

Constructing the Counseling Skills Course

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“This is a whole new way of being,” said a student. “In other parts of my life, I am a mother and a teacher and a boss. I am supposed to be in charge and tell everyone else what to do. To just sit and listen, follow the client, and reflect back to them what I hear is very strange and new. And I find it very difficult.”

Indeed, the Counseling Skills course—taught under the rubric of Interviewing Skills, the Helping Interview, or Techniques of Individual Counseling—is designed to introduce graduate or undergraduate students to ways of working and interacting with others that differ from what they have previously known. Beginning students’ experiences with interviewing and helping have usually been restricted to parental admonition, religious prescription, and secondary school college advising. Or “helping” for them, at its most concrete, might bring up visions of changing a flat tire for someone on the road, bandaging a wound, or washing the dishes. It usually surprises students that what we aim to teach them is not, at least initially, directive or advice oriented, despite its goal of influencing others toward behavior change and good decision making. We must not underestimate the pervasiveness of such a directive vision of helping on the part of neophyte counselors.

Inviting Personal Evolution

In contrast to their initial perspectives on helping, students discover that counseling is largely about two or more people discovering a new story, one that works better than the story that was previously held or known. The initial counseling course asks students, as interviewers, to let interviewees hold the power, to evoke the client’s agenda, and to encourage counselees’ willingness to question all advisors. This sort of helping requires an epistemological leap for most beginning counseling students—it is difficult for counselors-in-training to conceive of a client as self-authoring when they have yet to embrace their own authority, when they have yet to become self-defining (Kegan, 1994; Lovell & McAuliffe, 1996; Neukrug & McAuliffe, 1993). It is even more difficult for beginning counselors to dwell in the murky waters of a helping interview that is co-constructed.

The counseling skills course, then, as we propose it, is more than learning mere skills. We propose a way of helping that hinges on a worldview in which meanings are made in the context of a relationship, a relationship that reflects a respect for human beings' abilities to help themselves. As a result, the tasks we propose for the counseling skills course have the potential to challenge students in personally important ways, despite what appears to be mechanically teaching one microskill at a time. Developing active listening skills has changed our students' lives rather dramatically in both epistemological capacity and day-to-day relationships.

Moving From Other- to Self-Authorizing Thinking

The counseling skills course can instigate an evolution in students' ways of knowing by inviting them to view human norms, values, and views of reality as socially created constructions. It has the potential to move students from being defined by others to defining themselves, a shift Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1996) would call moving from a *received* or *subjective* way of knowing to a *procedural*, even *constructivist* way of knowing. Evidence exists that fewer than 30% of adults are able to consistently think reflectively and procedurally (Kegan, 1998). And our research indicates that our students are no exception. They enter our programs fully capable of listening to authorities and delivering directives, but not yet fully capable of living in a socially constructed universe. Very few reach procedural, self-authoring, or post-conventional ways of being by the time they graduate. Some will fluctuate from an authority-reliant tendency to an occasional self-authorizing capacity. Therefore, students will most likely be authority dependent (Lovell & McAuliffe, 1996); that is, they will be

- embedded in or subject to their relationships and to rules (e.g., saying to the instructor, "How long does the paper need to be?" "What do you want us to do this week?" "I didn't do what I wanted to on this paper because I didn't think that was what you would want."),
- able to meet their own needs, but more likely to sacrifice these to meet another's needs (e.g., letting practice counseling sessions go on long beyond the

required time and long beyond their comfort zone because the client is still distressed and seems to need to talk),

- able to hold an inner dialogue, but likely to merely experience feelings rather than to be able to name them or think about them (e.g., when asked to name feelings during class or during counseling sessions, they can only identify "bad" or "good" or "frustrated," which represents a limited awareness of or ability to identify their own feelings and a limited range of possible feelings; difficulty stepping back and examining these feelings in journals),
- determined and defined by others (e.g., difficulty saying no in work or personal situations; difficulty questioning the instructor's or program's authority),
- needing to maintain relationships, be approved of, and not challenge conventions,
- more likely to experience undifferentiated fusion in relationships (intimacy requires knowing where you end and the other begins; students' difficulties expressing or being aware of their own inner experiences in the presence of another's pain indicates a problem with this and thus with meeting the client with her or his whole self),
- intuitive in their approach to helping, following unexamined inner urges, sometimes reactively (difficulty standing back from a counseling session and explaining why they did what they did, and analyzing or evaluating their own or the client's behavior, or the counseling relationship; reactively jumping in with inappropriate responses, seeming to get pulled in by some clients' ways of talking or behaving).

While each of these characteristics can be seen as a strength of its own, in that each contributes to a student's ability to care for other people and their pain, they limit counselors' abilities to live within the ambiguity of counseling work, to set reasonable boundaries between themselves and the client (and the client's problem), to work independently and reflectively, and to plunge into the very personal depths that they are trying to help clients to explore.

Development-Enhancing Instruction

Instructors need to optimally support and challenge (Sanford, 1966) students in order to help them move

toward a more evidence-based way of making meaning. *Support* might mean celebrating their kindness and ability to tune in carefully to clients. It also means offering the structure, direction, and authority needed by people who are more concrete and authority reliant. *Challenge* means urging students to think about why they are doing what they are doing, to examine their multiple and even contradictory inner urges, to decide whether preserving conventions and relationships at all costs is helpful to them, to establish a separateness from others' definitions, and to be self-reflective. Such challenges have the potential to stretch students to a place of greater autonomy, to self-authoring, and to taking responsibility for their own behavior. They may, as a result, exhibit a more consistent identity across contexts and a greater ability to give evidence for their current beliefs and positions.

For instance, immediate personal benefits emerge for students through discovering and voicing their personal views: For the first time, they may say no to unhealthy relationships and work settings, express feelings in relationships, and expect deeper levels of intimacy with significant others. Complementarily, students discover the legitimacy of others' views and, in the process, move from an authoritarian toward a dialogical epistemology, or from dualism to greater relativism (Benack, 1988; Neukrug & McAuliffe, 1993). Not only are these changes revolutionary for the students, but they may catch those who are in the students' lives unaware, requiring changes that those significant others had not anticipated and may not be happy about. Thus, the shock waves that can emanate from a course such as this may resound further than either the students or their significant others would have expected.

In a much more concrete sense, the counseling skills course may—in fact, should—improve students' interpersonal relationships. Counseling skills include the basic communication skills that are fundamental to effective family and organizational life. As a result, students rather immediately apply these newfound skills to both professional and personal relationships (Ivey, 1994).

Practicing What We Preach

Responsible and developmentally aware instructors understand the anxiety that can be produced in these

challenging circumstances, and as a result they engage students in a manner that is parallel, or isomorphic, to the counselor-client relationship. For instance, just as the counselor-client relationship is usually grounded in the core conditions of empathy, respect, and unconditional positive regard (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1977) and, in most traditions, in an egalitarian—as opposed to an authoritarian—relationship, so too the instructor develops relationships with students based on respect, genuineness, and positive regard. Just as helpers can never change clients, but can expect them to construct new meanings and try on new behaviors, the instructor, in an effort to foster progression through developmental stages, similarly encourages and challenges students to envision and try on new ways of being. Just as counselors do not expect clients to change in significant ways merely by being *told* “the right answer,” instructors understand that merely lecturing on material seldom produces the desired student change. Just as many counselors believe that clients' lives will be enhanced and problems will be reduced if clients advance developmentally, many counselor educators believe that epistemological progress in students should improve their work as counselors (Lovell & McAuliffe, 1996). And finally, just as counselors use the assets that clients bring into counseling sessions in creating solutions with clients, instructors value the expertise that students bring into the classroom as a result of life experiences. Thus, instructors refuse to serve as the sole knowledge bearers.

For each of the desired counseling skills, the learning objectives, activities, and constructivist principles in Table 7.1 apply. Specific skills would be determined by the instructor and perhaps by the text used. However, the skills typically include those cited in the Counseling Skills Scale in Appendix C on page 107, such as Developing a Therapeutic Relationship, Managing the Session, Paraphrasing, Summarizing, Reflecting Feeling, Using Immediacy, Observing Themes and Patterns, Reflecting Meaning and Values, Pointing Out Discrepancies, Questioning, Requesting Concrete Examples, and the various strategies for Creating Change.

TABLE 7.1 Course Objectives, Activities, and Constructivist Principles

<i>Learning Objectives</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Learning Processes and Activities</i>	<i>Constructivist Principles</i>
Know textbook material on basic counseling skills	Attending Primary empathy Advanced empathy Goals and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read text • Answer study questions • Take quizzes • Classroom discussions 	Providing structure to support interpersonal knowers
Apply textbook principles, identifying skills and their purposes, to counseling demonstrations, videos, and own counseling	How to perform counseling skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor skills demonstrations • Expert video demonstrations • Seatwork • Targeted observations • Classroom discussions 	Applying principles, breaking down ambiguous stimuli into manageable parts, asking for evidence of position, including diversity of perspectives = challenge toward procedural knowing
Demonstrate increasing proficiency in basic counseling skills	More complex applications of counseling skills to real-world, ambiguous situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class practice with peer and instructor feedback • Between-class video- or audio-recorded practice with peer feedback • Midterm and final videos with instructor feedback 	Applying skills in action, creating real-world ambiguity, and deciding for oneself all = challenge toward procedural knowing Using structured grading rubrics and feedback sheets = support
Demonstrate ability to reflect on work, evaluate own skills, make plans for improvement	How to evaluate and analyze own and others' counseling skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection papers • Transcripts • Individual goal setting • All with instructor feedback 	Standing back from own work and from self to evaluate = challenge toward procedural knowing Using exemplars, grading rubrics, and feedback sheets = support
Develop awareness of personal issues that may interfere with skills delivery	Personal issues and their impact on counseling skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection papers with instructor feedback 	Standing back from self to evaluate = challenge toward procedural knowing Using exemplars, grading rubrics, and clear instructions = support

THE LEARNING SEQUENCE: A BIAS TOWARD ACTIVITY

In the counseling skills course, we consider activity necessary to retention, and we structure the activity very specifically in order to support conventional learners. The sequence of activities in the course might proceed as follows: Read, reflect, discuss in class; observe, critique,

apply in action during class, critique, practice outside of class, reflect, critique. Initially, students read about the topic or skill, using a book that breaks counseling into subskills. Then, prior to class, students try out the chapter's suggestions as a way of interacting with and reflecting upon the chapter's material. During the following class, instructors and students briefly discuss the key points of the reading, watch an instructor or

video-recorded model demonstrate the skills, and critically evaluate the demonstration. They then try out the new skills during class in practice counseling sessions, with observers looking on. After the brief counseling sessions, students evaluate their own and their peers' performance. Class discussion of the experience also helps to cement learning, identify needed areas for further guidance, and prepare students for between-class practice. Between class sessions, students conduct a counseling interview with either classmates or undergraduate volunteers, specifically focusing on a skill-of-the-week. Finally, following Schön (1983) and others' emphasis on reflection, students write in a journal about the feelings and thoughts that emerged during the experience, evaluate their success in performing the skills, and consider reasons for failures or difficulties and ways to improve.

Independent Learning: Reading, Writing, and Quizzing

We use a book that breaks the actions of the helping interview into manageable, learnable subskills. Students progress from performing concrete and discrete tasks to combining these into more complex behaviors. Study questions for each reading assignment (e.g., "What are the goals of attending behavior?" "What are the best uses for questioning?") and pop quizzes may be used to support (Sanford, 1966) students who cannot consistently utilize a relatively autonomous way of knowing, who are more concrete or convention dependent (Loevinger, 1976), and who, as a result, need the structure and external motivation that study questions and perhaps quizzes provide (Widick, Knefelkamp, & Parker, 1975). Students may dislike the quizzes, and instructors may be reluctant to generate such negative responses, but without externally imposed structure, students may lack the internal intention to prepare adequately for class. (After the quizzes have done their work—that is, getting students to read and think about the reading in preparation for class—I [Eriksen] generally throw out the grades, which makes everyone very happy.) We are sure that most faculty are familiar with these learning strategies.

Social Learning: In-Class Discussions, Observations, and Experimentation

Group experiences may create different knowledge than what has developed independently. The activities in this section are "social" events. As such, they offer experiences of the power of interacting with peers to develop insights and the power of constructing knowledge together.

Seatwork and Discussion: Asking for Evidence

Instructors challenge students by posing questions that require students to think for themselves, to consider different perspectives, and to offer evidence for assertions. For example, in initial discussions about video or live demonstrations of paraphrasing, the instructor may challenge students to stand back from the immediate skill and think for themselves by asking at a more macro level, "What is the point of paraphrasing? Why do we do it?" Students might respond by saying that they really feel heard when someone listening to them uses paraphrasing, that this seems to be the best way to let people know that you understand them. Students might further indicate that paraphrasing gives clients the space to explore and allows clients to construct their own answers and ideas. As a result, paraphrasing opens a window to constructivism, as students envision how merely reflecting a client's words more simply and clearly can open new meanings for the client. The steps for teaching paraphrasing might include the following:

- a. presenting a *vignette*, such as this interviewee quote: "I am really upset about the grade I got in my ethics course. I worked really hard, harder than the others in my group worked, and some of them got better grades than I did. I just don't know what that teacher expects."
- b. asking students to do *seatwork*, that is, to privately write various formulaic responses ("You feel . . . because . . ."), such as "You are feeling really concerned about your grade and the teacher's expectations" or "You seem to feel angry that you worked so hard and it didn't pay off."

- c. asking students to consider how to put these formulaic responses into *more natural feeling words* such as “You are saying . . .” and “It seems. . .”
- d. asking them to
 - *reflect* on how it would feel to use such responses,
 - *share* with one another their *ideas* about responses, and
 - *give evidence* for their answers.

Video Observation

Another layer of activity is added when students critique one another’s practice counseling sessions. Rather than merely receiving knowledge through viewing a video (or live demonstration), students again participate in creating knowledge. The constructivist instructor might engage students in actively watching demonstration videos by directing different students to focus on specific client characteristics and responses. Instructors might also direct different students to watch for various microskills and counselor characteristics. For instance, particular students would note eye contact, body language, and vocal tone; paraphrasing; or questioning. Students might be urged to note situational choices in interviewing as they track both when skills were used and how skillfully they were used. The instructor may also ask students how they would feel if they had been the client, a question that recognizes both the value of student input and the fact that “real” clients would have very similar perspectives to, at this point, “naïve” students.

The instructor might then switch from a micro focus toward a macro level of understanding by asking students to continually think about whether the goals of the microskill are being accomplished. For example, when attending is the skill-of-the-week, students might be asked, “Is the counselor demonstrating care, interest, and positive regard while performing the skills?” or “Are these attitudes encouraging trust and promoting client verbalization?” These strategies challenge students to generate answers from within, to build on what they already know, to contribute information from their own experiences, experiences that even the instructor may not share. The strategies promote an egalitarian atmosphere and challenge students to be active in their own learning experience.

The constructivist instructor uses video observation as more than passive reception; instead, instructors actively engage students in creating possibilities and stimulate the community of students to work together in creating possibilities. The instructor also challenges students to give effective feedback to one another. Reflecting on and specifically analyzing peers’ counseling in preparation for offering feedback helps students know how to improve and think independently about their own counseling. Helpful feedback might be defined as “tentatively and specifically giving voice to one’s own experience of another’s behavior, usually using an ‘I statement’” (Eriksen & Bruck, this volume). Global negative or positive evaluations are discouraged in favor of specific observations. For instance, if a student says, “I think the counselor was very caring,” the instructor asks, “What did you see specifically that led you to that conclusion? And how did you feel when the counselor did what she did?” The manner of questioning is always such that it indicates, “Your view is important. Whatever your view is, we will listen. And also, if you are going to state a view, you need to give reasons for it.” Again, in this manner, co-construction of knowledge is demonstrated and an environment conducive to students’ expression of their own voices is created.

During the feedback process, the instructor gives the student counselor whose video was viewed the responsibility for soliciting feedback and doing some self-critique. The initial questions from the instructor to the student counselor are “How did you feel during this segment of the video?” “What were you trying to accomplish?” “What did you feel successful at?” “What would you have changed if you had it to do over again?” “What help would you like from the class?” This line of questioning communicates that students have choices about what kind of and how much feedback they receive and that they determine what would be most helpful to them and when they have received as much as they find helpful.

In addition to facilitating the feedback process while viewing student videos, the instructor asks students to tune in to their own experiences of the counseling session. The instructor asks the student counselors whose videos were viewed how they felt during the session and asks them to trust their own internal indicators about

what worked or did not work. The instructor asks a similar question of the other class members. This line of questioning communicates the importance of students' internal processes, their own voices, and their subjective experience.

During such discussions and demonstrations, the teacher poses questions to the class, challenges rigid positions, urges students to challenge each other and the teacher, and takes positions opposing those stated by students in order to get them to think about other possibilities. Again, because constructing knowledge together and constructing the best possible products are the goals of any course, the instructor poses questions that encourage expressions of multiple perspectives. In doing so, the instructor communicates that without each student finding her or his voice, the answers generated might be less than the optimal, which only a diverse group can create.

Watching videos of student interviews brings concrete examples of both problems and counseling skills into the classroom and is thus invaluable to skill development. However, viewing videos may also create obstacles to student epistemological development if supervision is viewed traditionally. Traditionally, the expert instructor supervising the videos watches and evaluates the learner's performance of counseling and then offers "expert" advice about what to do next with the client. The learner is expected to be in a receptive mode in order to be considered open to supervision. Such traditional supervision poses obstacles to student development because it supports only a received way of knowing (Belenky et al., 1986) and fails to challenge students to generate their own ideas. Clearly, we are presenting a very different approach to viewing videos here.

Live Demonstration

Students benefit from observing expertise-in-action, so instructors who are counseling experts offer their students a gift by demonstrating their expertise. Instructors who are less expert might bring in videos of expert counselors-in-action. However, instructors may also give up the expert role or challenge the supposed "experts." When, in a live demonstration, the supposed expert instructor makes "mistakes," he may acknowledge

publicly how his efforts didn't work well and what he might have done differently if given another chance. The instructor might expose his own thinking process as it occurred during the session. In this way the threat level of learning counseling skills is reduced and the emerging, situation-driven use of them is demonstrated.

Role Play

Instructors might also challenge students by asking them to spontaneously role-play fictitious cases in small groups. The cases might be accompanied by questions that ask students to do such things as "give three effective paraphrases a counselor might use in response to the client's concerns."

Simulation

Alternatively, students might generate planned simulations, or scripts, for demonstrating the skills. Groups of students might discuss, decide on, and then act out effective use of paraphrases. During these activities, students must reach beyond what they have been told by the book or the instructor and generate knowledge. They also begin thinking ahead to real-world situations and thus preparing themselves to face professional challenges. They access many avenues and styles of learning, tapping into all three of the learning domains—cognition, behavior, and affect—in the process.

In-Class and Out-of-Class Practice

In some helping fields, little or no practice of counseling skills occurs before the first practicum. Thankfully, that has not been the case in counseling for the past generation. However, for those who teach the helping interview course with minimal opportunity for practice of skills, a reminder of theory and research related to education may be warranted here. For instance, Kolb's (1984) model indicates the need for regular and sequential experimentation in learning. Such application contributes to retention (Dale, 1969), as it requires the performance, not just the recognition, of a behavior. Bandura's (1997) work also has demonstrated the primacy of performance over vicarious learning.

Thus after students have read about the skills and observed and analyzed demonstrations of skills, they need to try out the skills during and after the class period. Most students find such practice to be anxiety producing. They are asked to dwell in the netherworld of not quite knowing enough yet being asked to perform. They thus discover that practice, rather than perfection, generates many questions and concerns.

Therefore, to balance the inherent challenge of this task, supports need to be provided. In the safety of the classroom, for instance, students can immediately be coached, their questions can be answered during teachable moments, they can get relatively nonthreatening feedback (because no grade is involved) from a variety of peers, and they can prepare for the longer between-class practice sessions.

Other support may be gleaned from providing a very clear structure for practice. For instance, the instructor may divide the class into triads and issue the following instructions: "For five minutes, one person is the counselor, another the client, and another the observer. Then, for two minutes the counselor self-evaluates using the previous discussion of the subskills components to guide the self-evaluation. For two minutes, the client talks about how she or he felt while participating in the counseling, also using the previous discussion as a guide. And for two minutes, the observer offers feedback, using the Feedback Sheets to structure the process." The Feedback Sheets that I (Eriksen) use ask clients or observers to answer the following questions: What is your gut reaction to the interviewer's style and way of being? How would (did) you feel if you were (as) the client? Identify the specific (assigned) skills that the interviewer did. Which of these did the interviewer do particularly well? Identify the skills done that were not specifically assigned. Did these interfere with time to do the assigned skills? Did they seem natural? Necessary?

Requiring students to offer their own observations communicates clearly that the views of each member are to be valued. I (Eriksen) have often had students indicate that they only wanted feedback from me because they somehow believed that my knowledge would be more helpful or accurate. While I believe that I have much to offer and do share my impressions with students, I also share with them that, semester after semester, when I read

and listen to the peer feedback, I find it to be congruent with my own impressions of students' performance. They are usually surprised at this. In response to their surprise, I ask them to consider that in the "real" world, clients are people just like *them*. And counselors-in-training ought to be very interested in their clients' opinions about how helpful they are. After all, the clients are the ones who will choose whether or not to return for more counseling on the basis of whether they evaluate the work to be helpful and the counselor to be caring.

Students continue the benefits of classroom practice by practicing outside of class with a peer or an undergraduate volunteer what they have learned in class each week. During the early part of the course, these counseling sessions are short and highly structured, designed to help them practice one microskill at a time. As the semester progresses, sessions increase in time and complexity; students add subskills, building toward a coherent session. Out-of-class counseling sessions provide a fairly safe environment for counseling, free from direct evaluation or observation. The aspiring counselors try on new behaviors, make mistakes, recover from their missteps, and explore the boundaries of what counseling means.

The between-class requirement that students practice interviewing skills sends them out on their own into the realm of ambiguity. Active encounters with real-life challenges stimulate students to question how and when to apply certain skills and the reasons for choosing them. These encounters may also create doubt about the usefulness of specific skills.

Such try-outs, while fluid and relatively spontaneous, are not amorphous, however. Instructors provide developmentally appropriate structure for these between-class practice sessions. For instance, instructors tell students that the sessions are to be a specific length of time, they are to include certain subskills, and they are to be audio- or video-recorded. I (Eriksen) also provide students with Feedback Sheets (as outlined above) to structure the feedback that they offer to one another.

Self-Assessment and Reflection

Theorists (e.g., Kegan, 1982) consider the ability to reflect on one's life to be a developmental achievement.

Self-reflection requires the capacity to take oneself as “object,” something that many students are not consistently able to do at the time that they begin graduate school (Kegan, 1998; Neukrug & McAuliffe, 1993). The reflection on action (Schön & Argyris, 1995) involved in trying out what is read and then reflecting during structured journaling communicates the value of pausing and speaking in measured tones, which are characteristic of evidence-based, procedural knowing (Belenky et al., 1996), or institutional (Kegan, 1982) or modernist knowing (Kegan, 1998). Many of the course activities discussed thus far have incorporated self-critique and reflection. However, here we discuss these more explicitly.

Following in-class and between-class practice sessions, we ask students to carefully consider, through self-assessment papers, what they have done, how well they have done it, and what they would do differently next time. Students must thus stand back from what is or has been, from their own behavior, and from their relationship with the client and think carefully about all of it. They write journal entries about how they felt and what they thought while practicing counseling. They also reflect on what personal, family, and cultural history might have contributed to the feelings they had while counseling. For example, because of personal history and defenses, some students have a difficult time with confrontation, others with simple listening.

For most students, reflection is a significant challenge; as a result, instructors need to offer substantial levels of support. I (Eriksen) have found that offering specific guidelines and exemplars contributes to that support. Exemplars illustrate what I think reflection or self-assessment might look like. These serve to “hold” students who have never reflected before while they try on a new way of knowing (see Appendix A on page 102 for instructions and exemplars that are offered to students).

Since self-reflection can't be “wrong,” we do not recommend giving grades for journal entries or self-assessment papers. However, instructors might, when students periodically hand in their reflections, offer ongoing feedback and pose questions about what students have written. This feedback creates a kind of dialogue, which gives instructors a chance to support and challenge students toward new developmental levels. For

instance, in response to a student who reports events or facts, I (Eriksen) write such supportive statements as “You seem to have assessed *what* happened quite descriptively” along with writing challenging questions such as “How did you feel when this happened?” “What did you think when she said that?” “What meaning do you make of this behavior?” If students offer absolutist statements or opinions without evidence, instructors might support them by responding, “You seem very clear about what you think in this situation,” while challenging them with “What other possible ways of evaluating the situation might there be?” If instructors are able to offer the appropriate balance of support and challenge, students ought to feel safe enough to reach more deeply into themselves in future reflections.

The benefits of this cycle of active reading, demonstration, discussion, and activity are numerous. *Better retention is assured* when students must generate knowledge or produce an idea or action (McNamara, Scott, & Bess, 2000). *Procedural knowing emerges* through the challenge to analyze both macro and micro dimensions of counseling skills, through stimulating students to think beyond their subjective impressions and to give evidence for their evaluations, and through posing questions that generate conflicting views. *Better solutions are constructed* in the context of a community of learners from diverse cultures and with varied experiences through challenging students to fully voice their diverse opinions and urging them to decide together what to do about disagreements. Such dialogically generated knowledge can be more useful than independently generated ideas.

In addition, the *emergent nature of knowledge is demonstrated* when the instructor becomes a question poser rather than only an answer giver. Continually asking, “What do you think?” “Who agrees?” “Why or why not?” “Who feels differently?” “What if . . . ?” challenges students to take risks, to put themselves on the line, to offer tentative ideas rather than waiting until they discover the “right” answers. During such unfinished discussions, out of the space between human beings in community, new ideas and thoughts emerge. Many are the times that I (Eriksen) have entered the classroom armed with questions and a list of the particular answers I think the class should “discover,” only

to find that during the discussion the class generates more and sometimes better answers than I constructed on my own. While it seems right that I, as the instructor, initially take responsibility for posing questions, and refereeing among different positions, I also need to make space for and respect the questions and answers that students generate from their own life experiences and thinking processes.

EVALUATION

Formative Evaluation

I (Eriksen) conceive of evaluation in this course as an ongoing dialogue, a co-constructed process in which the entire class community participates. Most of the evaluation is based on observable behavior and the ability to make sense of two factors: one's own and the client's behavior. Students regularly offer feedback to challenge each other to reach the height of their ability. Peers watch for signals about whether feedback is being perceived as helpful. They own their own reactions and try to be very specific about what worked and how they determined that it worked. The instructor makes every effort to offer both support and challenge in the feedback given.

Evaluation or feedback takes several forms. Students first self-evaluate, in order to evoke their own voices about their performance after in-class role plays, after reviewing their practice session videos and throughout the semester in journals and reflective papers.

Peer evaluation is also central. Following their self-evaluation of in-class role plays, students solicit input from their peers. After between-class practice sessions, counselors solicit input from their "clients." The instructor then asks students to include what they hear from peers in their written self-assessments. Emphasizing the importance of self- and peer evaluation communicates the importance of students developing their own voice and trusting their intuition.

Instructor evaluation is, of course, also part of the ongoing dialogue. Our input as veteran helper-educators is critical to student learning and to our gatekeeping role for the protection of future clients. When evaluating, the constructivist instructor intentionally balances support

and challenge. In that vein, when reviewing class role plays and videos of student sessions, the instructor points out and evokes strengths and competencies. The instructor also assertively and clearly critiques what isn't working, makes suggestions about alternate interventions, and offers comments on what she or he perceives to be most or least helpful.

This ongoing dialogue, or formative evaluation, offers students the opportunity to respond to and challenge the instructor throughout the semester. However, the process can still be quite threatening or challenging for some students. Yet it is difficult to conceive of helping students improve without offering them feedback on what does and doesn't work. If students become overwhelmed, instructors will need to increase support (for instance, provide greater structure and direction or express appreciation for a student's interpersonal [Kegan, 1998] capacities). Once students feel safely supported, instructors may experience greater success in offering suggestions for improvement.

Summative Evaluation

At the middle and end of the semester, instructors typically offer summative evaluations analyzing and evaluating students' mastery of counseling skills and their ability to think about what clients most need from the counselor. Thus, I (Eriksen) use a process of evaluation that merely continues what students have been doing all semester. They turn in mid-semester and end-of-semester video demonstrations of an exemplary counseling session, accompanied by both a transcript that explains what skills they were using and why and a self-evaluation of their performance. As a support prior to completing the mid-semester and final videos, I make a grading sheet available to students that lists the specific skills required in the videos (whatever skills have been covered in class to date; see Appendix C) and how grades will be determined. I also provide specific instructions and exemplars for the transcript and the self-evaluation (see Appendices A and B).

In response to the students' submissions, the instructor offers feedback that includes her perceptions of what worked well; other possible interventions, to

extend the counselor's range of possibilities; and interventions that might be better received by the client. For the midsemester videos, the instructor indicates specific improvements (e.g., examples of the words a counselor might actually say) that students might make in order to improve their grade on the final video. Such feedback offers students a sense that they have some control in the evaluation process, countering their feelings that evaluation is done "to" them. Students are rarely surprised at their end-of-semester grades. Finally, I (Eriksen) give students the opportunity to redo their final videos if they are unhappy with their grades or their performances. Students have repeatedly found this specific feedback and the opportunity for a redo to be some of the most helpful elements of this course.

CONCLUSION

We believe that promoting development is fundamental to educating effective counselors. While many readers may find little new in this chapter's presentation of the counseling skills course, others may not have considered how to ground the course in a constructivist or developmental framework or how to use the coursework to promote development. As you review our ideas about how this course might be structured, we hope that you notice that we have attempted to make the learning experiences as active, experiential, and inductive as possible. We hope that you realize our attempt to offer opportunities and challenges for students to develop their own voices and to access their own inner stores of knowledge. We hope it is clear that we have valued each person's experiences and asked students to bring their experiences to the classroom discussions. We believe that only when each person's voice is heard are we likely to come up with the best ideas and that these ideas are continually emerging. Finally, we believe that learning communities are the best environments for creating knowledge. The Counseling Skills course can be such a gathering.

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Appendix A

Self-Assessment/Reflection

The purpose of reflection is to think about or introspect about the material you are learning and the experiences you are having in class and outside of class. Reflection means many things to many people. However, in our rushed lifestyle we often do not stop to reflect, and thus live an unexamined life. For the purpose of this assignment, you will write an end-of-semester reflection paper that responds to and evaluates your experiences during Counseling I.

Write a five-page, double-spaced, 12-size-font, grammatically correct, well-organized paper evaluating yourself as a counselor. Address the specific skills you have read about, been directed to work on, discussed, and practiced during and between classes. Give evidence for your statements. Let me know that you are aware of your strengths, your growing edges, and the personal issues that may impact your work as a counselor. In addition to the examples stated below that reflect on specific skills, please evaluate yourself overall as a counselor.

Reflection should include the following:

1. Statement of the situation: This includes a sentence or two about “what happened.” For instance, “When I was practicing reflective listening today with my best friend, I found it hard to keep listening and not make suggestions about what she should do to solve her problem.” It may be tempting to include a lot more than a sentence or two. In fact, it may be tempting to journal only about events. Make every attempt to contain yourself.

2. Your thoughts about the situation: Beyond the actual facts of the situation is your interpretation or thoughts about it. Your interpretation impacts both your feelings about it and your decisions about how to respond. An example of thoughts about the situation above might be “I had thought previously that I was a good listener. And now I realize that while I care a lot about my friends, I am usually putting a lot of input into our conversations, rather than allowing space for them to talk fully about themselves.”

3. Your feelings about these thoughts: Feelings are feelings, not thoughts. That is, feelings are angry, sad, hurt, happy, exuberant, discouraged, etc. If you find yourself saying, “I feel that . . .” or “I feel as though . . .” or “I feel like . . .,” you are expressing a thought or opinion, not a feeling. An example of a feeling reaction to the thought expressed above in #2 might be “I am disappointed when I look back on all the conversations I have had with friends, when I think I might not have been as caring as I wanted to be. I feel hopeful that now I can care more effectively. I also am excited about trying these skills out on friends and on real clients. I feel encouraged that something relatively simple might help people a lot.”

4. Your related issues or reasons: This includes your ideas about how your experiences, and your thoughts and feelings about your experiences, might be related to your own issues or history. It is important to understand that experiences, feelings, and thoughts do not just happen, for you or for your “clients” and loved ones. They have some roots in a person’s history, culture, gender, religion, or other previous experiences. Understanding yourself and why you respond in certain ways is the first step to making choices and having greater control in the future about how you respond. It is particularly important in the mental health field to understand yourself, because clients and mental health organizations will “push many buttons” if you don’t (and perhaps even if you do) understand and have some conscious control over yourself. Further, if you find yourself in trouble, it will probably be necessary to understand your responses to the troubling situation in order to get yourself out of trouble. An example of issues or history related to the situation expressed above might be “I realize that in my family people didn’t listen very much. In fact, people felt that the most loving thing to do was to provide a solution to the problem the other person was expressing. Many times we would end up arguing over why it was or wasn’t a good solution. I often felt as though no one really cared about why I was bringing up the problem in the

first place. Now I know that it was because even though people cared, they were not expressing to me their understanding of what I was saying. So in those moments, I didn't think they cared very much."

Make sure to answer questions such as the following:

- What is my gut reaction about my style and way of being during counseling sessions? How would I have felt if I were the client?
- What specific (assigned) skills do I do? How well do I do them? How successful are they in accomplishing what the interventions should accomplish? Explain.
- Do the interventions that I deliver seem natural? Necessary?
- What two or three things will I work on next semester?
- What are my thoughts/opinions about the learning process and how I am doing with it?

SAMPLE WEEKLY REFLECTION PAPER/SKILLS SECTION

This week in class we were talking about reflective listening. I found it hard to keep listening and not make suggestions about what my partner should do to solve her problem. I spent some time watching people outside of class too, and found that many people don't really listen. I was also noticing that an awful lot of people don't make eye contact or maintain an open position. Sometimes they don't ask many questions before they respond either.

I also tried in my practice session and with my friends to do the reflective listening. While it was hard not to give solutions or suggestions, I found that the other person talked more if I listened. A couple of people actually expressed to me that they appreciated my listening instead of giving solutions. I think I was successful about half the time. I didn't realize it would be so hard. When I did listen and reflect effectively, my "client" did talk more, and did talk more openly. When I reflected, but didn't quite get it right, she corrected me, but didn't seem too upset by my not being right. It seemed that when I reflected feelings, the whole session changed into something deeper and more meaningful. She reported that she felt understood and cared for when we spoke afterward. I am finding that attending is easier after practicing it for a couple of weeks. I find myself leaning forward more

naturally, maintaining eye contact without staring, and using a tone of voice that seems less forced. It is hard to keep questions open. I asked both closed and open questions, and the open questions seemed to work better. But you can really see how questioning can interfere with attending and reflecting. Sometimes it seemed that when I questioned her, she was stymied and it seemed to interfere with her train of thought. Next time I plan to really focus on the client and worry less about my responses. I think that will help me know what to reflect, what is most important to reflect. I think it will help me ask only necessary and on-target questions. And I think that that kind of focus will naturally make me attend well.

I had thought previously that I was a good listener. And now I realize that while I care a lot about my friends, I am usually putting a lot of input into our conversations, rather than allowing space for them to talk fully about themselves. I am disappointed when I look back on all the conversations I have had with friends before, when I think I might not have been as caring as I wanted to be. I feel hopeful that now I can care more effectively. I also am excited about trying these skills out on friends and on real clients. I feel encouraged that something relatively simple might help people a lot.

I realize that in my family people didn't listen very much. In fact, people felt that the most loving thing to do was to provide a solution to the problem the other person was expressing. Many times we would end up arguing over why it was or wasn't a good solution. I often felt as though no one really cared about why I was bringing up the problem in the first place. Now I know that it was because even though people cared, they were not expressing to me their understanding of what I was saying. So in those moments, I didn't think they cared very much.

I have also been wondering about what the value of all this is. I mean, if most people don't do this attending and probing and listening, why should we? Is it normal? Is this what it means to be a counselor? Are we supposed to be different from other people? I mean, it isn't really just something you do at work, like some computer person would do computer skills. We are talking here about a way of being, a change in us personally. I can't imagine that we can just do it at work and not do it in the rest of our lives. So will people think we are weird? Will people think we are psychoanalyzing them? Are we asking questions and paying

attention to things that no one really wants us to? Might we be embarrassing them to focus in on such personal things? Somehow it seems OK to do this with clients or patients. But I don't know about doing it in my personal life.

And yet, when I think of the people who have made the most impact on my life, they seem to ask these kinds of questions and have paid attention to me and listened to me in the ways this class is teaching. I feel kind of confused about which way to go. But I am challenged to find out what seems right. I guess it is no surprise given the way my family is that I would wonder about this. And it certainly has not helped to be this new way in my family. They don't notice that I am listening. They just ask me why I am being so quiet, what's wrong with me. I guess I will have to practice on friends for now.

SAMPLE FINAL SELF-EVALUATION PAPER

As I look back over the semester, I am surprised by what I was unable to do initially and what comes quite easily now. I suppose that is the way it is with new skills. They seem so foreign initially. But I am happy with what I have accomplished. I find that attending comes quite easily

now. I am able to keep eye contact and to maintain an open body position. I find myself able to communicate clearly that I am with the person and to follow in a more relaxed way what they are saying. I do question sometimes whether I should do this with everyone. I mean, if I attend this way, won't it mean that even people I won't want to listen to will be hanging on me? I am not sure I want that. I may have to develop some nonattending skills—of course, not when I am working as a counselor—but for those times when I really don't have time or when it is someone I don't want to encourage.

Questioning is something I have never had a problem with. My mother used to tell me that I asked more questions than anyone she knew. I find that I never run out of questions because I am really interested in what people have to say. I am finding that I am better now at asking open questions. I also have learned a little better how to ask questions that will help the client explore, rather than questions that are just to satisfy my curiosity. I think I will probably have to remember to use fewer questions and to use the other skills more.

[and so on, evaluating yourself on each of the skills, identifying strengths and areas to still work on, examining the progress you have made]

Appendix B

Example of Transcript

This is an example of what your transcript might look like. Notice that all of the clients' words are included. Then the counselor's words are included, followed by naming the skill that has been used and including some explanation of why that skill seemed appropriate at that time. If it

seems as though some other skill might have been appropriate, or as though you might have said it differently or more clearly, include that also. Then reflect on whether the intervention had the desired impact on the client.

<i>Verbatim Session</i>	<i>Skill Used and Reason</i>	<i>Evaluation of Intervention— Better Option?</i>	<i>Impact on Client</i>
Client: I really want to talk about my roommate. She has been giving me all kinds of trouble lately.			
Counselor: Uh-huh.	Minimal encourage, to encourage client to continue talking without interrupting the flow of expression		
Client: I come in at night and she is waiting for me at the door with complaints of some kind: I have eaten some of her food, or I have left some dishes in the sink, or I was making too much noise last night on the computer, or with my stereo, or talking on the phone.			This was effective and helpful in encouraging continued talk by client.
Counselor: You are upset that she has so many complaints.	Paraphrase, to communicate my understanding of what the client is saying and to let the client know that I am with her.	Could have been clearer on the feeling, as this feeling is rather ambiguous.	
Client: Right! I can't believe she is so constant about the complaints, and has so many, and about so many picky things. I find myself dreading coming home at night, wondering what she is going to be upset about next. I find myself wondering if			She really seems to indicate that she felt heard, that I was with her. And she is encouraged to keep talking about what is bothering her, about important issues.

(Continued)

(Continued)

<i>Verbatim Session</i>	<i>Skill Used and Reason</i>	<i>Evaluation of Intervention— Better Option?</i>	<i>Impact on Client</i>
I am going to get evicted and not have a place to live, because she will complain to the landlord. I'm not sure I would even care at this point because it is so awful living with her right now.			
Counselor: You are not just upset, but you also worry about a place to live and whether you will be in trouble with the landlord	Reflection of feeling and content, to take session to deeper level while letting the client know that I understand what she is experiencing, letting her know that I am right with her, empathizing with her.	Again, <i>upset</i> is a rather ambiguous feeling word. Could have used <i>distressed</i> , or <i>irritated</i> , or <i>annoyed</i> . I think I successfully capture a couple of different feelings here to help her feel understood.	

Appendix C

Counseling Skills Scale-R (CSS)

University Name _____ Student Name _____

Review by Audio _____ Video _____ Transcript _____ Faculty Name _____

Reviewed After Skills _____ Practicum _____ School Intern _____ Comm/MH Intern _____

Grade faculty anticipates student will receive _____

This survey assesses the quality of student performance of counseling skills. It divides 19 specific microskills into six groupings (in caps following roman numerals). Please first rate the student's microskills as -2, -1, 0, +1, or +2 according to the scale below. Then summarize each grouping of skills by adding and averaging its individual microskills scores. Place that average in the blank following the grouping heading. NOTE: If a skill is not performed but does not seem necessary, then assign it an NN and average only those skills performed into mean grouping scores. If a skill is not performed but should have been, then give it a -1 score and average it with the rest of the skills performed under that super-heading.

- +2 Highly developed: helpful, well timed, and consistently well performed
- +1 Well developed: helpful and well timed when performed, but not consistently smooth
- 0 Developing skills: somewhat helpful, too many missed opportunities
- 1 Continue practice: not helpful or well timed, or no skill existent when it should be
- 2 Major adjustment needed: not at all helpful or well timed, harmful
- NN Not performed, but not necessary; (an)other skill(s) within this grouping used to effectively meet this grouping's goals

I. SHOWS INTEREST AND APPRECIATION

Group Score _____

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Body Language and Appearance —Maintains open, relaxed, confident posture with appropriate eye contact. Forward lean, comfortable position shows interest. Uses head nods and body gestures to encourage client talk. Maintains professional dress. | -2 -1 0 +1 +2 |
| 2. Minimal Encouragers —Repeats key words and phrases. Uses prompts (uh-huh, okay, right, yes) to let client know she or he is heard. Uses silence helpfully. | -2 -1 0 +1 +2 |
| 3. Vocal Tone —Uses vocal tone that matches the sense of the session and session goals. Vocal tone communicates caring and connection with the client. | -2 -1 0 +1 +2 |
| 4. Evoking and Punctuating Client Strengths —Session grounded in appreciation of and belief in client and in client strengths and accomplishments. | -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN |

II. ENCOURAGES EXPLORATION (Primary Empathy)

Group Score _____

5. **Questioning**—Asks open-ended questions that encourage the client to continue talking and to provide information. Uses judiciously when needed and when theoretically consistent. Does not overuse questions. -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN
6. **Requesting Concrete and Specific Examples**—Asks for concrete and specific instances when client provides vague generalities. (“Could you give me an example of [or specifics about] how he might show you love?”) -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN
7. **Paraphrasing (reflection of content)**—Engages in brief, accurate, and clear paraphrasing of what the client has expressed. -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN
8. **Summarizing**—Makes statements at key (a few) moments in the session that capture the overall sense of what the client has been expressing. -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN

III. DEEPENS THE SESSION (Advanced Empathy)

Group Score _____

9. **Reflecting Feeling**—States succinctly the feeling and the content of the problem faced by the client (“You feel _____ when _____.”) -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN
10. **Using Immediacy**—Reflects here-and-now session experiences of the client or the counselor—how session is going, how relationship is going, nonverbals that client is not expressing verbally. (“As we talk about _____ problem, I sense you are feeling _____ about me. In turn, I’m feeling _____ about how you are viewing the problem right now.”) -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN
11. **Observing Themes and Patterns**—Identifies more overarching patterns of client acting, thinking, or behaving that may be related to the problem (“In _____ situations, you regularly do _____ [or think _____ or feel _____], which seems to lead to _____, which causes you problems.”) -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN
12. **Challenging/Pointing Out Discrepancies**—Expresses observations of discrepancies between plans and behaviors, between desires and actions, etc. (“You expect yourself to do _____ when facing the problem of _____, but you do _____ instead. What do you make of this?”) -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN
13. **Reflecting Meaning and Values**—Reflects the unexpressed meaning or belief/value system that is behind the words the client is saying. (“You feel strongly about your choice to _____ because it reflects values you were raised with.”) -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN

IV. ENCOURAGES CHANGE

Group Score _____

14. **Determining Goals and Desired Outcomes**—Collaboratively determines outcomes toward which the counseling process will aim. Helps client set goals. Miracle question or alternative. -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN

15. **Using Strategies for Creating Change**—Uses theoretically consistent and intentional intervention strategies to help client move forward toward treatment goals (such as setting up reinforcement systems, using guided imagery, directives, self-disclosure, interpretation, information, instruction, search for exceptions or past successes). -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN
16. **Considering Alternatives and Their Consequences**—Helps client review and evaluate possible solutions. (“One option would be _____, and that would mean _____. Another option would be _____.”) -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN
17. **Planning Action and Anticipating Possible Obstacles**—Reaches agreement about actions to take between sessions, who is responsible for them, and when they will be done. Helps client identify obstacles that might interfere and decide how to handle them. (“So, you will do _____ by _____ date. What could prevent you from accomplishing your plan?”) -2 -1 0 +1 +2 NN

V. DEVELOPS THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP **Score** _____

18. **Consistently engaging in caring manner with client,** particularly by demonstrating such core conditions as genuineness and authenticity, warmth and acceptance, respect and positive regard, and empathy. -2 -1 0 +1 +2

VI. MANAGES THE SESSION **Score** _____

19. **Opening session smoothly and warmly greeting client.** Begins work on counseling issues in a timely way. Structures session, directing client naturally through opening, exploration, deeper understanding, creating change, and closing; focuses client on essence of issues at a level deep enough to promote positive movement. Smoothly and warmly ends the session in a timely way, planning for future sessions or for termination. -2 -1 0 +1 +2

TOTAL CSS SCORE (add grouping averages): _____

Instructor Comments:

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