

Letter Two

Dear Frankie

Thank you so much for letting me see inside your head and to hear about your struggles. It is such a privilege to see the inner world isn't it, and something we hope to do as therapists. I don't know if you realise what a gift it is that you have given.

I should introduce myself. I am a counselling psychologist practising in Wales and I also supervise and teach trainee therapists. Even though I live in Wales I am monolingual and only speak English. I also live in an area in South Wales where English is everywhere – work, home, shops, education.... Having said that I have had many clients over the years who speak both Welsh and English. Of course, they have had their therapy with me in English and I am ashamed to say that I have not really given much thought to their other language – often their first language. There is shame when I say this Frankie and I wonder if that fits with how you feel when you look back at the work that you did during your training and what was missed. Maybe there is some comfort for you that your struggle was not just a struggle for a trainee but here is someone who has been in practice for twenty years saying that I have shame about not being more skilled in working with a multilingual client. You sounded very cross with yourself that you SHOULD be able to work as your more experienced supervisor did. “She would do it better than me, why can't I just DO IT!!!” But I wonder what specialist training she had and what was lacking in your own training. I recall language being a silent issue in my own therapy training (how ironic is that). Now as a trainer myself I am trying to bring awareness and understanding and experimentation with issues of multilingualism into training that I run. How can we expect trainees to not struggle if they are not given the chance to hear about the research and practice in the multilingual field? I think back to many clients who spoke other languages and what I could have done differently if I had the awareness, I have had from doing some training, and watching your videos was a big part of that Frankie!!!

I am sure that your experiences with Malik, your conversations with your supervisor and the observations of the work with Valerie will have influenced your practice, Frankie. Not least that you will have sought out reading and initiated conversations that help you to make sense of this difficult time in your training. We are never the finished article as therapists! We are always striving to improve, to know more about how to help people and to bring ourselves authentically to the work. You have a fantasy, an understandable one, that your supervisor was all knowing. It's likely that she had her own insecurities and worries about her work. She would have taken those to her own supervisor as a reflective practitioner. Also, her lived experience wasn't yours! Remember that she drew attention to your own family and cultural difference and saw that as an asset! Watching your videos helped me to appreciate that I live in Wales and that there is an opportunity for me to learn more from my colleagues, friends and others who speak both Welsh and English. I feel so sad at what was missed. But I need to look forward positively to what could be.....

Watching your videos has helped me Frankie so thank you for the gift of sharing yourself, your insecurities and your journey to understand the multilingual therapy world!