through direct interaction with the poetic soul and the literal brain of the client.