

vivid, hard-hitting, lasting realisations that would-be counsellors and therapists need to experience if they are to be effective in their chosen work. That is why the training of our students must include experiences where they can learn directly, in interpersonal contexts, about their own interpersonal strengths and weaknesses. They need more than just feedback from staff, more than just feedback from clinical supervisors. They need a range of feedback from their peers as well. They should ideally come to realise how their typical behaviour is seen by other members of their families, or by their workmates.

All of this is difficult stuff—sometimes exciting and joyful, often painful or vexing. Nobody likes to be told that they talk too much, that their silent smile seems ‘smug’ or ‘superior’ to others, that their valued ‘feisty’ attitude to the world can strike others as opinionated and rude. These are ‘home truths’ that we grow up protecting ourselves from, ‘home truths’ that even our best friends and lovers are scared to tell us. And it is not as if any one of these reactions *is* a ‘truth’ (in the old, pre-postmodernist sense of that word). Only by hearing a range of reactions from a range of very different individuals can our students build up a reliable sense of how they affect others, and what parts of their typical attitudes and actions may need to be modified or restrained in certain interpersonal contexts. Taking such feedback ‘on board’ may—and ideally *should*—lead to self-questioning and self-examination. Which, of course, takes students into the territory of personal therapy—another experience which large, bureaucratic, government-funded institutions are poorly equipped to handle, or even understand.

Most of all, our students need to learn to pay close, accurate attention to the responses they evoke in others, because this is the kind of attention they will need to pay to their clients. ‘This kind of person is going to see me as withholding and contemptuous unless I say something’; ‘With someone like her, I need to throttle back my dramatic adjectives, and speak more slowly and quietly, or I’ll scare her out of her wits’. Sensitive, well-attuned listening is the core skill for our field, from one-off telephone counselling to longterm psychoanalytic psychotherapy. During their education, it is crucial that trainees shift from focusing on *what they should be doing to their clients* to focusing on *what their clients*

are experiencing, and this shift can only be facilitated effectively by the kinds of feedback that I have been discussing. Process interventions cannot be learned by reading or studying manuals.

If self- and other-awareness is so vital a part of the training of counsellors and psychotherapists, then we should be paying close attention to how it can be embodied in curricula, and how curricula can be translated into meaningful, coherent training processes. I am not convinced that we have got all that far with this task. As I said in my first column, too many of our educators rely on structures and practices remembered from their own training days, and are unwilling to question them. Universities, however, will certainly question what we do, and then, too often, we will find ourselves at a loss for what to say to justify it. We urgently need a set of plain-language training principles that have some hope of making sense to lay people, and which do not gloss over some of the uncomfortable realities of training. One of them, as I suggested at the beginning of this column, should be that since counselling/psychotherapy is a relational art, then training for it must of necessity be relational, and hence, involve self- and other-awareness. But, having established that, we need immediately to talk about who we would offer such training to—and there we will immediately encounter greater possibilities for misunderstanding. That will be the subject to my final column for this year.



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