Ray Woolfe and Steve Murgatroyd
ON TEACHING HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

To what extent can the theory and methods of humanistic psychology be applied to the teaching of first year university students studying psychology or related courses? We tried to look at this question in a course we offered recently to a class of 50 full-time first year students taking the educational studies option of an Arts first degree programme. The resources available to us were ten sessions of one hour, located in a large tiered lecture theatre, xeroxing, blackboards and ourselves.

We decided to call the programme "Career and Personal Development" and in our planning we tried to define what we were attempting to do by laying out for ourselves the following set of principles.

1. The 'self' crucially determines action, that is to say, individuals are responsible for their own actions;
2. Self-growth and development occurs in settings where individuals are accepted, understood and shown warmth as persons - growth is facilitated not taught;
3. To maximise self-growth there is a need to facilitate self-understanding in a caring environment and to encourage individuals to take on responsibility both for their own development and for their contributions to the work of others;
4. The role of theory in this process of self-growth and responsibility taking is minimal - experience of responsibility taking is more likely to permit and facilitate growth;
5. The only valid way of assessing growth and self-change is by means of self-assessment and assessment by those who have shared in the process of growth and change.

From these principles, we arrived at a set of formulations about the way in which the programme should be approached. These were:

a. **It was to be student directed**

At the point of selecting options we should hold a meeting to let students (a) make their own selections and (b) determine the content of their programme.

b. **Our role as teachers was to facilitate student-directed activities**

We agreed to minimise formal inputs and maximise the power of the group. We agreed as far as possible to refuse to take responsibility for decisions about content or method but offer support to the group for the actions they wished to take. While we might offer things we'd

like to share, the decision to take up these 'offers' would be a matter for the group.

c. Assessment would be by three measures: (a) self-assessment, (b) peer assessment and (c) the completion of a work portfolio.

For this purpose, we were to be regarded as peers.

This position created a number of potential political problems with the university in question which we think would have been common to all higher educational institutions in Britain. In particular, while the set book: **Freedom to Learn** by Carl Rogers was thought to be acceptable as an academic text, the tradition is that the principles enshrined in such a text should be lectured upon, rather than used to facilitate discovery of them. This expectation would be rationalized in terms of the legitimation of knowledge by the university. In other words, the model of learning operated by universities is that lecturers are experts who have information and skills which can be neatly packaged and presented to students. The latter are perceived in terms of empty vessels to be filled full of 'knowledge'. This perception of knowledge is internalized within students and enshrined in the status which they award to lecturers. A challenge to the model is in effect an attack upon personal identity. A "different" pedagogy creates both personal and political problems. In order that students should realise that they were to be involved in a somewhat different form of pedagogy than that to which they had become accustomed, each received a copy of the following letter before the course began.

Dear Student,

We are writing to you for three reasons. First, we would like to introduce ourselves to you, since we shall be offering a course of workshops and meetings to you next Term. Second, we would like to tell you something of this programme. Finally, we would like you to buy a book which is, in our view, useful reading for the programme.

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Ray Woolfe is 38 and is a sociologist interested in working with small groups in a variety of settings. He is currently employed as Staff Tutor in Educational Studies by the Open University and is engaged in writing a book about personal change in adult life.

The programme we are offering in the next term we shall call "Career and Personal Development" and is about three things. First it is about those issues which face you both as students of the university and as potential graduates. It is about your conceptions of your past, present and future. Second, the programme is about changing your conceptions of the learning process. Our aim is not to lecture or to set ourselves up as experts from whom you must learn but is to act as facilitators for learning which you as students feel and think is helpful to you. Finally, the programme will focus upon skills which are relevant to both studenthood and to careers after college.

The primary method of working we hope you will feel able to adopt is a setting in which all make contributions and participate and in which all of us are equal partners.

Finally, we think it would be helpful for you to read something about the kind of educational activities which have been undertaken with the framework we hope to adopt. For this reason we would like you to buy and read Rogers, C., (1969): Freedom to Learn NY: Charles Merrill.

We look forward to meeting you on Wednesday January 9th at 11.00 am. Meantime have a good Christmas and New Year".

At the first session, we discussed the issues raised by this letter with the group and pointed out that while we were expected to produce an examination question, we would delegate that task to the members of the group. We did this so as to demonstrate firmly our commitment to self direction and to defuse our 'status' within the group. After an initial period of disbelief, this eventually led to a competition during the sixth session at which the democratically chosen entry was "Life after School: Does the educational system in England and Wales adequately prepare the individual to come to terms both with him/herself and with society?" On this first occasion we also explored the relationship between students' expectations of university life and their actual experience and did so by examining the objectives (if any) which each individual had for that term and what they hoped to achieve in the long run. We adopted the method of pyramiding (i.e. two persons discuss, then join with another group of two to form a group of four who join with another to form a group of 8, and so on), though the architecture of the room always made small group discussion difficult. Indeed the architecture, some participants pointed out, embodied the university assumptions about the learning process and made challenge to these assumptions physically difficult.

After this session we produced a Course Bulletin which we handed out at the beginning of the second week giving our version of what had transpired on the previous occasion. Our purpose in doing this was to share with the

students our perceptions of what was happening as well as assisting us in our political task of persuading the university that an academic structure and logic did in fact exist for this programme. In this bulletin we also provided a number of suggestions as to further reading, for example a paper by Kuhn and McPartland (1) which gave the background to the "Who am I?" text which students had completed. In the bulletin we noted that the most frequent description of self-identity was in terms of social roles e.g. wife, mother, student but also that many statements were emotional ones e.g. "I'm a shy person - I don't like speaking in groups". This, we argued, suggested the need to see oneself not just as a disembodied cognitive entity, but as a whole person with feelings and emotional needs. We noted that as feelings changed, so did definitions of self-identity.

We continued as follows:

"At our first meeting we worked on a number of exercises. Our aim was to encourage you to participate in activities you had not done before and to open-up discussion in the group as a whole and between pairs in the group. For some, we thought this would be an opportunity to talk to someone 'new' for the first time.

The topics we chose were what surprised you about your first term of University and what your objectives were for the present term. We chose them because you would be focussing upon your experiences and trying to sort out the difference between expectation and experience: you were looking at unanticipated experiences and sorting out what surprised you. You were also asked to anticipate the future and project yourself into it: to plan some objectives. These activities could be expressed as 'evaluate experiences against expectations' and 'project through objectives'.

One comment we heard was 'why are we doing this?'

There are several responses to this that might be made. Two occur to us. One is that you were doing it because you didn't decide to do something else - like leave or read or object. You have rights over your own education and you exercised them by participating. Another is because you felt you had to. We were the 'lecturers' so you had to do what we asked of you because learning is sometimes seen to be about conforming to the ideas and structures used by 'the experts'. Also, since others seemed to be participating you might have flet a pressure to conform to the group norm. Questions about your actions can only be answered by reference to both your own feelings and your understanding of social norms and etiquette.

Another comment we h eard was 'I enjoyed that, but I'm not sure I learned anything'.

Two things occur to us here. First, it was said as if enjoying something and learning were not generally related. As if talking to your fellow students and enjoying it wasn't really learning. Perhaps this is true, but it's not our feeling. Next, there's a model of what learning actually implied here, but the model isn't stated. Our model is that learning about personal growth and development involves self-reflection, self-examination, uncertainty, enjoyment, discussion and sometimes pain.

You can read more about learning models by reading the set book for this course: Carl Rogers Freedom to Learn.

Our hope was that the task of producing a bulletin would eventually be taken over by different students, but this hope did not materialize; student commitment to the programme never became as strong as we had hoped it would be.

One thing which became apparent at the beginning of week two was that many students flt anxiety about the skills inherent in learning tasks. In weeks two and three, time was devoted to a study skills workshop. This took the form initially of exploring individuals' feelings of learning competence followed by an exploration of specific skills such as reading, taking notes, writing essays, revision, sitting exams and so on. These sessions went down well within the group. They were well attended and clearly seen as "helping" the individual, even if their relevance as substantive content of an undergraduate course were sometimes questioned. After each of these sessions, a bulletin was produced and this practice continued until the end of the fourth week, when it was discontinued for mainly logistical and economic reasons.

During the fourth week, we explored the question of personality measurement and the gulf between self-identity and self-aspiration and towards the end of this session we became involved in a vociferous discussion of student centred learning and the extent to which this was compatible with the imperatives of an examination based university course. Out of this discussion the class agreed that in the period between the fourth and fifth weeks, each person would do a lifeplotting exercise, noting periods of change and crisis. This shift towards individual contribution and self-disclosure turned out in retrospect to be a crucial turning point, as in the fifth week the numbers declined from almost 100% to about 60%. This fall in attendance was discussed and a large number of comments alluded to (a) the difficulty experienced by many students in disclosing hitherto private areas of self in front of a large group - this particularly applied to 18 year olds as opposed to "mature" students and (b) the difficulty of coming to terms with a pedagogy which saw learning as self directed. We take both these points extremely seriously. While there was little we could do about the former, the latter is one whose implications are sometimes ignored by those involved in humanistic psychology. It is all too easy for those who have knowledge to fall into the trap of arguing that all "knowledge" is relative and that there is no meaningful knowledge which does not arise from the learner. On the contrary we think it is necessary

to recognize that some knowledge may be best transmitted via formal methods of teaching, which recognizes the absolute value of that information. At the very least, this question has to be negotiated with learners, if we accept that the individual is the best definer of his or her own needs.

Attendances declined further - to about 50% during weeks 6 to 8 and 4)% during weeks 9 and 10. In general it was the same people who kept coming from week to week and about a dozen people (24%) attended every session. Session six was concerned with age roles and revealed the rather interesting point that the vast majority of the group defined themselves not as adolescent or adult, but as "student". This reveals the way in which roles arise to provide individuals with an identity. This led to a discussion of what it meant to be adult in our society (2) and what was involved in the notion of maturity.

Weeks 7 and 8 were concerned with discussion of career choice: the relationship between the abilities and the values held by individuals and the extent to which fantasy entered into career choice. During these sessions the methods of exploration by guided fantasy and brainstorming were adopted. During week 9 we attempted to link the discussion of the ensuing two weeks to the option - selection which students had to make about their second and third year university courses. Finally, in week ten, we attempted to summarize the programme by looking at the concept of 'self' and raising the questions of inner processes and the self accepting responsibility for its own decision making.

Within the initial framework we set ourselves, we planned the course on a week to week basis. What we did depended on (a) what had transpired the previous week (b) how students perceived it and reacted to it (c) student declaration of needs. This latter element became particularly predominant as the course wore on - Overall we can say that it determined the content of sessions 2, 3, 7, 8 and 9 (half of the programme) - (d) our understanding of student needs (e) our own interests and abilities. The course as it finally emerged looked as follows.

Week 1	Goals and objectives of university study - conflict between
Week 1	Goals and objectives of university study - conflict between expectations and reality. Self-identity.
Week 2	Feelings of learning competence. Study skills.
Week 3	Study skills - continued.
Week 4	Measurement of personality - gulf between self-identity and self-aspiration.

Week 5	Social Roles - life plotting exercise.
Week 6	Age Roles - definitions of Adulthood and maturity.
Week 7	Career choice - Values and ability-dimensions.
Week 8	Career choice - continued.
Week 9	University options and vocational implications.
Week 10)	Inner Processes - the self-accepting responsibility for our decisions - review of the course.

What is interesting about this list is that though planned loosely on a week to week basis and attempting to respond flexibly to student demands it nevertheless largely focussed around precisely those issues which we had laid out in our original letter to students. To remind you, these were as follows.

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Conclusion

In reflecting upon the programme and the observation we make about it, we can make a number of comments. First, the pressures on us as facilitators to confirm to expected teacher roles was considerable. This pressure came from within us - the models of learning from our own experiences as learners were still fighting for a hearing. It also came from the students - their experiences suggested to them that lectures were better learning media than discussions. There was also a pressure to conform from the year tutor who complained about declining attendance, unorthodox teaching methods and the need to maintain standards. We feel we managed to resist some of these pressures but, as we have pointed out, it may well be that we over-resisted.

Second, there was a personal reaction to the course. We were disappointed in the extent to which the students exercised their rights. We were disappointed in the attendance rates. We were especially pleased with the response to the sessions by some of the students - their comments left us feeling good about our performances. We were surprised how hard it was to maintain the objectives within the framework of humanistic psychology outlined earlier. It was also a strain working in a right institutional framework - we felt that we had to

resist the easy seduction back into socratic teaching, but that we failed on a number of occasions. We felt comforted by being able to fall back on 'conventional' methods of teaching.

We decided, as a result of this experience, that we needed to explore further the potential and possibilities of working in a self-directing group of university students. We decided that, because of factors such as group size, the relationship of one course to another in the degree programme and institutional expectations, our next involvement needed to be outside the formal degree programme and needed to be explicitly and implicitly voluntary and self-directing. We have been working with a small group of students from social science and science departments in the same institution now for over 70 hours (seven times longer than the programme outlined above) and have found this a more rewarding experience. The group concerned contains a number of eighteen and nineteen year olds as well as some mature students. It is smaller than the first group (9 persons) and it meets in a non-institutional environment. Both the size of the group as well as its voluntarism make it much easier to establish a workable contract and an empathic environment, than the formal and less personal context in which we worked with the first group.

Overall, these experiences lead us to suggest that humanistic psychologists would do well to consider the need for institutional change to have at least the same priority as personal change. The former provides the framework within which individual expectations are established and sets limits upon the dynamics and processes of group relationships. In order to facilitate development towards this end, we would like to hear from others who have been attempting to teach humanistic psychology in traditional higher educational contexts in non-traditional ways.

References and Notes

1. Kuhn M.H. and McPartland T. (1954) 'An empirical investigation of self attitudes' American Sociological Review 19, pp 6876. See discussion in ed. Cohen L. (1974) Educational Research in Classrooms and Schools, Harper and Row, New York.

2. For discussion of this issue see Unit 21 "Personal change in adult life" by Ken Giles and Ray Woolfe of Open University Course E200 "Contemporary Issues in Education".