

## Person-Centred / Student-Centred Training

### Shall we be beaten into submission or...?

#### *An earnest plea from the heart, brain and soul!*

Telephone the LSC (Learning Skills Council) and they'll tell you they fund what QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) sends to them. Telephone QCA and they'll say 'Ah yes - but LSC make it very clear what they will and won't fund'. Telephone LSC again and...

Carl Rogers was very definite in his view that authentic student/trainee-centred learning (and, indeed, the person-centred approach) would only ever be accepted by mainstream education in a very diluted form. How right he has been proved to be!

Over the years I have felt very proud about the degree to which the Person-Centred Training Unit I began has achieved funded training programmes founded in person-centred and trainee-centred beliefs, principles, and practises.

Whoever is responsible - LSC, QCA, validating bodies, central government - there can be no doubt but that trainee-centred learning of client-centred therapy attracts government funding no more. This concerns me, and I hope that it will concern you and BAPCA, too.

To begin with, trainees clearly cannot be trusted or considered to have the wherewithal to construct their own learning criteria - either in advance or in retrospect. Criteria are to be imposed from an external locus of evaluation - experts who clearly know best and who cannot permit learners to discover their own ways. Well, that's been around for a long time... Notwithstanding this fundamental distrust of the wisdom of the group, just look at some of the new criteria from a relatively sympathetic awarding body: -

Unit One is 'Professional and Organisational Issues' and is evidenced by a minimum 1500, maximum 2000 word essay, to be marked by tutors. At this point, please note that no longer is the wisdom of the individual learner or the learning group to be trusted - trainees clearly lack the initiative or wherewithal to identify such issues as a learning criterion. Please also note that facilitation has all but disappeared - we have become assessors and markers. Please note too that creativity and experimentation with different media for presenting evidence of learning is unacceptable (despite another compulsory unit being the celebration of diversity and anti-discriminatory practice!).

Anyway, back to the Unit: it has to be marked out of 100 and is divided into ten sub-criteria, each carrying between 5 and 20 marks. We can probably fairly assume that the criterion attracting 20 marks is deemed to be the 'biggest' - and pro rata we could therefore expect a minimum of 300 and a maximum of 400 words - yes?

Now... This sub-criterion is further divided into five main areas - professional conduct, confidentiality, boundaries, legal and professional responsibilities, and negligence. Divide our minimum and maximum word count and we are left with a minimum of 60 and a maximum of 80 words per issue. If we could (just for fun?) equate quality with word counts, and take into account a minimum pass mark of 33% per unit (overall 40%), we could say that one-third would suffice - leaving us with (in terms of acceptable quality) between 20 and 26.4 words per issue.

Twenty words as evidence of good professional conduct?

Twenty words as evidence of good ethical confidentiality?

And so on...

Yes: "And so on" - for there's more! Each of the above five sub-criteria of a sub-criteria are *further* divided into four different levels of evidence: - briefly describing the area and giving an example, explaining the importance of each issue with a further example, demonstrating an understanding of the issue, and evaluating each issue analytically. Ho hum! So for each sub-division of the sub-division, each trainee has a minimum of 15 words and a maximum of 20 words per level per issue. A 33% pass rate leaves a minimum of *five* words and a maximum of *six and two-thirds* words per level per issue.

*Talk about "dumbing down"!*

Unit Two is compulsory (actually, all the units are compulsory) and is Counselling in a Diverse Society. Again, this criterion is divided, this time into seven subsections.

So - you can demonstrate a celebration of diversity - but only in this way. If you are visually impaired or have learning difficulties - tough! If you are creative and want to experiment with a variety of ways of generating evidence of learning - tough! Just celebrate diversity, okay? But you must do it this way! Anti-discriminatory practice? Pah!

I feel sure that by now you are getting the picture. Let me skip to Unit Four: Advanced Counselling Skills.

Counselling skills? Now it was in 'A Way Of Being' that Rogers wrote, "reflect becoming in time a word that made me cringe," and Rogers wrote and spoke many times and with some passion about the anathema of skills training. Yet here we have imposed upon us *explanation* (to clients), *assessment* (of clients), *contracting*, *ensuring*, *evaluating*, *minimal encouragers*, *managing* silence, *open questioning*, *reflecting* (content and feelings), *paraphrasing* and *summarising*, *focusing* and *challenging*, *reflecting* (again - this time on process and immediacy), empowering change, making appropriate referrals... The research evidence demonstrates over and over again that authenticity, respect and warmth (UPR), and empathic understanding are the key elements of effective therapy. Why is there such an insistence of ignoring the evidence, minimising the crucial and maximising the 'nuts and bolts' (or "wooden techniques" to quote Rogers) that are erroneously believed to hold therapy together?

Anyway: these non client-centred criteria have to be demonstrated on a tape (or video) of between 15 and 30 minutes, together with a 1500 - 2000 word case study, both marked (by the tutor, of course) out of 100, with the tape weighted to 60% and the written work 40%! 35% of the tape marks are allocated to ending the session - including "doorknob skills"...

In the last but one paragraph, *eighteen* different skills or techniques were identified by the validating body - and these eighteen techniques are to be evidenced in a minimum fifteen-minute tape! That's fifty seconds per skill - provided the client doesn't speak at all, of course (useful for "managing silence" at least - and doorknob not included)!

Carl isn't turning in his grave - he's so damn dizzy from spinning he's burrowed through the planet and come out the other side! What planet are the awarding bodies on, I wonder...

Unit Six is called Specialisms. So: we have Carl Rogers stating that specialising with different theories and practises and introducing them for different clients "goes a long way towards destroying the possibility of a therapeutic relationship" - and the QCA or LSC (or whoever) saying that pathologising groups of people is compulsory.

Enough... Enough.

Personally, I'm not prepared to stand for this. Nor am I prepared to simply sit and nod. I am angry and disappointed - though not, I have to say, particularly surprised. Sad.

I believe that an impromptu group of concerned trainers got together at the Durham Conference, which I chose not to attend (I'd just become a dad for the first time). I'd certainly like to know what that group is up to and may well wish to join with them. If there is anyone else out there who feels remotely as I do, I'd like to hear from you. I'd like to call on BAPCA to support initiatives that strive to maintain and enhance the ethos and practises of trainee-centred learning, the person-centred approach, and client-centred therapy.

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I do realise that in my frustration and despair my writing above may seem somewhat flippant, irreverent, or whatever. Yet I really am with Carl on this one, and believe that the traditions of trainee-centred learning are worth some time and effort in an attempt to preserve them. I know that few, if any, mainstream education therapy training programmes are truly or wholly student-centred - however, many of us have done our best to maximise such elements, and now even that is being demolished.

The tone of my writing will be different as I write to the government, and to government and validating bodies. Yet write I will - and I urge you to join the PCA preservation society.

Please do feel free to get in touch.

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