

Working at the boundary

Carolyn Mumby trains youth counsellors who wish to develop a coaching approach, and posits the case for adding coaching to our repertoire

From my experience of crossing the boundary from counselling to coaching, I believe that an integrated approach could benefit young people in general, and especially young people with complex needs. Some counsellors may already be using aspects of coaching and my aim in this article is to stimulate debate and an exploration of whether or not the two can be offered as an integrated model, such as the one I describe. These observations are not based on current research findings or evidence of outcomes. However, I am hopeful that interest in this area will develop and generate an evidence base of its effectiveness.

From counselling to coaching

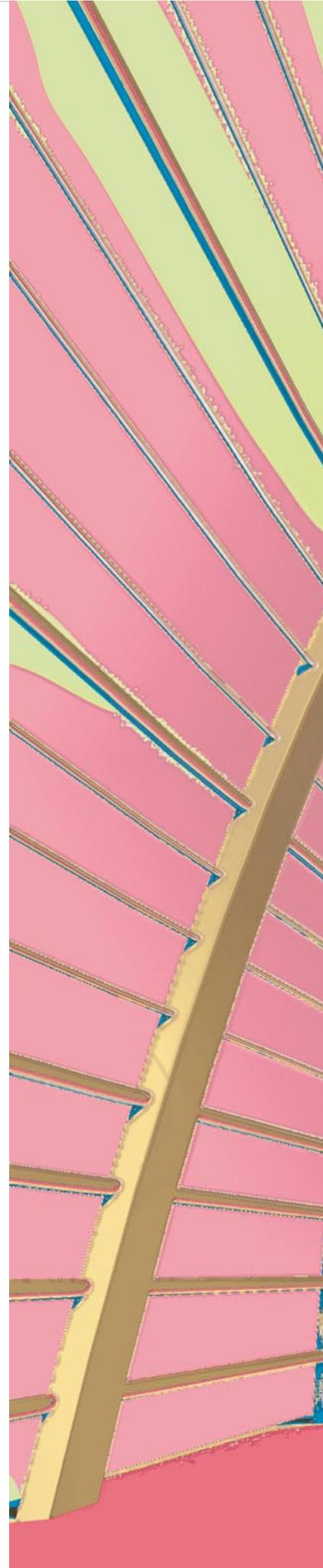
If a boundary is a line determining the limits of an area, my experience as a therapist-coach is that the line between counselling and coaching young people is not clear and distinct, but rather a wider, well-walked path through some shared territory.

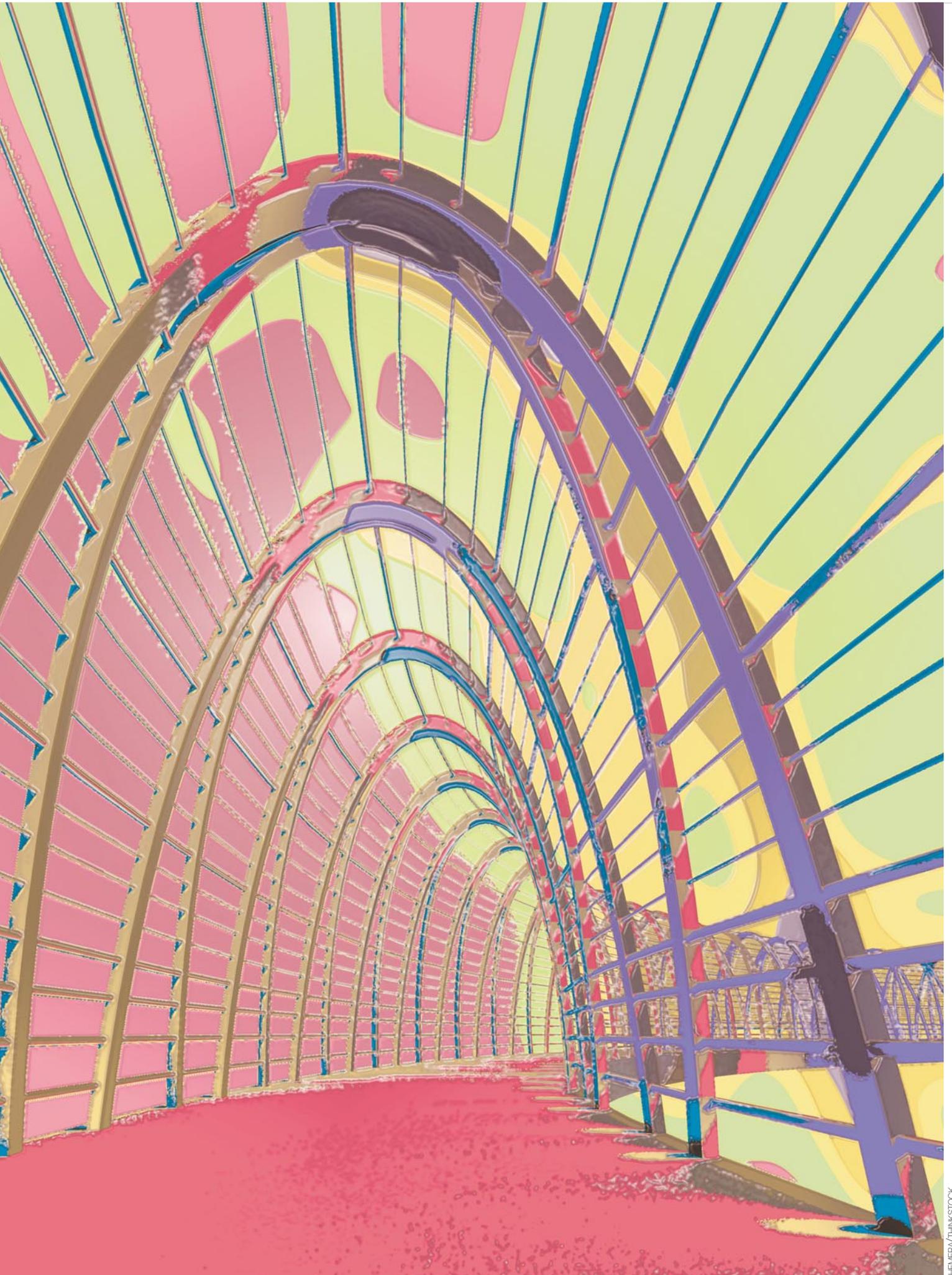
My view about this boundary changed because of my experience of working in both professions, which I previously saw as distinct, like banks on either side of a river but linked as if by a bridge. Michael Carroll developed this very useful metaphor and estimated that counsellors are already 65 per cent of the way across the bridge to coaching, and if they are already trainers and supervisors, they are 75-80 per cent of the way over¹.

To extend the metaphor, I have subsequently become interested in the river between these two banks or disciplines, into which many counsellors and coaches will either dip or dive in and swim, depending on their training and theoretical orientation. (Of course, some practitioners on either side may choose not to go near the water at all.)



Some counsellors may already be using aspects of coaching, and my aim in this article is to stimulate debate and exploration





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Having worked in the field of counselling young people and adults for more than 20 years, I intended to cross this bridge, starting the journey with Carroll's Master class² and continuing via postgraduate training for coaching³. I would carry all my transferable skills from counselling, supervision, training, youth work and drugs work with me to deliver a different intervention on the other side.

However, when I became a qualified coach I was delighted to find that I could *build* on my ability to work with people in depth. I felt at home on the coaching bank; many of the tools were familiar to me. I enjoyed learning new frameworks and interventions eg asking incisive questions and structuring my approach to support clients to identify and reach their goals. And this is why I believe that many of us involved in this kind of work are actually further along the bridge towards the coaching bank than we might have realised.

Where are we on the bridge?

As well as working in depth to hear and support young people emotionally and create space for them to understand and process their pain, many of us also use tools to enable them to move forward in their lives. This may sometimes involve them moving away from damaging/limiting situations into more positive/productive places. Of course, this process is not always straightforward or easy. Some young people have less autonomy than others, depending on their age and stage of development, their individual characteristics and their life circumstances. Whilst some are well supported, others are not. Some will be facing prejudice and discrimination. Others may be restricted in what they can achieve in the short term due to a lack of confidence or skills, or because they are traumatised or live in difficult or harmful environments. For some young people, homelessness, addiction and violence, to name only a few, mean that gaining stability and security is a greater priority than working towards aspirations. But if we neglect to develop their resilience and their strengths and only see them through the lens of their problems, we are doing them the disservice of not recognising that aspirations can also be part of a strategy of survival and stabilisation and provide them with a stake in the world.

What counsellors bring

Counsellors in generic work bring the skills of active and deep listening, reflecting, paraphrasing and summarising. They bring the core conditions of congruence, empathy and acceptance, of demonstrating positive regard and a respect for the client's agenda. The relationship is a foundation of the approach and the counsellor can stay with the client through, at times, painful exploration of their feelings.

But counsellors of young people may often need to – and do – go further, for a number of reasons.

- Young people may find an hour of listening and talking harder to engage with than adults.
- Many young people want to just sort out the problem and move forward – they are not always interested in longer-term exploration of their past (although for some young people, an intervention that offers long-term emotional depth is crucial in order to meet previously unmet attachment needs).
- Recent research into the adolescent brain⁴ has shown that young people's brains are still in development, particularly the function that enables coordination of behaviour, directing attention, recognising consequences of actions and planning future tasks. The adolescent brain also appears to be flexible and responsive and is undergoing significant remodelling. Experiences create physical structures in the brain⁵ so young people need support to learn and *practise* problem-solving, decision-making, planning and experimenting with and testing solutions, all of which help build and strengthen neural pathways and contribute to resilience and life-skills.
- Erik Erikson⁶, in his theory of life stages, says the task in adolescence is to resolve identity and direction and negotiate role confusion, to be yourself and share this with others. As children, development mostly depends on 'what is done to us', whereas in adolescence development depends on 'what we do'. Adolescence is a state of active transition to independence; this move can be supported by a more proactive approach. Something we can easily see as connected with the idea of coaching, in fact.

Geldard and Geldard have written in depth about the need to work more proactively with young people⁷. Starting from their theoretical base in existential philosophy (we can learn from our experiences and have freedom to choose our response within inevitable constraints) and constructivist thinking (we organise how we see the world through constructs that we test and revise), and adding the need to listen deeply and build the counselling relationship, they build up what they describe as symbolic, creative, cognitive-behavioural and psycho-educational strategies⁷ to engage young people and give them tools to support their development. A proactive counsellor may work with metaphor, symbols, ritual, art, role-play and journals. They may draw on approaches such as challenging self-limiting beliefs, and teaching techniques of problem-solving and decision-making. Strategies to develop understanding about how we work with our emotions and behaviour, and explore and make relationships with others, include scaling,

genograms and life diagrams. One tool I use, for instance, is The Emotional Pendulum® to explore emotional swings and how we can become compulsively high or low, as well as appreciating and validating a range of emotions.

Under-one-roof provision...?

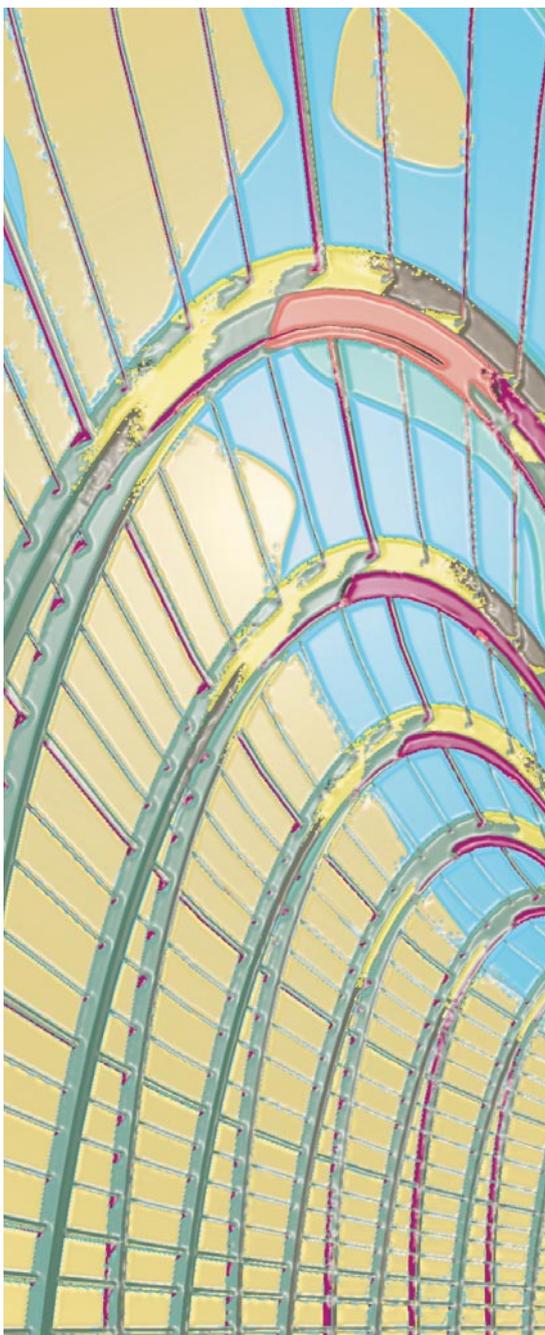
Because of this boundary where proactive counselling meets coaching techniques, I believe that it is also important to offer a variety of dedicated services that young people can access flexibly under one roof. From my experience of managing a counselling service for young people, and from working with Youth Access⁹, I have observed that this model works well. Youth Access represents a network of 200 young people's information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS) nationwide: 'Open to all young people, YIACS offers a universal access point to targeted and specialist services, supporting young people on a diverse range of issues that are frequently interrelated'¹⁰. These services are usually clearly delineated and the workers are professionally trained and supervised. And having separate services in one place serves to lessen some of the fear and sense of stigma that young people might have about counselling, especially young men. It's my view that such venues would also be a natural home in which to offer coaching, complementing the services currently offered by YIACS.

...or is there another way?

But could there be another way of offering coaching interventions to young people, which does not involve setting up a project that is entirely separate from existing counselling services?

In recognition of the place that coaching could have in YIACS, Youth Access has developed an innovative course¹¹ that provides accredited training to enable counsellors of young people to develop an understanding of how their transferable counselling skills can form a foundation for a coaching approach to add to their repertoire of support for young people. The module defines and explores coaching, both in terms of similarities and differences to counselling, and enables participants to develop a clear coaching framework and tools for use with young people. The training aims to help counsellors to explore when a coaching approach might be a more appropriate intervention for seeking help.

However, when designing the training for this course, I envisaged that a life or personal coaching service would operate independently from the counselling service, and this is still one model that agencies may be keen to explore. But even at this very early stage of running the training, I am rapidly becoming of the opinion that a more appropriate way forward might be to explore an integrated model that allows the counsellor-coach



A more appropriate way forward may be to explore an integrated model that allows the counsellor-coach to assess with the young person the levels and type of intervention needed

to assess with the young person the levels and type of intervention needed in order to help them work through their difficulties, build their resilience and develop their lives in a more satisfying way.

Over the last few months, it has been exciting for me to be part of the newly established BACP Coaching division. Linda Aspey, in her opening address at the inaugural conference¹², articulated this connection: 'When coaching first started out, it was seen largely as a personal development tool for already successful people who wanted to be more successful. In contrast, counselling was often seen as largely restorative, healing the past and building resources for the future. Nowadays, the two are in some cases almost indistinguishable, with models and ideas from both spheres influencing the other, and often with clients seeking something that combines the best of both.'

An integrated approach

One such approach, therefore, that could be explored by counsellors working with young people is the Personal Consultancy model, developed initially by Popovic and Boniwell¹³, which is an attempt to provide a framework that 'allows practitioners to integrate the depth perspective offered by counselling and psychotherapy with an opportunity to make constructive practical changes, associated with coaching'. Four stages of this process are suggested:

1. Authentic listening
2. Re-balancing
3. Generating
4. Supporting

The work would usually start in the first quadrant with listening and then move through the others, with more listening in between each stage, in a pattern likely to be 1/2/1/3/1/4, though some clients might stop at 2. The first and fourth quadrants are about 'being' with the client and the second and third quadrants are about 'doing' with the client.

Communicating the offer of the counsellor-coach

Together with Nash Popovic and Debra Jinks¹⁴, I have begun to explore how the language in the framework could be made more accessible to young people (see figure 1).

This is how it might look:

1 Get heard *We will listen really well to you, and to your thoughts and feelings about your situation. This can help you understand what it is you want to work on*

This may be the young person's first experience of being really listened to, without an agenda.

Listening deeply to them helps the young person hear themselves, their own thoughts and feelings, shows that what they think and feel is of primary importance. It also begins to identify some of the problems and opportunities.

2 Find your balance *Build on your strengths, sort out some of the places where you may be stuck*
Resolving internal conflicts, challenging self-limiting beliefs, releasing blocked emotions and recognising the impact of behaviour. It also involves identifying strengths and what the young person is already doing well. (For some young people, to get to this stage may be enough for the time being.)

3 Move on *Helping you develop your ideas and work towards what you want to achieve*
Using visualisation, exploring options, making decisions, forming goals, testing solutions, creating positive patterns of thoughts and behaviour. Working with emotions.

4 Keep going *Getting support to help you get results*

The counsellor-coach continues to offer support as a sounding board, encouraging the young person, helping them to navigate difficulties and maintain motivation. Helping the young person to identify others who can provide support in their lives eg friends, families, youth workers, role models etc.

Considerations

So if we were to offer an integrated service to young people, what would be some important boundaries and considerations?

- Being clear with the young person at the outset about what our service is, how it works, what it offers them, and what they will need to do themselves to make it work for them.
- Making an assessment with them about what is required to meet their needs, which includes an assessment of risk and resilience.
- Contracting clearly or making a supported referral to a more appropriate service.
- Being appropriately trained and experienced and practising within the limits of our competence.
- Working according to an appropriate code of ethics and practice.
- Having supervision from someone experienced in both working with young people and working as a counsellor and coach.

Crossing the bridge or swimming in the river between?

Initially, when I crossed the bridge myself and became a qualified coach, I believed that I could work at the boundary between coaching and therapy but that I would contract with people at

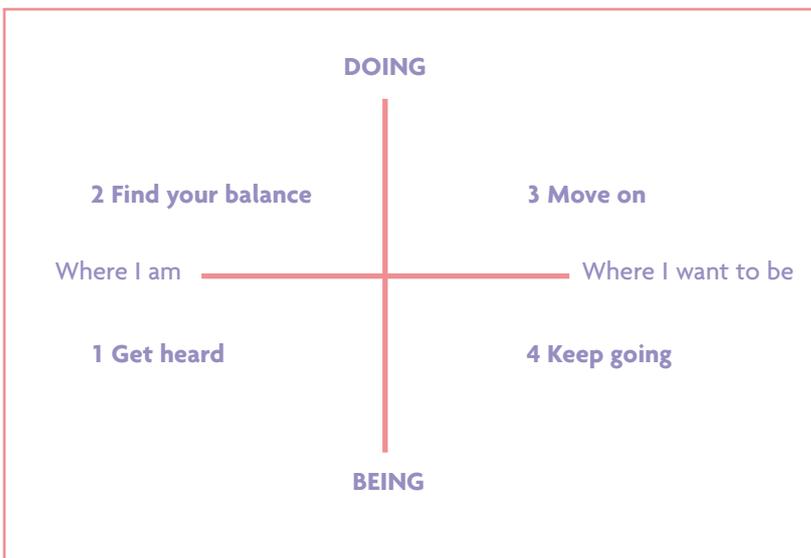


Figure 1. Personal Consultancy: a youth friendly version (Mumby, Jinks and Popovich, based on the Personal Consultancy model of Popovic and Boniwell)

the outset to provide either one service or the other. This made sense to me – after all, it was important for people to know what they were getting and it would be wrong to just practise therapy under the guise of offering coaching. Another reason for articulating and emphasising the difference in the worlds of counselling and coaching was to ensure that coaches worked within their own competence and did not cross into therapeutic work that they were not trained for or equipped to deal with. However, the more I worked, particularly as a personal or life coach, but also in my work coaching leaders, the more I realised that it was not always useful or perhaps even possible for me, as a therapist-coach, to work purely on one side or the other.

Both professions are involved in supporting their clients to face and overcome barriers, to become more aware of the feelings and thoughts that block or sustain them, to build on their resilience, release their potential and make changes in their lives. The emphasis in coaching is on present and future focus, but emotional and psychological blocks may be, at times, for some coachees, the greatest impediment to achieving their vision. As a coach, I aim to create the conditions for a transformational shift in the session, in terms of insight and realisation about patterns arising from past experience, as well as focusing clearly on achieving identified future goals.

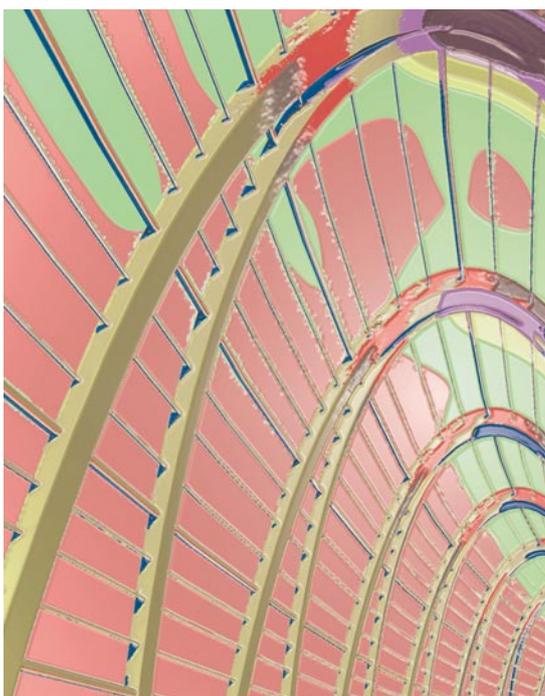
I have come to the view, therefore, that it is possible to work not only at the boundary but also effectively on the bridge between counselling and coaching, and even in the river beneath!

I would be interested to see this researched and piloted with young people and youth counsellors in the hope of developing a clear evidence base for this potentially exciting and effective integrated approach. ■

Carolyn Mumby has a consultancy in London providing coaching to individuals and organisations, and clinical supervision to counsellors and coaches. She designs and delivers counselling training, principally for Youth Access on a freelance basis, and through them delivers youth counselling courses for other local and national organisations including Relate, and the Diversity module for the Place2Be Postgraduate Diploma. Carolyn collaborates with a senior yoga teacher to provide 'Developing Space' workshops, a unique opportunity to benefit from both yoga and coaching (see www.carolynmumby.com). She is the volunteer London Link for BACP Coaching Division network meetings and can be contacted by emailing info@carolynmumby.com

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