Pondering Ambivalence: Science, Research and Counselling Psychology

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A reminder:
Counselling Psychology …

… evolved as a reaction against unthinking positivistic science that dehumanises and mechanises people.

… works to understand people through our skills of critical inquiry

Focuses on health and wellbeing and resists unnecessary pathologising
A reminder:
Counselling Psychology …

- Relational epistemology

- … aims to develop interventions that assist people as individuals, couples, families and hopefully more broadly

- … engages with a number of different epistemological positions
Optimal personal characteristics

- Nosey ... or maybe curious
- Thoughtful
- Analytical and critical
- Rigorous
- Reflective
- Engaging
- Trustworthy .....
Therefore …

- the counselling psychologist ‘simply’ applies these characteristics to their areas of curiosity in as many ways as possible …

… and everything is Rosy?
On the one hand ...

- Our profession is that of the scientist-practitioner
- We do research
- We do IMPORTANT research
- Challenging dominant paradigms
- Informs policy as well as practice
- Within the consulting room and beyond
Yet on the other …

- Many come to interview without clear ideas about what they would like to research
- ‘A hoop to jump through’
- When lethargy hits, its research activity that falters before other aspects of training
- Examiners seem more able to contemplate passing a poor researcher than a poor therapist
- NHS departments have you seeing hundreds of clients and provide no time for R and D.
So …

- ‘Odd’ split in counselling psychology discourse between research and practice
- Research vs Practice
Current discourses of ‘Science’

- In psychology and in the wider world we are being sold an idea that it is about Knowing, Truth, Certainty and Evidence.

- Science = EBP = CBT.
‘Science’ is no more a single thing than ‘life’ is, or ‘energy’ or any other human concept.
Einstein …

Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted
Counselling Psychology Research

- Undertaken from a curious and passionate position
- Done with critical thinking and an urge to find out and discover rather than ‘prove’
- Related to actual human experience, therefore needs to be attuned as well as explanatory. It ‘gives voice’.
- Related to human well-being – both in the consulting room and beyond. Non-pathologising.
Therapy is co-research

- In ‘existential therapy […] we are concerned to engage with the client in a piece of co-research to clarify the way the client creates meaning’

Research skills enhance therapeutic skills

- ‘Consumer’ or ‘Producer’ of research
- Rigour and quality of thinking
- Questioning attitude
Therapy skills enhance research

- Engagement
- Facilitation of story telling
- Reflection and Meaning making
- Ethics
Types of research … consulting room focussed

- Knowledge about forms of distress/ client experiences
- Knowledge about therapeutic relationships
- Knowledge about therapeutic styles and their contribution
Types of research … relevant to the wider world

- Understanding the effects of the world on our sense of wellbeing

- Extend collaboration to Medicine, School and Education, Nature Reserves, Greenpeace, Local Government,

- Collaborate and contribute rather than take over/empire build
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