

SELF AWARENESS AND THE EFFECTIVE COUNSELLOR: A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

Jevne (1981) found self awareness to be considered first among competency areas necessary for training an effective counsellor. In response to this finding, a view of the concept is presented which could serve as the basis for systematic assessment of the competency area. A two-dimensional matrix composed of content and process dimensions is elaborated to examine self awareness. The content dimension is based on components of the concept presented by Jevne. To clarify the integration of the content and process dimensions of the matrix, examples of self aware and non-self aware expressions are presented. Other counselling professionals are encouraged to present their views of self awareness so the competency area may be clarified, and implemented in counsellor training.

Résumé

Jevne (1981) a trouvé que la conscience du soi est la plus importante des compétences requises pour la formation d'un conseiller efficace. En guise de réponse à cette conclusion, on présente une perspective du concept pouvant servir de base pour une évaluation systématique de ce domaine de compétence. On élabore sur une matrix à deux dimensions composée du contenu et du processus destiné à l'étude de la conscience du soi. La dimension concept est basée sur des éléments du concept présenté par Jevne. Afin de préciser l'intégration des dimensions du contenu et du processus de la matrix, des exemples de l'expression de la conscience du soi et de la non conscience du soi sont présentées. On encourage d'autres professionnels en counselling de présenter leurs points de vue sur la conscience du soi afin de préciser ce domaine de compétence et de l'implanter au sein de la formation des conseillers.

Jevne's (1981) survey indicates a consensus that there is a need to define minimal standards of professional preparation in counselling and to develop methods for assessment of competence. Of particular note is her finding that self awareness is considered first among competency areas necessary for training an effective counsellor. However, it is pointed out that self awareness has been one of the most controversial areas in regard to its usefulness in counsellor education, training and assessment. As well, no consensual definition of the term is available in the literature. Jevne does not attempt to provide a definition of the term, but she gives some meaning to the concept by listing from her survey the first six items which cluster together as components of self awareness.

For us, Jevne's survey provides a useful focus for efforts to clarify the nature of self awareness and the effective counsellor. From our experience in counsellor education, training and practice, self awareness is essential in the cognitive and emotional development of an effective counsellor. In this paper we share some thoughts about self

awareness and present a view of the concept which could form the basis for systematic assessment of this competency.

The items of Jevne's survey which cluster as the first six components of self awareness are: values and attitudes, competencies, needs/wants/aspirations, personal impact, emotional reactions, and personal limits. We suggest that several of these components imply awareness of the theories, models and frameworks which influence the effective counsellor's actions, attitudes, emotional reactions, etc. In other words the effective counsellor is aware of *self* as experiencing, conceptually organizing and acting upon the world.

In our view, self awareness includes both a content dimension (what) and a process dimension (how). The components listed above are of *what* the counsellor can be aware. The process dimension taps aspects of *how* the counsellor reveals awareness through components such as concreteness or specificity (Carkhuff, 1969; Egan, 1975), ownership or responsibility (Livitsky & Perls, 1970; Miller, Nunally, & Wackman, 1975),

immediacy and experiencing (Gendlin, 1962) and integration and assimilation (Polster & Polster, 1973). These process components have been traditionally investigated as elements of client exploration (e.g., Schauble & Pierce, 1974), but apply equally well to the assessment of counsellor awareness.

A two-dimensional framework suggested by the content-process perspective could provide the basis for assessment of self awareness through a focused discussion or an interview. The discussion might be specifically intended as an assessment task, or the assessment might occur as part of an ongoing supervisory relationship. In the former situation one of the authors uses the question, "What is the difference between you as a trained counsellor talking with a person experiencing life stress, and you talking with the same person as a friend over coffee?" In the supervisory relationship discussion of specific clients can provide the needed stimulus for assessment.

In either assessment setting a major clue to the kind of self awareness we are looking for is the degree to which the counsellor's expressions reflect the use of ongoing experience to suggest hypotheses and to modify actions when in the counselling role. The degree to which conceptual models have been incorporated into self aware functioning in the counselling role should be reflected in the specificity, ownership, immediacy and integration of the counsellor's expression. While there may be a risk that semantic formulae can be mechanically learned, we believe that self awareness should be reflected in the ease and frequency of use of "I messages" (Gordon, 1970), or "self-responsible statements" (Miller et al., 1975) in the discussion.

A further step toward systematic assessment involves casting the content and process components along the two dimensions of a matrix and defining the content of each cell. The models or frameworks which make up the content dimension may vary according to the theoretical persuasion of the supervisor or training site. The process dimension might evolve as a rating scale with levels of awareness rather than simple presence or absence. However, at this stage of development we present the process dimension without levels. Figure 1 illustrates the two-dimensional framework as it has currently evolved. The six components of self awareness presented by Jevne provide the outline for the content dimension. The suggested process components make up the second dimension.

The integration of content and process dimensions of the matrix is clarified by presenting examples of self aware and non-self aware counsellor expressions representing several cells. Currently, there is considerable overlap among the compo-

nents within the two dimensions, and the examples generally cover more than one cell. Further definition will require research to establish rater reliability and to factor out independent components of various cells.

EXAMPLE 1: *Values X Concreteness and Strategy X Integration*

The effective counsellor is aware that *counseling is for the client* (content), and the *larger goal of client self-sufficiency* (content) overlaps with solving the immediate concern. The counsellor can discuss this principle *concretely* (process) in a manner which reflects *integration* (process) of this principle with the *specific strategy* (content) which has been adopted.

Self Aware: "I wanted to have John role-play tomorrow's interview, but he was trying to formulate the quality of the way he wanted to come across. I got involved with him on that, and when we finished he asked if he could practice it with me. His style of getting the conceptual side clear first seems to work well for him."

Non-Self Aware: "Clients should learn problem-solving skills, not just solutions to the particular problems."

EXAMPLE 2: *Skills X Ownership and Impact X Integration*

The effective counsellor reveals a *range of skills* (content) in a manner which reflects *responsibility* (process) for the *impact of different interventions* (content) and *immediacy of experiencing* (process).

Self Aware: "He got really vague when he started talking about work habits, so I stayed with simple reflection a little longer. Later I asked about his usual study area, and he showed surprise. He had never used a particular place for studying, so I shared some information about effective study. He was enthusiastic about trying this out so I encouraged him to work out a plan with me."

Non-Self Aware: "The counsellor is flexible in the use of techniques."

EXAMPLE 3: *Aspirations X Ownership and Personal Limits X Integration*

The effective counsellor *owns* (process) identified *aspirations* (content) and *integrates* (process) awareness of *personal limits* (content).

Self Aware: "Mary is the most difficult client I have seen to date. Her apparent helplessness really pulls me to offer easy advice. I want to come to extend the range of people I can work with so I would like to continue. I would be

Content Components	Process Components			
	Concreteness/ Specificity	Ownership/ Responsibility	Immediacy/ Experiencing	Integration/ Assimilation
Values/Attitudes				
View of Man; Model of Health; Professional Ethics; Societal Norms	<u>1^a</u>	<u> </u>	<u>4</u>	<u> </u>
Competencies				
Model of Change/Helping Skills; Change Strategies	<u> </u>	<u>2</u>	<u> </u>	<u>1</u>
Needs/Wants/Aspirations				
Personal Goals; Professional Ambitions	<u> </u>	<u>3</u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
Emotional Reactions				
View of Feelings; Stereotypes; Areas of Personal Sensitivity	<u>4</u>	<u> </u>	<u>5</u>	<u> </u>
Personal Impact				
Model of Interpersonal Dynamics	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>
Personal Limits				
Realistic Expectations; Model of Development/Pathology	<u> </u>	<u>6</u>	<u> </u>	<u>3</u>

^aNumbers in cells refer to examples in text.

Figure 1.

Content process matrix of self awareness for the effective counsellor.

confident if I could tape and go over the sessions thoroughly with you."

Non-Self Aware: "If the counsellor is in over her head, she should seek supervision or refer the client."

EXAMPLE 4: Values X Immediacy and Emotional Reactions X Specificity

The effective counsellor reflects awareness of *stereotypes, biases, and emotionally laden issues* (content) which might limit effectiveness with some clients. The counsellor can discuss these with *specificity and immediacy* (process).

Self Aware: "I have not gotten clear myself about whether I can work to help a client who wants to be more comfortable as a homosexual, or if I can only accept him if he'll work at changing. When John brought up his relationship with Bill I could feel myself getting tight, and I know I allowed the discussion to drift while I was deciding what to do."

Non-Self Aware: "Counsellors must keep their own values from interfering with client goals or refer the client elsewhere."

EXAMPLE 5: Experiencing X Emotional Reactions and Personal Impact X Integration

The effective counsellor *experiences* (process) *feelings* (content) and their *impact* (content) in the *immediate* (process) ongoing interaction.

Self Aware: "I was frustrated with George's meandering, and my voice was showing it. The more I pressed the more he wandered."

Non-Self Aware: "I think my feelings are revealed indirectly if I don't explicitly express them."

EXAMPLE 6: Limits X Ownership

The effective counsellor reveals realistic *expectations* (content) in a manner that reflects *ownership* (process).

Self Aware: "John sat slumped in his chair, looking at the floor and volunteered nothing. I was thinking that if I couldn't make some kind of contact with him in this first session he would not return. I decided to disclose my observation of his 'hopeless' appearance."

Non-Self Aware: "The counsellor and client must be in psychological contact."

Self awareness is valued because it involves continued personal learning and development. The *aware* counsellors in the above examples reveal the potential for ongoing assessment of their effectiveness. Our hunch is that this quality is, in fact, being intuitively assessed in most training centres. However, without more specific awareness of how we are assessing this quality, we are unable to be accountable and/or increase our effectiveness in the selection and training for self awareness.

Jevne's survey has provided the stimulus for us to collect our thoughts about how we conceptualize and assess self awareness. Our perspective is presented with the intent to stimulate others to clarify and share their approaches to the assessment of this concept. Perhaps the resulting increase in *our awareness* will promote movement toward consensus on how this important competency can be conceptualized, assessed and finally implemented in counsellor training.

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