

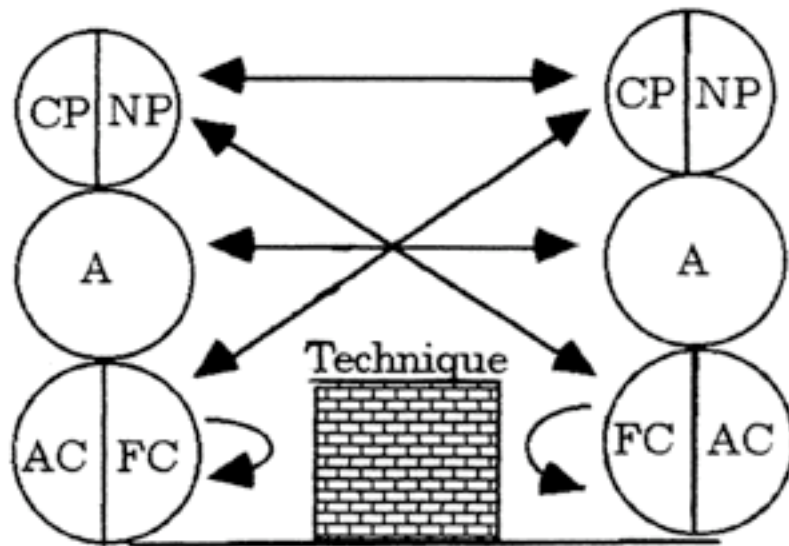
Can therapists be real with their clients?

by Tony White, July 12, 1996

Many modes of therapy stress the importance of the therapeutic relationship in helping the client change and grow. Rogers' client centred therapy, Perls' Gestalt therapy and our own Eric Berne all highlighted this aspect of psychotherapy.

In their discussions they all however, were left with an unresolved problem. For example, Perls [in Clarkson (1992)] says that Gestalt therapy is a techniqueless therapy. The therapist uses himself or herself as the agent of change. Rogers [in Rogers and Stevens (1967)] stated the same. It is the 'genuineness' of the therapist which mainly causes the change, almost regardless of the technique employed.

Following on from this, it is plausible that both therapist and client can use therapeutic techniques as a distraction. See diagram 1. This shows that the Free Child to Free Child transactions between therapist and client can be stopped by a technique being used in therapy. If the therapist does two chair work with a client then they both can feel 'safe' in the sense that they are distracted from having to relate to each other. The technique becomes what Goulding and Goulding (1979) call a wall of trivia.



Technique wall of trivia
Diagram 1.

This is where the theory of transference falls into trouble. The problem being that the therapist can become the technique. The genuineness of the therapist becomes the technique used by the therapist to facilitate change. The therapeutic relationship becomes the technique.

Berne, Perls and Rogers all suggest that therapists need to get training on being real with the client. How to be themselves and genuine with a client. We are thus left with an oxymoron. How can you train people to be real, how can you train people to be free, how can you train people to be untrained. At the Western Institute we are researching if this is in fact possible. Can a therapist be real or Free Child with a client? Or do we have to accept that this is not possible? Transactional Analysis makes this dilemma clear.

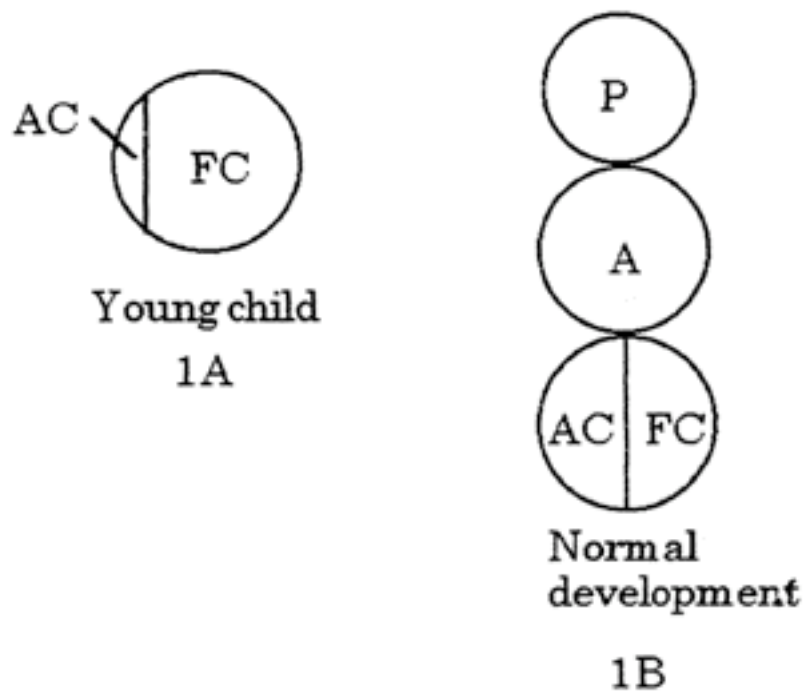


Diagram 2.

Consider diagram 2. In a young child, the Free Child is active and the Adapted Child is less prominent. As he develops he gets 'trained' or socialized. The free, untrained and unsocialized aspects of himself reduce and his adaptations to the environment increase. In this sense his 'real' or natural, spontaneous feelings, thoughts and reactions become harder for him to access and be. The Adapted Child gets 'larger' as well as the Adult and Parent ego states developing. For two people to be real and genuine with each other about their feelings involves at least in part Free Child to Free Child transactions.

Rogers, Perls and Berne all suggest therapists to be authentic and genuine with their clients. Thus have Free Child to Free Child transactions. However, as we train our therapist we are in fact hindering the process. The more someone is trained the smaller the Free Child becomes. An authentic therapist needs to be untrained. Can one train therapists to be untrained? This is the dilemma currently being researched. Can one have a techniqueless therapy where there is just client and therapist? Gestalt, Transactional Analysis and Rogerian therapy, at least theoretically, do not achieve this and the transference becomes a technique and part of the wall of trivia.

References

Clarkson, P. (1992). *Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy*. Routledge: New York.

Goulding, R.L. & Goulding, M.M. (1979) *Changing Lives*. Brunner/Mazel: New York.

Rogers, C.R. & Stevens, B. (1967). *Person to person: The problem of being human*. Real People Press: California.

TA Times (Newsletter of the Western Pacific Association of Transactional Analysis). August 1996, pages 10 - 11.

[Tony White](#)