Fit for Purpose: The Organisation of Psychotherapy Training

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Compared with the libraries of literature on the practice and theory of therapy (psychotherapy and counselling), there is surprisingly little on the theory or practice of teaching or training therapists. Few of the founding fathers and mothers of psychotherapy wrote about the pedagogy of psychotherapy. A major exception to this was Carl Rogers, the founder of client-centred therapy, now more commonly referred to as the person-centred approach, who wrote a chapter on the training of therapists in his seminal work Client-Centered Therapy (published in 1951) and, later, a book on his philosophy of and approach to education, which is summarised in its title, Freedom to Learn (Rogers, 1969). He himself later revised this for a second edition (in 1983) and, after his death, a colleague, H. Jerome Freiberg, made further revisions for a third edition (published in 1994).

Here, echoing Rogers' (1969) interest in educational administration, the authors, a trainer/facilitator and director, and a manager of a training institute, respectively, consider the importance of congruence or the 'fit' between the philosophy, practice, theory and organisation of training.

Our interest is based on a number of hypotheses:

1. That a particular approach to therapy also applies to life outside the consulting room, and, specifically, that it is relevant to the education and training of therapists; and that this is an ethical perspective.

2. That students' education and training in a particular therapeutic approach is more grounded and enhanced if they have a 360° experience of it.

3. That the training organisation forms an important aspect of the training relationship, and that a shared valued base makes for clear relationships between students, staff and administrators.

4. That all of these make the education and training of therapists more sustainable.

Therapy as an approach

All forms of psychotherapy hold and embody certain fundamental beliefs about human beings and human nature; the nature of health and pathology, their origins and maintenance; and the nature of change. How explicit these beliefs are, and how explicitly they are presented, varies greatly between practitioners, orientations, and institutes. The Association of Humanistic Psychology Practitioners (AHPP), for instance, are clear that humanistic practitioners share certain fundamental core beliefs about:

- The theory of human nature and of self - that it is unique, relational, OK, aspirational, holistic, self-regulating, autonomous and responsible.

- The aims of therapy and growth - self-awareness, wholeness, authenticity, creativity, etc.

- The nature of the therapeutic relationship - as the primary agent of change, and based on the therapist's genuineness, empathy, and non judgemental acceptance of the client, etc. (see AHPP, 1998).

It follows that humanistic educators will subscribe to such principles and embody them in their practice. It also follows that individuals training to become therapists are, in effect, being supported and challenged by their training institutes to recognise, develop and organise their own 'way of being', derived from their own values. Thus, a fundamental element of training is to facilitate students develop knowledge and practice of philosophical and scientific values that facilitate and support the development of humanity. In this sense, we believe that training therapists is a highly ethical activity.

As we have suggested, some theoretical orientations, and some people within them, are more explicit about this perspective than others. The same is true for the logical extension or application of a particular theory of therapy to the learning and teaching of the therapy, and to life in general.

From its origins as 'relationship therapy', 'non directive therapy' and 'client-centred therapy' the therapy inspired by the work of Rogers is now most commonly referred to as 'the person-centred approach', literally, an approach to the (whole) person. As Wood (1996, pp.168-9) puts it:

> it is neither a psychotherapy nor a psychology. It is not a school...itself, it is not a movement...it is not a philosophy. Nor is it any number of other things frequently imagined. It is merely, as its name implies, an approach, nothing more, nothing less. It is a psychological posture, if you like, from which thought or action may arise and experience be organized. It is a 'way of being'.

In our view, it is important that a particular approach to therapy should be applicable to life outside the consulting room, as this makes it more relevant to understanding different aspects of life such as groups, organisations, art, culture, politics, and so on (see Embleton Tudor et al, 2004). One of these applications is, of course, the education and training of therapists.

Freedom in organisation

We think that being explicit about the principles which underpin the particular therapeutic orientation and its training is both important for students and significant for the integrity of the orientation as offering a philosophy of education and therapy. Taking as an example our own organisation, Temenos, we are interested in promoting and maintaining person-centred principles in an organisation that provides person-centred education and training. A description of Temenos appeared in Self & Society in May 1999. This year Temenos was accepted into membership of the Humanistic and Integrative Section of the UKCP and, to date, is the only person-centred organisation in the UKCP.

In his writing Rogers emphasises the centrality of the human organism – and its tendency to actualize. Reporting on his musings as an educational administrator, originally written in 1948, Rogers (1969, p.210) asks himself – and us – rhetorically whether basic attitudes for human motivation are trustworthy, and concludes that: 'The group seems to be an organism, and when it feels itself to be clearly integrated, action follows inevitably. When it is in conflict, action is confused or conflicting, and no amount of typed policy will make it otherwise.' Similarly, with reference to larger structures, some suggest, as Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996, p.3) do, that 'organisations are living systems. They too are intelligent, creative, adaptive, self-organising, meaning-seeking' (our emphasis) (see also Embleton Tudor et al, 2004). Just as human organisms comprise many cells, so human organisations are multi-cellular. It seems reasonable, therefore, to consider a training organisation as a multi-cellular living organism. As such, the organisation has one basic tendency: towards growth, the fulfilment of potentiality, and greater complexity. Mateus Rocha (1998, p.3) defines self-organisation as the 'spontaneous formation of well organized structures, patterns, or behaviors, from random initial conditions.' Learning, as a self-organising process requires that the system, whether personal or organisational, (p.4) 'be informationally open, that is, for it to be able to classify its own interaction with an environment, it must be able to change its structure.' This potential for growth and complexity resides in every constituent part of the organisation (students, trainers, administrative staff, and management), as well as the organisation as a whole.

An organisation which seeks to embody person-centred principles has to manage not only this kind of internal congruence but also its relations with the external world – and, at times, the contradictions and conflicts between the two. We discuss this with reference to some of Rogers' (1969) musings as a trainer and an administrator.

1. Do I trust the capacities of the group or groups, the course or programme (that is, a number of courses), to meet the problems we face – or do I trust only myself? We see a tendency on the part of administrators and organisations to solve problems and to seek to apply one solution to all. We think that a person-centred organisation can embrace complexity, for

instance, of offering different strands to training so that students can opt into doing additional work for additional, academic qualifications, or fulfilling additional requirements to meet the requirements for professional accreditation or registration. We think that trainers – and courses – have a responsibility not only to be clear about requirements, but also to be clear which requirements are which: course, institute, professional association, and validating body. This is so that students may see what's what and may chose between and even challenge different 'requirements'. For example, there is no good educational or professional reason for an institute to insist that students can see only those supervisors of whom they approve – and, more insidiously, who themselves trained at the same institute. This smacks of unnecessary control, rather than promoting a freedom of choice and a freedom to practice. Conversely, greater trust in the group and, ultimately, in the organisation, leads to more open systems.

2. Do I free the courses for creative discussion by being willing to understand, accept and respect all attitudes? Rogers comments (1969, p.210) that 'this tests my basic philosophy very deeply'. He continues:

When there is a genuine willingness for all attitudes to be expressed – critical and hostile as well as constructive – then the group senses the fact that it is their organisation, and they respond with vigour, with loyalty, and with responsibility.

In our experience, this is not easy. However, for the most part, any short-term pain (of hostility, for instance) is, for the most part, rewarded by the longer-term gain of congruence and satisfaction. In addressing the question whether he makes it possible for tensions to be brought out into the open, Rogers makes the point that it seems much sounder (p.211) 'to accept the fact of tension as basic'. Whilst tension, conflict and complaints are often viewed as negative, it is perhaps helpful, especially in moments of crisis, to remember that tension is an inherent quality of the organism. As Macmurray (1957/91, p.33) puts it, 'the organism is conceived as a harmonious balancing of differences, and in its pure form, a tension of opposites'. The organismic organisation faces facts – 'The facts are friendly' as Rogers (1961/67, p.25) puts it – and is open to questions and questioning, suggestions, and even complaints. From a non defensive stance, these responses may be welcomed as learning for the organisation, a perspective which sits well with current perspectives on organisations and their development (see, for instance, Senge, 1990).

Other courses, based on different theoretical principles, will have different foundations. Training courses in transactional analysis, for example, will be based on the contractual method and a commitment to open communication. The challenge for all trainers, courses and institutes is, in effect, to match the method and process of education to the content.

Our experience suggests that when the method matches the message, students integrate both the message and the

method more genuinely and more fully, as they see it and, importantly, experience it working in practice as well as theory. In other words, it represents congruent and 'joined up' thinking.

In one description of his theory of therapy Rogers describes the sixth condition, that the client experiences 'being received' by the therapist, as the 'assumed condition'. We draw a parallel between this as a condition of therapy and as a condition of training: that it is necessary that students experience being received by their trainer and by the training institution. Also, in order to enhance students' complete experience of training and of the theoretical orientation, it follows that administrators of training courses are included in the whole picture of service provision.

Values and communication

Any administration relies on clear personal communication and the development of communication systems. Arguably, for the administration of courses involved in training therapists offering the 'listening cure', this is even more important. In response to Rogers' musings with regard to trust, creativity and facilitation (discussed above), we think that two personal and organisational qualities in particular facilitate students' learning.

1. A non defensive attitude. Many students experience training as a therapist as a challenge which involves personal change and development. At times they are anxious, and, arguably, more so in an organization which promotes fluidity and complexity. If the organisation is responsible – as we argue that it is – for providing conditions which are facilitative for learning, then administrative staff and management are part of the facilitative environment. As such they need to understand students' experiences of learning, of which administration and organization form an important part. Thus, administration needs to be as clear and smooth as possible; management open; policies and procedures congruent and integrated; and resources managed sustainably. The ethos and style of administration and management needs to be trustworthy, respectful and empathic, so as to facilitate and ease, rather than distract or disrupt students' learning. This may be challenging for staff, who are, in effect, being encouraged to view staff-student relationships as facilitative and mutual – and who, in turn, need to be supported to offer this. Establishing and maintaining mutuality is central to the process of learning for students and staff alike, and the organisation needs to reflect this in its structure.

2. Open communication. It is challenging for an organisation to be and to remain open in its communication, especially outside the training session. One forum for communication is staff-student meetings such as course, programme or community meetings. Assuming these take place, it is important that the organisation is clear about the status of discussions. When discussing particular issues or items we find it helpful to distinguish between those which are genuinely open to decision-making by all, including perhaps

by majority; those which are consultative, that is, which the management want to consult on but about which they will make the final decision; and those which are informative, that is, items of information.

In these ways, the manner and forms of communication also communicate values. One of the values of person-centred training is that it is based on andragogy (the teaching of adults) and not pedagogy (the teaching of children). This is distinct from the all too common, subtle, and not so subtle, infantilisation of students. Many trainers hold a model of adult training which, in effect, is based on a stage theory of child development. This involves the teacher deciding what the students may or may not study or know and in which order they are 'fed'. Here the root metaphor is one based on feeding, sustained by a parent-child relationship, with the result that some such trainers refer to their students (they are always possessive!) as 'my babies'. This has no place in a person-centred approach to education nor, we think, in any adult approach to adult learning. Another problematic dynamic we observe is what we would refer to as the lay psychoanalysing of students, by which any difficulties they are experiencing about the course is put down to their 'process'. As we believe that everything is co-created we are equally interested in understanding what part the administrative and/or teaching staff or systems play in any dynamic. This is not to say that students don't have issues. It is to acknowledge that trainers, administrators and systems are not immune to process and problems.

Sustainability

Being a therapist is a serious business. Training therapists is an equally serious business and, once begun, often involves a minimum of four years' commitment. In an increasingly competitive world with local and international markets, it is perhaps tempting to see training simply as a business and more training as bigger business. However, in our view, larger organisations cast longer shadows and, whilst small may no longer be beautiful, it may be more sustainable in terms of maintaining the fit between the values, practice and experience of training.

As a set of organising principles, we think that the person-centred approach has a lot to offer the debate on sustainable development. Sustainable development is a term that grew out of the conservation/ environmental movement of the 1970s. It is about ensuring a better quality of life for everyone now and for generations to come. It is an approach that is being widely used in science, business and public institutions for managing our environmental, economic, and social resources for the long term. When we seek to value and understand others; to affirm solidarity with others; to facilitate the recovery of personal power; to demonstrate justice in relationships; and to promote justice as fairness, enlarged by empathy and compassion – then we live and organise on the basis of values that are a precondition to a just and sustainable world. We class every interaction whether between students or between students and staff as a microcosm of the larger society. The human organism actualises itself in the context of a sustained and sustainable environment Therefore, sustainable practices

are those which promote congruent human development which, in turn, support and maintain natural systems. Just as practitioners of the person-centred approach are interested in providing environmental conditions that facilitate growth, relationship, creativity, personal power and social responsibility, so too, a training organisation can provide the necessary environmental conditions for its staff and students. It can also provide, and attempt to influence the wider social and ecological environment in terms of having policies based on principles of sustainable development such as: using recycled and sustainable products; sourcing through local sellers; and supporting local businesses through referrals. Beyond this, humanistic and ecological organisations may – and, arguably, should – consider using ethical banking and financial products; sourcing energy from 'green' energy-providers and, in general, managing their 'environmental footprint'.

Training organisations are complex organisms/organisations, made further complex by their environmental setting. Some person-centred training courses are located in the public sector, in colleges and institutions of further and higher education; others are located in institutes in the independent, private sector. The former, almost by definition, are located in environments which do not embody the principles of the approach, at best may be ignorant of or indifferent to them, and at worst, actively hostile to them. In many countries education in the public sector is becoming more traditional and hierarchical, with constant pressure from managers and administrators on teaching staff to recruit all applicants; to teach and process students rather than to facilitate their learning; and to assess performance against set objectives, which are incompatible with the approach. Institutes in the private sector have both the advantages and the disadvantages of independence. Also, many institutes, especially the larger ones, run training courses based on different theoretical models, which brings further complexity and often tension between the different orientations and different theories of therapy, training and organisation.

The person-centred facilitation of learning does have implications for the organisation which hosts the course, for instance, with regard to student-directed learning; having a critical view of curriculum-based learning and traditional methods of assessment; and having course meetings in which students are actively involved in making decisions. As we have an organismic – and organisational – tendency to be congruent and integrated in relationship, it is sometimes hard for person-centred practitioners to work in an organisation which neither acknowledges nor seeks to embody person-centred principles and practice. Of course, this is also true in different ways for practitioners from different orientations.

Conclusion

Writing about creativity, Rogers (1961/67) talks about the significance of a person's 'inner conditions' as well as the importance of the external environment in fostering creativity. In many ways his ideas about creativity parallel his ideas about education theory, based on a student's inner freedom, supported by a facilitative and 'freeing' environment, both in the training room and, we argue, in the

organisation of training and the training organisation.

As is evident from our argument, the person-centred approach to the education of therapists is challenging. One of the themes which emerges in response to this challenge is that of balancing, on the one hand, an acceptance of certain external conditions which impact on training, regarding, for instance, the validation of courses, and the accreditation and registration of therapists, with, on the other hand, the courage of our convictions to challenge, critique and change – and, as St Francis of Assisi puts it, the wisdom to know the difference.

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