

further thousands at other Centres world-wide. The three main centres will be linked by video satellite for 3 hours a day, so that speakers like Carl Rogers, Theodore Roszak, Marshall McLuhan, Ralph Nader, Buckminster Fuller, Dane Rudhyar, Michio Kushi, Jean Houston, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Fritjof Capra, Baba Ram Dass and Frank Herbert can interact with the participants and with each other. This daily broadcast can be picked up by other centres, which can then build their own programme round it. The aim is to get real communication going on a two-way basis, and all the resources of technology will be used to enable the participants to express opinions, to be heard and to vote on proposals put together as the Symposium goes along. This is a fascinating attempt to use technology in a positive way, rather than always having the feeling that we are being used by it. Further details may be obtained from the British organiser, Brenda Brett, Flat 4, 83 Vincent Square, London SW1.

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Theresa Symington

## Theory is Detrimental to Practice: Discuss

I started writing this article in the middle of exams. - hence the format of the title!

'Ed.' had rung me to say that the September issue of *Self and Society* was to be devoted to counselling and would I write something about student counselling. The request came at a time when I was tired of having a variety of ideas rattling round in my head and no stimulus, until the request came, for putting them in some sort of order. I was therefore delighted to be asked to put pen to paper.

As I write now, several drafts and many thoughts later, I muse on the irony of the situation: a dead-line to meet, an editorial board to satisfy and a readership who will show by their response whether or not I should continue on my present course. When exams next come round and students say to me there is so much they wished they had done, I shall have a clearer idea of how they feel!

I have been thinking a lot recently about measurement in counselling (and I suppose I mean measurement of success). But I have got rather stuck. My present position is that half of me says that counselling cannot be measured and the other half says that of course it can, that it's arrogant to believe counselling 'above' measurement and that it's only the methods of measurement which are insufficiently advanced to allow it.

I have also been thinking a lot recently about theory. There was a time

when I thought theory hindered rather than helped my counselling. But as soon as I began to put down examples of this on paper, it became obvious that I was not abandoning theory but merely swapping one for another. Take for example the case of the student who comes along during May/June anxious about his impending exams. I listen to the tale of the year, find out that he has had problems at home but despite these has attended most of the lectures and a fair proportion of tutorials, that he has had good marks for his written work - in other words seems a capable, conscientious student. So what do I do? Slot into the 'behavioural' framework and tell him as long as he stops work now (a week before exams start), gets enough sleep, food, physical exercise and answers the requisite number of questions in the exam, he will be alright. What happens? He carries on exactly as before, late nights, skimming on meals, no entertainment, too much studying. In the next session I start wondering aloud why he isn't taking the advice I offer and why he is having to be so harsh on himself i.e. working all hours of day and night and under-nourishing himself. Somehow this leads us on to talk about failure and what it will mean to him. The picture is not rosy. I leave the session discouraged and do not feel we have got anywhere. However, the next time I see him, there has been a 'marked improvement'; he has had his first decent night's sleep for several days and he has sat an exam and answered the requisite number of questions which was not what he had been doing before.

Take another example - a final year student who has recently broken up with her boy-friend. She is having difficulty in concentrating on her work and feels generally that life holds little for her. She is tense and sits on the edge of her chair talking in a rather flat manner and choosing her words with care, pausing rarely - an articulate, intelligent student. She obviously needs help over this difficult time and it transpires that not only are there present difficulties but there have been difficulties in the past associated with illness in the family which necessitated the student taking on responsibilities usually taken on by the mother. This in turn make her appear more mature than in fact she is. I respond to this maturity by putting on to her the decision whether or not to return. She decides to return. Nothing wrong here with the non-directive theory I was holding at the back of my mind. But when I found that 'whether or not to return' became an issue at each session, it occurred to me that we were wasting time: she was keeping appointments - in other words, saying 'yes' fairly loud and clear. I abandoned the non-directive theory at this point and arranged to see her weekly for the next six weeks.

It is impossible to say whether our sessions went better because of the new arrangement or because there were outside factors which were improving. Nevertheless, our sessions did go better and if I had not heard about non-directive counselling we would not have spend so much time talking about whether to meet again or not.

It will be obvious from these two examples that when I abandoned the behavioural and non-directive theories, I did not move into a theory-less

world but smartly took up other theories. I swapped behavioural for client-centred and non-directive for contractual counselling. It was Edith Venables who said that whether we are aware of it or not, we work within a framework and I have come to agree with her.

So what theory do I work to? In which framework do I operate? And in particular what does the theory embodied in Humanistic Psychology provide for me to use? The foregoing examples speak for themselves I believe: I move from one theory to another, sometimes knowingly but more often unaware at the time of whose sphere of speculative thought (one of the definitions of theory given by the Oxford Dictionary) I am working within.

But to be more specific about how I use the speculative thought of the Humanistic Psychologists: a phrase first I think, "Pay attention to . . . . .". I shall call him David. "Pay attention to David." I well remember being on a three-day Rogerian group where on the second day one of the members wept and raged mightily. On the third day he showed signs of doing so again. My attempts to comfort him, let him off the hook, etc. were stopped by the leaders. "Pay attention to David" he said. And the leader was right. David had more work to do which he went on and did and there were more tears and there was more raging. And he emerged knowing more about himself and enriched by the experience, as indeed were the other members of the group. And now in my counselling I sometimes say to myself "Pay attention to Jane; pay attention to John". Not a very profound theory you may say. But what is important is that the leader on that day did *not* say "Pay attention to *why* David is so enraged and unhappy." or "Pay attention to *the extent* of David's rage and unhappiness", he said "Pay attention to *David*."

What else from Humanistic Psychology? Two of those odd sounding theories - Gestalt and Transactional Analysis. Then there is role-play. Whereas I would not say I was a practitioner of any of these theories, I do bear them in mind. I find the word 'now' coming into my counselling. "How are you feeling now, at this moment?" (Here I am borrowing from the Gestaltists.) "How old do you feel you are?" (Here I am looking for the child within the adult as expressed by the Transactional Analysts.) "I don't feel you are talking to me. Who do you see sitting in this chair?" (Here I am asking the student to put me in a role.)

But of the ideas, thoughts, speculations which have been rattling around in my head over the last year, what I call 'the surprise element' has been the most persistent. Surprise seems to me to be an essential element in counselling. If a student's response to a remark of mine is one which I wouldn't have imagined in a month of Sundays, I obviously find that surprising. I also find it exciting. I think 'How marvellous I made that remark which sparked off that response! What a good counsellor I am! Life is great! I must write a book!' Take another instance: I say something which I think could be useful to the student but could also be too obvious to be worth saying and is really thoroughly banal - and the response is as if I had made

an inspired utterance, worthy of being engraved on tablets of stone! The surprise can also be a less productive one. I may say something which I think shows remarkable insight and will be greeted with great acclaim by the student, only to find that he acknowledges it with a mere 'Mmmm' before rapidly moving to something which is important to him as opposed to important to the counsellor!

Why I think the surprise element is so important is because I believe it shows that real communication is taking place, that each person is really there both in mind and body and not participating in some sterile, unacknowledged role-play of counsellor and counselled.

A couple of months have gone by since I chose the heading for this article. If I had to choose one now, I would put 'Theory *can be* detrimental to Practice. Discuss.' Implied in this revised statement is the presence of a practitioner and the use he or she makes of theory.

I finish by commending a book to you - 'Lives of a Cell' by Lewis Thomas. He calls himself a Biology Watcher: the biographical note at the beginning of the book tells us he is President of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre in New York and that he has several professorships, chairmanships and deanships behind him. It was exciting for me to find such an erudite man saying so eloquently what I was struggling to think. The book is a collection of essays on the theme that the earth is like a single cell. One of the essays describes research scientists at work and the conditions that are necessary for 'good ideas' to emerge. "What it needs is for the air to be made right. If you want a bee to make honey, you do not issue protocols on solar navigation or carbohydrate chemistry, you put him together with other bees (and you'd better do this quickly, for solitary bees do not stay alive) and you do what you can to arrange the general environment around the hive. If the air is right, the science will come in its own season, like pure honey." And what is this science? What is it that he hopes will emerge? ". . . . . what must be planned for, in the laboratories engaged in the work, is the totally unforeseeable . . . . . the system must be designed primarily for the elicitation of disbelief and the celebration of surprise."

In the next academic year I hope I shall be able to make 'the air right' and for every student who comes to see me, there may be a 'celebration of surprise.'

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Beverley Besmer

## **The Use of Symbols and Imaging Techniques in Counselling**

In personal growth counselling we ask the client to close his eyes and get