

## The Humanistic Counselling Perspective and Its Applicability in Education.

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### Abstract

*In the 1950s, Rogers developed the Humanist counselling approach which he labelled the client-centred therapy or non-directive counselling. Humanism is a philosophy that is primarily concerned with humanity (i.e.) the worth of humans as individuals. It encompasses the richness of the human existential experience that emphasises the crucial role of the here and now interpersonal relationship with others and our actual subjective experiences. The perspective assumed that human maladjustment could be rectified by bringing more insights into the client's own statements. The humanistic approach "emphasizes that each individual has great freedom in directing his or her future, a large capacity for personal growth, a considerable amount of intrinsic worth, and enormous potential for self-fulfilment". Humanists strongly maintain that each individual was prewired with a life-long quest to keep on changing and growing. Counselling is a complex and progressive process made of several interwoven sub-processes. While acknowledging that each individual counselling situation is unique, a general pattern emerges where individual counselling is practiced, that enables us to theorise about how individual counselling is carried out.*

**Keys Words:** counselling humanistic counselling counsellor practice perspective

### INTRODUCTION

The humanistic counselling perspective emerged in the 1950s as a counter reaction to both behaviourism and psychoanalysis. The humanistic approach tries to make counselling more humanistic, thus more personal, non-directive, authentic, genuine and meaningful. Despite being launched after the development of psychodynamic and behavioural counselling approaches, the humanistic paradigm has gained substantial recognition and acceptance in modern times. With the whole world being virtually vocal about human rights, counsellors to a larger extent are governed by the dictates of the humanistic approach. This paper looks at the fundamental tenets, the counselling process and the applicability of the humanistic approach in educational institutions.

### Conceptualisation of Humanistic approach to counselling

According to Hansen, Stevic and Warner (1986), counselling is concerned with assisting individuals to learn new ways of mobilizing themselves to fully tackle challenges before them. It remains arguably true that different psychological paradigms propound different definitions of counselling. In fact the definition of counselling to be used in a particular situation hinges upon the psychological perspective upon which it is anchored. Mpofu, (2006) adds that, in the case of educational counselling for example, the chief goal is to enable students to relate educational content and experience to the world of everyday life as to empower them for meaningful participation in the functioning of their societies.

Chiremba and Makore – Rukuni (2004) contend that the humanistic counselling approach, which is called the third force movement, emerged as a reaction to the limitations of its two predecessors, namely the psychodynamic and behaviourist as counselling paradigms. According to Rukuni (2002) humanists allege that, both the psychodynamic and behavioural approaches offered a mechanistic or pre-deterministic view of human nature respectively.

Humanism is a philosophy that is primarily concerned with humanity (i.e.) the worth of humans as individuals (Gladding, 2001). It encompasses the richness of the human existential experience that emphasises the crucial role of the here and now interpersonal relationship with others and our own actual subjective experiences. According to Gladding (2008) humanistic counselling approaches focus on the potential of individuals to actively choose and purposefully decide about matters related to themselves and environments. Humanistic approach assist people increase self-understanding through experiencing their feelings (Gladding, 2008).

Ruch (1984) defines humanistic counselling as an approach that puts much emphasis on self-actualization through the exercise of free will. Zimbardo, (1980) defines humanism as an approach to psychology in which emphasis is on studying human experience, both private and public behaviour and the uniqueness and wholeness of individuals and focused on personal development.

The chief proponents of the humanists and existential movement are Rogers, Maslow, Frankl, Perls and May (Nelson – Jones, 1997). Of these proponents, Rogers

made more significant contributions to the field of counselling hence more of my attention in this write up will be devoted to the works of Rogers. In the 1950s, Rogers developed the counselling approach which he labelled the client-centred therapy or non-directive counselling. He assumed that human maladjustment could be rectified by bringing more insights into the client's own statements (Mpofu, 2006).

### **PERSON-CENTRED THERAPY**

Person-centred therapy uses stages or phases. The classification of these stages varies from author to author. However, there is some consensus that in the beginning Rogerian therapy was client-centred and emphasized the helper-client relationship. The client-centred phase of Rogerian therapy is also referred to as the non-directive stage in the evolution of person-centred therapy. Person – centred therapy, unlike client-centred therapy is associated with the later period of Rogers; work from the early 1970s to the present. The person-centred approach is characterized by a greater acceptance and incorporation of an active role of the counselee. The counsellor in the person-centred communicates a greater degree of genuineness with the client. What that means is that the relationship between the counsellor and client is less that of helper to client, and more of person to person. The counsellor and client are regarded as equals, and involved in a collaborative relationship that is aimed at resolving the client's problems as experienced.

Rogers then renamed it the person-centred approach in the early 1970s. The hallmark of the person-centred approach is that the counsellor and the client are viewed as two individuals who are par and are jointly concerned with resolving the client's problem with great genuineness and openness.

### **FUNDAMENTAL TENETS**

Rowan (2003:81) declares that the humanistic approach emphasizes that each individual has great freedom in directing his or her future, a large capacity for personal growth, a considerable amount of intrinsic worth, and enormous potential for self-fulfilment. Humanists strongly maintain that each individual was prewired with a life-long quest to keep on changing and growing. This insatiable zeal to grow is constructive in nature. This inherent tendency towards growth is commonly referred to as the self-actualising tendency (Mpofu, 2006).

Another crucial Rogerian assumption is that positive regard or loving warmth is a fundamental human need. An individual's self-actualizing tendency can be thrown

out of order when positive regard is withdrawn. Positive regard can be conditional or unconditional. Mpofu (2006:120) views unconditional positive regard as, "the acceptance of the person as a worth being and without any requirements or preconditions". Conditional positive regard on the other hand is love and acceptance given to an individual after behaving in a particular way. These preconditions are called conditions of worth.

An individual's self-regard is the way he or she views herself or himself. Unconditional positive regard usually enables a client to develop unconditional positive self-regard. Mpofu (2006:120) claims that, a person with a positive self-regard is one who has a positive attitude towards himself, or herself, and which is not dependent on the positive evaluation of significant others. The source of maladjustment in clients can be the conditions of worth imposed on them. Rukuni (2005:55) postulate conditions of worth impact negatively on the person because they prevent or inhibit him/her from self-actualizing". Halikides, (1958) cited in Rukuni and Maunganidze (2001) established through research that there is a high positive correlation between the degree of unconditional positive regard and successful counselling relationship.

Closely related to unconditional positive self-regard is self-concept. Self-concept is the individual's view of oneself along the lines of thought process, feelings and the experiencing individual (Mpofu 2006). The ideal self, representing what one can best be and the real self, which is what one actually is. The difference between an individual's real self and ideal self-tally, the individual is said to be a fully-functioning organism whose attempts to self-actualize are not being interfered with. There is congruence between the real self and the ideal self. On the other hand, a mismatch between the real and the ideal self which is called incongruence is a source of problems. According to Rogers, the difference between an individual's real self and ideal self is the chief source of problems which trigger the person to seek counselling services. Traux, (1963) cited in Rukuni and Maunganidze (2001) found out that counsellors who are related as self-congruent by their clients had a more positive effect on their clients than those rated as low self-congruent.

The concept of empathy remains pivotal to the person-centred counselling approach. Stewart (2001:98) indicates that empathy means, "trying to understand the thoughts, feelings, behaviours and personal meanings from the other's internal frame of reference". The counsellor stands in the shoes of the client, not for judgment or diagnostic purposes, but merely to facilitate

the client's endeavors to gain congruence. Unlike sympathy, which further paralyzes the client, empathy is meant to strengthen the client by enabling him or her to recognize the intrinsic resources at his/her disposal. Tactfully coined questions or comments may help to manifest empathy to the client. Shapiro, Frauss and Truaz (1969) cited in Rukuni and Maunganidze (2001) established through research that clients tend to disclose themselves more deeply to empathetic and warm counsellors.

Humanistic counselling principles require that the counsellor must exude genuineness in the way they interact with the client. The counsellor must openly and freely convey how she/he feels so that the client can perceive his/her commitment and realness. Mezzano (1969) and Tosi (1970) quoted in Rukuni and Maunganidze (2001) found in separate research studies that open-mindedness and total acceptance of clients are highly conducive to effective counselling. The ultimate purpose of all the elaborated tenets is to create an enabling environment required for the client to eventually solve his or her own problems. Chiremba and Makore – Rukuni (2004:34) declare, "What encourage the clients to resolve their problems is that environment of unconditional positive regard and the perception of the clients of the counsellor as providing such an environment".

## THE COUNSELLING PROCESS

Counselling is a complex and progressive process made of several interwoven sub-processes (Cormier and Hackney, 1993). While acknowledging that each individual counselling situation is unique, a general pattern emerges where individual counselling is practiced, that enables us to theorise about how individual counselling is carried out. There are three basic phases through which counselling took place. Rogers, (1961) mentioned the exploratory phase, the understanding or insight phase and action phase. These phases were simplified by Mpofu, (2006) to five stages which are initiating counselling, establishment of a relationship, defining the problem, generating a maximum number of solutions, evaluating outcomes and terminating the counselling.

### Initiating Counselling

In initiating counselling, the counsellor must be aware of client expectations and preferences as these have a bearing on the quality of the counselling relationship that would emerge in the counselling situation and the likely outcomes. Hansen, Stevic and Warner, (1986) are of the

view that a good starting point for any counselling would be to demystify the process of counselling for the client by defining what counselling is all about.

### Establishing a Relationship

Rogers, (1961) named this stage the exploratory phase. The counsellor tries to help the client gain access to the real challenge or the preventing problem. Exploration creates a secure relationship that the client would have the courage to disclose the problem or feelings. At this step of the counselling process, the main goal is to build a relationship of trust based upon openness and honesty of expression so as to facilitate effective counselling.

The influencing relationship in counselling situation is a therapeutic alliance that is more powerful than ordinary social relationships to solve client problems, (Hansen et al 1986). Rogers, (1961) mentioned counsellor congruence, genuineness and authenticity, positive regard of client, emphatic understanding, respect and non-possessiveness warmth of the client as critical aspects in counselling in counselling relationships. Schmidt, (1984) and Ivey (1983) stressed that the communication of these three conditions defined the necessary and sufficient counsellor attitudes for successful counselling. Rukuni and Maunganidze (2001) noted that through research that open-minded counsellors were able to effectively communicate facilitative conditions like warmth to their clients. It should be noted therefore that a conducive psychological atmosphere should be created for effective counselling to take place.

### Defining the problem/Insight Phase

A client is given an opportunity to state what his/her problems are (self-disclosure). The client may initially present a surface or a superficial view of the problem. Probing the client to get to the core of his/her problems is the chief business of the problem definition stage. The counsellor remains a facilitator in the regeneration of the client's problem-solving skills or their application. Roger, (1951) pointed out that listening and reflecting to the client's themes, patterns, messages beyond the words, challenging paradoxes and inconsistencies always using client material, not some counsellor determined agenda. The client should navigate deeper into oneself, values, attitudes and beliefs on current behaviour. Special techniques used by the counsellor in this stage include paraphrasing non-verbal messages. Sometimes counsellors paraphrase non-verbal messages to reflect the feelings which the therapist observes in the client's behaviour.

Paraphrasing of non-verbal messages is sometimes called mirroring suggesting that the counsellor provides a mirror image of the client's feeling. The counsellor can also make use of paralinguistic language such as Uh! Umm – hmm and also non-verbal behaviours like smiles, frowns, head nods and many others.

### **Generating a maximum number of solutions/The Action Phase**

The counsellor as a facilitator helps the client to generate a number of possible solutions to the defined problem. Solutions are then ranked according to their potential to support the client's value system. Those solutions that are likely to meet client needs have the greater probability of implementation. In facilitating solution generation and selection by the client, the counsellor must have a clear knowledge of his or her own value system and that of the client.

### **Evaluating of Outcomes**

According to Brammer, (1977) the counselling relationship needs evaluation, which refers to checking to see if the goals of counselling have been met and to what degree. This also implies judging the process or resolving the client's problem.

### **Termination**

This phase is the last step in the counselling process. It refers to ending the relationship between counsellor and client, Morse, Bottoroff, Anderson, O'Brien, Solberg and July (1992) in Rukuni and Maunganidze (2001) suggest that the termination phase is the most difficult on the counselling process because it evokes feelings of loss and sometimes anxiety on both counsellor and client. This means that both counsellor and client have to device ways of saying good-bye. For termination to be useful both client and counsellor should be open and honesty.

### **Applicability in Educational Settings**

The humanistic counselling approach, if properly applied in schools and other educational institutions, almost guarantees the churning out of highly confident, autonomous and emotionally health graduates. In schools, teachers should always endeavour to help the students to develop unconditional positive self-regard and to take time to meditate upon any challenge they encounter. This can best be done by showing them warmth, genuineness and empathy during interpersonal interactions. Moreover, classroom practitioners should try to convince students that the formal authority of the

teacher is not much in force during counselling sessions. This will somehow spur the students to willingly and honestly disclose all the relevant information pertaining to the problem in question. Teachers must also impress it upon the students that they have an internal mechanism to tackle most problems they encounter if only they give themselves time to mobilize their internal facilities.

Nevertheless, some teachers find it very difficult to step down their authority ladder simply to show warmth to pupils. This then means that the entire counselling process will be negatively affected. Moreover, some Zimbabwean cultural practices contradict the counselling procedures proposed by the humanists. In many Zimbabwean cultures, an individual who visits a counsellor for help will be anticipating to be given a pre-packaged solution to the problem. This means students with problems confront their teachers expecting the teachers to clarify the problems and give them solutions while they are virtually passive. This means more needs to be done to nurture the students' abilities to ultimately arrive at the appropriate solutions to problems with minimum aid from their teachers. Moreover, some counselling relationships may not be terminated but rather degenerate into improper love relationships between teachers and their students. However, this can be avoided by ensuring that students seek counselling from counsellors of the same gender.

Group counselling in schools, universities and colleges can also be done using the humanistic approach. If a group of students have a common problem, teachers can simply create a conducive and permitting environment which will stimulate their inherent potentialities to get solutions to the problem. This can be useful because these students may later embark on automatically generating solutions to their problems without the use of humanistic approaches, especially given the hectic schedule in schools and other educational settings. Moreover, leaving a group of students or even individual students to ultimately generate their solutions can lead to unnecessary delays. Sometimes, these students will be so desperate to get solutions that they may harm themselves or even commit suicide. Students especially at primary and secondary school level may be unable to logically mobilize their internal resources to eventually solve their problems. It then can be contended that the applicability in educational setting hinges upon the nature of the problem and the maturity of the students.

### **Conclusion**

While it is true that no single counselling approach is a panacea, it remains arguable that the humanistic approach has contributed much to the contemporary counselling practices. However, in the Zimbabwean educational settings, more still needs to be done to help practitioners to smoothly progress from the directive counselling practices to the more optimistic person-centred approach. It can be argued that the person-centred approach if properly implemented will be quite beneficial to the Zimbabwean educational society given the various social challenges currently bedevilling it.

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