

To Carl Rogers, with Fond Regards: Interrogating our Dominant Models of Counsellor and Psychotherapy Skills Training

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The world is a very different place since the 1950's and 1960's. At that time, Rogerian humanism emerged as the central organizing framework for counsellor and psychotherapy skills training. Since then, a wide array of theoretical and empirical work has attuned us to issues of power, language, meaning, and perhaps above all, cultural diversity. It is challenging to accommodate these within a predominantly individualist, developmental, humanist approach. And yet curiously, the extensive developments pertaining to therapeutic practice in recent decades have not managed to nudge aside the humanist thread which continues to provide the backbone of virtually all counselling and psychotherapy skills texts. Instead, contemporary, culture-conscious contributions are included as add-ons without any significant re-visioning of the underlying practice framework.

In this presentation, David will outline what he perceives as the blind spots of a liberal humanist model, framed around practices such as “active listening” and “reflecting feeling”, in preparing counsellors for engaging clients in the 21st century. After a recap of humanism's depiction of the self and the therapeutic process, participants will be introduced to a range of alternate metaphors and theoretical resources. These support a practice that involves inescapably cross-cultural conversations subject to power differentials, where meaning and experience are constructed jointly by clients and counsellors within the fertile, but fragile, medium of language. David will present examples of a selection of counselling practices associated with these contemporary perspectives, demonstrating how they accomplish tasks not addressed by interventions associated with traditional approaches to counsellor skills training.

In addition to being of potential interest to counsellor educators, this presentation may be useful for any practitioners experiencing limitations to the vocabularies available for describing their work, or seeking additional practices for working with diverse clientele.