

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.'

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

an image or symbol of what his problem, block, or present state is. In very simple terms we are utilizing a commonplace mental function, the imagination, in order for the client to tell us, as George Kelly wryly suggests, what is wrong. "If you want to know what is wrong with someone, try asking them". (Kelly)

Often a distressed person can say something about what is wrong, but they usually cannot tell the whole story. However their psyche can put us in the picture - so to speak - with symbols; the psyche speaks in symbols.

The best way to grasp how this technique works is to experience it yourself. In my opening paragraph I said that in a therapy session the client is asked to close his/her eyes and to get a picture, symbol, image of his present state of being. Usually it is set in the context of a particular problem or feeling. You may do this now if you like. Choose a problem that is real for you, or take your present feelings about what you are doing right now - reading this paper - and become aware of your feelings. What are you feeling? Whatever else may be running through your mind, make a note of it. . .and let it happen. As you become aware of your feelings, close your eyes (you may open them in a moment) and let a picture surface on your mind screen, the very first thing that pops into view. Let it happen effortlessly. However fleeting or irrelevant it seems. If you have got a picture come back, open your eyes, and draw it on a piece of paper. If you want to doodle with it, do so, but also keep the original impression clear in your mind. If you had no picture, reflect on this question, "What is my feeling about looking within?" - get in touch with your present feelings, see if you can recognize what you are feeling - may be confusion, may be anticipation - whether your feeling is OK. Then start to move your hand over the page of paper with your pen, making a picture spontaneously and freely. Play with it, doing whatever you feel like. . . Now you probably have either a picture or a free drawing.

Look closely at this picture and make note of your feelings and thoughts, even if they seem unrelated to the picture. What are you feeling, . . .what are you thinking?

Now let your picture talk to you and respond to your question "What is my feeling about looking within?" If it had a voice, what would it say? What colour would it be? What does this colour mean to you? Let yourself free associate with it. Is it masculine or feminine? What sort of a voice does it have? If it sang a song, what would it sing? If it could move how would it move? Play with your symbols or drawing in this way as long as you like, going along with whatever energy the picture gives you. If it is grim, explore that. If you find yourself being judgmental, let that happen too. Really go into whatever your inclinations, and exaggerate them, as much as you like. Contradict yourself too if that happens naturally.

If you find this picture interests you, enough to go on exploring it, you can get up and let your body take a posture that expresses this picture.

How does that feel? Hold the posture for a bit. . . Then begin to move with it, see how it moves, fast, slow; what does it remind you of? Does it have a name? Feel into this experience of becoming this picture symbol. What is the MAIN feeling quality it contains? In a word let this feeling quality permeate your being. . .breathe it in all the way to your toes and to the tip of your head.

Now if you want to go on, see how it feels to stand as your symbol in a circle of light. You can do this in imagination or in body posture. Feel yourself enveloped in the warmth of the sun, and see your symbol change. It might grow or shrink. . .it might go somewhere in your imagination, follow it if you like. Where does it take you?

When you feel that you have had enough of a chance to experience this symbol, then begin to find a specific thing you have learned from it, and write this down. What is the main message of this symbol? Also make a note of the specific feeling quality it contains. If you recognize this as something you want more of in your life, you can use your picture as a means of self-development; nourishing or "programming" yourself with this feeling. Your picture is a reminder to make this feeling a mnemonic device.

If your picture has given you a negative message or feeling, you can (or also if you just want to explore it more) do the following exercise to explore it further. It is a brain-storming exercise. Write the word for the symbol in the centre of a page of paper. Decide that you want to spend a definite period of time doing this exercise, say 10 minutes. Now for 10 minutes start from the centre word and free associate, each time writing down the response as on an arrow going out from the centre, and each time returning to the centre word for next association. Make sure you really focus in on the centre quality/symbol/word. Write down whatever comes to mind, and do not think twice about it. Try to keep a rapid pace, and if you find you get stuck, use your 5 senses to stimulate free associations. For example, smell, in connection with the centre word. See what fruitful new levels of meaning open up for you through this. You can also let your body, mind and feelings in turn respond to the centre symbol, as part of the brain-storming exercise. Take note of surprising associations.

The exercise requires that you take note of what comes into awareness even if you find it totally absurd or inconsequential. That is your feedback, whatever these feelings are about they may have some meaning for you about your attitude toward yourself or toward your feeling nature in particular. Intellectual people sometimes tend to disregard feelings or thoughts as trivial or obvious. However if you take the attitude of curiosity that you want some feedback from your inner self and feel open and receptive, without trying hard for it, it usually is right there for you so effortlessly that people get sceptical .

A very obscure or strange symbol may appear that has a great fascination for you. It may be too cryptic to understand right away. This sort of symbol needs time to reveal to you its meaning. It is best not to force it, but to live with it for a while in the back of your mind, and let its feeling quality take effect on you. One day it may just pop up with a real 'aha'.

If you have found a particularly inspiring or meaningful symbol, you can use it actively for whatever purpose it is attached to in your life. For example, it may be a feeling you want to bring to your work, or personal life and the symbol can be evoked by you in your mind's eye as a reminder of this feeling, which carries this feeling energy. It may also have some motivational content, for example a goal. Make a picture of the symbol and set it where you can see it often. It can help you too keep a balance or to keep attuned to a quality of consciousness, or to concentrate and focus your mind. It can be used for meditation in the traditional sense, or for centering as you go about your daily activities, even while in the midst of driving a car or a conversation.

An interesting experiment to do with a symbol that has a lot of energy charge for you is to check into it in your mind's eye from time to time, and see how it changes. It may give you some on-going feedback about yourself in a particular aspect. It may also help you monitor your own growth process.

The preceding example and exercise is one approach to mental imagery in personal growth counselling. It is a very flexible and fruitful technique which can not only provide insight but also release energy, and facilitate emotional catharsis, of deeply embedded psychological material. I have been conducting my own experiment, and have found a particular symbol that gives me a refreshing boost of energy to carry out a particular task through difficult times of uncertainty. The symbol I've got also reminds me of an experience I had as a child, an experience that was one of the most memorable and highly charged moments of my life! I just remembered this! That's how a symbol may contain layers of meaning that gradually unfold surprises.

The Open Centre, 188 Old Street, London EC1, announce their members of staff: Peter Payne "Tai-do Tai-chi". Kate Wyle "Psychosynthesis". Petra Griffiths "Massage and Self Nourishment". Bonny Meekums "Release contact dance and self healing". Freda Sharpe "Gestalt Therapy". Curtis Turchin "Postural Integration and Tragering". Akasha "Encounter and Bioenergetics". New brochure available.
