

What is the significance of living-theory action research to counselling students as they integrate what they are learning about personal growth and development to their understanding of their practice of counselling?

By

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Abstract

In this paper I generate my living-theory action research as an explanation of my educational influences in learning as I research my facilitation of a module in personal growth and development and enable my counselling students to link it with their practice of counselling of their clients affected by alcohol and drug misuse.

I try to provide an educational space where the counselling students can create knowledge in collaboration with each other. I recognise that dialogue is essential to the students' processes of learning. It enables them to open themselves to questions and assumptions rather than ready-made solutions to counselling concerns as they arise.

The originality of this contribution lies in the constellation of values and understandings I use as explanatory principles in my generation of my educational influence. They include values of acceptance and awareness as endorsed by McLeod (1993) who believes, as I do, that who counsels is more significant in terms of effectiveness than what is done and how. I invite our students 'to live life to the full', as Mearns and Thorne (2000) advocate, and which, for me, include the students' chosen form of spirituality / interiority. Lather's (1994, pp. 40-42) reference to Ironic validity has reference to this essay, 'also, in that what I am trying to represent is living, dynamic and constantly changing and so, I can never fully represent or communicate it - I will always fall short of it. The validity of my essay is, therefore, best represented in its failure to fully represent what I know.'

Introduction: Setting the Scene

Having completed my PhD with Jack Whitehead in the University of Bath in 1999, and as a qualified counsellor from the mid 1970s, I applied for, was successful, and duly appointed as Director of a Counselling Course in a small town some 40 miles south of Dublin. I was to facilitate a Module of Personal Growth and Development, and be available to teach Modules in Drugs and Alcohol Abuse, Family Therapy, and other subject areas as need arose, to which I assented. I was to do all office work, send out end of year results to students, liaise with staff, chair three annual staff meetings and help students prepare for what was called a thesis (an extended essay really) at the end of the course. I made an early decision to use the thesis as a vehicle for living-theory action research by which the students could measure their progress as counsellors in their counselling practice at the end of Year Two of the Course. I regularly appraised my employer of the meaning of living-theory action research. For me, the subsequent eleven years I spent as director was one of the most creative periods of my working life. It provided me with the opportunity to use my intuition, imagination, personal knowledge and humanity, as I enabled students to prepare to become 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1965) counsellors. What especially delighted me was that I was able to convince many students who had not completed secondary school certification that they could successfully complete the course, thus giving them third level accreditation. Some students in different years would, of course, have higher qualifications, one year, a doctor, several psychologists, nurses, teachers

and other professionals. I was devastated that after eleven years I had to resign on a point of principle, in 2010, which I will later explain.

According to the Counselling Course Booklet, the Module on Personal Growth and Development was to consist of “a regular and systematic approach to self awareness,” as “an indispensable part of the course.” It was to be “conducted through a series of sessions consisting of theoretical input, reflection, group sharing and discussion.” Its purpose was: “to ensure that each student has the opportunity to grow in self awareness and self acceptance and to examine, explore and record his / her own personal growth story.” I was particularly pleased that the personal growth module was “not to exist in isolation,” but would be “maintained as a priority throughout the Course” and be seen as a “significant thread” that would weave “indispensably throughout all aspects of the Course Content and Orientation.” What alarmed me, however, was that my approach to it was to be “systematic”. ‘System’ to me means a lived life which is linear and follows a set pattern starting at point one and proceeding to point ten or beyond. The word ‘system’ is intended, I assumed, to mean an organised body of material. That is not my understanding of personal growth. For me it will mean responding to personal issues that arise within individuals in group, which will be necessary as they are aiming to become proficient counsellors.

Personal Growth and Development: Its Meaning

What is meant by personal growth and development as a preparation for becoming a counsellor? The counselling booklet summarises it as, “growth in self awareness and self acceptance” for those aspiring to become counsellors. While there are no specific explanations given to these terms in counselling books, I will attempt to flesh them out from various other sources. Jersild (1955), talks of ‘Who and What and Why Am I?’ and argues that self-knowledge, self-awareness, self-understanding and ultimately, self-acceptance are crucial. Annand (1977) argues for ‘the search for ones own nature and significance and place in things’ and that the process of self- discovery is ‘essentially social.’ Hemming, (1977) says that ‘self-sufficiency is an illusion ... we become what we do become by interaction with others’. It has been said that ‘the human organism seems capable of enduring anything in the universe except a clear, complete, fully conscious view of himself (sic) as he actually is’ (Egan, 1973). Jourard (1964) reinforces this strongly: ‘When a man does not acknowledge to himself who, what and who he is, he is out of touch with reality and he will sicken and die.’ In a counselling context, McLeod (1993) endorses the concept that *who* counsels is more significant in terms of effectiveness than *what* is done and *how*. In terms of dealing with these issues in group work, I turn to Rodgers (1970) who endorses ‘personal development as an essential element of ‘the individual’s efforts to become himself.’ Mearns and Thorne (1988) say that: ‘The counsellor’s obligation to keep on growing is, in fact, a glorious invitation to live life to the full.’

Corey & Corey (1997, p. 7), endorsing a humanistic approach, explain that a central concern of this approach to personal growth is self-actualisation. To become self- actualised means being able to fulfil your potential and becoming all that you are capable of becoming. The effort to achieve growth involves pain and considerable turmoil, however, because our desire for security and dependence clash with our desire for to achieve growth. Among those who devoted their lives to the promotion of psychological growth were Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow.

Adler in opposition to Freud's deterministic views of the person, Adler's (Ibid. pages 6-7) theory stresses self-determination. In his early childhood, Adler had to struggle to overcome weaknesses and feelings of inferiority and his theory grew out of his willingness to deal with his personal problems and striving for a better future.

Carl Jung (Ibid. p. 8), a contemporary of Adler's, contributed to the depth of understanding of the human personality and human development. As with Adler, his findings grew out of his childhood experiences, in his case, of loneliness.

Carl Flogers (Ibid. p. 10) emphasised the importance of non-judgemental listening and acceptance and, as with the others quoted here, his ideas grew because of his fear of his mother's critical judgements of him.

Then there was Abraham Maslow (Ibid., pp. 10, 11) who also contributed to our understanding of self-actualising individuals. Though basing his work on those of his contemporaries, he distinguished himself in discovering a psychology of health, including instituting a hierarchy of basic survival needs, to include at the apex, need for individuality, and then in ascending order of importance to ego and esteem needs; acceptance, belonging and feeling loved and wanted; to protection from physical or psychological threat; need for order and structure; protection from fear and anxiety; and need for food, water, air, and so forth.

Personal Growth and Development In Group

Moving to dealing with the above issues and others in group, Corey (2000, p. xiii – xvi), says that the concerns mentioned above and others, can be re-enacted in group with a view to learning how to better manage such concerns. They can experience themselves as they do in their family of origin, reliving conflicts they had with parents and siblings and experiencing similar happenings with others within the group. Being in such a group also provides an opportunity to practice new ways of behaving. The empathy and support from other members of the group help to identify what one wishes to change and how to bring about such change. Students learn to respect differences in values and may even discover that they are more like others than different. Although circumstances may differ, their pain and struggles are universal.

Rodgers (1970) humanistic approach to group work / counselling is relatively unstructured, choosing its own goals and personal directions. I mainly follow Rogers' ideas for such groups, although I am pragmatic in terms of approach. For the group with me as leader, there is a focus on the process and dynamics of immediate personal interactions, with little prior preparation. I tend to plunge straight into questions to be answered, my motto being, love the question and learn as you go, through interaction and argument. Though students may wish to rely on me, initially, I encourage them to think for themselves and to assert themselves. Because of the unstructured nature of such a group, students will gradually, tentatively and, perhaps, fearfully explore their feelings and attitudes towards each other. At the beginning it will be evident to individuals within group that what they first presented to each other was what Rogers calls 'facades', 'masks'; that the real 'you' wasn't present yet. Only cautiously do real feelings, and students as real persons, emerge. The contrast between the outer shell and the inner person becomes more and more apparent as the days and hours go by. A sense of genuine communication builds up with my help. Those who, as Rogers puts it, "have been thoroughly walled off from others" come out with some small segment of their actual feelings. To their and our astonishment, they find that they are more accepted the more real they become. It is probably true to say that most may initially fear negative feelings, since it seems certain that one's angry or jealous feelings cannot possibly be accepted by others! But gradually acceptance comes, including freedom to be whoever one wishes to be! A sense of trust slowly begins to build, and with it a sense of warmth and liking for other members of the group grows and develops. Much of this depends on me as group leader. I still remember a female participant saying to me on a Sunday afternoon: 'If anybody had told me that by Thursday evening in our first week on the course before we went home that I would be loving every member of this group, I would have told him that he belonged in the nut house. So, I begin, hopefully, to feel a closeness and intimacy which I may not have felt for a while for my spouse or members of my

own family.' The issues highlighted in the previous few paragraphs, above, about personal development, understanding one's self better, getting a clear view of who one is, will arise again and again, directly or indirectly in the words / thoughts of the student counsellors and in the words and thoughts of Ben Cunningham throughout this essay.

The Counselling Course Booklet and the 'Thesis'

Let me direct your attention back to the booklet governing the Course. In hindsight, I now know I ought to have requested a prior copy of it. My perusal of it might have obliterated an eleven year stand-off regarding the issue of living-theory action research. Quoting the Counselling Booklet where it refers to research, I read that:

By August 1st of Year Two each student will be required to present a thesis, incorporating research, design and methodology. It is to be based on one of the major components of the course. This project should not be less than 8,000 and not more than 10,000 words.

When I arrived to take up duty my perusal of the pre-existing theses in the Counselling Course storeroom indicated that the previous objective theses were on topics, such as: 'The incidence of alcohol abuse among teenagers in Ireland in 1980' and so on. I was totally opposed to wasting professional time on such objective-type exercises without merit to the preparation of students to become counsellors. What they needed, in my view, was to be able to represent a living-theory action research on their own practice of counselling. I appraised my employer constantly of my view in this regard and, during the next eleven years, explained the meaning of living-theory to her, to which I never received an answer. It also came up at every meeting with her, which again gave me the opportunity of explaining it. Of course, I was not unaware of Whitehead's warning (1993) that: "new ideas have often met with scepticism, rejection or hostility from those who are working within the dominant paradigm. (Ibid.). How right he was, when he explained that:

Researchers who are trying to make original and acknowledged contributions to their subject might expect powerful opposition to their ideas. (Ibid.).

And, yes, I experienced powerful, unremitting opposition to my research ideas. Each of the eleven years I was director of the Counselling Course I was called to a meeting held by three of the Trustees governing the Course. At these annual meetings, no agendas were ever produced either beforehand or at the meetings themselves. That appeared to me to be deliberate in that it is easier, I would imagine, to undermine your opponent when you don't know what he or she is going to say or do. I was left in little doubt at the meetings, however, that the removal of living-theory action research was the object, though strangely, never overtly mentioned by name. Though never "distorting," but certainly "undermining", as Whitehead once experienced it, the Trust governing my work was intent on "systematically blocking development" (Ibid.) of living-theory action research, presumably because it had not originated from themselves.

Because I realised the possibilities inherent in building "exemplars of the types of dialogical communities in which practical rationality flourishes" (Whitehead, 1993, pp. 84-85), I felt so sad at having to resign after eleven years, as future students attending the Counselling Course would now be deprived by the removal of counselling living-theory action research and would be reduced to writing energy-sapping theses which had nothing to do with students becoming counsellors. I felt proud, however, that I had been able to stem the tide of opposition for eleven years. People in power inevitably win, I believe, unless they have the capacity to trust the professional 'nous' and integrity of those they employ. My workplace was, reputedly, a place of higher learning, where one could expect that values such as "freedom, truth and democracy," "rational debate," and "integrity"(Ibid.) would be espoused, but they weren't. Though such

values might have a home in a more enlightened workplace, it would never happen in this place. I found out to my cost that the basic requirement of this private organisation was total unquestioning obedience in all areas of endeavour and loyalty to whatever edict was laid down by the employers at any given time. As for me, I have always brought dedication to my work whatever it was and wherever it was, but never unquestioned loyalty to employers because I never felt it was warranted or necessary. All that was warranted and necessary for me in any workplace was my total commitment to my students' welfare and amity towards my employer, which I gave. I also wrote to my employer frequently year explaining in great detail my understanding of living theory and how I felt it linked with the work of Carl Rogers (he was a favourite of my employer's!) and those of other theorists, but all to no avail! Despite that, I lasted for eleven years doing something I loved, and that was good for the students, also, I believe.

Those eleven years were remembered fondly by some of my final year students on the Course in October, 2010. Hearing that I had resigned, some of these students wrote to me, telling me what my presence had meant to them:

I became very emotional when I now realised you were looking into my soul. No one ever in my life bothered to take that much time to listen to anything I said before. That is why you will be such a loss to the course, others will follow in your footsteps but no one will ever put their whole heart and soul into it like you did. I really mean it when I say it was such an honour to have met you and how lucky I was that you were there with us for our first year of the Course.

Another:

I am absolutely gutted by the news of your recent resignation from the Course. It has hit me very hard and I am struggling to accept it. I feel very privileged that I arrived a year before you made your decision to resign ... Nobody has any idea of the complete being you have become; your influence on my life has been enormous ... you have helped to change my life completely. The sense of positivity, respect, freedom, which now filters through my relationships at home and with other people are due to you. I told my wife you were a genius ... I now have feelings of emptiness because I won't see you again at the Counselling Course.

Finally:

I hope you are happy and fulfilled in yourself and content in the knowledge that you did an excellent job at the Counselling Course and were loved by your students. You made the Course your own with your individual style and competence.

You challenged and enthused me and all allowed me develop a new and fresh method of critical thinking using living-theory action research, I will miss you deeply. I had looked forward to developing my research question under your guidance. I wonder where that will go now that you are not here. But I hear the boss has got rid of it!

What was will never be again!

Students Realising They Can Choose, Start Examining The Lives!

I believe that the Module on Personal Growth and Development linked well with the students' living-theory 'thesis' as part of their preparation for becoming counsellors. I offer my understanding of both of these areas in this paper- My explanation of my module of personal growth and development is presented in the form of a few sample exercises below consisting of

my questions and the students' answers to them together with their overall responses to what they were learning. Throughout this text, I intertwine this with my own learning, indicating how I was influenced by others and how both objective and personal learning contributed to both my learning and that of my students.

1. Are You Examining Your Life?

Ben: What do you think of the idea of examining your life?

Mary: Maybe it's okay but it sounds very intrusive to me. My life is my own, is private, belonging to me and to nobody else.

Ben: Yes, I agree with you. But, I do think you might consider keeping an open mind on this question for one very important reason. When you are qualified as a counsellor you will find that your clients need to talk to you about serious personal issues that caused them to ask to meet you in the first place. They are not meeting you because they want to talk about the weather. In any case, how many people feel all that much at ease about talking about their inmost secrets? Very few, I imagine. With clients, however, they will need to examine their lives in order to bring about change in order to begin the process of recovery from addiction. It's unlikely, in my experience, that you'll ever be able to persuade another to do that unless you have actually done it yourself, that is, opening yourself up personally to others.

Darren: Okay, I accept that, but why can't you counsel clients without needing to open up your soul, as it appears we are going to be doing?

Mary: To be honest, Darren, I think you're trying to avoid what Ben is trying to point out as I understand it, unless we open ourselves up to each other, we won't be able to persuade our clients to open themselves to us so that they too can change. This will be part of their recovery path.

Ben: How often do you hear anybody speak about their inmost thoughts and feelings to you'?

Darren: Very seldom, and when it does happen I feel taken aback, not sure what to say. In fact, it feels like having to accept a burden from someone that I could have done without.

Ben: Does it sound like: "I am not my brother's keeper,"

Darren? *Darren:* Yes, I suppose so. What I was thinking really was this: surely people ought to be able to sort themselves out without intervention, or, is it interference!

Ben: The word "interference" doesn't fit when we are talking about counselling. You could say, okay, that it may sound like interference in that we don't talk about the weather, about the horses, about politics, and so on. No, we talk about intimate things, about feeling lost, abandoned, hurt, sad and so on. We won't be able to help anyone unless we intervene in that way, but it's in a controlled way, showing respect for the feelings of our clients.

Darren Donnan, a former student, explains below how he coped with his life at a very tough time for him, as I intuit that an idea of Sigmund Freud's may be influencing Darren though unknown to him, as he explains his life to date to us. Sigmund Freud (in Corey, G., 2001, p. 67i), one of the 'greats' of psychoanalysis, admits that he suffered severe emotional problems himself, and explained how he coped with them by *bringing to light* or *recovering what is buried*, or *seeing something in a new light*. I won't be explaining Freud's exploration of the meaning of his own dreams, nor his childhood sexual feelings for his mother, who was attractive, loving, and protective; nor his ID, Ego and Superego, nor his exploration of the Conscious and the Unconscious, but only with his phrase about "bringing to light" or recovering what is buried, or seeing something in a new light, as it is what, I believe, Darren Donnan did.

Darren Donnan (student, 2009-2010), spoke honestly and passionately about himself to me and to his fellow students on a memorable occasion. Darren later sent me an e-mail describing what he had already spoken about in one of our personal development group sessions in 2009. He felt it contributed to his wanting to become a counsellor, so that what he went through might contribute to others' lives positively, even if never again spoken about. I found myself warmed by his sincerity, authenticity and bravery, as he revealed some very troubling things that happened to him and what helped him deal with them:

My journey to this point in life had left me very raw within myself; fuelled by the politics in Northern Ireland ... Bombs and shootings occurred ... This upheaval ... led us to moving to ... a new life, a new town, one that was to be quickly shattered all over again. Unfortunately my new school introduced me to the headmaster that was to abuse me.

Dr Ben Cunningham from my past experience was not someone that I would have wanted to be in the company of. He would have been an example of someone that I would have resisted taking direction from. Titles were not something that I respected or admired, titles to me were authoritarians, dictators so to speak ... Little did I know then that Ben would become one of the most influential people in my life! ... But school became somewhere that signalled danger to me... Alcohol was soon to become a close friend of mine, numbing out the pain, hiding my low self-esteem and fuelling my anger to an extent where people became afraid to look at me....

My first memories of meeting Ben Cunningham were a contradiction to my old belief system ... I liked him. Straight away Ben made me feel at ease, with his gentle manner in a soft well spoken southern Irish accent. Ben struck me at first glance as being an extremely intelligent man. He oozed wisdom and reminded me of a poet or a composer. He seemed to be surrounded by an aura of calmness. His beard extremely well groomed with a tan complexion, the picture of health. Yes, I liked Ben Cunningham in an instant. I felt safe and secure around him, and this was a new experience for me.

Ben is an extremely compassionate man, with a passion for helping people, this is so very clear to me, and much more evident to me today. He had a natural patience and understanding, whilst also having the ability and skills, in moving a person on, at a pace where one felt safe, but not letting them become stagnant. Ben wanted each person to strive to become the best person each of us could be, encouraging us to delve deeper within ourselves, unravelling our own knots. Ben taught me that I also had a safe pair of hands and that he could assist me unravelling the knots but it was up to me to choose to unravel them.

It was Ben's defining statement in his personal growth and development session about '*Having Choices*' that made me sit up and pay attention. He said: "*In life we all have choices and it is we who create our own lives.*" This statement at the time sparked a fire within me that could have burnt the college to the ground. I remember thinking, "*how dare he!*" The chattering voice began in my head, uttering statements such as: "*Did I ever have a choice when an adult wanted to take advantage of me? I didn't have a choice then, did I ?*" I remember the wave of emotions, anger, rage, self-pity and a fireball of many more, wanting to explode; the volcano was ready to erupt I remember not being able to contain myself and blurting out: "*that's not true*". But what I have learned with the help of Ben was that in this life we all have choices in how we decide to live our lives. Others can most certainly have an impact on our lives but it is up to us to make the final decision. This statement has led me on to a greater journey of self-discovery, helping me to become responsible for my actions and preventing me from laying the blame on others.

I now feel inspired to reach out to people and I believe that to reach out to other human beings in need is the reason we experience this beautiful life on this earth ... Ben Cunningham has helped me more than he will ever know, but as it was he that made me aware in the first place, I had to be willing to become aware of what he was presenting to me.

Why Am I Worthy Of Trust?

Just as my students explain who they are and what's important to them, so, I, too, explain who I am, both professionally and personally. Among other qualifications, I am a qualified counsellor, having received my counselling accreditation in the mid 1970s at Mater Dei Institute of Education, Dublin, a constituent college of Dublin City University. This course was the only one at that time in Ireland, or elsewhere for that matter, which offered a Module of Personal Growth and Development. This Module fascinated me. It wasn't an objectively oriented module, depending on objective-type language, but was free-flowing, and welcoming of emotional sharing of thoughts. It gave me my first taste of interrogating myself personally. Later in the 1980s, as a facilitator for the Irish Health Education Bureau of the Department of Health I used to give courses to teachers on physical and emotional health issues through the medium of a personal growth and development module.

A question arises now: why did my students trust me, as I believe they must have, considering that all of them (some 160 of them over eleven years) opened up personally and emotionally to me and to each other during their personal growth sessions? Before answering for myself, personally, I will partially explain it by turning first to Carl Jung (in McLeod, 2003, p. 88) for an explanation of his work on personality, including mine, seeking at least a partial answer. His ideas were responsible for a system, developed by others, for understanding personality differences, in which people categorise themselves as 'types' made up of sensation / intuition, extraversion / introversion, and thinking / feeling. Keirsey-Bates / Myers- Briggs (1984, pp. 176-178) developed a questionnaire, based on Jung's ideas, in order to assess personality types in individuals. As I answered the questions and situated myself in 'my type' some twenty-five years ago, and occasionally since then, my personality type does not seem to have changed. It helps me, among other things, to explain my understanding of the questions: "Who am I?", "How do I relate to others and they to me?" and "Why?"

Jung's Personality Type Theory is based on 'four preferences', which are as follows: Extraversion-Introversion (E-I); Sensing-Intuition (S-N); Thinking-Feeling (T-F); and Judging-Perceiving.

Having completed the questionnaire, I emerged with the 'portrait' INFP. The 'I' stands for Introvert'; the 'N' for 'Intuition'; F for Feelings; and P for Perceiving. The following is my explanatory account, based on Keirsey & Bates (pp. 173-174) explanation, with some minor changes made by me:

What does my portrait of my personality reveal about me? I present a calm, pleasant face to the world. Although I may sometimes appear reserved, inside I am anything but distant. I have a capacity for caring not always found in other types. I care deeply – indeed passionately – about persons and sometimes, causes. I am an idealist. At times, this characteristic may leave me feeling isolated, especially since my type is found in only one per cent of the general population. I have a profound sense of honour derived from internal values. I am willing to make sacrifices for someone or something I believe in. I seek unity in my life, unity of body and mind, emotions and intellect. I have a deep commitment to the positive and the good that cause me to be alert to the negative and to evil. I prefer the valuing process over the purely logical. I see things as either real or fancied, and may be impatient with the hypothetical.

At work, I am adaptable, welcome new ideas and new information, am well aware of people and their feelings, and relate well to most. I can work well alone, as well as with others. I am patient with complicated situations, but impatient With routine details. I can make errors of fact, but seldom of values. I seem willing and usually am able to apply myself scholastically to gain the necessary training for professional work- I have a natural interest in scholarly activities. Often I hear a calling to help Others; | am willing to make the necessary personal sacrifices involved in responding to that call.

In common with NF (Intuitive-Feeling) types, I wish to be recognised as unique, however grandiose that may sound, and wish to make a unique contribution to whatever I am doing. When I'm working with others, I am interested in developing their potentialities, and that has often been remarked upon by my former students. I use enthusiasm, intent listening with them, and approval of them. I try to make sure my students have sufficient freedom, autonomy and room for initiative.

For further information about my personality and what's important about my relationship with others, let me now move the scene to the Education Department of the University of Bath where I pursued a PhD between 1995 and 1999. A seminal moment for me there was on a November evening in 1995, when I spoke clearly for the first time about who I am and why I have been able to exert a spiritual influence with others, and have continued to do so since, especially with my counselling students in Ireland. Let me describe and explain, at the request of my supervisor, Dr. Jack Whitehead, that I give an input on spirituality to a group of Jack's higher degree students, many of who, like me, were studying for a PhD. I am using it in order to give a sense of my spiritual / loving influence with others, similar, I believe to that I exercised as Director of the Counselling Course, especially in the module on Personal Growth and Development in Ireland between 1999 and 2010. At our weekly meeting at the University of Bath on 27th November, 1995, Jack Whitehead said of me that:

When I'm in contexts with Ben I see others come alive because of his presence. He added that: It's you and your life that you are actually giving to us. It's your sense of being that you are actually sharing with us.

Steve, one of my fellow students said that:

What really comes out when you start talking about other people, like your memories, your experiences, it's all there, it's living. It's just amazing sort of the care and the empathy, call it what you will, that you actually show other people. I mean I've experienced that when talking to you. When you start talking about other people and what they've meant to you, I mean your care re-all comes out. When you talk about disembodied things like economics and stuff like that it isn't really you. '

I know you do live your values. The first time I met you, you listened. Right. And That's incredibly rare. People don't do that. And you do it all the time to people who you've never met. You live out your values it's there. And we're all witness to that.

Jack Whitehead also wondered about my "poetic forms of communication":

I'm asking whether or not there have been moments or episodes, just times, this evening when there was something about the way Ben was communicating which really captivated your imagination in that poetic sense There were moments when Ben's face lit up, there was an increased passion in his voice and I was very conscious at those moments of having my imagination gripped.

My explanation was that:

I suppose a part of me wanted to communicate who I am and now I believe I succeeded to some extent this evening I wanted to explain myself to myself actually.

Jack asked the group:

Could I ask – this is important regarding the validity of an account – how the language is being used? You could also say something about your authentic response, you know, how are you feeling, if it is meditative, anything, so that Ben gets an appropriate feeling himself about how his writing is being received. What does it do to you as you hear or read it? It's important to look at Ben's question where I said, 'How do I accept and reveal myself to you, and that is what people are saying Ben does.'

Pat replied, that:

It's not exactly a new revelation to say that being a good listener is a very good important quality.

Jack's response to Pat was:

Now, if you ask: what does it mean to be a 'good', a 'good' listener?, there's a complete shift of emphasis and meaning That seems to me to be very related to why others would feel that immediate rapport in the sense of Ben being not just a good listener in those terms of listening well, but a good person who is listening well.

What I discovered then about my influence with others, integrated as it was with my spirituality, which is basically an acknowledgement that I am a 'good' man. It seems similar to what Wosket (1990 p. xi) says, when she explains that "I now feel so convinced that the best of my knowing ... is determined by what I know and use of myself"

The capacity to use emotion and to feel it, which was present throughout my Ba"? presentation, is supported by Chittchister's (1998: 50) passionate declaration that if we remove the capacity to feel, we take away life. I am still very moved by her description of it, as she says, that:

When poets talk about the human soul, they do not talk about reason: they talk about feeling. The totally human being they enable us to see, is the one who weeps over evil, revels in goodness, loves outrageously, and carries the Pal" °f the world in healing hands. Without feeling, living becomes one long, living journey to nowhere that tastes of nothing. Take feeling away, and we take away life. To talk about a spiritual life without feeling, to talk about any life at all without feeling, reduces spirituality to the most sterile of initiatives.

Love is an essential feeling ingredient of my spirituality. But of course, communication is it's lifeblood and guarantees its growth. Powell (1974, p. 70) says of communication that it is the "secret of staying in love." The secret of staying in love is to love, to share, and to live my commitment to others. I will be offering evidence of these aspects of my spiritual values as my students experienced it throughout this account, as they fed it back to me in their varied ways, especially, in their recent e-mails to me. I've never been in doubt, that the practice of love is essential, even if occasionally, costly. Dag Hammarskjold (1964, p. 10) writing of "humility, warmth" and "love", says that:

The "great" commitment all too easily obscures the "little" ones. But without the humility and warmth which you have to develop in your relations to the few with whom you are personally involved, you will never be able to do anything for the many. Without them, you will live in a world of abstractions, where your greed for power, and your death-wish lack the one component which is stronger than they – love ... It is better for the health of the soul to make one man good than "to sacrifice oneself for mankind."

Though men, and some women even, may fight shy of using words like love, I don't. I use it as one of my explanations for what I do, otherwise I will, I believe, lack credibility in my own eyes and perhaps, in the eyes of others. I am much struck by the fact that Freire (1972, p. 62), that great defender of the oppressed, uses the word 'love' freely, too. He maintains that:

dialogue cannot exist ... in the absence of a profound love for the world and for men (and women). The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love.

The value of love for me includes faith, hope and trust in my students. I accept that my students, and myself are gifts to be given -- me to them and they to me -- and to others. We are even more so through our self-disclosures, according to Powell and Brady (1985, p. 26). Each of us is, I believe, a unique mystery: the mystery of you and the mystery of me; we have never existed before. We are unique, as unique as our fingerprints.

Buber (1937, p. 11) contributes to my value of spirituality, as well, when he states that 'all real living is meeting'. Bragan (1996, p. 20) adds, that we bring 'out the best in each other'. What enabled me to come to know myself even more deeply was as a result of my contact with so many wonderful students over so many years.

I agree with how Clarkson (1990, p. 159), characterises the transpersonal meaning of spirituality when he characterises it, "paradoxically, by a kind of intimacy and by an 'emptying of the ego' at the same time ... leaving space for something numinous to be created in the 'between' of the relationship." It implies a letting go of skills, of knowledge, of experience, of preconceptions, even of the desire to heal to be present. It is essentially allowing 'passivity' and receptiveness for which preparation can never be adequate.

I follow Rogers' view (1983, p. 2), that I ought to create "a human climate so that more and more significant learning would take place." In order for this to happen, I agree with Whitehead (2006), that I act out of values such as those of freedom, justice, compassion, respect for persons, love and democracy. I am influenced, too, by Polanyi's (1958) idea of understanding the world from my own point of view as an individual claiming originality and exercising judgement responsibly with universal intent. I accept that the local identity of one's 'I' is influenced by the non-local flows of space and energy through the cosmos (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).

My explanations are at least some of the reasons why, I believe, my students placed their trust in me. Their e-mails to me explain what they believed I offered them and how they, consequently, trusted me. This started, of course, when they experienced how I conducted various relationally-influenced topics in group sessions with me on the Counselling Course.

On the Course, there was a time to dream, too, as Mary Kelly (student, 2003-2005) experienced it, a dream beyond the stars when she says in 'The Road To My Dreams' that:

I had a dream and I wanted to live it, and I knew I could not accomplish it by dreaming only. I had to find a path to determine it. When I was a child I had dreams; they came easy. I had no limits, the world was my oyster. As time went by and I got older I started listening to others around me: what I could and could not do; this placed limits on me and my imagination and I lost my dream. So time slipped by with raising family, making money and trying to be responsible and my dream became lost in the past.

Regret is a great sadness and I experienced that for many years and it would not let me go. But this was now my time to take the risk I arrived at the Counselling Course in the summer of 2003. Oh, what a day, to meet you, Ben, and you were so friendly and

welcoming and, then, I was introduced to those who would be my classmates for the next two years.

As time went by I got a feeling within me that this was the food of the soul and I was devouring it. I waited so long for this and I could not wait for the next day to come. There would then be more to experience: what to find out about myself? Later, I found that the bad days turned out to be good food days for me; they were days of great learning. This is where my inspiration grew and a meaning to my life started to take place. One day, Ben, you said: "Now, start interacting and sharing your own stuff." This is where you turned to me, Ben, and asked me to share what I was thinking and feeling! It was like I grew up overnight. For me, life was changing. In trying to achieve my dream it gave me hope and inspiration and great meaning to my life for the first time.

I always wanted to be independent, and that somehow I could make a difference. This has happened and all these things have come true and more boundaries that were put in front of me have faded into the past. My Dream to sit in that Single Chair in front of the group and experience the magic that unfolded in front of me on a daily basis was now a reality. Thank you, Ben, for being my greatest teacher and helping me to achieve My Dream. Love, Mary.

What a beautiful thought of Mary's: 'food for the soul,' which was how she described what we were doing! Wasn't Mary in her poetic way as close to her inner, intuitive self, as Rogers was as he explains it below?

When I am at my best, as a group facilitator or a therapist, I discover another characteristic. I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness in the relationship, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then simply my presence is releasing and helpful.... (In I. L. Kutash and A. Wolf [eds.], 1986b, p. 97)

I could not but be aware that, after eleven years of group work experience, it was my presence with my students that was "releasing and helpful." I share with Viktor Frankl (1963, p. 104), that love is the highest goal to which humans can aspire. I share with him the view that everything can be taken from a human being but one thing: "the last of human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." Frankl came to believe that love is the highest goal to which humans can aspire and that salvation comes through love. Despite his terrible circumstances, he believed we could still preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom and independence of mind. His views continue to inspire me.

"Am I Afraid To Change?"

Ben: How many of you are entirely happy about the way you live now?

Micheal: Well, I don't think most people are happy all the time. I admit that I am like that, too, not happy all the time. And, to be honest, up to now I never thought about being able to change and why I should change.

Brid: Well, we are actually changing all the time, whether we know it or not. Until now I didn't realise that we never asked ourselves questions like this. I never thought that asking such questions could change us, but maybe they do.

Ben: I suppose asking questions is the first step; following through by acting on the answers is the next step.

Liam: I'm not really sure. For me, asking and answering questions about who I am, for example, would be difficult, I think. And doing it in front of this group might be too much. I wouldn't want others to know too much about me. I'm very private, you know. Maybe I don't want to admit to myself who I am.

Ben: Why wouldn't you? *Liam:* Well, I'm not all that proud of myself. I don't believe I have achieved much in life up to now, anyway.

Ben: What would you like to have achieved, or that you would like to achieve now? *Liam:* I'm not sure, but I would like to have the courage to do more with my life than I have done with it so far.

Micheal: This is your time now, Liam. Go for it. Sometimes we get one chance and if we ignore it, it may not come again.

Liam: When I asked yesterday "Why can't you counsel clients without needing to open your soul here?", that's not really what I meant. To be honest, what I now know I meant was that I was afraid of the idea of doing it.

Ben: Thanks, Liam. That's honest and the beginning of your growth within you. What you said is understandable. Is it okay for me to say that perhaps you need to row in self-love. Think of Viktor Frankl - that was one of his values. But we won't force anybody to say or do what they don't want to say or do. We'll just open their mouths and stick a fist in and threaten to pull their tongues out unless they tell us what we want to hear!

Laughs all round.

Ben: At the same time, trying to be honest with yourself and others is quite difficult. There are bound to be fears for all of you at the thought of opening yourself up, even though I'm saying that such honesty will inevitably help you to help your clients.

What I'm advocating to Liam and others, too, is what I'm attempting to do myself. I want to love myself, be myself, and to love others too. When I first came to the house where I presently live in Dublin, do you know what was the first thing I did? Over a few days I visited all the houses nearest to me and introduced myself to their owners. I genuinely felt a need to get to know everybody. Now, they've given me the freedom to keep doing it. So, I'm never lonely. I think this action of mine is symptomatic of what I think Schon (1983, 1987) was saying we ought to do:

When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what it is that we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at a loss, or we produce descriptions that are obviously inappropriate. Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is in our action.

Certainly, there was a knowing, better still - a self-understanding - before I took action, but it had increased greatly as a result of my actions. Similarly with Robert Parker, another former student (2002- 2004) of mine. He was always, as I remember him, trying to achieve a better self-understanding for the sake of others. Below is what he said in his own folksy style:

You once implied, Ben, that we were "living contradictions." Holy God, I wanted to string you up so often but you were such a cute laid back hoor, you seemed to be in touch with yourself at a level which I could only dream and hope for. You came across to me like a bit of a guru, someone who had a connection with the "Master". However I did, and I thank God, I did see you lose the plot one day, and you were like a demon, ya were

stone mad, ha, ha, ha 'Twas great for me to see you were only human and could and would fly off the handle when need be.

Mostly what I liked was your sense of not so much of "being the teacher" but rather being a fellow traveller, and acting as our guide along the way and you were always open to the odd detour which enriched our journey. You were not a teacher, Ben. To me you were so much more; you helped me to learn, and that was what I sought more than anything else. Your clever little tricks, your gentleness, your understanding, your acceptance, your compassion and especially your ability to turn my questions to you into my questions for myself. They made a huge impact on my ability to gain self-understanding. Sometimes I hated when you replied to my questions with a question. Only you, Ben, could have got away with that sort of stuff.

The seeds which you have sown continue to grow, Ben. There is no end to my questioning now and my acceptance of that eases the pressures I once imposed upon myself. Perhaps I have learned to cherish the question, rather than expect or demand the answer today.

Ben, keep safe and keep in touch.

I am delighted to know that I helped Robert's self understanding by my "clever little tricks", gentleness, understanding, acceptance, compassion and especially my ability to turn my questions to him into his questions for himself.

As a Leader, how effective am I?

My task for myself is to achieve self-realization, which is what my students are trying to achieve, as well. I am attempting to write about the influence of my leadership with my counselling students. In order to understand better what it means I look to some new scholarship and what it says about the meaning of leadership. Covey (2004, pp. 20-4 & 98), writing about leadership and management, asks us to take account of all aspects of the human person: mind, body, feelings, and spirit. To be a leader I need to communicate to my students my total belief in 'their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it themselves.' (Ibid.). And that is what, I believe, they represented in their encomiums in their e-mails to me.

I offer a particular form of leadership that, as Dorr (2006, pp. 77 & 78) understands it, means how do I influence, motivate, guide, and direct groups and individuals so that they are enabled to bring about interior change that helps them not to resist change? It might appear mundane to say so, but a leader changes by being successful. Was I successful? I believe I was! Before I answer the 'why', let me briefly consider the usual meaning of 'success'. For me, it means accomplishing an aim, to have a favourable outcome to something I had decided to do. These were two things that coincided: I wished to enable my students to believe in themselves, knowing that I also believed in them. My growing acceptance of, and belief in myself, learned perhaps through the cauldron of youthful difficulties and some travail throughout my life, some, no doubt, self-inflicted, enabled me to do so. Being successful does not mean that no adversity either precedes or follows. But, and this is important, there was always something within me that refused to lie down, to give up, and that something was myself! I believe that I became successful at understanding my life, successful in enabling my students to believe in themselves, and accepting themselves. Importantly, I believe I contributed sincerity, integrity inspiration and personal success, all of which I had acquired through tribulation of one kind or another throughout my life. Hard graft was also part of my life. I have been blessed to have been able to put all gifts, values or whatever I acquired, both personally and professionally, at

the disposal of others. But with this type of success I am describing there was also often anxiety or unease in my life that, I believe, I ought not to discount because it, too, had a positive influence on the course of my life.

Unease or anxiety is a strange quality, one might think, for one exercising leadership Powell (1967, p. 29) explains that anxiety means having an irrational fear of the unknown, and perhaps he's right. If so, it means I am often unsure about what is bothering me, and am aware of an uneasiness affecting my nervous system. Such uneasiness may be due to what Bowlby (1969) calls prenatal experiences. He believes that an adult's capacity for making good relationships with other adults depends upon the individual's experience of attachment figures as a child. Though my mother is now long dead, her children, myself included, had little doubt that she was not maternally oriented, which was not her fault, of course. That was just the way she was! She followed societal patterns and had children, but did she really want them? None of us knows, but I, personally, believe that maybe she didn't. I'm not imputing fault here. How could I? What she did was who she was. When I was seven years old, I remember vividly being with my mother and a friend of hers who had just had baby. When this woman passed her baby to my mother. She immediately passed the baby to me. I wondered what the other mother thought? I was intrigued but took note of my mother's reluctance. My youngest sister was often deposited on me in the early hours of the morning when she began screaming. I would rock her until she quietened and return her to bed. Why wasn't my mother able to do that? There is no answer except hers, and I never found out what that was.

Another childhood memory is of being locked in our back garden immediately after school every day, hail, rain, or shine, year in, year out, as was a sister a year younger than me, with nothing to do until we were thirteen or fourteen years of age. It seemed like an unusual and unmerited punishment!' But I realise now that it wasn't about punishment but about my mother's need to deal with depression. For long periods she would take to the bed in the afternoons to be with what? Silence? Did these happenstances contribute anything useful to my personality? They did, I believe. If you spend hours locked outdoors with nothing to do in all kinds of weather, helping someone in later life who is in trouble is not a problem, no matter how long it takes. Having to endure something intolerable with patience, which is what I consistently did, ensured I possessed immense patience with those who suffer. I remember, also, being often bidden to silence for hours on end in our dining room because my mother was not 'well'. Not allowed speak, read, nor listen to radio, nothing to do but be silent. I learned a lot about silence then! No wonder I am sometimes reticent about speaking in public! Probably not surprising then that I have been able, throughout my life, I believe, to listen to others who need or wish to ventilate their worries, fears, disappointments and dread, often for hours at a time. I think I can understand at a deep level what others tell me and am able, I believe, to do so with compassion. I think my childhood experiences of silence may also account for the fact that, until I know people well, I tend to remain quite silent for a period of time. So, though I never thought then that silences could be useful, be a gift, they can be, especially, of course, in one-on-one counselling. I can wait for people to communicate what they wish, no matter how long it takes. Somehow or other I 'know not how' - silences have helped me develop myself interiorly, develop patience and love towards others. So, what might be considered, in one's youth, to be cruel and unusual punishment, a 'negative, may, instead be among the most important gifts bequeathed to me: a gift of life to me in order to give life!

Let me return now, however, to another exercise with my students, about a topic that hasn't been unknown to me throughout my life.

Dealing With Your Fears

Ben: What do you most fear and why?

Mary: To be honest, I fear taking an honest look at myself. Maybe it is because I don't want to find out that I'm not okay!

Ben: What would being okay mean to you?

Nick: It would mean me taking an honest look at myself and hoping not to discover awful things about myself.

Ben: Why is your first instinct to think that you might discover something awful about Yourself? Did somebody in your life tell you that? And, if so, how are you now coping with it?

Nick: That's it: Teachers told me; my parents told me at times; employers did it, too.

Ben: Do you believe people when they tell you these negatives?

Nick: I don't want to, but sometimes you get to thinking that they wouldn't say it unless there was some truth in it, would they?

Mary: I don't know whether I feel like Nick does, but I'm not ready yet to look in depth at myself, nor to reveal it fully yet.

Ben: What would help you to look in depth at yourself now? What kind of conditions would you need?

Mary: If I could be sure that nobody would think less of me after I had told the truth about myself, that would help.

Ben: Could you still do it if not everybody endorsed you? *Mary:* Why are you putting it that way? *Ben:* Because at some stage we'll all have to decide whether to trust each other or not. And, even if we don't, it would say a lot for your self-belief if you could do it regardless of what others think. If you don't or can't, you'll miss out on huge learning, I believe. So, are you ready yet to make that commitment? Only the brave will do it. Are you brave enough and, if not, why not? And, if not, how can we help you? Maybe our next exercise will be the time when you'll get the courage to do it, and get the help of others, too.

It would be worth it, I believe, for Mary to listen to something William James, the psychologist, said years ago:

Man alone, of all creatures of the earth, can change his own pattern. Man alone is the architect of his destiny. The greatest discovery in our generation is that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives. (1890)

Powell (1976), too, says that:

The more flexible and open people are the more insights they will acquire. Their emotional patterns and ability to participate in a fully human life will improve and grow with each new insight.

As my students were wondering how they might open themselves up to others and the scrutiny of others, I am going to continue doing it myself. Rogers (1970. P- 117) inspires me again, as so often, with these words:

When I present myself as I am, when I can come forth non-defensively, without armour, just me - when I can accept the fact that I have many deficiencies and faults, make many mistakes, and often ignorant when I should be open-minded, often having feelings not justified by the circumstances - then I can be much more real So I enjoy life very much more when I am not defensive, not hiding behind a facade, but just trying to be and express the real me.

One of the means that helped me to understand myself more thoroughly than heretofore, was the Enneagram of Personality (Riso, 1990, pp. 53-55; 128, 132, 219- 220), which I underwent some thirty years ago in group and a few times since then on my own, self-administered. The results were always the same. The Enneagram is a model of human personality which is principally understood and taught as a typology of nine interconnected personality types. Though its origins are disputed with some inferring that Moslem mystics, or Sufis originated it and developed it is a theory; others maintain that personality psychology had something to do with it in that it studied personality from various angles. Contemporary Enneagram understandings are principally derived from the teachings of Oscar Ichazo and Claudio Naranjo. The main thing is that there is now agreement that, as a typology, the Enneagram defines nine personality types (sometimes referred to as "enneagram types"), which are represented by the points of a geometric figure called an enneagram, which also indicates some of the connections between the types.

Why is the Enneagram used? It is used, firstly, for self-understanding, and secondly, for understanding others. I discovered that my personality, Type Four, is described as the "Artist or Creative-Individualistic-introverted-Depressive Person." I am described as being introspective, self-aware, and searching for "self." I am in touch with feelings and inner impulses. I am sensitive and intuitive both to myself and others: compassionate, tactful, discreet, and respectful. I am self-expressive, personal, and individualistic. I am also self-revealing, emotionally honest, authentic, and true to self. I can be serious and funny, easily moved, and yet emotionally strong. At my best, I can be profoundly creative, expressing the personal and the universal extremely well. On the personal level, I am able to transform all my experiences into something valuable.

However, If my dreams, and expectations, fail, I can become tormented by such failures and become self-accusatory. Feeling worthless and hopeless, I can despair and become self-destructive, possibly abusing alcohol or drugs, which I have done in the past in order to escape my crushingly negative self-hatred now, thankfully, thirty years in the past. Because I never arrived at the ultimate extremity of self-despair I did not become emotionally broken or suicidal. But such negativity as I possess had its genesis in my childhood when I often felt abandoned by at least one of my parents, misunderstood by her in some way. To recover or create a life of my own, was forced to create my own identity by looking inward to my feelings and imagination, thereby achieving emotional balance over many years. Why I feel I have been useful to my former students, some of whom had a disoriented early life quite like mine, is that I am perhaps a role model for them in terms of recovery and challenge. What I learned is that negative experiences can be turned into something positive, and that I can find peace, knowing that I am able to transform most things into something worthwhile and valuable. I need to say, too, that some people I met in the course of my life greatly influenced not only my personal growth and development, but me as a person, particularly because they believed in me instinctively as a person. Pre-eminent among these is Dr. Jack Whitehead. He was the first person ever in my life who not only believed in me but convinced me of my worth. While his help in writing my thesis was important, it was his belief in me that was, and has been, crucial in my life ever since. I'm not sure that my students would ever have had their one life-given experiences with me unless I had first met Jack Whitehead.

But back to the Enneagram: I have broken somewhat with my habitual pattern of introversion though maybe not completely yet, but I am working towards my own self-actualisation. According to my enneagram, I am prone to imagining life instead of living it, but I have changed. I recognise that my self is not the same as my feelings and my negative feelings do not preclude the presence of good in myself. I am learning to put myself in the way of good. I believe that my work of preparing students to become counsellors for eleven years, and my

subsequent work for those suffering from alcohol and drug abuse for a further three years, have contributed to giving me a better perspective on myself. I haven't indulged in self-pity or complaints about myself for many years, nor do I now indulge in hatred of those who I feel affected my life adversely. I accept that I am responsible for my life, not they. I do not believe I have been damaged by my youth because I have actively made efforts to become whole as a person over the course of my life. Concerning my lifelong hero, Thomas Merton, I am chuffed to know that a recent study shows that his Enneagram Profile coincides with mine. He too is a Type 4 in the Enneagram. Frequently described as "one of the major spiritual leaders of our time" (Zuercher, 8., 1996), in his letters, journals, and writings on spirituality he best reveals his attitude towards himself. Like me, he remembered his mother as the initial source of confusion about his goodness. Though his most authoritative biographer, Mott (1984), says that though Merton's mother filled him with a sense of his own importance, on the other, she filled him also with a sense of how inadequate he was. Out of his awareness, however Merton tried to create a self in order to win acceptance, an acceptance that brought him world-wide fame, especially for his form of spirituality in the nineteen-sixties. And, he is still read worldwide today.

I intersperse below another exercise which I used with my students whenever there were times when they became silent and were either unable or unwilling to explain their silence. One interesting revelation, or outcome of it, was what Mary said: "*We were with each other in a different arrangement. I found I needed to trust others more than I had done up to this.*" So, trust might now begin to build or rebuild, and no doubt, I'll be finding out also what caused the mistrust!

Exercise: What Have Your Experiences Been Like?

I provide an opportunity for students to pause and reflect on their own experiences of their lives that were very important to them and why that was so. This time, I don't offer them any prepared exercise. Apart from the topic question, they are free to discuss it whatever way they wish with others. They break into small groups after their period of reflection and discuss their findings. I ask them to focus in their groups on how they can increase their awareness in areas in which they do not fully accept themselves.

Thesis Responses to me were, as follows:

Ben: How did you experience this exercise and what did you learn about yourself?

Mary: I found I was more open than I thought I was. I also felt others understood me better than I thought they did when I first arrived on the Course. I was pleased with that. This exercise was different, too, in that we weren't in a group facing you and being asked questions and being required to answer them. We were with each other in a different arrangement. I found I needed to trust others more than I had done up to this.

Ben: Anybody else? How did you find this exercise?

Nick: Like Mary, I was pleased that others seemed to know me better than I expected. They told me positive things about myself which greatly pleased me. I got to thinking that this is something we ought to do with our clients too: to sometimes compliment them when they have managed to do something that at first appeared difficult for them.

Ben: That's very interesting, Nick. Many of the clients you'll be dealing with while you're on this Course will be totally unused to being thought well of. Without overdoing it, offering a compliment when it's deserved, will lift your client's spirits, will encourage them, hopefully, to believe in their own goodness.

Brid: I'm beginning to feel more relaxed and I feel I am now able to trust others in this group. I didn't say much for a while and I'm sure everybody noticed it. I'm glad I wasn't pressurised to do so either until I was ready, thanks to you, Ben.

Psychoanalysts Contribute To My Learning And Hence To My Influence With My Students

Some psychoanalysts contributed to my influence, among them Alfred Adler. In early twenties I suffered from a deep inferiority complex, together with depression I happened to in the library of the house in which I was then living, Adler's book "*What Life Should Mean To You*" (1980, pp. 55-56). I devoured it, and immediately felt a bounce in my step, a light in my eyes, and warmth in my heart, and, wonder of wonders, joy, for the first time in a long time. All Adler said was, 'that: inferiority feelings are in some degree common to all of us, since we all find ourselves in positions which we wish to improve' (Ibid.) The point is that "inferiority feelings are not in themselves abnormal." They are, in fact, the cause of all improvements (p. 56). What I learned from Adler was that: "inferiority feelings are not in themselves abnormal" and that they "are the cause of all improvements in the position of mankind." I have carried this belief in my soul and actions ever since. Surely this experience, as with others I have had in my lifetime, has helped me influence others for good?

Another theorist who fascinated and helped my understanding, especially of compassion, was R.D. Laing, a psychiatrist and psychotherapist, though now discredited unfortunately, due to his drinking and drugging and somewhat disreputable behaviour. I feel differently about him, though. I'm sure Laing fully understood Leo Tolstoy's view that: "All happy families resemble one another. Each unhappy family is unhappy in its own unhappy way" (Anna Karenina). Laing's mother was known in her street "as an oddity," as Clay (1996, p. 1), puts it. I found the reference to the 'strangeness' of his mother of great interest, and that both his father and mother "used him to offload their own private anxieties" on to him (Ibid., p. 12). Was I a cousin of his, I wondered? However, - and this was of great interest to me - on one occasion it is reputed that as a trainee psychiatrist, Laing secured permission in a high security wing of a psychiatric hospital to visit a "mad" woman held in a straightjacket in a padded cell. The warder knowing he shouldn't grant such a permissions to trainees, did so this time for Laing because of Laing's constant pleading, or maybe because he intuited that Laing could do something deemed impossible by others. Laing entered the "mad" woman's cell and stayed there for seven hours sitting beside her. She didn't open her mouth during that time and neither did he, until the seven hours were almost up. "Why did you come here?," she asked. "To see you," he replied. He immediately sought permission, which was granted, for her to be unshackled and to be given proper clothes. He also asked to be allowed bring her to the hospital restaurant for her meals from that day forward. She achieved sanity, though it didn't last. Anybody who can do that, even if only for a time, is surely at heart a good human being! Laing's son, Adrian, though hating what RD did to his family: drink, drugs, multiple marriages, nevertheless finishes his book about his father with a sentence that sounds to me like forgiveness, "despite all we went through: we're proud of you, Dad" (Laing, A., 2006: xxi). Well, thanks to my mother, Adler, R.D. Laing and many others, both negative and positive, I grew and developed and became who I am now, despite adversities. In all of the psychoanalytic figures I have mentioned there was always a reference to doing good for others. That has been a motif in my life for as long as I can remember.

Let me return to my students now and the question of trust. Here is how Rogers (1970, p. 14), helpfully, describes it "One of the most common developments (in group) is that a sense of trust slowly begins to build, and also a sense of warmth and liking for other members of the group. Yes, that's true. I remember each year that within two weeks or so, what Rogers said

would happen for me and my groups, too. That is, that “a sense of trust” would grow, albeit slowly. And also, “a sense of warmth and liking for other members of the group.” Listening to what my erstwhile students think and talk about what I offered them, it indicates how useful my group work was to them as was I, myself, as a person, as they were to me as well. When they grew as persons, so did I.

Another Mary (a past student between 2002-2004), indicated that I inspired and influenced her, just as Adler, Laing, Merton and Rogers, Whitehead and so many others, influenced me:

To start with, I observed from day one that you knew your own objectives, Ben. You put in the time and effort needed to build trust and rapport with us. If a student was not performing well you showed a particular interest in him or her. Your energy and enthusiasm were contagious. You grounded us by persuading us that we could change and become anybody we wanted to become. You inspired us to be better. Although you didn't explain the established norms, processes and practice of being in a therapeutic group; we learned what it was like by how you did it in practice. You then gave us handouts on various issues at the end of each session, but not before we had found a way to work on these issues in practice ourselves, with your help. Of great importance to me - and others, too - was that you were likeable and so, it made it easier for us to work with you. I and others felt you understood us. These attitudes of yours made it easier to work with, and bring out the best in me and in others.

For me, Mary echoed, indirectly what Kissinger (Dallek, 2007, p. 42) (incidentally, not a pin-up of mine!) said on one occasion: ‘No technical solutions to the dilemmas of life are at hand. That is the fate of existence. But it also poses a challenge, an evocation of the sense of responsibility to give one's own meaning to one's life.’ Mary gave meaning to her own life, as I did, but I helped her to see she could do it. In the same passage in the book mentioned, Kissinger also said that: “people did better to rely on themselves than on some unknowable superior authority.” I may not agree with him, politically or in any other way, but I'm always grateful for gems of wisdom from whatever source they come. This was part of what I attempted when helping my students, including Mary, to: “accept responsibility for your own learning and to not to over-rely on anybody, myself included! Rely on yourself to the greatest extent possible!”

Students And I Became Involved In The Growth Of Our ‘Selves’, For The Sake Of Others!

According to Wosket (1999, p. 8): “recent developments in the field of counselling (including modules of personal growth and development) have seen something of a burgeoning of interest in the therapist's / counsellor's use of self.” Wosket asks, though: “what, precisely is meant by the term ‘the therapeutic use of self?’” There are various answers to the question. Wosket says that, “a number of writers have emphasised that the self is primarily constructed through interaction with others.” I agree. Andrews (1991), agreeing with Wosket, says that his initial self-concept does not necessarily remain fixed, but is constantly being adapted and refined in response to environmental factors:

[T]here is an active, in-motion quality about the sense of self. It is not only that a person ‘has’ a self-concept, an image of personal qualities and characteristics; in addition, he or she is continually testing, confirming, extending, and reconceiving that image in each new situation. The sense of self is as much verb as noun. And it is this fluidity of self-conceiving - the fact that the self concept is sustained by an ongoing definitional process - that makes psychotherapy possible and fruitful. The central function of the therapist is to help the client channel that process. (Andrews 1991, p. 6)

Micheal (Irish language spelling) Kelly, a counselling student of mine ((2008-2010), certainly tested, confirmed, extended, and reconceived his 'Self' in each new situation he met, both as a student and as a counsellor. He penned a verse of a poem at the beginning of his e-mail to me below (August, 2014), which describes me, my relationship with others, and the dynamics I established at the beginning of the Counselling Course, when he was introduced to the Personal Growth Module:

"Come to the edge, He said.
They said: We are afraid.
Come to the edge, He said.
They came. He pushed them,
And they flew. . ."

Ben, you were the conductor of the music of our hearts, minds and souls. Like any good conductor you knew when to hear the trumpets thunderously roar or the fiddles whisper, "enough for one day". It was not your songs you wanted to hear, it was our instruments. The elegance of how you held this class of eighteen or so authentic individuals is of genius. It looked effortless to you. When it came to talk therapy in groups in the room we had seasoned musicians, improving players and in my case, a two chord Jimmy.

Did I struggle in your class at the start? Did I what! My idea of counselling wasn't THIS. Why is X talking about being abused by his/her parent/teacher, and so on? Why is Y telling us her kids want nothing to do with her? Isn't the counsellor meant to be the 'normal' one? I was frozen in the chair. Overwhelmed with the pain, grief and hurt that some of our group were talking about as openly as the weather. What the hell have I got to talk about here? My issues are locked up nice and tight inside me and you can f*** off if I'm sharing them with you, or X, or Y! I struggled at the start of the year terribly. First of all, I felt my issues were 'not as bad' as some of the other stories I was hearing in class. Who am I to bring my bits to the floor when these people are talking about 'real pain'. I felt I'd look like an idiot if I was to talk about things that gave me sleepless nights.

I submitted a personal development piece to you over the summer, Ben Your reply was: "I believe you have missed a very valuable learning experience this year." I was gob-smacked! The head that had come out of its shell over the year was given a slap. I was angry with you. But I didn't dwell in anger for long. Could this man who was so influential in my growth in Year One be right? It took me all summer to get back to reading my reflection and slowly I came to realise that I could have pushed myself a little more. So I put the head down when it came to it and poured my heart and soul into it. Glad to say I got an A, a fine validation from you. Yet, the most important validation I had got was from myself. So these days when I am working with a group or in one-to-ones, counselling, I too hold this idea of being the conductor without a script or a plan. I like to get out of my head and into my heart: to listen to where my clients are. To know when a client has more in them. To give them this space to make their music...Thank you for everything, Ben.

I Make Use Of A 'Road Metaphor' In Order To Explain The Nature Of Our Educational Journey

Just as life is uncertain, so is counselling, until students become acclimatised to it. The "Road Metaphor", which follows below, is borrowed from the Irish Times (19th January, 1999). It was, for me, somewhat reminiscent of Kerouac's 'On the Road' (1955). One of Kerouac's

biographers, Barry Miles (2002, p. xvi) says of the quality of Kerouac's prose, that it consisted "of physical beauty and grandeur, vibrant optimism and energy." Could our students, too, have such beauty of thought, grandeur of utterance, vibrant optimism and energy? Yes, of course they could! I wanted our students to experience these things: to want to travel on their own imaginative journey on the Counselling Course, one which would have repercussions for their lives and the career they would now be taking up. Below is the 'Road Metaphor', even if not quite Kerouac, is imaginative, too: -

I always find it daunting to negotiate my way through a large town with which I am not familiar. But as I approach the city I find a clear sign directing me to the road I seek, and a stem "get in lane" message a few metres later. I promptly obey. Around the corner there are further directions and instructions to get in lane. By the time I approach the outskirts of the city I am in complete obedience mode and complimenting the Corporation on its clear (if somewhat authoritarian) sign posting.

As I cross the county border the clarity of the city fades. The roads are poorly lit and there are no signs that mentioned the county town where I am heading. It is scary and confusing not knowing where I am going. I have an idea that I am on the right road, but aren't too sure. I begin to yearn for the clarity of the city, when suddenly a sign appears and directs me to the town that is my goal. I would soon arrive safely at my destination, and I have time to relax and think as I drive the last few miles.

There was once a time when life was a bit like travelling uncertain roads.

Great writers often spoke of how the quest for what is good involves dark periods of unknowing and doubt. But almost every part of human life was guided by trust, providence and adventure - the uncertain values that gave us the strength to keep going. These were the hopes that drove us forward.

Yet in latter years we seem to have sacrificed these skills of yesteryear for the comfortable clarity of the well signpost city. The comfort of clear directive has become ingrained in our psyche and has perhaps destroyed too much of our human taste for adventure and discovery. Experts, studies and other scientific authorities have taken hold of the joyful wanderer and forced him to walk along a predefined path.

The growing tendency to rely on experts to interpret and direct our life experiences is tragic. While these services are designed to help us see our situation, we often treat them as final diagnoses and use them as an excuse to stop.

Once I can be labelled as depressive, bereaved, caring, intelligent, guilty or wandering, I can leave it at that. I am successfully categorised. I can simply get in lane and keep going on a path designed by somebody else, relinquishing responsibility and freedom in one fell swoop. It is very often convenient to forget that we are more than the labels we apply to ourselves.

But for all our analysis we are only trying to do what European communism failed to achieve in the past. The human spirit isn't something that thrives on linear paths. It yearns for the unlit roads and the sense of adventure that is the substance of our dreams, our hopes, our fantasies and our prayers. Our aspirations are muted by this god of clarity that wants to shepherd us into an assembly-line society that even Thomas More didn't envisage in Utopia. I was created with an intellect and a free will, with the ability to pace an unknown route in confidence and trust.

The soul wanders unfettered into the desert. Let's not make the paths through it too straight!

In response to my questions about what our 'journey' of Personal Growth and Development meant to them I got some responses, such as the following:

"Scary"; "Makes me feel afraid of what's coming in the Course"; "I wonder will I be able for it?" "Are we going to be going around in circles like sheep, not knowing where we are going?" "It sounds as if you would need to be a practised adventurer to go on a trip like this, not knowing where you were going." "I'm different; I'm excited. I love journeys. I believe your imagination needs to be stimulated for you to become a good enough counsellor."

My Responses to the students:

"With a pioneering spirit, you will manage this year's journey. As well as knowledge you will, in my view, need what I said: a pioneering spirit, and an imaginative one too, in order to bring you to places most people wouldn't, or just don't, go. My Personal Growth and Development sessions are a form of improvisatory self-realisation. By improvisatory I mean how the Road Metaphor describes it and also how Kundera (1984) puts it, when he says that:

We live everything as it comes, without warning, like an actor going on cold. And what can life be worth if the first rehearsal for life is life itself?

As our journey of self-discovery is improvisatory I can't pretend that it will be 'safe' or certain. Neither can I specify beforehand what the topics will be. Rogers (1970) describes it well when he says that:

Little by little, a sense of genuine communication builds up, and the person who has been thoroughly walled off from others comes out with some small segment of his actual feelings. To his astonishment, he finds that he is more accepted the more real that he becomes. Negative feelings are often especially feared, since it seems certain to each individual that his angry or jealous feelings cannot possibly be accepted by another. Thus one of the most common developments is that a sense of trust slowly begins to build, and also a sense of warmth and liking for other members of the group.

Dympna O' Connor (2004-2006), another past student, who threw herself, like others, into the journey I offered, one without maps. She e-mailed me about it and the methods I used to ensure that each student learned something of essential importance to them, in this case, being able to attribute some of the good you do to yourself. Below is what she said:

What helped me most and influenced me greatly was the gift you had of asking the relevant questions that would help me move on from where I was at and reach down to discover the deeper meaning of my written statements and reflections. There was always the "more than" required. The precision of your enquiry always helped me to connect with my own intuition and appreciate my own gifts and the reality of who I am, e.g. "What do you mean by saying: 'The silence was powerful?' or, 'I was happy with the healing that took place.' 'What does that mean?' you asked.

"What's wrong with taking credit for the client's movement forward?" You again Ben. '

The learning in all this for me is how becoming more aware of the meaning of my statements and the implications they have for me as a person has been so beneficial for my own personal growth and has influenced me in my counselling practice.

Thank you, Ben.

"I Kept Coming Back Because You Accepted Me!"

I have been greatly moved on many occasions, over eleven years, by the honesty and integrity of so many students, and to know that many of them had gained relief from burdens that might

have been too heavy to carry but once released, their hold had greatly lessened, even if they hadn't yet disappeared. Inherent in all these learnings, too, was that the students were beginning to know how to be with their clients and that it had little to do with 'objective' knowledge of various counselling theories, as useful as some of these may be. What was basically needed was compassion, love, listening and making sure to suspend judgements as difficult as that might occasionally be.

In my role as leader of group therapy I sometimes wondered was my capacity to listen to my students' concerns sufficient, and was empathy enough? If we remain capable only of empathic resonance our capacity for helping may be limited, according to Casement (1985, P. 95), when he says that:

Empathic identification is not enough, as it can limit a therapist to seeing what is familiar, or is similar to his own experience. Therapists therefore have to develop an openness to, and respect for, feelings and experiences that are quite unlike their own.

Somehow, I found I was able to hold together my empathy and compassion towards others, an openness to, and respect for, feelings and experiences different from my own. I wonder what do the series of e-mails back and forth between Declan Carroll, a student signify, during my final year as Director of the counselling Course (2009- 2010)? Am I Unpredictable?, Unaware? Unfeeling? Just Testing? Or what? Or is it about trying to tell Declan that I know there is a step further he can go if he wishes!

The first e-mail from Declan to me is on August 19th, 2014, commenting on a session I had conducted about freedom:

You called us to your office individually. Your question to me was, what was my idea of freedom? My answer, after a period of frantic searching, with you sitting two feet away, was about climbing to the top of a mountain and letting out a great roar. You didn't elaborate on it and you just said: "Thank you good bye." I remember feeling very immature and insecure when I left the office, again prompting me to have a look at myself. It was those kind of hits that benefited me towards becoming a better human being.

I now regret what appeared to be my bluntness, especially if it hurt Declan, as I'm sure it did. If so, I wasn't as empathetic, was I, as I should have been? However, I sometimes did something like that with students on the grounds that they needed to be prepared for any kind of unusual reaction from their clients and to be able to deal with it. I believe my reply below would reassure him, as I did pick up on what I sincerely admired about him, and still do.

Me to Declan by e-mail on August 19th, an hour later: Many thanks, Declan. I always saw you as a highly intelligent individual with a very strong personality, and great ability. You were very reflective. I'm quite surprised to hear another side to myself that, for some reason, I hadn't realised. Thank goodness, you're teaching me something new as well. What I'm amazed at is this: why did you put up with me? Why did you keep coming back for more of what appeared to be so blunt and, therefore, difficult? You must be one great man! That's what I have to say. I'm delighted, though, that life seems to have turned out very well for you. Whatever you went through in the past seems to have stood to you, even the counselling course and me! Whatever it did, it prepared you to be a guide to others. I'm really delighted for you. Warm regards, Ben
Return e-mail from Declan to me: Thanks Ben.

The reason I kept coming back was to do with the belief and trust I had in you. Also, I had never met anybody like you; you seemed to have a magnificent understanding of human dynamics. I also had no one to compare you with and for that reason I think you really influenced me more. I will never forget these experiences I had with you. I am open to, and

hoping there will be more. The second year in the Counselling Course was not of huge benefit to me and I felt I was just going through the motions. There was a deep void after you left (I resigned in 2010). So yes, I have an awful lot to learn but I am still willing and that is a good thing for me. Do keep me updated on what's happening. Bye for now, Declan.

You Were Not A Teacher, You Were A Fellow Traveller!

Robert Parker, another student of mine in 2002-2004, enunciates what I offered him on the Course:

You once implied that we were in fact "living contradiction!" Ben, I wanted to string you up so often but you were such a laid back guy; you seemed to be in touch with yourself at a level which I could only dream and hope for. You came across to me like a bit of a guru, someone who had a connection with the "Master". However I did see you lose the plot one day, and you were like a demon, you were stone mad, ha, ha 'Twas great for me to see you were only human and could and would let fly off the handle when need be.

But, mostly what was important was your sense, not so much of "being the teacher," but rather being a fellow traveller, and acting as our guide along the way. You were always open to the odd detour which enriched our journey. You were not a teacher, Ben. To me you were so much more. You helped me to learn, and that was what I sought more than anything else. Your clever little tricks, your gentleness, your understanding, your acceptance, your compassion and especially your ability to turn my questions to you into my questions about self for me, really made a huge impact on my ability to gain understanding of myself. Sometimes I hated when you replied to my questions with a question. Only you, Ben, could have got away with that sort of stuff. You showed us love, Ben. You showed me love, you modelled love, you shared your love, Ben. You inspired me, you loving man. God bless you for that.

Concerning educational influence (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, p. 57), I encourage my counselling students to become independent of me, to think for themselves, to make their own life choices. They have a right to come up with their own thoughts, feelings, choices, and to discuss them in group. I take responsibility for myself and for my own choices, not for theirs. But I do encourage them to take responsibility for their choices and to question themselves thoroughly, so that they may come to realise who they are to be as fully as possible (Ibid. p. 58).

The group and myself talk about self-love and remind ourselves about how Mearns and Thorne (1999: 24) characterise it when they say that:

Essentially it requires a willingness to give oneself time, attention and care, not out of self-indulgence but from a sense of responsibility to clients in the service of the work of counselling.

Another former student, Olive O'Riordan (2002-2004), writing to me on 27th August last, said that I am the kind of leader who communicates to students my total belief in 'their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it themselves.' She said that:

You accepted me as I am and this in turn allowed me to accept myself, as a 'good enough' person. I had never been able to do that before meeting you despite years of personal counselling. You were doing more role modelling than teaching. I remember you laughing one day and being so taken aback by this that I went on to share something that I had been too embarrassed to do, and it started a very honest session of sharing around the room.

It was interesting that it was my carefree laughter that caused Olive to feel free. It changed something significant for her. Perhaps laughter should be mandated always and everywhere even if the potential hearers are asleep!

Healing, Not Technique, Is What Is Important!

Now that counselling and psychotherapy have reached the proportions of an industry (Bond and Shea 1997; Thorne, 1995), moves to regulate it are in full swing. The professionalisation of counselling is proceeding apace with the advent of registration, and accreditation procedures both in Ireland and world-wide. Wosket (1999) fears that a danger inherent in the increased clamour for 'professionalisation' of counselling is that the counsellor who takes an individualistic and unorthodox ('a living theory' stance, for example?) approach will have their voices ignored or, worse still, find themselves scapegoated and driven underground.

Hutterer (1993. pp 280-1) writing about the pressures to conform that are apparent within the "trend towards instrumentalism and technology" becoming evident in the world of counselling in recent years, says that he:

sees this trend being fuelled by 'economic demands and competition between distinct counselling I therapeutic schools' and considers that it is the pressure to be successful which, in turn, has promoted 'closed and narrow views of effectiveness'. The trend has led to a growth in technical eclecticism and the popularisation of time-limited interventionist approaches, particularly cognitive-behavioural ones. The counsellors /therapists who are most likely to lose out if this trend continues are those who eschew the power of technique in favour of viewing the therapist as the primary instrument of healing.

While unaware of 'living theory action research', Wosket says that she senses that healthy unorthodoxy has been driven underground in no small measure by the recent backlash of media criticism, much of it vituperative. Wary of this shadow, counsellors and psychotherapists are becoming squeamish about admitting publicly to aspects of their work that may be misconstrued, from fear that they may summon up such demons in the public mind as abuse of power, exploitation and charlatanism. Wosket says she fears that we may be in real danger of succumbing to our own version of what might be termed 'therapeutic correctness'.

According to Virginia Hilton (1997a) there is now a growing trend towards counsellors trying to minimise possible exposure to litigation and false accusations of unethical practice. She suggests that an 'unfortunate consequence' of this professional contraction 'is that for many therapists it means a loss of spontaneity, of creativity, and a resulting loss of joy and satisfaction in their work' (p. 5). Well, my experiment in 'unorthodox' practice, that is, living-theory action research died in my work place before it could get either delighted or frightened of possible litigation or false accusations of unethical practice!

But let me return to my Course Handbook for Counselling as it explains the purpose of the Counselling Course, as follows:

To provide systematic (italics are Ben's!) training in counselling theory and practice. Its aims were "to train counsellors suited for the special work of Rehabilitation Centres (Alcohol & Drug)." The course provided modules in the following areas: Personal Development, Addiction Studies, Family Therapy, Counselling Theory and Practical Skills Development and Supervised Practice Experience."

I feel distinctly uneasy at the words "systematic" and "training" in the Handbook although I know these selfsame phrases are common in the explanatory brochures of counselling courses world-wide. The word, "system," conjures up for me the notion of objective, propositional

knowledge which we are meant to “teach” our students, and which, they in turn, are expected to regurgitate in their essays as part preparation for becoming counsellors. The word ‘training’ and its meaning may be appropriate for those aspiring to become mechanics, carpenters, and other practical manual careers, as McLeod said, but not, I believe, for those aspiring to become counsellors. Though most counselling literature espouse “systematic” approaches and “training” in various ‘models’ and techniques’ of counselling, Wosket (1999) has the courage to demur in favour of something else, when she says that:

Paradoxically, it may yet prove that what comes from the person of the therapist, rather than their use of models and techniques, provides whatever equivalence of effectiveness that actually exists across approaches (to counselling). Research findings seem to support what has come to be known as the paradox of equivalence - the notion that experienced therapists, regardless of orientation, are more similar than different in the way that they practise.

It seems that Wosket is not alone because Clarkson (1994a), and Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992), indicate that: "experience rather than theory drives the practice of more seasoned therapists." I look again at the Counselling Course Handbook of my Course again, where it states that:

participants will become acquainted with different models of counselling and their applications, and will have the opportunity to use different theoretical models under supervision.

I am not against “models of counselling,” but there is contemporary evidence that indicates that one may construct one's own form of counselling. The phrase, “different models of counselling and their applications...,” also alarms me because models are based on theories, and as Karasu (in Wosket, 1999) says, "theory naturally confers restraints.”

Wosket (1999: 176) worries that:

an over-reliance on theory may diminish what we have available within our natural helping repertoire and that too many therapists appear to wield their preferred theories and models of helping without sufficiently questioning the premises and assumptions upon which they are founded.

My Counselling Course Handbook speaks of “the skills of counselling,” but I agree with McLeod (2003: 26) when he says that the word ‘skill ought never’ to be used as one of the foundations of counselling because its real use is about analysing sequences of motor performance only that lead to clear-cut, observable outcomes, assembling a weapon, for example, or hitting a golf ball, and so on. Ivan Illich (2001), the social critic, calls the use of skills, in other than mechanical usage, deskilling, and goes on to say that skills are learned in everyday life without having to ‘train’ in their use. What counselling students really need, McLeod says, is not skills but how to be competent in the facilitation of meaning, as in: ‘How do I understand myself?’ ‘How do I understand my client and what is assailing him / her?’ (Ibid.). If I am unsure of, or ignorant / unknowing about what is going on within me and my clients, of what use will mechanical skills be? Also, my students need to be clear about their purpose and understand the meaning of what they are doing as they counsel their clients. Blind adherence to counselling skills or abstract theories will be of little use without a consideration of meaning and purpose by the students of their own lives for the sake of their eventual clients.

In terms of orientation in counselling, I prefer to stay, philosophically with Rogers’ views, as explained in the counselling Handbook of the Course of which I was Director:

(It is) based on a holistic view of the person, physical, philosophical, social, emotional and spiritual; that the view of human nature is positive and appreciates that humans have an inclination to become fully functioning.

And that:

“the human person is unique, valuable and complex and that the central task of counselling is to help the individual to discover his / her dignity, beauty and value in the context of a caring, empathic, counselling relationship” Whitehead’s (1993) living-theory, because of its insistence on evidence, would have ensured that this happens, as no other method does, in my view. Rogers’ ideas of the “fully functioning person” who asks and answers questions of the kind, “Who am I?“, “How can I discover my real self?“, “How can I become what I deeply wish to become?“, “How can I get out from behind my facade and become myself?” were all questions I used to deal with in the Personal Growth and Development Course I used to run.

In his book, *Freedom to Learn* (1983, p. 2), Rogers says that he cultivates what he calls: “a human climate so that more and more significant learning (will take) place.” He speaks about the necessity to become “a facilitator of learning.” That is how I saw myself, as well as being a living theory action researcher practitioner of counselling methods and practice until the sword of Damocles fell and wiped out a worthwhile experiment in living counselling theory. In the light of what my former employer did, it is fascinating to hear Williams and Irving (1999) observe that many counselling staff, world-wide, never reflectively question what they teach; never critically analyse concepts, nor hold a healthy scepticism about the theories they present. Neither do they give the impression that what is self-evidently true may not be true at all. Should not such complacency be of concern to counselling accreditation bodies, to people like my former employer, but it isn’t. Why not? Because counselling courses world- wide adhere to objective theories of counselling, whose practitioners do not question anything because, apparently, it’s not needed! Haven’t they found the Holy Grail of Counselling, supposedly, in the theoretical works devoted to counselling. I think there is a reasonable chance of finding among my many past students counsellors another counsellor approximating to some degree at least the great Carl Rogers than amongst all the students of other course in counselling at least in Ireland.

Micheal Kelly's Living-Theory Action Research Of His Counselling Practice

Ben: Micheal, as you remember the inputs / lectures on your counselling course from the lecturers dealing with various objective theories of counselling, what did you learn from them?

Micheal: I must admit that I did enjoy the inputs on various counselling theories.

However, the more I heard about different methods of counselling clients, the more I felt I could become confused in the counselling room, wondering what approach I should take with my clients. My main concern is that I continue to be in touch with my clients regardless of theories. Would I be able to do two things together, keep in touch with my client and also remember to practise a theory?

Ben: To answer your question indirectly, I wonder is counselling ”a tidy workshop where we can find relief from the complexities of practice”, as the writer, Val Wosket, puts it?

Micheal: I have found that counselling is far from being tidy. The explanations of theories we got on the Course could have led us to believe that the practice is easy once you’ve mastered the theories, well, it isn’t. What I now know is that I have to claim my own authority, my own right to do it in the way that enables me to help my clients.

Ben: So, would you agree with Val Wosket (1999) when she says that: “we need to direct... our attention away from the models and processes originally taught us in counselling and move towards acknowledging our own unique helping attributes“?

Micheal: Yes, that's right. That's what I'm focusing on now: what are my own helping attributes, values really, but I'm determined to do it that way.

Ben: Empathy is heavily emphasised in counselling, but what does it mean to you?

Micheal: For me, it means getting into the shoes of my client, so to speak. It means willing my client to be able to speak for themselves with confidence, if not yet with clarity, if that is possible. Above everything else, I want them to know I'm for them.

Ben: One counselling researcher, Schlien (1997, p. 67), researching empathy, found that responding fully to another person involves not just a verbal response, but a ‘whole body’ reaction. What do you think of that?

Micheal: Well, that's new to me. But I think i can see what he means. You've just got me thinking now about what a client thinks when he sees my face, my eyes, my hands, and so on? I never thought of this before. It has definitely got me thinking.

Ben: Can we fully respond to another person unless we accept that empathy might include, for example, the smell of fear, the sight of tears, blushing, and of yawning and that we would be able to stay with these?

Micheal: That's right. That's a very human way of looking at counselling. I think I'll have to practice in front of the mirror now in order to get an idea of how others see me (Joke?), as I practice empathy.

Ben: The same writer, Schlien, believes that empathy is now about ‘the the brain being more important than the body’. What do you think?

Micheal: I suppose what this means is that I'll have to make sure to pay proper attention to the whole person of the client, which includes brain and body.

Ben: Another fascinating thing for me is that Schlien and Wosket seem to be telling us that sympathy rather than empathy is now more appropriate because sympathy involves “a type of moral commitment to the person.” What do you think about that, Micheal?

Micheal: Yes, Schlien (p. 67 in Wosket) says, doesn't he, that: “empathy alone, without sympathy, and even more, without understanding, may be harmful”? When I'm with clients I'll have to consider empathy as combining feelings with thoughts. I'm hearing more interesting ideas about counselling from you now, Ben, than I heard at any time in the classroom on the Course with the teacher doing counselling theories.

Ben: To get back to empathy, it means, doesn't it, sensing your client's feelings as if they were your own, but without becoming lost in these feelings. What do you think?

Micheal: Yes, I'll have to be careful not to get lost in the client's or my own feelings. I suppose what all this means is that I'll will have to help my clients become more reflective about themselves. Nobody else on the counselling course, apart from you, Ben, encouraged us to become reflective. It seemed to some lecturers as if all the answers' to counselling concerns or problems are contained in a book somewhere and that their lectures brought these ‘answers’ to us.

Ben: Are you able to share your clients' subjective world by tuning into your own feelings when they seem to be like your clients' feelings?

Micheal: Yes, but it's only after/wards I realise that.

Ben: Rogers said that the best school of therapy is the school of therapy that you developed for yourself. In other words, you need to develop your own theory of counselling.

Micheal: I'm beginning to realise that more and more and that's what I'm actually doing now. That's what your living-theory of counselling was about, wasn't it'?

Ben: What about feelings of tenderness, love and intimacy when you're with clients, would it be okay to think these as you are with clients? Are they appropriate? I know such feelings words were probably never mentioned in the part of the Course dealing with preparation to become counsellors, and if they were, you were probably warned to keep away from them. What do you think that now you've been counselling for a while'?

Micheal: You showed me a while ago some of the remarks of one counselling writer, Kreincheder (1980), when he said:

If you want to be a healer then you have to be in relationship with others. There is a person before you, and you and that other person are there to relate. That means psychologically touching the places in each other that are close and tender where the sensitivity is, where the wounds are, and where the turmoil is. That's intimacy. When you get this close, there is love. And when love comes, the healing comes. You are an expert in the art of achieving intimacy. When you touch each other intimately, psychologically, and with good will, then there is healing.

Ben: Yes, that's the kind of counselling being spoken about now, Micheal. We have to get the love, the closeness, the tenderness, the intimacy working with clients as well, so that healing comes. And when it gets that close, we also need plenty of supervision.

Micheal: Yes, that's true. Thanks for opening up so many interesting avenues to explore, as I'm moving along, learning as much as I can about clients and myself.

Note: The client's name is anonymised to 'Carl' to preserve his identity. To further preserve his anonymity, his conversations with Micheal have not been taped, but reconstructed by Micheal as carefully as he could.

Session Three 25-03 09

Self: How are you this morning, Carl?

Carl: Flying. Had our NA (Narcotics Anonymous) group over the weekend and we got talking. One of the lads told a story about his mother leaving when he was young. It went on for a while and was very similar to mine. I wasn't going to say anything but then I just blurted out that my mother left us when we were about the same age. It was great, the lads were real supportive of me and I got through a good bit of my story.

Reflection 25.03.09

This brought me back. I remember my first few months in college when I had not planned to say much but then I would just blurt things out. It comes from something inside saying that I will feel better after voicing my opinion. To express my feelings to other people is all part of growth in a group. Self disclosure in a safe environment, followed by positive, non-judgemental feedback is better than any drug or drink I have ever taken. It appeared that Carl may be understanding this point.

2nd Reflection, 18.05.09

This is all about honesty. I had to tell my story, particularly in Ben's class at the start: when a member of the class spoke of her feelings of hurt around the abortion issue. Honesty and courage made me tell my story.

Dialogue continues

Self: Well done, that takes a lot of courage. It shows great growth in you, I believe.

What made you talk, do you think?

Carl: Well, when one of the guys spoke about his story, I felt it would be right to tell mine. I mean if he was going to have the courage to talk then, so must I. There is now great unity between us.

Self: You feel a real bond with these guys.

Carl: Definitely, we are all really similar at the end of it all. I mean at the start I didn't think I fitted in too well, as I had just a dope (cannabis) background and some of these other guys were on heroin for years and have lost all sort of things. I know now as they have told me, that it is only my own pain I have to worry about. Not to minimise my addiction as it's a lesser drug.

Reflection 25.03.09

I could empathise with Carl here as I had similar experiences throughout my life, a feeling of inadequacy — that I never lived up to other people's expectations. The fact that Carl could see this now and that I could see it about myself is real awareness for both of us. We must own our own pain. I had an experience during the year as I sat in class. People were speaking of their addictions and what they had lost as a result of their behaviour. I was quiet that day, as I felt that my story did not live up to these more intense stories. Next day I decided that I must tell my story, as it is mine. I own the hurts that surround it. It really all comes back to my father's abandonment of the family. Some people in my class lost families and large fortunes. I lost some teenage years due to feelings of being unwanted and feeling emptiness inside me. Its important for me never to minimise my story; to say it wasn't too bad, as it were.

Carl: My sisters came here at the weekend. It was great. I could see them face-to-face and talk without lies to them. We had a great time.

Self: They're happy you're here, so?

Carl: Yes, we talked a bit about my Dad and the past. They said they found it tough also.

Self: You weren't alone, so.

Carl: No, they found him really difficult and still do. They lied as to where they were going on Saturday - here! We didn't mention my mother which was okay, as none of us are used to talking about her. Do you think I should have had?

Self: It is not for me to say, but look at the positives from that meeting. You could talk openly about your father and how he has hurt all of you in the past. This would have been a no-go area a few weeks back, but one step at a time. You did excellently, in my view.

Reflection 25.03.09

I was really proud of Carl. He was breaking the chains of his pain. He had grasped the ethos of recovery. I had learned, and am still learning, what it is like to think positively all the time.

Carl: When they left I got a little emotional. I went up into the woods and had a little cry (Carl was welling up with tears as he spoke). They were like happy tears, you know. Thanks for giving me the chance to talk about this here.

Self: No problem Carl. That's what I'm here for.

Reflection 25. 03. 09

Carl's emotional state really brought me close to tears myself. I was happy for him. I knew that I had gone through years of being miserable also only able to rely on family for emotional support. It was a very tender moment between us. I can't even remember what I said next, but words weren't too important here. He knew I understood. This was empathy as I understand the word.

Reflection 10.08.10

In relation to the last reflection here, I was happy for Carl and I got what could have been my first 'kick' from counselling.

I like my turn sharing issues in my counselling group on the Course. It seems as important then as it is now. Honesty is the only thing that can set you free. I discovered this and it looks like Carl did also. My enthusiasm when he spoke about his issue in the group had given him a lift. This is my value of honesty working for the good of the client.

Self Validation

I am writing this now on 10-08-'10. Reason being, the self validation I originally wrote is not a validation. It is mainly a summary of the three sessions and quite frankly a poor piece of work. I still remember these sessions as they were yesterday. I think this is so, as Carl was one of my first clients. My reflections from that time and two months afterwards are very important as they show me where I was at this stage and show me if growth has taken place in me since.

I had this idea that I was going to be ultra-professional in my new career. I knew self disclosure was a no-go area — that all the work must be about the client's world. This is a fair point and it is one I still hold, yet I feel I was too regimental in my thinking. This is textbook stuff really — client on one side, counsellor on the other. Strictly professional relationship! I feel now it is ok to build the counselling relationship in a more relaxed way. If that means talking about football or hurling for 20 minutes well then I'll do it. Anything to make the client more relaxed. It is all about the client and anything I feel will help him I will do. This is using my life experience of relationship- building to help me in the counselling room.

Carl's story was very similar to mine, as I went on a roller coaster of emotions. was shocked when he spoke about it first. I had an urge to get him to deal with the issue at another stage instead of now. I wanted to avoid the subject as it felt too overwhelming for me. This shows me that I had unresolved issues regarding my father's abandonment. The fact that I was up and down on the issue shows me how I could not have lasted this long in counselling had I not come to a resolution of the issue. I thought I had dealt with my emotions on the subject during my first year in counselling college. And to a certain extent, I had. Talking about something is a huge step towards resolving an issue - probably the bravest! Living my life with a thought pattern I have changed is the next step. But how easy it is to slip back into old trails of thought when triggered! Practice and patience is the next step towards getting to a resolution.

Reflecting on old thought trails after the incident has taken place has to be done in order for healing to continue. Carl's mention of abandonment did this for me. It was a huge experience for me to undertake. This was one of those make or break points in my practice. Glad to say I got over this one.

I spoke about my inadequacies during my sessions with my supervisor. Carl brought up within me thoughts of my own inadequacies, when he spoke about feeling like he did not fit in. That he was not good enough. It's amazing how quickly I can feel these fears coming back to me — that nagging voice of unworthiness speaking loudly in my ear. Sometimes if I'm not feeling strong, I listen to it reluctantly. It shows me how much I must keep working on myself. How any of the good things in life have to be given constant care. Such as self-praise, spiritual

practise, meditation, personal relationships. Constant work and reassurance are needed and Carl reminded me of this as he spoke of his inadequacies.

I mentioned the first 'kick' I got from counselling. This is something I'll try to explain. There is a deep sense of fullest in helping another human being. When another person has begun to awaken from the dark slumber they were trapped in and see that life is for living it resonates with my own happiness.

Evidence for my claim

Can I now show you, the reader, that Carl wants to live rather than endure life? First I will show with Carl's dialogue to see how he was enduring life.

Carl (17-03-09), says that: "I came in for smoking dope about five weeks ago. I know it sounds mad but my life was becoming unbearable. I was smoking up to two ounces a week. Morning, noon and night, I just couldn't stop. I was turning into a paranoid wreck. I'd smoke every day and go around frightened of everything This was all great at the time (working at home) yet I was slowly turning into a recluse. I had a whole system for avoiding people.

Carl (19-03-09), also goes on to say that: "Well, my addiction was a temporary release. I always seem to be running from something. Like back then I didn't really deal with my problems and I think that has followed me into adult life."

This shows me that Carl was clearly enduring life. His expression in telling the facts of his addictive life showed me how much he hated his former life. He talks about his behaviour and how it almost frightened him. I feel he had enough.

Carl was beginning to see that life was for living as he said the following:

Carl on 17-03-10, said that: "... I didn't see it clearly at the time but now I am thinking more clearly these days..... It's this place I think. I like it here. The minute I drove in here (the Treatment Centre) I felt a huge weight lift off my shoulders. It was like I didn't have to run anymore. That I could tell the truth and admit to my family and myself that I had a problem. I like what NA has to offer.

Carl (on 25-03-09) said: My sister came up here to see me at the weekend. It was great. I could face her face-to face and talk without lies to her. We had a great time... "

This shows me that Carl has had the fog lifted from his eyes. He said he was thinking more clearly now. He had accepted he was an addict and that he had issues that needed to be dealt with. This is the first step towards enjoying life and Carl, I feel, has made it. His sister's visit went well. He felt he didn't have to lie to his sister anymore and this honesty got him emotional relief. This was real. This is healing.

So where did I come in, and try to influence Carl with my philosophies. I think this is best illustrated by my values.

Evidence for my value of honesty

Now I will try and show how my value of honesty helped to bring Carl to a better place:

Self, on 17-03-09: "I was a little taken back by the names of places and people I know. I felt I should lie to preserve my objectivity. I wasn't expected to be his friend. In my experience talking to men my own age, we could have fallen into chat mode. I feel that these counselling sessions should be professional and I intended to start them off that way..."

This reflection shows how I had to tell a lie - even if it was a 'white' one - in order to continue to be professional. The lie I told was obviously the opposite of honesty. Yet I felt I was being true and honest to myself. Indeed showing my integrity in my work.

Self, on 17-03-09: “Carl was very open about looking at himself. This I liked, as I know how important it is. In my life I kept a lot of things bottled up and told nobody. I too suffered from paranoia around people, and had different strategies for avoiding places and people... “

I showed how I could hear Carl's story and relate it to my own. Giving an honest reflection of my own feelings. Being honest in being able to listen to myself, as I listened to Carl showed how I am comfortable with the counselling setting. Indeed, reading all my reflections from the first session I can stand by them that my honesty is prevalent.

I know how much honesty is important to healing, as I said (*Self, 19-03-09*): “I, too ran from a lot of problems when I was younger. It was easier hide or move on from problems rather than face them. I would have in the past said to myself that as my father was not around, what chance did I have? I know now that it was a cop out. Another way of just giving up! To say that, yes I don 't have a perfect set-up here but what am I going to do about it? Sit around miserable or start living? If I could get Carl to see this I would feel like a good day's work had been done “

This shows how much emphasis I put on the truth setting you free. I go on to get Carl to try and talk about his past — to get him to talk about his mother. The reason I am doing this is I know that honesty has to prevail here. Carl talking about this thing that lay toxic for years can only help him. I believe this as abandonment an issue so close to my own. '

Client Validation

I feel Carl liked me. He admitted that as soon he got to this Treatment Centre, he felt a huge weight lift off his shoulders. He seemed to be accepting his addiction. He was embracing the idea of getting 'clean'. Meeting his counsel/or was another step towards finding a new sense of himself and I felt he used the time in the Centre and with me to his benefit.

He spoke about his mothers abandonment to me. This was not an easy subject for him to talk about. He also spoke of his father's physical abuse and the impact that this had on him. I don't think if Carl had found me comfortable to talk to, that he would have opened up so much. Expressing himself with me gave him the confidence to go on and tell some of his story in group. The fact he had found the experience with me a safe comfortable one, I reckon his group sharing came easier.

When Carl spoke of the break through he had with his sisters, and how they talked about their upbringing it was huge. Carl felt comfortable about telling me this, and started to get emotional. I felt he really trusted me at this point. He finished by thanking me for giving him this opportunity to speak.

Peer Validation

Some of the same points are brought up repeatedly by my peers. I have grouped similar comments together to avoid repeating myself. I believe I have covered all the points made about my presentation of my dialogues.

Pat: The small talk or repetitive stuff may mean a lot to your client. A lot of addiction is about behaviour and I've learned that: "I'm not my behaviour." I think you're client came around to that, too, because of you.

Liam: You related well to your client. What fear do you have around people who make you uncomfortable? Slow down your thinking. Separate the behaviour from the person. We/I done.

Micheal: Thank you Liam. The fear I have is a fear of my own uncomfortableness coming back at me. I was uncomfortable in my own skin for years, so my clients can remind me of how

insecure I was. As for slowing down my thinking, easier said than done. Something I want all right, and hopefully it will come in time.

Darren: I like your action research question. It says a lot, even for me, as sometimes in my life I was enduring rather than living and enjoying. I like your awareness and honesty. Your awareness will help you be an excellent counsellor. I do believe you were 100% with your client and also believe you did help to move him on. I know you will make an excellent counsellor.

Micheal: Thank you Darren. I seemed to have been looking for the reason a person is addicted and not spending much time on the addiction itself. Maybe as I was never in treatment I will never know what it is like to be addicted. This is something I had to work on this year and I think I have an idea of most of my clients' worlds. It's about going at their pace and understanding what is going on for them.

Imelda: Honest with yourself - my motto too. Abandonment: A shock for you as it mirrored what had happened in your life, too. But you appeared very comfortable, with great presence.

Micheal: Thank you Imelda. Like you, I think I have a good presence, though I wonder about it sometimes. As for being comfortable, again there are times when I am very uneasy.

Ben Cunningham: Your avoidance of being a 'mate' with your client seems to me to be about your integrity in that you wanted him to focus on his issues. From knowing you on the Course, I believe all the work you did in the Personal Growth and Development Module stood to you. I found you totally focussed on improving yourself in order to be a good persona and a good counsellor. When you put that Module and your experience of counselling together now, it seems they were both growth producing for you, not forgetting, of course, your own willingness to do so, and how far you have come as a person and a counsellor since then. Just one other idea that might be useful to you. I came across it when reading what David Brazier said (in Brazier, D., 1993): 'the idea of a need to love rather than a need for love.' A slight change from the Rogerian assumption that everybody has a need for positive regard but rather that you, as counsellor, need to provide positive regard to others.

Micheal: Thanks, Ben. I like the ideas of integrity, that I 'm now a person of integrity and, also, Brazier's idea that I need to provide positive regard to others.

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