
An Empowerment Model of Counsellor Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to apply an empowerment model of counselling to counsellor education programs, describing how the critical components of empowerment can be infused into counsellor education curriculum.

Résumé

Cet article est divisé en trois parties. D'abord, il définit l'habilitation dans le contexte du counseling. Ensuite, il propose un modèle général d'éducation en counseling, décrit en fonction de 5 éléments critiques de l'habilitation. Finalement, l'article discute des implications découlant d'un modèle d'éducation en counseling axé sur l'habilitation.

When I invite you into my confidence
my secret places
introduce you to my devils
my ancestors
my way of being
Show me this much:
that you will tread lightly
over the graves
yield to my wisdom
know me
as creator, lover, maker
of my life
amidst this ruckus.

(E. H. M.)

“Empowerment” is a popular, 1990s word that is often used to describe the goal of counselling or the end result of other helping relationships. While the term is used with frequency across a number of disciplines (McWhirter, 1991), it often goes undefined in the counseling literature, with a general implication that empowerment means increased assertiveness or other self-management skills. The increasing use of this term in the counselling literature is not surprising, given that across definitions or implied meanings, empowerment is associated with positive human growth and change processes (McWhirter, 1991).

As helping professionals, counsellors are committed to the growth, healing, and development of the clients they serve. Unfortunately, the *intention* to help does not always guarantee that counsellors are helpful. Some have argued that counselling and psychotherapy can actually serve to oppress rather than empower clients. For example, Steinbock (1988) argues that helping relationships are oppressive to the extent that helpes embrace a view of themselves as needy and dependent on the

helper for solutions to their problems. Further, he contends that problem resolution focuses on the individual rather than the systems that create the problems, resulting in a very low likelihood of constructive, preventative change (Steinbock, 1988). Prilleltensky (1989) argues that interventions based on traditional approaches to psychotherapy serve to perpetuate the kinds of systemic problems and inequalities that lead clients to seek psychological services, preserving rather than transforming an unjust status quo. Caplan (1992) argues persuasively that feminist therapy, explicitly created to address women's oppression, is also vulnerable to reflecting and preserving the gender inequities of society.

These critiques warrant serious consideration. In societies marred by inequality and injustice, racism and sexism, economic stratification and violence, all counselling relationships are vulnerable to subtly and even overtly reflecting these and other forms of oppression (Arnold, 1997). By virtue of our training and education, counsellors are in a position of relative privilege that, unexamined, can contribute to maintaining the presence of oppressive social influences within the counselling relationship. For example, counsellors who fail to acknowledge the roles that racism and classism play in creating the environment of a low income client of color may "blame the victim"; counsellors ascribing to the values of the dominant culture without examining the influence of their values in counselling may define client problems and engage in interventions that are inappropriate for their clients (e.g., Arnold, 1997; Katz, 1985; Sue & Sue, 1990).

Counsellor educators are in a critical position to ensure that counselling services facilitate client empowerment and contribute to an improved society, consistent with the goals of the profession. The purpose of this article is to apply an empowerment model of counselling to counsellor education programs. First, I will define empowerment in the context of counselling. Second, I will apply this definition of empowerment to counsellor education programs, describing a general model for counsellor education in terms of five critical components of empowerment. Finally, I will describe some general implications of an empowerment model of counsellor education.

Empowerment in Counselling

Drawing from the literature on empowerment in social work, community psychology, education, multicultural counselling, and feminist literatures, empowerment in the context of counselling has been defined as follows:

Empowerment is the process by which people, organizations, or groups who are powerless or marginalized: (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) which they exercise, (d) without infringing upon the

rights of others, and (e) which coincides with supporting the empowerment of others in their community. (McWhirter, 1994, p. 12).

An analysis of each component of the definition will help elaborate the meaning of empowerment in counselling.

Become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context refers to identifying systemic and structural influences on clients' lives at personal, interpersonal, and societal levels. Some of these systemic and structural influences include racism, sexism, heterosexism, inaccessible environments, and ageism. These powerful social influences may be reflected within the counselling relationship as well, thus, the counsellor's critical awareness of power dynamics within the counselling relationship and in the client's larger social context is prerequisite to facilitation of client awareness.

Developing the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives refers to skill acquisition as well as the motivation and self-efficacy expectations required to exercise those skills. Counsellors often play an important role in facilitating the acquisition of new skills. It is important to keep in mind, however, that counsellors are often trained in skill-building exercises rooted in European American values, worldviews, and norms. Thus the nature of each skill, as well as the manner and context in which the skill is practiced, must be shaped in accord with the client's concerns as well as other salient client characteristics such as personal and sociopolitical history, culture, interpersonal style, level of acculturation, and preferences. Further, counsellors must not overlook the vital resources with which the client enters the counselling relationship; specific coping mechanisms, attitudes, knowledge, and experiences that sustained the client through life thus far.

Which they exercise without infringing upon the rights of others addresses the fundamental nature of empowerment as integrative power or "power with others" (Hagberg, 1984) rather than power over others, or power "to do to" others. The exercise of skills that violate the human rights of others is fundamentally incompatible with empowerment.

Coinciding with support for the empowerment of others in their community can range from interpersonal behaviours such as providing encouragement and support to community consciousness-raising efforts such as participating in marches or helping to organize cultural and educational events. The role of the counsellor is to facilitate and support the client's connections with community, and to enhance the client's ability to support the empowerment of others as appropriate for the client's current situation.

These elaborations should make clear that empowerment is not a linear process, nor one that concludes with the achievement of a particular "empowered" state. Many clients will not be ready for or interested in the empowerment of others—in the form of interpersonal relationships

or community participation—when they terminate the counselling relationship. This must not be considered a failure on the part of the client or the counsellor to “achieve” the goal of empowerment. The counsellor’s role is to meet clients where they are in the empowerment process and work to support increasing, enhancing, or otherwise promoting empowerment in additional ways that are consistent with the client’s goals.

An Empowerment Model of Counsellor Education: The Five Cs

A counsellor education program consistent with the goals of empowerment would not look radically different from many counsellor education programs. Embracing an empowerment model does not imply adoption of a particular theoretical orientation or specific curriculum. Rather, the adoption of an empowerment model would involve focused examination and modification (as needed) of existing courses and faculty/student relationships, and would add special emphasis to certain aspects of training.

An empowerment model of counsellor education includes three central goals: (a) to empower students, (b) to train counsellors to practice counselling in a manner designed to empower clients, and (c) to provide counsellor education in a manner consistent with the empowerment process. Critical components of an empowerment model, for both the practice of counselling and counsellor education, can be represented in terms of “Five Cs”: Collaboration, Competence, Context, Critical Consciousness, and Community. The first three of the five are more likely to be a part of existing counsellor education programs and will be more briefly discussed than the latter two components.

Collaboration. “Collaboration” refers to the dynamic relationship between counsellor and client, and to the relationship between counselling students and faculty members. The relationship should be characterized by collaborative definition of problematic issues, goals, and development of interventions and strategies for change or growth. These interventions and change strategies are consistent with the client’s/student’s values, goals, skills, experiences, and abilities. The client is viewed as an active member of a team rather than a passive recipient of services; the counselling student is viewed, *a la* Paulo Freire (1971), as a co-learner and co-teacher in the process of becoming a counsellor. Faculty members are co-students and engage in continuous learning along with their students.

Reduction in the hierarchical nature of these relationships must not obfuscate the very real power differences that exist between counsellor and client, faculty member and student. To pretend such differences do not exist is to perpetuate the “homogeneity of power” (Steinbock, 1988). According to Steinbock (1988), when we presume equality we act as if all involved are equally free to present their viewpoints and to initiate change. Such an assumption in the context of a counsellor education

program protects faculty members from critique and from having to change their methods, attitudes, etc. Rather than assuming a false equality, power differences should be freely acknowledged, with the faculty member viewed as an expert with the power of assigning grades and evaluating students, but at the same time as an expert who considers the students' self-knowledge, existing skills, and life experience as another source of expertise and as essential resources in the education/mutual growth process. The same is true of the counsellor-client relationship.

Counsellor education programs that seek to promote collaborative counsellor-client relationships are unlikely to be successful if collaboration is not reflected within the education program itself. For example, suppose that "Kate" is struggling in practicum due to unresolved issues of her own that interfere with her ability to support her clients. A collaborative or "power with" supervisory approach would include letting Kate know, clearly and directly, that there is a problem, getting Kate's perception of the problem, identifying possible means to address the problem, and choosing the optimal course of action. Kate would experience the supervisor's interest in her well-being and respect for her point of view. A non-collaborative or "power over" supervisory approach would involve unilateral definition of the problem and a threat-like solution without an attempt to integrate Kate's perceptions, ideas, or resources into the problem-solving process. In both cases the supervisor might believe that Kate must get therapy before continuing in practicum, but the process would unfold very differently according to the approach. Collaboration can also be integrated into counsellor education programs by supporting an active graduate student organization, maintaining a responsive system for identifying and attending to student concerns, incorporating student-driven content into courses, and treating students in a collegial rather than rigidly hierarchical fashion.

Competence. All clients have existing skills, resources, and a wealth of experience to contribute to the counselling process. To overlook these resources is likely to reinforce neediness, to foster dependency, to discourage esteem-building, and is generally contrary to the goals of empowerment and to good counselling. Counsellor recognition and authentic appreciation of client resources is essential. Honest counsellor feedback regarding skill deficits or personal weaknesses is also part of supporting client competence. The vast majority of clients understand that they have weaknesses (which they often perceive to be more serious than does the counsellor) and counsellor avoidance of constructive feedback is likely to make it hard for clients to believe positive feedback. So too with counsellors-in-training; counselling students must learn to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, grow in their understanding of how to utilize their strengths more effectively, and how to enhance areas of weakness. Counsellors are unlikely to truly appreciate the

strengths of others if they are unable to appreciate their own competencies, just as they are unlikely to accept others' weaknesses without accepting their own.

Group counselling classes and group supervision, as well as individual supervision, offer arenas for addressing counsellor competencies and deficiencies. Faculty members can focus on such counsellor-in-training behaviours as accepting compliments, realistic self-criticism, the ability to offer feedback or suggestions to peers without self-deprecating qualifications (e.g., "This may be a dumb idea, but . . ."). Consistent attention to these student behaviours will reinforce the notion that awareness of competence and the limits of competence is indeed an essential component of empowerment. These behaviours are consistent with our ethical responsibility to recognize the limits of our expertise (American Counseling Association [ACA], 1995; Schulz, 1994).

It has been my observation that graduate students in counselling often enter programs with many skills for academic success that are not tapped by the counsellor education process. Many experience frustration with the fact that reading and retaining information are not nearly so important as skills related to interpersonal awareness, conceptualization, and perspective-taking. Achievement in this context means something different than it has in previous academic experiences, and perfectionism may block rather than enhance progress through a program. Thus, faculty modelling of healthy self-critique is important. Most helpful are models who can discuss weaknesses and strengths, mistakes and successes, without apology or false humility; models who genuinely accept their limitations and do not expect perfection of themselves. Such modelling also conveys faculty "power with" rather than "power over" counselling students and promotes a reduction in the traditional power differential.

Context. The dynamics of power and privilege shape the client's context as well as the context in which we provide counselling services and in which we educate student counsellors. This context includes larger social forces (e.g., ageism, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, able-bodied assumptions) and the effects of these assumptions on care providers, families, and individuals, as well as on faculty members, departments, educational institutions, and individual students. Context also includes systems such as families, social networks, neighborhoods, ethnic groups, professional and work groups, and faith communities. Integration of the context component into counselling means that we acknowledge the role of context in the client's current situation or problem, including how the context serves to maintain or exacerbate problems, while at the same time acknowledging the client's options and responsibilities related to change.

Integration of the context component into counsellor training means that we acknowledge past and present contextual influences in shaping

student attitudes, experiences, behaviours, values, and beliefs. For example, when confronting a student's homophobia, faculty members identify and explore contextual influences such as religious beliefs, ethnic group membership, family attitudes, etc. that have shaped the student's attitudes, without condoning or excusing discriminatory behaviour. The context is acknowledged without serving as an excuse; the student remains responsible for addressing biases and attitudes that are at odds with our professional ethics.

The context component of empowerment is directly dependent upon the critical consciousness component. That is, without critical consciousness, efforts to address context are likely to be ineffective, because understanding context requires the development of critical consciousness.

Critical Consciousness. Supporting the empowerment process requires that counsellors engage in an ongoing attempt to facilitate client awareness of context through the process of consciousness-raising in a manner consistent with the client's situation, needs and abilities. Counsellors and counsellor educators cannot engage in consciousness-raising without developing their own understanding of the power dynamics affecting clients, students, and themselves. Critical consciousness can be increased through two overlapping processes: power analysis and critical self-reflection.

Power analysis refers to examining how power is distributed in a given situation in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, sexual orientation, age, experience, family position, etc. (McWhirter, 1994). To illustrate power analysis, a faculty member might engage students in exploring the personal and professional repercussions of the program/department/university's adherence to medical, economic, or sociopolitical models of disability (Hahn, 1988). According to Hahn (1988), the medical model defines disability in terms of individual limitations, while the economic model focuses on the individual's functional limitations. By contrast, the sociopolitical model defines disability as a multifaceted product of the interaction between the individual and the environment, and emphasizes disabling features of the environment. The economic and medical models of disability arise out of modern day cultural assumptions regarding disability, such as: "disability" equals "needing help"; disability is a fact of biology alone; and people with disabilities, as victims of biological injustice rather than social injustice, must change their personal behaviour rather than their social context (Fine & Asch, 1988). Exploration of the extent to which these models are represented in the department, and the implications of each model for counselling students with disabilities, would engage students in thinking critically and concretely about one important aspect of power dynamics. In addition to

raising awareness, such a discussion could lead to actions that improve the departmental environment for students with disabilities.

Critical self-reflection overlaps with power analysis in the sense that counsellors and counsellor educators must understand how they contribute to specific power dynamics in their behaviours, assumptions, and interactions with others (including clients and students). In addition, critical self-reflection involves developing awareness of privilege, and of how counsellors have benefitted from privilege at the expense of those who are not privileged. The vast majority of counsellors enjoy privilege at multiple levels, such as age, racial/ethnic group membership, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability status, education level, and gender. This is not to say that most counsellors are young, white, straight, middle or upper class, able-bodied males, but to say that most counsellors are members of more than one of these categories of privilege.

One way to explore privilege is to examine the common assumptions or things that people take for granted by virtue of membership in a privileged group. (Of course, these will not be true for all members of that privileged group.) European Canadians, for example, usually assume that everyone does (or should) speak their language (English), are far less likely to be hated or “tolerated” by persons with greater power because of their ethnicity, and generally experience higher teacher expectations than persons of color. Heterosexuals can engage in public displays of affection without their actions representing a political act; they also experience freedom from fear of losing their jobs on the basis of sexual orientation, and freedom from the threat of being outed or targeted by anti-gay hate crimes. Males are less likely to be interrupted, more likely to be judged on the basis of characteristics beyond purely physical characteristics, and are far less likely to be raped by strangers, acquaintances, or family members, than are females. An exploration of works enumerating these aspects of privilege may serve as a point of departure with students, for example, the work of Henning-Stout (1994), Freire (1971), and others.

Counsellor education programs can support the development of student skills in power analysis and critical self-reflection through a variety of means. For example, in vocational counselling classes, discussion and activities related to how the privileges of education, middle or higher SES, being heterosexual, free of disability, young, white, and male influence career development and occupational choices. Students can analyze the effects of their own privileged status in accordance with their own membership in various groups (e.g., for an able-bodied student, how being free of a disability has influenced their choices, assumptions, interests, etc.). Notice that these questions address a privilege that is largely “invisible” to those who possess it.

In group counselling classes, students can explore how power dynamics are manifested within groups, and even within a given cohort of students. For example, how are differences in age, class, race/ethnicity, gender, etc. played out within the group? If the group class is experiential in nature, how do verbal and nonverbal cues within the group exert influence on students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours? What choices do people make on the basis of perceived power within the group?

In practicum classes, provide exercises that challenge counsellor assumptions and biases in a manner that does not punish students for honesty but provides encouragement for the process of discovering and addressing weaknesses. Counsellors can monitor dynamics in counselling and supervision sessions related to: (a) their own feelings of powerlessness and how they deal with them (for example, does the counsellor become aggravated, determine that the client is resistant, or is "making" the counsellor do all the work?), (b) the extent to which counsellor sense of powerlessness is mirrored in clients or supervision sessions, (c) the way that they define success and failure with specific clients, and (d) the extent to which interventions meet counsellor needs vs. the client's. Consistent with the dual goals of an empowerment model of counsellor education, faculty members should simultaneously examine parallels in their work with students. Critical self-reflection may include questions such as: To what extent do I experience powerlessness as a counsellor educator, and how do I act upon these experiences? How do my definitions of student successes and failures fit with my personal needs, weaknesses, and values? To what extent do my program's admission practices perpetuate disproportionate numbers of white, middle and upper class, able-bodied counsellors?

As a final example, advanced practica courses (also called field placement or internship) offer an excellent opportunity for power analysis and critical self-reflection. I require students to begin and end their field work with a reflection on the power dynamics present at their site, using journals to reflect upon changes in their perceptions over time. I ask them to consider the following:

How is power distributed at your site? What level of respect, power, and decision-making, is granted to the various personnel (counsellors, administrative staff, nurses, psychologists, social workers, etc.) at your site? Salary, scheduling, "voting" ability, distribution of office space, unspoken rules such as "Don't interrupt the psychiatrist," are all ways in which these may be manifested. How are issues of class, culture, gender, and sexual orientation manifested and handled at your site? Are culture and class viewed separately or lumped together? What are the "appropriate" lines of communication and to what extent are they followed? How do friendships and alliances among staff affect power distribution, decision-making, atmosphere, credibility, etc.? What types of staff and client issues are viewed as more vs. less critical? Who defines problems? Which concerns are addressed and which are ignored or given lip service? How would you characterize the way clients are discussed (e.g., as inferior in some way, with respect, with labels?) How much

emphasis is placed on professional development? How is burnout manifested and handled?

Typically, students initially view their field sites as highly functional and “free” of power dynamics. By the end of the semester or year-long placement, they are able to provide detailed accounts of how power works in their organization, to critically reflect on what this means to them as practitioners in that organization, and to evaluate how well clients are served, in general, by the staff. Inevitably, this process is extended to critical reflection on their experience of the counsellor education program, as well as to a process of discernment on the kind of counsellor they want to be and the kind of organization and setting in which they want to practice. While the reflection process often produces some disillusionment, it also helps prepare counsellors for the reality of human services, to be active change agents in their future settings, and to recognize and appreciate healthy organizations. Students who view power analysis and critical self-reflection as a fundamental part of their professional practice, and who develop the skills for doing so through interactions with their peers, clients, supervisors, and instructors, will be far more likely to continue this process throughout their careers.

Community. Community may be defined in terms of ethnicity, family, friends, place of residence, faith, sexual orientation, common organizational affiliation, or other bonds. A community is a source of strength and hope, identity and history, support and challenge, interaction and contribution. Community is fundamental to empowerment in two ways. First, the community can provide resources, support, and affirmation for clients. Second, the client’s mutual contribution back to that community is essential in furthering the empowerment process. Counsellors work with clients to develop an understanding of the client’s sense of community, the resources available, and the extent and quality of client interactions with the identified community. Often clients will not experience a sense of community with any others in their environment, or may belong to communities that undermine their resources and abilities. Thus, counsellors must also be aware of potential new sources of community, and assist clients in accessing or fostering community. This may include helping clients develop skills for drawing upon the community’s support. Finally, counsellors can assist clients in identifying ways to support the empowerment of others in their community.

Community is important to student counsellors as well. Learning the content of counsellor education programs inevitably invites re-examination of personal history, relationships, and behaviours; a process that for many reveals new perspectives on self, family, and friends. The process of becoming a counsellor is challenging, risky, and at times very uncomfortable. Developing counsellor skills in the context of a supportive community can normalize and enhance the process of integrating of

new and healthier behaviours, attitudes, and perspectives. Fostering community in the context of a counsellor education program can be facilitated through the following: active promotion and support of graduate student organizations; provision of an informal common area for students in which to study and socialize; opportunities for semi-formal or informal faculty-student interaction focused on exploring professional issues or learning about counselling topic areas; close attention to how students and faculty provide one another with feedback inside the classroom or clinic; increasing rewards for students who provide encouragement and challenge to one another and decreasing rewards for competitiveness; and mutual student/faculty advocacy in the face of negative social influences such as sexism, racism, and homophobia.

Finally, the community aspect of the empowerment of counsellors also includes facilitating the empowerment of others outside of therapy sessions. Helping counselling students integrate the important role of social activist and advocate into their professional identity is critical (see McWhirter, 1997). Faculty and local professional counsellors can serve as role models for social activism that addresses community problems.

Case Example of the Five C's of Empowerment: EMAC

The Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee (EMAC) of the Department of Educational Psychology at the author's university serves as one concrete example of how the five Cs of empowerment might be promoted in an academic program. This example is not intended to capture *all* possibilities for empowerment, but to provide a realistic picture of one way to promote empowerment in counsellor education. After a description of EMAC, it is analyzed with respect to the five Cs.

EMAC was formed in the early 1970s by a faculty member and a group of ethnic minority students concerned about the welfare of graduate minority students in the department programs. Over twenty years later, the goals of this standing faculty/student committee continue to focus on the recruitment, retention, support, and advocacy for ethnic minority students and faculty within the department. Currently, biweekly meetings draw 20-25 students and faculty members, of which over 50% are American ethnic minority students or international students and 20% are faculty members. Participation is voluntary. EMAC is led by a team consisting of two faculty co-chairs, two student co-leaders, and a student secretary. The leadership team meets weekly to discuss the goals of the committee, plan events, coordinate activities, and provide mutual support. The department supports EMAC through the provision of assistantships, strong faculty and staff attendance of EMAC public functions, and thoughtful consideration of and attention to the issues raised by EMAC.

With respect to recruitment, EMAC members contact potential ethnic minority applicants to department programs to encourage students to

apply. EMAC then reviews the files of ethnic minority program applicants who request an EMAC review, making recommendations for admission to the program faculty. Upon request, ethnic minority applicants are contacted by EMAC members for more personal information and insight into the department and the community. EMAC student members also assist in the hosting of counselling students who come for interviews.

With respect to retention and support, the biweekly meetings often focus on personal sharing of positive and negative aspects of student and faculty lives, as well as meetings in which one person shares his or her life in a way that helps the group better understand the person's culture, history, and life context. The stresses of exams, living in a majority white community, and managing the multiple requests for assistance that graduate students of color typically receive (e.g., helping with workshops) are all processed in EMAC meetings. White student/faculty participants contribute through sharing their own perceptions and experiences, such that a greater mutual understanding of racism, the meaning of advocacy, and the experience of being graduate students of color are understood at deeper and more personal levels. Meetings often evoke a lively, thought-provoking tension among members as difficult issues, experiences, and feelings are discussed. Annual holiday parties and an end-of-the-year luncheon provide regular opportunities to relax and celebrate the accomplishments of the group. Between meetings, EMAC members frequently socialize together. New students are assigned an "EMAC buddy" who maintains weekly contact to assist in the adjustment process and to provide support for the transition to graduate student life.

Outreach, consciousness-raising, and advocacy activities in which the committee has engaged in the past three years include discussion of selected readings and videos on racism, review of the faculty teaching evaluation forms, outreach activities related to the death of a Latino resident of the community who died while in police custody, formation of a department committee to resolve authorship disputes, and sponsoring workshops on topics such as multicultural counselling and racism. These activities contribute to the development of critical consciousness both among the committee members and within the larger department.

Over the twenty-five years of EMAC's existence, recurring internal issues have emerged. For example, the question of whether or not to limit the number of faculty attending EMAC meetings arises from time to time. Thus far, no such limitation has been imposed, as students report more benefits than limitations related to faculty participation. However, the student members hold a "student only" meeting every semester to explore issues that are uncomfortable to discuss in front of faculty. This helps avoid the "homogeneity of power" assumption (Steinbock, 1988) described earlier. Students of color occasionally become concerned that

the participation of white students will gradually shift EMAC's focus away from issues of racism, and members have questioned whether to broaden the committee's focus by formally addressing, for example, the concerns of students with disabilities and gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Thus far, while acknowledging the importance and centrality of these other issues to students in the department, EMAC has continued to emphasize concerns related to students of color. As these kinds of questions arise, they are addressed in a manner unique to the time period, the issues involved, the current EMAC leadership team, and the current composition of the group.

EMAC manifests aspects of each of the five Cs of empowerment. Students and faculty participate in a *collaborative* endeavor to promote multiculturalism within the department in a manner that respects the differing perspectives of students and faculty, majority and minority students. Power differences are overtly acknowledged rather than hidden. Each member's *competence* is recognized, enhanced, and supported through the formal and informal activities of the committee. *Context* is consistently addressed through recognition and exploration of the effects of living in a majority white community and institution and through exploration of the personal effects of racism on the lives of students. The promotion of *critical consciousness* is ongoing, through educational activities and discussions in which committee members confront, challenge, and encourage each other. Finally, a strong sense of *community* is fostered both within the committee and within the department, as students and faculty experience EMAC as a source of support, a "home away from home," and a place to learn from one another.

Implications for Counsellor Education

The adoption of an empowerment model of counsellor education could begin with the formation of a student-faculty reflection group charged with examining perceptions of the power dynamics between students and faculty; examining the extent to which coursework addresses the larger social, cultural, political, and economic context in which clients and students function; examining the extent to which community is fostered and hindered within the program, and similar issues central to the five Cs of empowerment. Finally, such a group might reflect on the ways in which students and faculty, as mental health professionals, can utilize individual and collective resources to challenge the systems and structures that oppress the marginalized members of our communities. Reflection and critique could be followed with identification of specific goals for integration of empowerment into the program.

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of adopting an empowerment model is embracing the notion that counselling can be, and often is, a vehicle of oppression. Contrary to our best intentions, counselling can be

oppressive to the extent that it: (a) presupposes neediness, (b) encourages dependence, (c) reduces the likelihood of systemic change, and (d) presumes homogeneity of power (McWhirter, 1994, 1997; Steinbock, 1988). Counselling is most likely oppressive when counsellors are not trained in the kind of critical self-analysis that enables insight into one's assumptions, privileges, limitations, and blindspots. The goal of learning to identify areas of weakness is that, consistent with ACA and CGCA ethical standards, counsellors and other mental health professionals make such self-analysis an ongoing part of their professional responsibilities.

While many programs claim to provide such self-analysis, Sue and Sue (1990) argue that most counsellors-in-training do not experience rigorous self-exploration. Monocultural counsellor education programs that focus on individual psychopathology and ignore context also risk perpetuating the oppressive potential of counselling. In addition, counsellor education is inconsistent with empowerment when the components of empowerment are absent, for example, when faculty fail to engage in critical self-reflection on privilege and power, when rigid hierarchies exist in faculty-student relationships, when the composition of students is disproportionately white, middle to upper class, heterosexual, and able bodied, and when the educational environment promotes and rewards competition rather than mutual support.

CONCLUSION

Counsellor educators are in a critical position to influence the practice of counselling. As counsellors, we frequently work with people who are marginalized and/or experience themselves as powerless. As educators, we are responsible for co-participating with our students in social transformation processes designed to eliminate the many forms of oppression that exist in our society. Through the integration of the components of empowerment into our training programs, we may be better able to promote counselling services in a manner that facilitates social transformation at individual, programmatic, and societal levels, and consequently, to better serve our clients and our communities.

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