COUNSELLING: NOT ALWAYS A RECOGNIZED PROFESSION IN EUROPE*

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Men may conseille a wooman to be oon
Les hommes peuvent conseiller à une femme de rester seule
But conseilling is no commandment (Chaucer, 1929, p. 1)
Mais conseiller n'est pas commander

We see in Chaucer's verse, that the word "counselling" is derived from an ancient French word. We wouldn't regret continuing to use this word if its meaning hadn't taken off on an entirely different path such that "conseil" has come to be closely associated with an implicit command. Furthermore, with modernity, it has strayed far a field from meaning "to provide good advice," and has become lost in the realm of techniques. It now refers both to the person who provides advice, sometimes in disguised form, and also to the act of giving advice. In non-English speaking European countries, we therefore are reduced to seeking metaphorical substitutes unless we borrow here and there expressions that convey the pliancy of the saying, the doing and the being that is implicit in the term, "counselling."

Historical Survey

Counseling is by no means in the first flush of youth. As early as 1909 Frank Parsons referred to the counseling process in Choosing a Vocation. A year previously, Binet (1857-1911) in France had envisaged making children aware from their schooldays of careers for which they are best suited. Without seeking to enumerate all the authors who used both the word "counseling" and what it implies, we cannot pass over Rollo May. Indeed this American psychologist wrote as far back as 1939 The Art of Counseling. In his introduction May presents his book as "an exploration in a new field." He writes:

During recent years, counseling has become increasingly important. The dean who must deal with the brilliant student who is flunking, the minister calling in the home, the camp director with his youngsters by the lakeside. An infinite numbers of persons in innumerable vocations are realizing that they are called upon to do counseling, to mold personality whether they
wish to or not. "Guide, counselor and friend" - that is what we all are whenever we deal intimately with people. Counseling is an art, yes, but an art which can be peculiarly stimulated and developed, even more than painting and music, for people are the medium in which we all work. In the following pages is utilized the new understanding of personality offered by the modern authorities in the field, the psychotherapists, Freud, Jung, Rank and Kundel, ... and Adler. In counseling one does not, of course use the technique of the psychotherapists as such; but one can well profit from their discoveries in one's own adventure in the understanding of people. (May, 1939, foreword)

In 1942, Carl Rogers published Counseling and Psychotherapy (erroneously translated into French as Helping Relationship and Psychotherapy). Rogers' "One new approach" ... aims directly toward the greater independence and integration of the individual rather than hoping that such results will accrue if the counselor assists in solving the problem. The individual and not the problem is the focus. The aim is not to solve one particular problem, but to assist the individual to grow, so that he can cope with the present problem and with later problems in a better-integrated fashion. (Rogers, 1942, p. 28)

Following these publications a number of articles appeared which refer explicitly or implicitly to the term counseling. For example, in 1952 two "Reports on Counseling" appeared in the Bulletin of Division 17 of the American Psychological Association.

In 1955 Donald Super wrote an article in the Journal of Counseling Psychology, an article entitled "Transition from Vocational Guidance to Counseling." He stated the following:

In 1951, there emerged in the United States, fortuitously rather than planned, the name of a new psychological profession. The result of this was the expansion of a new professional discipline within psychology. The professional practitioner was the counseling psychologist, and the profession was the Psychology of Counseling.

There was a sudden interest in Super when he came to Europe, not only because he was heralding the professionalization of counseling, but also because he gave a series of important lectures in Paris on "The Techniques of Counseling and the Analysis of Interviews." These lectures were published in Le Bulletin de Psychologie de la Sorbonne (Paris, 1958-59). An article by A. Nepveu (1961) entitled "Les Relations Interpersonnelle en Orientation Scolaire et Professionnelle: Le Processus du Conseil" (Interpersonal Relationships in Schools and Career Guidance: the Process of Counseling), followed on Super's articles in the review BINOP. The era in Europe of standardized tests and systematic vocational guidance had begun to decline, and was being gradually replaced by the gradual incorporation of relationship into the interpersonal counseling situation.

It would be difficult and tedious to quote all the books and articles that subsequently appeared. But what is important to note here, is that counseling was and still is influenced by the various psychological orientations within which it developed. I mention among others the psychodynamic approach which originated with Freud, the transactional approach of Berne, the cognitive approaches of Beck (cognitive) and Ellis (rational-emotive), the humanistic
approaches, such as the gestalt approach of Perls, the person-centered approach of Rogers, and the systems approach initiated by Bertalanffy.

In 1976, an issue on psychological counseling appeared in the journal, Santé Mentale (Mental Health), with an article entitled "Le Conseiller et l'Institution." In this publication, some authors clumsily used the English word "counseling." I presume this was a sort of phonetic analogy with the word "council" referring to administrative councils such as town or parish councils. This word "council" is different from the word "counsel" meaning deliberation or consultation (Webster's dictionary).

Let us remember May's statement that "people are the medium in which we all work" (May, 1939, preface). Because of social changes dating from World War II, social milieus have proliferated remarkably. Thus, counseling has developed in specific areas such as marriage counseling, family counseling, school and university counseling, and more recently in the struggles against alcoholism, AIDS, etc., and other areas. These make up just a small sample of counseling applications.

Bernard Honoré said in 1975:

Counseling has become professionalized for every type of problem, at every institutional level, on the social level, at the family level, not to mention all the problems people encounter in adapting to a technological world....[However] it seems that we [counsellors] will not [be] content with this form of counselling...It appears that the time has come when a new human right is being sought, the right to take charge of one's own life...I mean to be able to choose for oneself the path one wishes to take in life, the solutions one works out with respect to life's problems, and not to be obliged to accept preordained solutions. (p. 32)

What is Counseling? Attempts at Definition

Is counseling just an amalgam of theoretical approaches, or is it a unifying concept that is supported by a certain philosophy? In fact, what is counseling? To simplify, as a first step I would suggest that counseling is primarily a relationship between the person who is asking and the person who is being asked. The essence of this situation, in the terminology of Alexandre Lhotellier (Leroy & Lhotellier, 1973), is "to be with" or to "tenir conseil" (to entertain counsel). Lhotellier defines counseling as establishing a relationship of a certain type which enables the client, the person facing the counselor, to gain confidence in himself/herself to the point where the client is enabled to make a positive decision. This is the meaning, the very core of counselling, the philosophical underpinning: the whole idea of placing one's confidence in another human being. It is a matter of giving the person his/her autonomy as much as a matter of integrating the individual into social structures. We must understand that whenever we think about counselling, this involves the autonomy of the individual, but will also refer to adjustment and adaptation to the 'real world,' to creation, creativity. (p. 19)

"Any author knows that what he or she writes does not come freshly minted from personal and private thoughts about things, but is in fact an assemblage of words and ideas borrowed from other people" (McLeod, 1998, p. xviii). As far as my own ideas and thoughts are concerned, I have often done more than borrow from others. I have made their words and
ideas my own, having taken them from words and phrases encountered in face-to-face dialogue or in my reading. This is why I have no hesitation in freely quoting certain authors, since without becoming totally identified with these authors, I feel perfectly at home with their views.

John McLeod (1998) paints an impressive picture of counseling in a book he simply calls “An Introduction to Counselling”. In this book, he is primarily addressing British readers thoroughly-schooled in the meaning of the word “counselling.” After World War II, a surge of altruistic initiatives flourished in Britain. Within Europe as a whole, it is mainly in Britain that counseling has developed professionally in an organized way for over 70 years. (At a rough guess, the British Association for Counseling has at present more than 15,000 members and it is not the only professional counseling association in England.) Therefore, given that there has been little input from other European writers, this work can serve as an introduction to counseling. “It has always seemed to me,” says McLeod,

that counselling is an activity that is at the same time simple and vastly complicated. What can be simpler than talking to a concerned and interested listener about your problems? But it is what is involved in the telling and the listening, knowing and being known, reflecting and acting, that can be so complex. In counselling, people talk about anything and everything. The relationship between the counsellor and the person seeking counsel is simultaneously taking place at the physical bodily level, and through language, and in the thoughts, feelings and memories of each participant….I have always argued that counselling is an inter-disciplinary activity. There is no way that what happens in counselling can be satisfactorily reduced to psychology. It is psychological, in part, but it is also social, cultural, spiritual, philosophical, aesthetic and much more. My belief is that it is a fragmented discipline, which contains different traditions and schools of thought, and spreads itself across the discoveries of theory, research and practice. (1998, p. xvii)

Then what is counseling? McLeod again: “…It is not just something that happens between two people. It is also a social institution which is rooted in the culture of modern industrialised society. It is an occupation, discipline or profession of relatively recent origin” (1998, p. 2). This last statement makes it even more difficult to situate the question in its own objective reality. The rapidity of politico-social change does not allow us to grasp what counseling may become even in a not too distant future. Up to now it is through work, among other things, that an individual’s integration has been evaluated socially. Will this always be? Counseling is constantly in development, and to follow the pace new concepts are created. This is why many definitions appear to be self-contradictory or overlapping. These definitions leave an unsatisfactory aftertaste when we expect too much from them. But they enable the person who treads the same path in a more adventurous spirit to discover little by little the meaning that is relevant to the present situation.
Burke and Steffire (1979), quoted by McLeod, defined counseling as: "...designed to help clients to understand and clarify their views of their life space and to learn to reach their self-determined goals through meaningful, well-informed choices and through resolution of problems of an emotional or interpersonal nature" (McLeod, 1998, p. 3). This definition relates to the remarks made by Lhotellier (Leroy & Lhotellier, 1973, p. 19); however it lacks the idea of integration into social structures which to me, is vital if the work of counseling is to be carried out successfully.

In 1995, Colin Feltham in his book, "What is Counselling?" returns at least to some extent to the definition he and Dryden had proposed in 1992 and which in recent articles he rephrased in more precise terms as follows:

Counselling is a principled relationship characterised by the application of one or more psychological theories and a recognised set of communication skills, modified by experience, intuition and other interpersonal factors to client's intimate concerns, problems or aspirations. Its predominant ethos is one of facilitation rather than advice-giving or coercion. It may be of very brief or long duration, take place in an organisational or private practice settings.... Counselling is a service sought by people in distress or in some degree of confusion who wish to discuss and resolve these in a relationship which is more disciplined and confidential than friendship and perhaps less stigmatising than helping relationships offered in traditional medical or psychiatric setting.

Counseling is therefore viewed as principled, (an ethical endeavour with strict boundaries); drawing on theories of psychotherapy and personality (it is a serious, professional activity resting partly on the knowledge from the social sciences); practiced according to certain learned (not innate or casually acquired) interpersonal skills; but which nonetheless includes the values of practical, personal experience and intuition. It should not be confused with advice-giving, but neither should it be thought inferior to, or even essentially different from psychotherapy.... (Feltham, 1995, p. 9)

John Lees (1999) uses the term "clinical" to differentiate counseling from other professions which employ talking as one of their intervention procedures. Talking is one type of intervention among others used by professions such as psychiatry, and clinical psychology through testing and advice work (work which consists of giving advice). This kind of advisory work necessitates a broad acquaintance with topics related to current affairs such as finance, careers etc., but requires little actual counseling skill. Lees goes even further and speaks of "clinical counseling in context," in his book of that title. He says:

My definition of clinical counselling has two parts. The term "clinical counseling" distinguishes counselling, as a professional activity with a therapeutic intent, from a counselling-skills activity in which a therapeutic activity is secondary to another professional activity. The description "in context" meanwhile distinguishes it from such forms of talking therapy as psychotherapy. Instead of making the distinction on the basis of depth, length of contract, and so on, as is usually the case, it is made on the basis of its contextual nature. Counsellors, by virtue of the fact that they are usually exposed to a whole range of contextual factors in the organisations.
in which they work, are able to build up a degree of expertise which arises out of their capacity to understand how the context affects the work. They are, so to speak, experts in working with all the issues that arise from the interface of organizational, social, cultural, political and clinical issues.... (Lees, 1999, p. 17)

As we are in the realm of definitions, it behooves us to quote the European Association for Counselling (EAC). The official definition of counseling adopted by the second AGM of the EAC on May 11, 1995 is as follows:

Counselling is an interactive learning process contracted between counsellor(s) and client(s), be they individuals, families, groups or institutions, which approaches in a holistic way, social, cultural, economic and/or emotional issues... Counselling may be concerned with addressing and resolving specific problems, making decisions, coping with crisis, improving relationships, developmental issues, promoting and developing personal awareness, working with feelings, thoughts, perceptions and internal or external conflict. The overall aim is to provide clients with opportunities to work in self defined ways, toward living in more satisfying and resourceful ways as individuals and as members of the broader society. (EAC, 1975)

Attempts at Clarification of the Concept of Counseling

The term counseling seems to have been associated with some concepts responsible for misunderstandings of the profession in some quarters.

Counseling Skills and Helping Relationships

Outside of the English-speaking world, there is a tendency in the literature to confuse theory and practice. I would like to try here to correct an error of translation which has made the term counseling equivalent to a helping relationship and which perhaps originated in the title of Carl Rogers' (1942) book, Counseling and Psychotherapy. The title was translated into French as “Helping Relationships and Psychotherapy.” This error persists in non-English speaking countries. I have wondered if the translator's work was complicated by the fact that he had to avoid translating counseling into “conseil” (or “consiglio,” in Italian, for example) by which the French language means “giving advice.”

A helping relationship within a specific professional role corresponds to what Anglo-Saxons call “counselling skills” (Lees, 1999, p. 15) and what Germans call “Beratung” (see SGGT/SPCP, 1997). A helping relationship is not itself a profession, but it gives a special character to the profession within which it is practiced. This relationship exists when two individuals are in contact and the second individual is, whether explicitly or not, seeking help. This relationship can exist in varying degrees from something very basic up to a very complex level of therapeutic relationship.

The nurse, the doctor, the priest, the teacher, the social worker, enter into a helping relationship with their client when their attention is no longer focused on the act they have to
perform but on the whole person. A nurse can for example, give an injection to a patient, without even looking at the patient, but she can also look at the patient's face and become extremely anxious at what she reads there. This is what Judith Seydoux (1999) accurately described as "the helping relationship" as part of a broader caring role.

In practice, this relationship of help involves a special focus of attention and presupposes specific skills. The person (nurse, doctor, priest) who has acquired these skills and who exercises them is a practitioner in a particular caring role and is conferring a new meaning on his or her professional work:

[These skills] are not wholly distinguishable from those of counselling. It is worth remembering that counselling hinges crucially on the user and the recipient explicitly agreeing to enter into a counselling relationship, as the BAC states... the difference lies in the additional requirements for theoretical understanding and ethical and professional boundaries and accountability. (Feltham, 1995, p. 24).

Counseling and Advice-Giving

Associating counseling with advice-giving further illustrates, by way of a highly specific example, the continued survival of former counseling models-- as when people were directed along well-trodden paths which had been "systematically structured" (Honore, 1976, p. 33) and were given tributary exhortations and advice to be followed: "If I were you..." Still, it is important not to confuse well-intentioned advice-giving with providing information that might be unethical and even dangerous to withhold. One day, asking my way of a passerby, I was told, "follow the bus line." When I came to an intersection, I of course chose the wrong turn which led me into unknown territory. This trivial example brings to mind Carl Rogers' "If the house is on fire, ...call the fire-brigade."

Counseling and Psychotherapy

John Lees' definition, that cites the "therapeutic intent" of counseling (Lees, 1999, p. 17), may crystallize the conflict between the adherents of "pure counseling" and "pure psychotherapy." The origins of this distinction are not clear. For myself, I would willingly side with Brian Thorne whose arguments in their time partly suggested that the issue was more a trivial matter of money than an academic or professional point for discussion. Since I'm in the Rogerian tradition, my sole objective is to "be with" the person whether I am operating as a counselor or a psychotherapist. Rogers, as we have seen, aims directly toward the greater independence and integration of the individual. The individual and not the problem is the focus. The aim is not to solve one particular problem, but to assist the individual to grow, so that he can cope with the present problem and with later problems in a better-integrated fashion. (Rogers, 1942, p. 28).

I also like to recall that in ancient Greece the "therapón" was the warrior's companion who accompanied him in his chariot, confident of his strategy. (I don't know if he offered him advice but at least he listened to him!). He was also the servant caring for the warriors' well-being. Confidant, servant, therapón-- Is this not the role of the counselor and indeed of the therapist, as suggested by Feltham (1995, p. 9)?
Counseling in Context - Or Simply "Counseling"

Whatever the theoretical base, the definitions considered above have one common practical objective: "[T]o empower clients to pursue the paths which are right for them" (EAC, 1975), "[T]o enable them to make positive decisions" (Leroy & Lhotellier, 1973), to "give them the right to take charge of their own lives" (Honoré, 1976), "through setting up a facilitating rather than a restrictive atmosphere or simply 'giving advice'" (Feltham, 1995).

Nowadays I find it hard to pursue this topic without going back to the words of Rollo May quoted at the beginning of this paper: "People are the medium in which we all work" (1939, foreword). People form the milieus in which we all work, and those milieus are rapidly changing because of the socio-economic developments of our post-war era. Is it inconceivable that there might be a boomerang effect, and that these changes would hit people emotionally, people who, in former times, might have led uneventful lives, or at least less exacerbated, sometimes at a paroxysmal level, less affected lives?

In recent years the socio-political scene has evolved considerably, especially in Europe. Social services are no longer able to respond to non-specific requests engendered by the specific nature of the problems of these new clients who seek help. The agent who distributes unemployment benefits cannot understand the emotional problems brought about by unemployment. The new wretchedness, whatever its origin--unemployment, AIDS, aggression, permanent or temporary immigration (refugees), natural or industrial catastrophes, to name but a few, cannot be alleviated by simple assistance. Individual mobility, voluntary or forced, has created a new type of population in a Europe with permeable boundaries, which handicaps some; perturbs others, and characterizes the range of classes.

It seems that, when confronted with extreme or hazardous situations, most individuals have recourse to an external, objective mode of functioning. This is the time when hunger, poverty, violence, privation, humiliation, hazards which daily menace the survival of the person and of the person's family - these are no longer thought of as perceived fears, threatening the subjective world of each individual. They are inexorable, concrete, objective realities which people confront and the therapist who wants to establish contact with his or her client cannot do less than take these facts into consideration (lossifides, 1994, p. 16).

Classic psychotherapy does not have a role in these situations. Counseling in its more recent forms, whether practiced privately or in an institutional setting, attends to these new types of clients. This kind of counseling is not a substitute for social services. It is not a low cost psychotherapy, either, but nor does it neglect deeper psychological problems. However, it does tackle these problems from the periphery of the socio-economic-cultural factors in which they are embedded. "I am especially addressing counsellors when I claim that counselling, as it is defined, exceeds the limits of therapy but also that therapy is part of counseling" (lossifides, 1994, p. 16).

Practically speaking, as well as from the psychological point of view, counseling has points of entry that are not available to psychotherapy. It is difficult to imagine a psychotherapist in a factory even if he or she is recruited into the panel of employee consultants, or in a reception center for refugees. This would not be the case with a counselor: "Counsellors make themselves available to a much larger number of people in a variety of organisational contexts" (Lees, 1999, p. 1).
Counseling "is not only something which takes place between two people. It is also a social institution rooted in the cultures of modern societies" (McLeod, 1998, p. 2). This recent thought resonates with what Bernard Honoré wrote in 1975:

I believe that counselling is an institutionalising praxis. It has a much wider range of possibilities than the possibilities it offers on the level of a dual relationship. The relationship between two persons is part of something which is at the start of new organizations. One could state that counselling is at the periphery of institutionalised systems and brings to consciousness all the differences that exist between people's reality and what is anticipated by institutions. (p. 35)

Clinical, Organizational, Social, Cultural Interface

Whether a socially established institution or an institutionalizing praxis, it is none the less true that counseling is at the periphery of institutionalized systems and thus reveals the contrast between the reality of people's situations and their appraisal by institutions.

This professional interface requires the counselor to have realistic knowledge of the situations he or she is likely to encounter. But through the interfacing role which has devolved upon the counselor, he or she cannot ignore the complexity of the situations in which clients may find themselves. John McLeod, in an extract already quoted, said, "I have always argued that counselling is an interdisciplinary activity ... It is partly psychological, but it is also social, cultural, philosophical, aesthetic and much more..." (McLeod, 1998, p. xvii). How impressive an educational programme!

Indeed, in order to be in a position to understand them from within, it is essential that the counselor be informed about the development of institutions, and the economic, social and cultural contexts of clients. The following example was not told by a counselor but by a famous psychiatrist, Edouard Zarifian. However, the episode, especially at the end, could have taken place in a counselor's office:

A thirty year old woman, reared in a wooded region of Normandy and of humble origin developed serious and incomprehensible behaviors. Because she was considered to be delirious she was hospitalised in a large psychiatric unit. The treatment she received appeared to be of no avail so she was sent home. A few years later a social psychiatrist tried to listen to her and having gained her confidence, discovered that she had an unshakable belief in the effects of magical spells. Belief in witchcraft is deeply-rooted in rural Normandy. The cultural convictions of the patient and her traditional vocabulary, [when used by the psychiatrist,] were able to totally liberate her from her troublesome symptoms. (Zarifian, 1994, p. 75)

Some counselors specialize in a particular area, but being too specialized may lead to restricted vision and to viewing the patient only from one's own perspective. There are specific institutions that avail themselves of the services of counselors. It is obvious that these counselors will be more familiar with the domain of the institution in question than would be
the case with their colleagues. However, counselors should be careful not to isolate themselves within their specialization and in fact they should have access to a wide network of information as well as to interdisciplinary and intercultural working groups.

The Counseling Process

When a client comes to see a counselor, whether privately or in an institutional setting, this person presents with a specific problem and not a general malaise. But this problem, however tangible it may be, requires much exploration and narrowing down. This is the work that the client will undertake with the counselor in a constructive dialogue which of course targets the problem, but which often reveals a hidden dimension, the importance of which only then comes to light. Attentive listening is what enables the counselor to facilitate the emergence of the real obstacle to clarification of the problem. This discernment is necessary for taking a decision that concludes in some form of action. Rogers said that the central focus is the client, not the problem. But he also added that the objective of counseling is to facilitate growth that will enable the client to cope with the present problem and subsequent problems, in a more integrated way (1942, p. 28). Arriving thus at the heart of the problem enables the client to work on it and all that it entails. Counseling is not an objective questioning method but a subjective encounter with a problem where the sequence will unfold in a longer or shorter time-span either in a two-person or a group situation.

This is the work that the client will undertake with the counselor in a constructive dialogue which of course targets the problem, but which often reveals a hidden dimension, the importance of which only then comes to light. Attentive listening is what enables the counselor to facilitate the emergence of the real obstacle to clarification of the problem.

The following diagram represents schematically what happens in a counseling relationship regardless of the counselor's orientation or the method used. At the beginning there is a problem that can be, at first sight, fairly ordinary (lack of water) or a social problem (unemployment). These situations are, at start, usually taken over by official specialist organizations. But in either case the real problem will probably persist and become unbearable.
Figure 1. The Process of Counseling.
The person whom we will call the "client," (cl. on the diagram), seeks "advice" so as to be able face up to the situation. This will mean approaching a counselor (co.).

What can the client say except to speak of the problem at great length: "No more water for washing... for cooking... and think how it is with children to care for... I've approached all the local services ... but to no avail." Or again, "I had a good job as an engineer in a firm which shut down and since then I have searched and searched ... but I'm 50 years old, nobody wants me, my technique is out of date." Little by little the first client begins to talk about herself. The counselor learns that her husband has left her and gone away with another woman, she has no money so cannot pay the water rates. "It is so hard to be alone to try to face all this, and above all to be alone, alone with only oneself." As for the engineer, he will say how degrading it is to have to sign up as unemployed. He is very depressed, he'll never again get work, "What is the point of living, I'm done for."

As can be seen from the diagram the "problem" at first is the topic of the interview. The relevant details mount up in tight loops. The dialogue resembles a breathless monologue (black line) which gives little opportunity for the counselor to intervene, only to listen. And it is thanks to the listening process that the counselor is able to reach out to the client in his or her deep distress and existential reality. This is the starting point of the therapeutic work of counseling. The woman or man can begin to talk about him or herself from within their own heart.

In the diagram, the black line is followed by a gray line which symbolizes the client's self-dialogue. One can listen to oneself, hear and understand oneself, because one is being heard, understood, acknowledged. The problem is no longer at the center, it is concentric. Up to now the client has been imprisoned within the problem, but now, suddenly, the problem gives way to the more urgent, the more important things. It is like someone who is damaged by external wounds to which deeper more insidious and more destructive sores attach themselves. The double spiral progressively expands as if vital space is being regenerated. The conscious realizations become more and more meaningful. The problem does not disappear but it no longer holds pride of place. Its magnitude is toned down as insight and self awareness begin to skim the surface of consciousness.

The problem is still there but the client's view of it is different. The intensity of work on the self that is accomplished by the client is what determines the therapeutic value of the counseling relationship: changing the focus of concern. This is a question of the "discernment" which emerged in the dialogue and which was established between client and counselor. This is not a dialogue in the sense of a "chat" with one other. I would compare it rather to a musical fugue where, after the introduction, the vocalists take up the theme and develop it to the exquisite point where everything has been expressed. The stretto, or movement which precedes the conclusion, can then begin. When the self becomes integrated, when the person regains confidence in the self and in one's own self-worth, then the situation can be viewed in a different way, decisions made and action taken. As in a musical fugue the conclusion through the medium of Alexandre Lhotelier's trilogy: Discernment, decision, action, indicates that the person has reached an internal integration which allows the self to be entirely gathered together within and capable of confronting whatever may come from without.
I'll borrow again from Lhotelier by saying that counseling consists of "clarifying a confused situation," which is causing pain, by bringing about "a new awareness" that the person uncovers about him or herself through the occasion of confronting a specific, external problem. (Leroy & Lhotelier, 1973).

A Psychosocial Vision of Counseling

Tap and Oubrayrie-Roussel (1999) describe the resolution of human suffering as the confrontation of a stressful situation.

Dealing with suffering rests on a successful adaptation to situations and also on the recognition of self as a person. According to Nuttin (1967) the adaptation corresponds to functional adjustment between the two poles of the life process, the organism and the environment. (Tap & Oubrayrie-Roussel 1999, p. 23) can be said that this suffering is distress arising from a mélange of disturbing biological and psychological assaults upon an organism in combination with the organism's corresponding reactions. (1999, p. 23)

The counselling interview enables the person to confront the stressful situation, to deal with the suffering involved and to respond in a satisfactory and proactive manner. 'Confronting (or 'coping') is a way of resolving a problem where what is at stake is the well-being of the person.' 'Coping is not just an adaptive process but also a strategy of personalisation.' (Lazarus, quoted by Tap & Oubrayrie-Roussel, 1999, p. 23)

Training

As we have seen, counseling is not an advice-giving enterprise. It is a skill that involves a willingness to learn how to listen to the client-person. Listening demands the total attention of the counselor-person who listens at a level far beyond that of the presenting problem, though of course, not all situations are necessarily embedded in complexity. This listening requires great sensitivity on the part of the counselor, a sensitivity which originates in deep self-knowledge, personal interdisciplinary experience, knowledge of the likely interactions among different aspects of a given situation, and above all, vast practical experience.

Training in counseling is a lengthy affair based on a common-core syllabus for people whose maturity has been forged in psychological and human situations. Only after several years of practice could a counselor expect to have developed a specialization in a particular area.

Every psychological model sets up a training procedure that corresponds to its own basic philosophical point of view. It is obviously not a question of imposing the same procedures on each prospective counselor, nor indeed should there be identical training procedures for everyone. Given the rapidity of socio-cultural and politico-economic change, they cannot ever be written once and for all. It has, however, been possible to identify the basic competencies essential for the counselor (EAC, 2001).
The EAC has also set minimal standards of training for recognition of counselors at the European level. These standards are minimal because they have to take into consideration those European countries where there is no recognized training. In these countries there are, of course, certain practitioners who exercise the profession of counseling in a remarkably successful way thanks to self-training, which is perhaps based more upon practical experience than upon educational learning. Undoubtedly the EAC norms will be reviewed as the profession develops.

It is nonetheless true that the training of counselors is based on a common core curriculum and must be exacting, not only in its length and its theoretical basis, but also in the counselor's work on her or himself, in her practical experience, and above all in his thoroughly supervised practice. Only then, after completion of formal training, should the multiple facets of counseling be considered through experiences that might, with long practice, lead to a so-called specialization.

Only then, after completion of formal training, should the multiple facets of counseling be considered through experiences that might, with long practice, lead to a so-called specialization.

And it is also true to say that training never ends. Experience in the field is certainly the trump card in the practice of counseling. But in itself, this is not enough. At a time when speed has become a norm, it is indispensable that one takes time to confront colleagues about differing ideas and differing ways of doing. This is part of Continuous Education.

Conclusion

Even though counseling originated in the last century when it was solidly established despite a sometimes chaotic evolution, in its present form, it is essentially a modern profession, a profession for the year 2000. In countries where the term psychotherapy is still strongly linked with a medical image, there are those who rightly wish to break free from this relationship. But if they wish to latch on to the words "counsel" and "counselling" they will have to try very hard to undo the negative connotation of dispenser of advice, which is what the word "conseiller" conveys. Although the word "counselling" is used in Greece, Italy and Portugal, to mention only southern European countries, it has perhaps a barbaric resonance outside of the English speaking countries in Europe. Nevertheless, until some new term emerges, "counseling" is the only term that commands, in theory and in practice, a consensus of opinion about its content in this era of life crises that transcend language boundaries and are linked with personal, cultural, social, political and economic factors. As Rollo May said so well a long time ago,
It is obvious that in counseling one does not use the technique of psychotherapists as such but one can well profit from their discoveries in one's own adventure in the understanding of other people. (1939, p. 25) Understanding the depths of another's pain, going beyond its external manifestations to understanding it within the client's own context, seeking the client's well-being, this is the core of counseling.

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