

What do your tutors learn from you?

This is a subject that is very close to my heart. In the recent CPCAB book the opening dedication gives thanks to all our students who taught us as much as we taught them. This is a message I really wanted to get out there.

I wonder sometimes if due to the dynamic of the tutor-student relationship and the idea that students are there to gain knowledge from the tutor, that the process-side of being a tutor can be lost or underestimated.

When I was doing my teaching training, my tutor often used the analogy of the student being the 'empty cup' and that the tutor might perceive that they must be the one to fill it up. We toyed with other analogies that we felt better reflected our ways of being with students, I liked the idea of the tutor being an enthusiastic travel companion, excited to see where we are going to go together.

At a conference in the US I heard the keynote speaker quote William Butler Yeats: "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." I liked the quote.

The speaker went on to say that college instruction should not be about dribbling drops of knowledge that students collect as they move from course to course. It should be more like gathering kindling, letting students play with matches, encouraging them to take risks and hoping that for some the materials burst into flames and become lifelong interests.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/education-is-not-the-filling-of-a-pail-but-the-lighting-of-a-fire-it-s-an-inspiring-quote-but-did-wb-yeats-say-it-1.1560192>

I like this idea, it is closer to my experience, but it still only acknowledges a one-way process, of the tutor passing something to the student. I however really found I learnt much about myself from my students:

- I learnt **how to be a better counsellor** – through seeing my students practice and feeling different responses in myself to their ways of being, I picked up nuances and deeper ways of relating that I had not thought of or experienced yet myself.
- I learnt **more about my theory** – they say that to truly understand something you have to be able to explain it to someone else so that they can understand. So by breaking down concepts, frameworks and legislation to make them understandable I learnt more about them myself.
- I learnt more about group **dynamics**, about how to deal with **resistance**, how to manage **conflicts**, how to **motivate** others whilst not taking the steps for them.
- I learnt how to **assess, but not judge**. A challenge for any very Person-Centred counsellor, how does one assess someone as non-proficient whilst also being fully acceptant of them?
- I learnt that being a tutor is equally as challenging, if not more so, than being a counsellor. And I undertook years of **teaching supervision** with a supervisor to work through what was brought up in me by my interactions with students. This made me a better teacher, better counsellor and a more self-aware person.

I read much of Rogers works around Person/Student-Centred education, and absorbed theories of teaching and learning as ambitiously as I had done counselling theory. To me it

is another relational activity that has an impact on all parties. I remember my students now as fondly as I think of my clients, and thank them for all they did for me.

Rogsonian Person-Centred learning was hugely influential in my teaching practice and I wanted to share a little overview of it here:

The Baseline of Person Centered Teaching and Learning

Student-Centered Learning is a personally significant kind of learning that integrates new elements, knowledge, or insights to the current repertoire of the learner's own resources such that he or she moves to an advanced constellation of meaning and resourcefulness (BARRETT-LENNARD, 1998).

Student-Centered Learning can be characterized by the following goals:

- a participatory mode in all aspects of learning and decision-making, furthering self-responsibility;
- a climate of trust in which curiosity and the natural desire to learn can be nourished and enhanced;
- helping students to achieve results they appreciate and consider worthwhile and inwardly meaningful;
- uncovering the excitement in self-initiated discovery, which leads students to become life-long learners, fosters originality, and brings out the creative potential of the individual;
- helping instructors to grow as persons finding rich satisfaction in their interactions with learners and thus increase their personal resourcefulness;
- Increasing a person's capabilities to experience and explore his or her own processes, thus raising the awareness of meaningful ways of inquiry, in other words, learning how to learn. This generic meta-capability enhances the person's disposition to successful problem solving in new situations.

(adapted from ROGERS, 1983, p. 3 and complemented by ideas from BARRETT-LENNARD, 1998, p. 187-188) Barrett-Lennard, G.T. (1998) Carl Rogers' Helping System: Journey and Substance. London: Sage.