

Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts, here on itunes: Taking Back Birth.

Maryn here today with a special podcast, and hoping this is just really informative for those that are either: A) interested in our Indie Birth Midwifery School, with some specific questions about accreditation and licensing or B) anybody who is curious about those things, as it relates to midwifery education in general. If you haven't checked out our new school, please go to indiebirthmidwiferyschool.com. Pretty much all of your initial questions can be answered there as well as in our virtual tour of the school, which you can access free by email. Just enter your email into the school's website, and you will receive a series of 10 or 11 emails, a kind of behind-the-scenes look at the school.

Today I want to address specific questions about our school. Is it MEAC-accredited or not? And what does that mean? This has been our most common question so far, and by that I mean a couple of emails a day! We LOVE that people are looking at the school, thinking critically and comparing and weighing if this is right for them. When we talk about accreditation for midwifery schools, there really is only one body that issues accreditation (at least here in the US): MEAC, which stands for Midwifery Education Accreditation Council. It is pronounced "meek". If that's new to you, can do a little bit of research. Whether it's new or old to you; if you're in the vein of looking at midwifery schools - whether you've been doing it for a while or are new to it - you will see that most schools are choosing to respond to this particular accrediting body, meaning they want validation. That's essentially what 'accreditation' is. They want that stamp of approval on their school that will (allegedly...there is debate about these things) set a standard for the kind of education given and perhaps promise a specific roadmap for a student. For example: they will become CPMs, etc. We'll just be blunt about it, and hopefully not offensive - blunt is not always offensive! We are really just seeking to create something different. If you've followed

Indie Birth through the years, if you're a regular listener of these podcasts, you know that we have valid respect for what has been done in the midwifery and birth world, and we are more intent on not changing the Old, but creating the New. That's exactly how we feel about midwifery education. We are not looking to correct the past. We are not looking to improve upon any kind of accreditation, but we also - very bluntly - are not looking for approval from said organization.

I'll explain more about why that is. It's safe to say that anything is possible, never say never. But...at this time, we are not seeking MEAC accreditation, and we probably never will. I'm going to discuss some of the reasoning behind that. But first: we don't care what anyone chooses to do. So, if you've done your research, and you've decided that going the route of the accredited school is the route for you, that's great! We think (and we know already) that the students coming our way are different. They're curious about serving families, serving women and babies, and they are not as gung-ho or committed - or interested at all! - in serving the state. So we ask that, if you're considering our school, you have your eyes open, you ask yourself these hard questions about fear, about liability, about persecution and you answer them honestly within yourself. If you choose to be regulated, or to be licensed, that is your business. Make the best choice you can...out of love, not fear. I had a similar conversation today (like I said, we've been having these conversations nearly every day), and this one was more personal; it was on the phone. A similar topic came up, and what I shared with this woman is that the idea that licensing is more legitimate, makes us better midwives, makes us unable to be persecuted or prosecuted, just isn't true. If you're really set on that being the truth, then you probably won't want to keep listening, but if you're at all curious why that isn't really the case, and how licensing can be misconstrued for what it is NOT, then perhaps you will want to have your eyes opened to that.

To go off on a tangent...what I was sharing with this woman is that I believe that our history as women healers - whether it's in our DNA from past generations, or if you believe in past lives or whatever it is. However you define that, you are connected to literally generations and generations of women that have come before you that have been in a similar space, existing outside of what we call now 'mainstream old paradigm'. For as long as we can trace back, we know that women healers have never been welcomed or well-integrated into the male patriarchal society as long as it has existed. That sounds really philosophical, but i think these are really important questions and topics, and when you're delving into possibly becoming a midwife, you need to meet them head on. Ultimately, i think a lot of the reason that somebody would ONLY look at accredited schools or licensing and regulation is out of fear. Everybody wants to be professional. They want to be approved of. They never want anything to happen to them, as far as persecution or prosecution. But I guess what I'm saying is: It's in our genetic code; not to be victims, but to be healers. There is a responsibility that comes with that. We need to look inside ourselves and see what we're really afraid of. When we find some of those answers, we choose to move forward in a way that honors what we've found, or not.

Let's get down to business. The standard of MEAC accreditation (or for that matter, any kind of body that would accredit anything) is a unique concept. It's a fairly new concept in the history of the world, and I think it's fair to say that most people haven't really thought it through. It's a lot like licensing. On the surface we're told it's safer, or better, or more legitimate, and we believe what we're told. But underneath all that, what actually IS IT? I think it's confusing. It is a body that was appointed by itself, so it's not as if people got together and wanted anything, it was simply a group of midwives that decided that they could be the authority on midwifery education, and they created their own set of standards.

And the standards themselves, are really fine. It's not as if it's an incredibly unreachable standard. I also would admit that it's not a ridiculously low standard, I think the standard that has been set is probably average, and I will elaborate on why I think our school will reach beyond the standard that has been set.

I feel like when people ask "Are you MEAC accredited?", it's a similar question to asking a doctor if he delivers at Hospital A. You're not really questioning any underlying idea or philosophy. You're actually not really questioning his ability or his experience or his knowledge. You've already accepted that that's the way it's going to be, and you want to know how it fits into the puzzle at the surface level. I feel like that's where a lot of people are coming from when they ask, and there's nothing wrong with that. I understand that often people are just new to this whole idea, and so they just want to know. They've heard that MEAC accreditation is the way to go, and they just want to know YES or NO. Again, if that's all you're interested in, you'll probably want to turn off this recording right now, but I want you to question what's deeper than that. It's not really a YES or NO, it's a WHY and HOW.

Of course, we believe in questioning these things, and in choosing to create a New Paradigm. In choosing not to be accredited, it's not because we're arrogant, or just want to be different. It's definitely not (and this has come up) because we don't feel like there shouldn't be some sort of standard. Obviously, if we're creating a school, a two-year full program with amazing midwives from all over the world teaching, we obviously think there is plenty to know. We obviously think that there is a little bit at least, that one would want to know before they were wanting to put themselves out there serving women. Learning is a lifelong commitment, it's a lifelong goal, so you can't - in any short-term school or learning opportunity - include absolutely everything that could be taught. We can only start with what we think is the basic to intermediate level of knowledge required for someone to serve women.

We do think we are creating a standard, and we do think it is more thoughtful than the standard that is currently being used.

Creating a standard is not our only purpose. We are just as interested in creating smart, intuitive, wise, confident, loving midwives that do not serve the system, and I think that will make our academic standard even higher. I can say that from personal experience. When I was a midwife in the system, I will admit that my standard of intellectual, clinical knowledge was lower. Reason being: I had to spend so much time and effort to keep up with protocol that was so restricting that I didn't need to keep learning so many things. At least, that's what I told myself, and so many regulated midwives ultimately tell themselves. They are too busy, and they're not allowed to entertain the idea of knowingly attending a breech birth or twin birth, for example. So there are certain skillsets and knowledge that they just wipe off the table. Not being in that world anymore, I'm very grateful. I feel like I've really opened myself up to learning every day, and this is the kind of midwife we are trying to create, not one who is dependent on rules, regulations and protocol, but is dependent on her own wise mind, heart and hands. That is a WAY higher calling, in my opinion, than any grade, any research. It's not that those things aren't important, but if they're not balanced, then we don't have a complete person, and our goal beyond anything is to create as complete a midwife-person as we can, not a one-sided person.

When it comes to accreditation, another question that's great to ask yourself as you're feeling into what's right for you is: Why is legitimacy so important? I think it's in our genetic code as women - for a large part of history - to have been the 'less than'. We seek legitimacy all the time, and when we're looking to serve women, we have to ask, very deeply: why is legitimacy what we seek? Maybe it'll be very easy, and some of you will very clearly see that you don't actually seek legitimacy, and therefore, all this nonsense - all this accreditation, all this regulation - is

not important to you. Those are the “easy” ones, and I’m proud to say, we will have many enrolled students who feel just this way. But perhaps that’s not exactly how you feel, and so let’s look into that... When we talk about preserving traditional midwifery and creating this New Midwifery Paradigm, what part does seeking legitimacy have? Perhaps we create our own legitimacy! That is what we are seeking to educate with and pass on through our teachers and the vision of this school is that we can create what we want to see. In turn, that is creating the type of legitimacy that I, personally, want to leave this Earth having shared. The vision of the school, mine personally, and Margo’s view as well, is that we can create a legacy by combining these things and not giving in to one side, not saying that midwifery should become medicalized just to save itself, instead meeting somewhere in the middle.

Our students will be prepared in the science and the sacred. That’s a sub-question that’s come up. We’ve had people who know a little bit about Indie Birth (but not quite enough), say something like “that school seems too holistic”. We’ve struggled figuring out the best way to word things, because certainly it can look a certain way from the outside, when you’re not MEAC accredited. Accreditation and regulation are so similar, when you don’t have a label attached to you; if you are approved or not, then people assume that it’s a joke, that unlicensed midwives are unskilled, or untrained, when that is not the truth. As far as the school goes, of course we will be covering the science of midwifery - probably everything that you’d learn in nearly every other program: skills, emergencies, complications, lab work, interventions. But because midwifery is not just a science, but is also an art, we combine the scientific with the sacred. We want our students to pay attention to their self-care, to their self-growth, to their inner voice, to inner struggle, their issues, to their shadow side. We talk about birth being life and death, we have to acknowledge these deep struggles within ourselves, and what we bring to births, things both positively and negatively affecting

us. We can't go out into the world with just knowledge: how to solve a shoulder dystocia, if we haven't really looked within ourselves to see what we think about the bigger issues that come along with these things. Things like interfering in a birth, if necessary, perhaps an injured baby, or a baby that doesn't live. These are things that are just as important as clinical knowledge.

We will be giving attention to business and development. So, now that you know all this stuff, best case scenario: you're really confident and you feel ready, and women are asking you to serve them. What can you offer them, uniquely, and how is your business set up in a way that brings you joy? Is it successful, as far as feeling great about what you do, and bringing more lives into the world that are met with peace and love? There may be a financial component to your success, which we readily and fully admit can be part of a successful midwifery practice in the New Paradigm.

Along those lines (back to accreditation and regulation) we do have a system and offer advice on how you can also practice inside this system, so part of our course is passing on knowledge and resources and you can make that call. We are not saying - like many places are - that you MUST get a license, that you must be regulated, we're not even saying the opposite, which is "for sure, don't". Of course, that has been our personal choice, but when you come through this school, we hope you can see both sides very clearly for what they are, and make the best choice for you. In response to a couple of emails we have received, in which people have written "I'm forced to be licensed", "I see your school, I really like the idea, but I don't understand how this fits for me, because I HAVE to be licensed where I live". And although I get what they are trying to communicate, which is the public law dictates licensing, the truth is: no one HAS to be licensed. This is opening up a can of worms...this isn't neat and pretty, if you're looking for me to

validate that you must be licensed, and should go to a MEAC accredited school, I'd ask you to think and dig a little bit deeper.

Another issue that's come up, that I think is worth being really transparent about is this: when you're creating a New Paradigm like this, and you're part of this New Paradigm, everyone won't love you! Not everyone loves me, haha...I'm sure you wouldn't have guessed, but that's ok, really! There's nobody in the world that doesn't have that problem at one time or another, but when you're creating something new, you can feel alone or isolated. Our goal for this school is to create enough of a community that slowly, over years, we have so many more Indie Birth midwives, that none of us feel alone or ostracized. The truth is - and this is where the transparency comes in - it may be hard to get an apprenticeship. We do have contacts, nearly all over the world, and for our first 20-30 students, maybe even our first 60 students, we'll be able to really help out finding apprenticeships, but it is not guaranteed, of course, with our program, because it is a really difficult and precarious relationship to set people up with. So, questions have come up with this as well: "the midwives in my area won't accept me for an apprenticeship if I don't do a MEAC accredited school", and that's a hamster wheel of an answer... Do you care? Why do you care? If they only care about that, why do you want to train with them? But yet, I get the validity of the question, and the seriousness of it, and want to be transparent that you may not be accepted by every licensed or maybe any licensed midwife where you are. I hope the school, if you finish, will give you the tools and the confidence to create a whole new thing; where you are able to get the experience and the training you require in a way that, right now, you can't imagine. What you are going to be doing, if you are enrolled in our school, is creating a New Paradigm, and you are creating something that is outside the realm of possibility of most midwives, especially regulated midwives. They won't be able to understand, and that's ok. But women need more choices, so it's not

about making the other midwives understand, or even being competition! I truly don't think that's even an issue. If you're one of those people that has pondered these things, then just know that we support you in helping find the training you need (although we can't guarantee it), that we support you exploring these ideas, and understanding that when you do, often parts of the world, and people, open up to you that just weren't there before. If you're looking within a certain box, you're only going to see what's in the box. We hope to open your eyes to see what's outside.

Another valid concern has been students in other countries who have similar concerns about looking for employment after they finish the school and I would say at this moment, that although we do have women enrolled from Canada, at least (so far the US and Canada), we are able to accept students from any country in the world, if they want to complete an online program. We are probably not creating many midwives that will be clinic-based. Although there is absolutely nothing wrong with that; there are birth clinics and hospital clinics all over the world that need midwives, and typically, that's more a question of employment or certifications. Often those midwives have nursing degrees. The CPM, actually, isn't standing up terribly well in countries around the world. It's certainly not considered the 'gold standard' everywhere. It's pretty much a North American thing. I'm a CPM, for those that think I'm deliberately talking down that credential. I'm not, it's just maybe not what everyone thought it would be. Looking at these things honestly and thinking a bit ahead about your path. If you are looking to be a midwife in a clinic in Africa, perhaps this won't give you the papers and certification you need and that's fine, we just want to have transparency about these things.

People have asked "Can I sit for the NARM test after taking the two-year program, and we can say (at this moment) yes, if you are doing the PEP process with an approved preceptor, then there is no reason why

you would not pass the test, after a two-year intensive program such as ours. I took the test myself, going on 8 years ago now, and passed, of course, on the first try. I don't think the test has changed much. We most likely will be setting up a similar type of test for the Indie Birth Midwifery School at the completion of the program. The point of this test wouldn't be to certify anybody or give anybody a paper with letters behind their name, but simply because we think our students will want to test their level of knowledge, to see where they stand, some feedback. They may or may not choose to take the NARM test, neither is it our business.

I hope that answers most of the questions out there about our position on accreditation and, in the bigger picture, regulation. The bottom line is that our school will appeal to the people it is right for. Many have said (and I don't think these people are talking to each other) that this school is "speaking to their heart". I find that interesting and exciting and heartwarming and humbling that there is something about what we've created here already that people are curious about. They want to know more, and this is an invitation to know more. I hope that my answers and our transparency about these issues have further validated what you're feeling, or given you enough information to say that this isn't right for you. But I have to say, to all of you that have said that the school is speaking to your heart, I just want to ask you: What will you listen to?

Thanks so much for listening. Check out indiebirthmidwiferyschool.com and feel free to email myself or Margo with any questions. Also sign up for the virtual tour there, and find out some behind the scenes about the school. Have a great day!