

HOW DO... YOU DO

Or..

DO YOU... YOU DO

Or..

IS THERE... THERE
IS

Or...

But I much prefer

HOW DO... YOU DO

The idea of '*HOW DO YOU DO*' - a snappy title, some might say, came to me with reference to both 'demarcation disputes' and the process of student-centred learning of a person-centred approach (PCA) to counselling.

'Demarcation disputes' for me was around *differentiation* - the efforts of many to distinguish between *counselling* and *psychotherapy*, between *person-centred* and *other* approaches to counselling. Or psychotherapy. Or... Then, too, there have been the attempts to differentiate between *counselling* and *counselling skills*...

So many lines, it seems, to be drawn.

Reflecting upon training progression within the PCA, course members who have moved from 'intermediate' training in counselling *skills* into 'advanced' training as a person-centred *counsellor* have very often experienced anxiety during a phase of feeling de-skilled and 'rubbished' (either by themselves or through feedback). To illustrate:

At intermediate level, trainees develop what might be considered a *generic* set of communication skills, and at a practice level the core counselling approach, or model, may not be as significant as the skills in-themselves. In other words, an *open-ended question* is an acceptable counselling *skill whatever* the favoured model. Any trainee demonstrating open-ended questioning at an intermediate level of counselling skills training is likely to receive favourable feedback and experience a feeling of being okay.

To illustrate further: An often used open-ended, questioning response to a client likely to receive favourable feedback in a counselling skills context is:

How do you feel about that?

So:

HOW DO...

It is likely that there would be a consensus of agreement amongst most trainers of counselling skills that '*How do you feel about that?*' is a reasonable demonstration of a counselling skills competence.

This same '*How do you feel about that?*' trainee may then embark upon advanced person-centred counselling training, secure in the knowledge of having achieved a counselling skills qualification. Yet, at some stage, '*How do you feel about that?*' may well receive somewhat less favourable feedback - as ***questions*** rarely if ever **communicate empathic understanding**, and are usually only utilised if the counsellor has not empathised or understood a client. This may lead to the trainee experiencing a feeling of *not* being okay, of low self worth/esteem.

Communicating empathic understanding is around, in general, the counsellor perception checking that s/he *is* empathising and understanding, and that the client is perceiving/receiving/experiencing this empathic understanding at least to some degree. Indeed, Carl Rogers, in collaboration with Eric Porter, quotes (in 'On Becoming A Person') research findings that client-centred counsellors use questioning skills very sparingly indeed. ***Statements*** are far more likely to effectively communicate empathic understanding.

Thus this could be illustrated by stating that

YOU DO

type responses are more likely to convey empathic understanding than '*How do...?*'.

Leaving the relatively security of (certificated!) '*How do*' ***questions*** and entering the relatively threatening and uncharted territory of venturing (albeit probably tentatively at first) ***statements*** which communicate empathic understanding can be deeply unsettling for some.

How do... You do is an attempt to reflect upon the passage from counselling skills to counselling. There is no need to de-value or 'rubbish' counselling skills, although there may be a value in attempting to place such skills (or techniques) within a counselling skills ***context***.

It is conceivable that the trainee who can identify, acknowledge and own the movement from ***How do*** to ***You do*** is on the way to differentiating between a counselling skills context and becoming a counsellor.

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