

Person-Centered Teacher Advocates as Culture Brokers

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Abstract

This paper explores the application, by teachers, of the person-centered counseling approach, within an ethnically diverse educational population, to investigate how students may feel heard, express their concerns and become empowered in their learning. The central focus of this paper, revolves around the application of the Advocacy model, a school-based, person-centered system, designed to support disengaged adolescent students. The case-study of an individual student, illustrates how the person-centered approach, may contribute to addressing the complex experiences of adolescent students, who are attempting to negotiate the space between their traditional culture and the alien and confusing culture of the school. The terms advocacy and culture-broker will be addressed in this paper.

Keywords: Person-centered, advocacy, culture broker, school students

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The complexities of working with students in a supportive role, within a multi-cultural environment, is a challenge not often explored from theory to practice. This paper, examines the application of a program, specially designed to provide such support, the Advocacy Program, within the framework of a person-centered approach in a secondary school. The added issue of a diverse environment, required the subtle awareness of cultural brokerage.

Culture Brokers

The notion of "culture broker" was originally applied in the negotiation of differences between modern white European and indigenous peoples, but is now applied more widely. It is defined as follows by Buckley and Bradshaw (2010), who extend the concept to inter-species as well as inter-ethnic interaction:

A culture broker seeks to support the values, beliefs, and customs of a marginalized group, helping the members of it gain access to resources that have been denied and sequestered by the dominating culture. These resources may include jobs, education, healthcare, funds, and social access. In human contexts, the culture broker commonly holds the position of educator, social worker, or healthcare practitioner. At the interpersonal level, the culture broker functions similarly to a therapist by cultivating the means for

the "client" to attain and maintain a self-identity that permits healthful functioning across cultures. (p.45)

The culture broker, must be able to function empathically with those outside her native culture. She must be able to hear and speak meaningfully to both cultures and to navigate the taken-for-granted assumptions of cultures, that are at odds with each other. She must be able to, both support an individual's sense of self and support the individual, in adjusting to the norms of an alternative culture that holds most of the power. In the context of schooling, this poses both a political and an ethical dilemma.

In the Australian context, the administration of most schools is firmly embedded in the Anglo-Celtic culture, which is assumed to be the norm, even in schools where few of the students come from families where English is spoken at home. A teacher's class may be populated by a mix of Iraqi, Afghani, Pacific Islander, Turkish, Vietnamese, Burmese and Indigenous Australian students, to name but a few of the groups, which make up Australia's rich multicultural mix. Teachers are regularly confronted with the conflict between the mainstream culture of the school and the culture of a student's family and the ethnic community, which supports it.

For instance, schools in an individualistic culture, such as is dominant in most English-speaking countries, tend to assume that they exist to meet the needs and ambitions of their students. Children who manifest particular talents, are generally encouraged to develop them and find a satisfying career consistent with them. However, a student's family may have brought a collectivist culture with them from the 'old country.' In such a culture, the child is educated to meet the family's needs, not their own. Indeed, the notion that there might be a divergence between the adolescent's ambitions and the family's is not entertained.

So, the teacher encourages the student, to select subjects which will support a career in the Visual Arts, while the family insists that he or she concentrates on subjects (Mathematics and Sciences) which will secure a place in a Medical faculty. The family wins; the family sees the school as unhelpful; the teacher sees wasted talent; the student struggles and is stressed. Or, the teacher

wins; the family sees the school as encouraging adolescent rebellion; the student struggles and is stressed. The teacher may, or may not successfully fill the role of culture broker between the students and the school. Meanwhile, the students themselves have a parallel role. Jones & Trickett (2005) argue that immigrant students themselves, have to fill the role of culture broker.

This role encompasses a wide range of behaviors, in which children and adolescents mediate, or broker the relationship of family members with local institutions, other adults, and peers of the children. These activities may involve translating documents sent home by a local school, arranging for doctors appointments, answering the telephone, or simply explaining to parents what their native-speaking friends are talking about when visiting the home. In each instance, the activity serves to make more comprehensible to parents, or family members, the customs, mores, policies, legal constraints, or interaction patterns of the new country. (p.23)

This complex role, which necessarily involves both adaptation to the dominant culture and retention of the culture of origin, may be a source of considerable stress for students. Their parents may find the necessary role-reversal disturbing and disempowering and react negatively to the student's best efforts. (Puig, 2002) A student who is having difficulty in understanding and adapting to the dominant culture as manifested in the school can be thrust into the role of mediating between this confusing culture and that of his or her parents.

Teacher-Advocates

Teacher-advocates are teachers working within an advocacy model of student support, based on the person-centered approach. The advocacy model was developed in 1999, and trialed in a number of secondary schools, within the public Education system in the State of Victoria, Australia. It was designed and funded in the first place, as a means of dealing with the problem of school attendance and retention in the post-compulsory years of schooling. During the 90s, the conservative state government had ceased to fund auxiliary staff (counselors, welfare coordinators, careers advisors, pastoral

careers) in schools. There had subsequently been a substantial decline in attendance and retention in post-compulsory classes. The advocacy model, was proposed within a rhetoric of learning management and student pathways monitoring, as a means to increase the attendance, retention and consequent employability of at risk students. While such a description of the purposes of advocacy was essential in securing funding, the intent of its designers was more general – to support the psychological and social well-being of students within a student-centered framework.

The essence of the advocacy model, is the allocation to each student of a teacher-advocate who is committed to meet with the student fortnightly, for at least fifteen minutes. The advocate undertakes to develop a trusting relationship with the student and to listen to the student empathically and non-judgmentally. The advocate, who is generally not the student's classroom teacher, undertakes to intervene on the student's behalf, whenever the student is in trouble with a teacher or the school administration, to make sure that the student's circumstances and perspective on the situation is heard and understood. The advocate's prime focus, is to provide a person-centered environment, to provide support for the student's learning and school engagement. Because the advocate role demands substantially different skills than teaching, teacher advocates receive professional development in the attitudes and skills associated with the person-centered approach to counseling. One of the most challenging aspects of the model, is the demand it makes on teachers to refrain from certain of their habitual behaviors. They must refrain from instructing, directing, reprimanding and evaluating. They must even control their tendency to give advice. Their task is to listen and to understand.

Many schools have adopted the practice of providing students, especially those perceived as at-risk, with mentors — either members of the school staff or sympathetic adults from outside the school. Evaluations of such programs, have generally shown that students with mentors are significantly less likely to engage in risky or anti-social behaviors than those without them, and that they have a positive view of their experience of being mentored (Beier; Rosenfeld, Spitalny, Zansky & Bontempo, 2000 ; De Anda,

2001). However, Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper (2002), Jekielek, Moore & Haire (2002) and Koerner & Harris (2007) conclude from their analyses of the effectiveness of mentoring programs that mentoring does not of itself produce these positive outcomes. It has to be based on sound theory and the systematic application of good practice. (In other words it has to be ‘done right.’) It must be adequately resourced. It must be grounded in the formation of a strong relationship and must be focused on meeting the needs of the young person, not those of the mentor or the school.

The advocacy model differs from many mentoring programs, in that it comes from a clear understanding of what is entailed in ‘doing it right.’ It is supported explicitly by person-centered theory, as articulated by Carl Rogers. This implies both the formation of a positive, caring relationship and a particular mode of interaction, which focuses on the student’s subjective experience. Furthermore, the relationship is purposeful and focused. Advocate and student do not meet occasionally for a chat. They meet frequently, at a regular time, to explore the student’s engagement in learning and whatever might inhibit it. These conversations are supported by a number of electronic tools – The Student Achievement Inventory [www.sai.vic.edu.au] – which encourage students to reflect on their learning and to develop a sense of purpose in their experience of schooling. In addition, unlike the case in many mentoring programs, advocates are all members of the school staff (either teaching or administrative) who are in a position to advocate for their allocated students within the school system.

Formal evaluations of the model (Ocean 2000, 2001; Henry et. al., 2002) indicate that advocacy makes a strong positive impact not only on school attendance and retention, but on general engagement in learning, academic achievement and psychological and social well-being. They also indicate that the model only ‘works’ when it is properly executed; that is, when it is supported and resourced by the school, when advocates are consistent in regularly meeting with the students allocated to them, and when they interact with the students in a manner consistent with the person-centered approach.

Being Empathic

Henry et. al.,(2002), in their study of the impact of advocacy in the middle school (Grades 5-9) note that students, were more appreciative of the help teacher-advocates gave them on welfare and wellbeing issues, than on learning issues. They note that:

The intensive, personalized nature of the one-to-one relationship contributes to the well-being/welfare flavor of the study, and allows both the student and the advocate teacher to acquire a shared deeper knowledge of one another — a mutual understanding that arguably rests on a higher plain than achievable within the usual conventional teacher/student roles. The result of this deeper, shared knowledge is potentially very powerful with the capability to prevent an escalation of students' problems and avert a decline in their well-being, thus creating more rewarding and satisfying school experiences of both the teacher and student. (Henry et. al., 2002, p. 45)

The advocacy model, was designed with 'at risk' adolescents in mind, but without any focus on adolescents whose at risk status is a function of cultural marginalization. However, it should be noted, that in the formal evaluation of the model, as it operated in the original twelve schools (Ocean 2000), the evidence gathered from students, indicated that students from non English-speaking families, were significantly more positive in their assessment of the advocacy experience than the average.

We suggest that advocacy has a special role in the school's relationship with such students. While some schools find the means to celebrate cultural diversity of the student population, it appears that in the managerial climate of other schools, difference is perceived as a problem to be overcome. In either case, students from marginalized backgrounds may have anxieties, which conventional welfare strategies are unable to mitigate. What advocacy provides for such students, is the security of knowing that there is some one in the school who understands their situation, who cares, who listens,

who can explain to the school authorities how difficult it is for you and who can always be relied on for support and encouragement. We explore this through example later in the paper.

We suggest, that for schools to initiate mentoring programs that intend to provide students with support, in how to comply with the prevailing cultural paradigm, and think purely in terms of acculturation and adaptation to the dominant culture, is neither respectful of the wider school community, nor capable of promoting the ideal of an harmonious multicultural society. Where teachers are able to function adequately as culture brokers with their students, they substantially lessen the strain on students in mediating and interpreting the dominant culture for their parents. We suggest that adequate functioning in this role, involves learning to function empathically, congruently and non-judgmentally.

For Rogers (1980) it was “a basic fact of all human life that we live in separate realities.” (p.107) He developed a theory of personality and therapeutic change, within a subjectivist paradigm, arguing that ‘behavior is basically the goal-directed attempt of the organism to satisfy its needs, as experienced, in the field as perceived.’ (1951, p. 491) In this view, the ‘field’ may represent a distorted perspective on reality, but the behavior is nevertheless a rational response to it. The approach of the person-centered counselor, working with an individual client, is to offer a genuine, empathic, non-judgmental relationship, which will provide the client with the freedom to explore the field, as perceived without inhibition, having faith that the client’s actualizing tendency will move the client away from conditions of worth and dysfunctional behaviors towards a more fully human experience. Where the world of the other appears different from the common culture, it must nevertheless be entered into, for “the best vantage point for understanding behavior is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself [sic].” (Rogers, 1951, p. 494) The occasional challenging difference, must not prevent the counselor from accepting the client unconditionally and without judgment. Neither should it prevent the culture broker from taking the marginal culture seriously, as an authentic response to the field as perceived.

The teacher-advocate can take on the role of culture broker in interacting with a student from a marginalized community. The primary aim is to listen and to understand, and in doing so to provide a model of genuine listening and understanding. Moreover, the advocate is likely to be dealing not with the marginalized culture itself but with an adolescent burdened with the double task of negotiating an alien and confusing culture and mediating between this culture and his or her family. The role of advocate, like the role of counselor, involves:

being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever it is that he or she is experiencing it means sensing meanings of which he or she is scarcely aware. (Rogers, 1980, p.143)

The practical considerations of how to implement this process in schools, required complex thinking and specific arrangements, to ensure success for the students and advocate. Success in this, is considered to be that the advocate can listen in a person-centered manner, be aware of Rogers' six conditions and work towards establishing a trusting relationship, whereby the student can develop skills of reflection and hear their own voice.

Tricia taught in secondary schools for six years; in schools consistent with the one in which the case-study student attended, therefore Tricia had had previous experience of culture broking within a culturally diverse educational institution. She was also heavily involved in the original establishment of the Advocacy Project and was therefore, fully aware of the tension between the political rhetoric required to get funding for the project and the person-centered and cultural requirements for being an advocate.

She was invited and chose to work as an advocate in the metropolitan, low socio-economic secondary school with six older students who voluntarily completed forms granting permission for her to research and record interactions. The name of the student used in this paper has been changed, so as not to identify her. Tricia, the advocate and Rasia, the student, met once a fortnight as a minimum,

and Rasia was happy to share her thoughts about school, her personal reflections and concerns.

Tricia had undertaken a Masters in Education and part of that was a unit entitled Person-Centered Approach in Education, which required a particular understanding of the application of the approach in a State Government educational environment rather than a strictly clinical regime. In adopting the person-centered approach as an advocate, Tricia was aware of Rogers' six principles for engagement (Wyatt, 2001 p:iii) and particularly the ten questions that Rogers explored in establishing a helping relationship. (Rogers, 1984)

Scenes from a Life

The following transcript, comes from a case study, in which one of the authors, Tricia, was in the role of advocate, with an adolescent girl from an Iraqi background. (McCann, 2008) At the time of this interaction, Rasia had been speaking English for three years. She had no primary school education, as she had spent years in a refugee camp with her family, before arriving in Australia. She had welcomed the opportunity to have an advocate, because she felt isolated in the school and was desperate to make sense of the various narratives in her life.

In the Advocacy relationship, Rasia spent a lot of her time reflecting upon the voices she heard in her life, especially those to whom she attributed authority over her life: her mother and her teachers. The three segments presented here, concern her mother, the careers counselor and the Mathematics teacher. My concern, as the person-centered advocate and culture broker, was how to interact with her about her concerns without mindlessly imposing ideas that would not be appropriate for her. In the advocate role, my primary focus was to support Rasia's learning, but, as is apparent in the scenes that follow, the establishment of a safe and trusting relationship provides an opportunity for her to talk freely about whatever is troubling her.

Rasia had a tendency to speak as if in dialogue with the 'other' in her story. She gives voice to the other characters as if they were present in the room and the transcript is here presented as if in a play. The text is entirely verbatim.

In the first scene, Rasia's mother provides her with some guidelines for marriage. Rasia is of a culture where women marry young. This is a recurring theme for Rasia in the fortnightly sessions.

Scene One: Mother and Daughter

Rasia speaks to Tricia: My mother. I talk to my mother. My mum got married when she was thirteen years old and she had me when she was seventeen. My mum wants me to get engaged to him.

Rasia as Mother: He's a nice guy. Not like other guys. In these days it's hard to find the right guy.

Rasia to Tricia: Is this true?

Rasia as Mother: I really, like, want a guy who likes you, loves you for who you are, be with you the rest of your life, that's what I want. You can get engaged to him but not straight get married to him, just wait for 2 years or three and then get engaged. I seen him at a lot of parties and he wouldn't look at no one. He's quiet, very quiet person. I don't think you'd find a guy like him. It's very hard to find the right guy. I think love comes after marriage. Take time; see if you really get to love him. I think you will love him. You've seen all these guys out there, 20, 30 years old, have you seen how they are out with a different girl every day? You want to meet a guy like them? Get Married? If a girl gets married and settled down it's good for her. She gets more freedom.

Rasia to Tricia: Is this true?

Rasia as Mother: Your father's not going to stop you going to Uni you know. He wants you to go to Uni.

Rasia: My head's all weird, all with this weird stuff. I'm not sure. I should say no and concentrate on school and Uni. I think and I worry what people will think of me and stuff.

Rasia as Mother: Who cares what people think? It's your happiness.

As a representative of the school, a confident and culture broker what is the responsibility of the advocate? In the segment above, Rasia turns to Tricia as an external authority to verify or contradict the advice of her mother. She is aware that there are multiple narratives at work in her life and is trying to negotiate her way through the contradictory requirements. She is directly asking Tricia, to confirm or deny what her mother is saying. It is possible to respond to this, in a variety of ways, appropriate to the many different narratives that rule her life.

An appropriate person-centered approach, would be to allow her to explore these issues in her own way and time, rather than provide her with an answer. She is persistently requesting an answer. Since the prevailing school narrative, is essentially to ensure that students comply with the requirements of the school, Tricia could support her, by describing what the school wants her to do, skilling her in planning, goal setting and homework, and ensuring that she understands the system and is able to use it to the best advantage. This may enable her to meet the requirements of the school. Tricia could also suggest she ignore her mother and listen to the voice of the advocate as an external expert. This may lead to familial tension and disconnection. Neither of these, is likely to release her from the tension she feels, between her emerging sense of self and the conflicting demands of school, family and friends. The tension inherent in attempting to wend a way through the competing narratives, with their competing demands for action, ways of knowing, and ways of being, is difficult to live with.

Such a directive approach, does not support her emerging sense of self. The issue that is challenging her, is whether to adopt the school's, or her mother's narrative as a way of understanding the world. The school simply wants her to adopt the mainstream narrative of study, accreditation and employment. The person-centered approach allows her to explore and develop her own sense of self and her ways of making meaning. In terms of her personal processing, she has gone beyond the notion that there is only one way of interpreting or making sense of the world. Her questions to Tricia, indicate that she is aware of multiple possibilities and wants her opinion. Yet Tricia is wary of giving an opinion, lest Rasia

become dependent on her and her answers. Tricia is aware that there is a possibility of becoming another voice of authority, setting up new conditions of worth and ultimately adding to Rasia's confusion.

Nevertheless, if Tricia were to merely repeat, or confirm what Rasia says she feels, or believes, she may stop exploring her feelings of discomfort. One of the forms of support that can be offered to Rasia, is to be a person-centered culture broker, while she explores the duality of her experience. Below, is an example of an interaction with her careers counselor, who is an authority voice in the school.

Scene Two: Rasia and the careers counselor.

Rasia to Tricia: I went to the careers teacher. She was a bit annoying to be honest with you, and mad and cruel...to be honest with you.

Rasia to careers counselor: I want to do air hosting.

Rasia as careers counselor: No you can't do it.

Rasia: Why not?

Rasia as careers counselor: It's going to be hard for you.

Rasia: It's not hard. O.K. Everything is hard to do. Once you try your best at it, you will do it.

Rasia as careers counselor: No, it will be hard for you. You have to learn languages; you have to be good at it. You have to be tall at it.

Rasia: I can speak five languages, that's enough. That's enough for me.

Rasia to Tricia: I'm not going to her anymore.

In this dialogic representation of her interaction with the careers counselor, Rasia represents her as being emphatic (not empathic) and unyielding, in terms of her opinion of what Rasia can, or cannot do. Rasia does not present her as being interactive, or relational. Rasia is challenging the authority figure of the careers counselor, who tells her she is not capable of being an air host. She does not accept the careers counselor's opinion of her choices as correct. She considers that her own opinion of her careers choice, is as valid as that of the careers counselor. Although this attitude may not be helpful for her school experience, or her choices concerning

her future, she is engaged in developing a way of making meaning of the experience of authority in her life. She is not seeing Tricia in this scene, as an alternative authority figure, but as one who is with her on her journey, as she examines her ways of knowing. This can only occur, if she sees the relationship as trustworthy, reliable and focused on her needs, rather than Tricia's own opinions. Rasia's next concern, is her Math teacher.

Scene Three: The Math Teacher

Rasia to Tricia: I'm doing well with Maths but you know my teacher's a bit annoying. She doesn't like giving me Bs and As, you know what I mean? She always gives me Cs and I really try so hard, to get As and Bs and you know she's putting me down, you know what I mean, I really don't like her.

Tricia: So you reckon you should be getting better marks...

Rasia: I really try **hard** Trish, really, really, **hard**. Everything I put into it and she's still giving me Cs. I don't know why. I don't ask her for help sometimes. She puts the work on the board and I do it myself, that's what I do, I don't struggle with it, I just do it. That's what I do, I ask her a question, she goes to me,

Rasia as Maths Teacher: I help you too much. That's why I give you C.

Rasia to Maths Teacher: What's the matter if you help me with it? I'm still doing it by myself. I'm just asking a question you're just answering me. I'm not asking you to do the answer for me.

Rasia as Maths Teacher: No, you're just getting a lot of help from me that's why.

Rasia to Tricia: (Sigh). It's just like (sigh) I don't know, like, she's a bit mean, you know what I mean?

Tricia: Mmmm (uses nods, facial expression and body language to indicate empathy)

Rasia to Tricia: I don't know, like I can't figure out what she wants from me, you know what I mean? I can't figure out what she wants from me. It's really ...If she wants me to do something, I will do it. I don't mind, you know? I can't figure out what she wants and what she doesn't want from me, you know what I mean? She wants me to

do by myself everything. And sometimes even if I ask a question or something like that she says,

Rasia as Maths Teacher: Yeah yeah, you can wait until after I help other students.

Rasia: OK, I'm going to wait. (hands folded on lap)

Rasia to Tricia; So I wait and wait and wait and again I call and then she comes.

Rasia is reflecting upon her own behavior, her actions and her attitudes, in an attempt to understand what more she could do to change the situation. It is obvious that she is attempting to understand the world of the teacher in her statements. 'I can't figure out what she wants from me, you know what I mean? I can't figure out what she wants from me. It's really ...If she wants me to do something, I will do it. I don't mind, you know? I can't figure out what she wants and what she doesn't want from me, you know what I mean?'

Rasia begins the segment, by holding two distinct and separate notions of Maths. She is 'doing well' with Maths, but the teacher is annoying. As the story evolves, it is evident that the teacher does not agree with Rasia's perception and that she is struggling to comprehend why this is so. She initially decides that the teacher does not like to give her As and Bs, and then decides she, Rasia, does not like the teacher. She then enters into personal analysis of the situation, with her own responses, concerns and feelings paramount. She reflects that she tries really, really hard, she asks for help and gets rejected, she tries to understand what the teacher wants from her, she does what the teacher asks and after all this, the teacher will still not give her an A or B. By the end of the reflection, she still doesn't understand what she needs to do to be successful in the Math's class. She has gathered evidence from a variety of interactions with the Maths teacher and attempted to find a consistency or an understanding from these reflections. She also seems to be prepared to live with the discomfort of not knowing, rather than just staying with a conclusion that was previously acceptable to her, i.e. that the teacher doesn't like her. This suggests, that through this reflective process, she is developing skills and a cognitive capacity to comprehend increasing complexity in

situations. Her meaning-making processes are capable of embracing and exploring situations and she is capable of staying with discomfort, rather than rushing to a simple, acceptable answer. She is moving towards an acceptance of the tension between cultures, and away from engaging in a fruitless argument with herself about which is 'right.' Tricia, as advocate, felt that part of her culture broker role, would be to engage with the Math teacher and ask for clarification about her expectations of Rasia.

Tricia: One of the things I can do as an Advocate is to ask her how you're going to get what kinds of things you will have to do in Maths to get As and Bs and then we can work on that kind of thing together

(Simultaneously) **Rasia:** Yes, that would be good **Tricia:** would that be good?

Tricia: But I need to have your permission to go talk to her.

Rasia: Yeah that's all right. ...

Tricia: I'd love to understand her side of the story too so that I can help you with that. So we can work together on that. Does that sound like a (Rasia: yeah, good) useful thing?

Rasia: Yeah.

This interaction is much more directive than a clinical person-centered approach, but by asking permission, Tricia hoped to empower Rasia in the relationship and ensure it remained based on empathy, trust and congruence. She did not record the interaction with the Math teacher, but suffice to say, the teacher was not supportive of Rasia's concerns. She did not perceive Rasia to be an A or B student and essentially deducted marks every time Rasia asked for help with work that was part of the assessment task. Tricia attempted to advocate on behalf of Rasia, with the teacher, but as Tricia was not a member of school staff, the Math teacher felt little obligation to change her behavior, or perceptions of Rasia. When Rasia and Tricia next met, Math was no longer a concern of Rasia, and in keeping with the person-centered approach, we followed the current direction of the student/client, rather than follow an issue from a prior time, albeit a fortnight previous. Whether to follow up

on issues, thereby directing the interaction, or whether to follow the client on the day, was an area of internal conflict for the person-centered advocate. Generally Tricia chose to follow Rasia.

The careers counselor, the Maths teacher, her mother and the advocate are all female, and all interact with her in various ways. The careers counselor frames Rasia, as not belonging to the prevailing culture and seems to believe that the counselor's role is to inform Rasia, that her perception of her life choices is incorrect. Rasia dismisses this approach as cruel and chooses not to return to her. The Math teacher sees Rasia as not worthy of her expert attention and indicates this by deducting marks rather than communicating with her. The Math teacher's actions, disempower her as a learner and a person.

The most prominent woman in Rasia's life is her mother. She is the primary role model of her culture and her life. The words that Rasia gives to her mother in the interaction presented in this paper, indicate the power of her mother's words as authority. Rasia shows us her mother giving her advice, that is different from the mother's own experience, in that she is not encouraging Rasia to replicate her own experience of early marriage and early child bearing, but to explore further life experiences and education.

The role of the person-centered advocate, is to culture-broke between the various participants in Rasia's life and support her in finding her way through the mire. The process also enables her to experience being listened to in depth, to hear her own voice and concerns, and to develop skills in listening to her own journey.

Conclusion

Institutionalized education often responds to students at risk by ignoring them, or attempting to fix them through telling them what to do, or how to be compliant to the dominant culture. This way has not been successful and students continue to disengage from schools, society and education. In this study, the Careers counselor and Math teacher were too stuck in their dominant narrative to be able to support Rasia to experience deep listening or to develop reflexive skills. We might speculate that they were themselves,

perhaps incapable of the complex cognitive processes which we find tentatively emerging in Rasia, just as they appear to have been incapable of really hearing her. The role of the advocate, as used in this case-study, embraced many different aspects of the person-centered approach in application. The non-directive, deep listening, provided by the advocate, helped establish a supportive, trusting relationship that provided Rasia with an opportunity to speak of whatever issue was important to her at the time, without judgment. In a strongly judging academic environment, such as a school, this approach appeared to the student, to be refreshingly different.

The actively supportive aspect of the role, was designed to empower the student to engage the institution in dialogue, so that her side of the story could be told in any conflict with the school. This aspect did not work as successfully, as desired in the interaction with the Math teacher. One can surmise, that if Tricia had been a member of staff, valued by the teacher, this communication may have been more effective. As Tricia was predominantly working one-to-one with the student, her role was not fully understood by the teachers. Advocacy was, in itself, a different culture from the prevailing school culture of identifying for the student where they had a weakness and setting out to fix it. The Advocate listened to the student and by so doing, encouraged her to express her voice, express her needs, to become aware of the conflict between the different voices she was hearing and how she was choosing to engage with the different perspectives. Rasia was acting out the voices she had heard, in a safe non-judging environment, with a trusted adult. She increasingly developed the capacity to hear her own concerns and make choices.

The Advocacy Program and the person-centered relationship concluded when the academic year finished. Rasia understood this and stated:

Tricia to Rasia: How have you found Advocacy; how have you found us?

Rasia to Tricia: I think it's really good. it's good talking to someone, what do you want to do, what feelings you've got and it really helps with you. yeah I think it's very good.

Buckley and Bradford (2010) liken the culture broker to a therapist. The advocate as culture broker, cultivates the means for student “to attain and maintain a self-identity that permits healthful functioning across cultures” (p.45). It would be foolish to argue that the resourcing of advocacy by schools, with populations of culturally marginalized students, would provide any certainty, that this end will be achieved, but we can at least suggest that it provides the beginnings of a strategy.

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