

COUNSELLING CTA - WHY DID I DO IT?

A few folk with bravado ask me directly - many others respond with a quizzical and pitying and bewildered mixture of a transparent gaze revealing brain cells attempting to deduce what script issues might have possessed me to take another CTA exam, and in particular in the Counselling field. I believe only one other person in Britain has ever qualified as a CTA Counsellor (if you know otherwise please let me know!)

There is much I could voice in personal terms about this which mostly belongs elsewhere - here I want to share my professional and provocative thoughts amongst my colleagues, and to enthuse and excite others as to what the Counselling field has to offer. It is my intention here to stimulate thinking - after all, being 'on the edge' is part of the rich cultural heritage of TA created by Berne, attracting and stimulating many of us who experience an attachment to transactional analysis!

I have trained in and taught psychodynamic studies - where counsellor and therapist are interchangeable terms. It was a shock to experience their pecking order apparent in TA - and fascinating to discover that this is particularly distinct in Britain, and there are different attitudes elsewhere in our international community. It would seem that many countries do not differentiate status in this way - and where they practically do so it's in relation to national licencing arrangements. In Germany now Counsellors are the largest field of CTAs from having been the minority ten years or so ago - however the regulations changed in that psychotherapists became required to have a psychology degree and this created the impetus for the Counselling field to develop rapidly. As we in Britain face regulation of our fields it may be time to review our potential rather than only react to limitations put upon us.

Counselling is beautifully described in the EATA handbook - take a look! The range of competences is clearer and more rigorous than any other field descriptors. And the scope of counselling described gives a nomenclature to all sorts of work that we have no professional title for in Britain, because the term 'counselling' somehow got hijacked a long time ago to mostly mean 'therapeutic' counselling - and became the poor cousin of psychotherapy to such an extent that the British Association of Counselling added 'and Psychotherapy' to emphasise this. Recent communications amongst the TA trainers about whether to build in BACP accreditation into our psychotherapy training programmes elicited

comments that are clearly a form of snobbery about the prestige of the counselling field.

So Counselling in EATA covers a range of working practices: it includes 'primary' counselling which is akin to the tradition of one to one work called counselling here in Britain. However it also includes what the EATA handbook terms 'complementary' counselling, and describes this as ways of working used by many professionals in the course of their work, such as nurses, doctors, lawyers, financial advisors, coaches, residential workers, and all sorts of others roles involved in human relations. It adds that this includes facilitators of teams in organisations, as well as personal development groups.

The nature of the work is described as empowering the client/s to use their own resources to resolve their issues. This links closely with many descriptions of the domain of coaching put forward by many professionals in this field - and is perhaps why Julie Hay of the IDTA is pressurising EATA and ITAA to either change the name of the Counselling field to Coaching or to add 'and Coaching.' Whether this is a wise move, and whether this will happen is, I guess, open to debate. Certainly one of my reasons for becoming qualified is to add a legitimate and loud voice into any such a debate from this country.

It is apparent that coaching is becoming a well known term in the developed world in particular, focussing on enabling individuals and teams to realise their potential, and in Britain there are associations aiming to establish regulation of the field reminiscent of those within counselling and psychotherapy in the 80s and 90s. The marketing of TA is losing out by not having a qualification on offer in coaching - although I understand that on the continent the term coaching is interchangeable with counselling, and such a semantic problem does not exist.

In my past eleven years as a TA trainer in the Organisational and Educational fields, and director of an institute where we also run a TA psychotherapy training, I have met many people in the UK who are in training in various TA psychotherapy programmes. I have been struck at how many do not find it a paradox to have a placement in a 'counselling service' - and count these as psychotherapy application hours. I have been concerned to discover that some are primarily calling themselves coaches in their work. I know that many do 'day jobs' where their hours enabling people to develop life, relationship and social skills do not count towards

their CTA log in the psychotherapy field, yet TA is informing their practice, and would be counted as hours in the Counselling field. I suspect that some attain CTA - P without ever practicing what I understand to be psychotherapy: that is to work primarily with deconfusing the Child ego state with the intention of changing the neural pathways.

This understanding of psychotherapy (and I take this from my colleagues in the psychoanalytic and psychodynamic fields as well as from some of my TA colleagues) means that it is very different in purpose and method to the Counselling field - and to that of Education and Organisations. In these 3 fields the work may well be experienced as therapeutic and there may be spontaneous regression to a Child ego state which needs to be responded to, but this is not the intended and primary way of working. Instead of working with psychopathology the focus is working with health ('psychosatology') by exploring the positive strengths within the Adult ego state and empowering its resilience and capacities for ethos, pathos, logos and technos. The positive psychology research of Martin Seligman and others has much to contribute to this thinking and links well with TA traditions, alongside methods such as appreciative inquiry.

There is much overlap between psychotherapy and 'primary Counselling' and BACP definitions of counselling, and overlap qualification options can work well. I had the privilege of being the external examiner for Metanoia's Counselling qualifications for 6 years which involved me in reading many essays and case studies, and involved the trainers in blending the learning of these participants and those on the psychotherapy programme. It also provided Metanoia with qualification options - a masters for successful psychotherapy CTAs and a first degree for those succeeding with the Metanoia/Middlesex qualification in counselling. From the point of view of student access this is commendable - and at the same time such reinforcing of the hierarchy of field status is saddening.

As I demonstrate in the accompanying diagram there is also overlap between the Counselling field and that of Organisations -for example both facilitation and coaching of individuals and teams - and also of Education in, for example the tutorial. (Indeed, I have often wondered why we have a separate TTA exam when we have an excellent set of competences and standards embedded in the CTA Education, whilst what is involved and well described in the Counselling field is also required but less well expressed in the STA exam!)

It has often struck me that the TA culture in the UK prevails with a 'I'm more OK than you' character - and the condescension to the Counselling, Organisational and Educational fields is one of the ways this is enacted in our etiquette. I've often had trainers say to me 'oh you are Organisational, the exam is easier'. Yet, as trainers in any field ought to know, the practical exam requirements are identical. (And the reality of psychologically holding and containing an organisation is enormous as many who have had the courage to take up positions on ITA Council have experienced.) It was these sort of attitudes that drove some to separate from ITA and set up IDTA (the D stands for Developmental) which is claiming the Counselling field as part of their domain.

As many of us within ITA practice Counselling (possibly even without knowing it) it is time to claim our professionalism, review our prejudices, and revel in honouring some of our working hours as loggable practice. In these times of dissent about regulation, lets be willing to stand for alternatives and the radicalism which is inherent within the TA culture. And lets embrace the unique range of recognised practice which TA provides professional qualifications for - including Counselling!

Rosemary Napper is a CTA in three fields: Organisations, Education and Counselling; and a TSTA in Organisational and Educational applications. She has also been BACP accredited since 1996. She is director of TAworks in Oxford which provides a single foundation for all four fields followed by specialisation over three subsequent years, all with a co-creative and relational stance.