INSTRUCTIONAL COUNSELLING: THE COUNSELLOR AS TEACHER

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Abstract

Counselling is an instructional activity wherein clients act as learners and counsellors act as teachers. It is argued that an adoption of this viewpoint has profound and far-reaching implications for counselling practice, counselling effectiveness research, and counsellor training. Such implications are discussed, and an instructional counselling model for counsellor training is briefly described.

Résumé

L'orientation est la discipline pédagogique où ceux qui demandent conseil se comportent comme des apprenants alors que les conseillers pédagogiques occupent la position du maître. Si adoptée, cette définition — et c'est ce dont nous allons arguer—n'est pas sans avoid d'importantes conséquences sur la pratique de l'orientation, les recherches concernant l'efficacité de celle-ci et la formation des conseillers pédagogiques. Ce sont ces conséquences dont nous traiterons ici tout en esquissant un modèle pour la formation des conseillers pédagogiques.

Recent advances in counselling theory and practice have emphasized the client's role in learning various behaviors, cognitions, perceptions, attitudes, and feelings (Cormier & Cormier, 1979; Kanfer & Goldstein, 1975; Krumboltz & Thoresen, 1976; Meichenbaum, 1977). The process of learning skills and strategies in areas such as decision-making, problem-solving, social interaction and assertion, self-control, anxiety/stress management, and career development may be seen as a generic process which typifies contemporary counselling practice. Although the role of client is increasingly viewed as that of learner, the implications of this view for counsellors, and the profession of counselling itself, have not been fully appreciated. In this paper we argue that counselling is an instructional process and examine the implications of this position for counselling practice, counselling effectiveness research, and counsellor training.

Counselling as Instruction

When clients change their behaviors, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and/or attitudes, they have learned. While theories of learning place more or less emphasis on the modalities across which change occurs (e.g., phenomenologists emphasize change and changes to self structures, behaviorists emphasize overt and covert behavior

Authors names are given in alphabetical order. All authors contributed equally to the preparation of this paper. We would like to thank Roger Gehlbach, Janet Kendall, and Phil Winne of the Instructional Psychology Research Group, Simon Fraser University, for their comment on a draft of this article.

change, cognitivists emphasize changes in cognitive structure) and pose different explanatory models in support of such changes, the general notion of change in one or more of these modalities remains the basic criterion which defines learning. When client learning is associated with interactions between the client and a counsellor, it is common practice to ascribe such learning to the counselling process. Notice, however, when counselling is defined in this way, what has been defined is a process of instruction. When people learn as a result of purposeful actions undertaken on their behalf by another with the expressed purpose of changing behaviors, perceptions, feelings, attitudes, or thoughts, they have been instructed. The basic process of counselling is first, and foremost, a process of instruction. When we counsel, we instruct (Christensen, 1976; Ellis, 1977).

There are many kinds of instruction which vary in terms of degree of client self-direction or freedom; degree of counsellor involvement and direction; the nature of the instructional (counselling) strategies enacted and learning foci toward which instruction is directed; and the settings and interpersonal contexts within which instruction occurs. When we talk about counselling as instruction, we are talking about a broad framework of instruction within which numerous varieties are possible. But, whatever its structural form, the process of counselling remains a process of instruction. Instructional counselling occurs whenever purposeful interactions of any kind between a counsellor and a client result in client learning. More specifically, instructional counselling is purposeful activity on the part of a counsellor which results in client learning consistent with counselling goals and/or objectives.

Since counselling may be seen as a process of instruction (albeit of a highly personal and sensitive genre), most theories of counselling can be conceptualized in terms of a basic instructional model. Instruction normally contains five essential elements (based on Popham & Baker, 1970): (1) general goals (explicit or implicit) toward which learning is directed; (2) preassessment of current learner (client) capabilities and characteristics in relation to these general goals; (3) objectives (explicit or implicit) which transform general goals into specific statements of personal learning outcome suggested by preassessment data; (4) instructional activities aimed at facilitating learning changes toward the objectives; and (5) evaluation of learning in relation to goals and objectives. Whether or not these five elements occur explicitly, consciously, or sequentially, and regardless of the language adopted to describe them, these five instructional elements are present in most forms of counselling.

Most theories of counselling, and the counsellors who employ them, have not, to date, considered counselling as instruction. Without a recognition of the basic instructional character of the counselling process, it is difficult to fully analyze, conceptualize, and understand the process. This incompleteness probably has hindered the evolution of counselling roles, research, training, and practice because practitioners have not seen the advantage of applying the laws and properties of learning and instruction which govern the process of counselling and its products. In what follows, counselling practice, counsellor effectiveness research, and counsellor training are discussed from the framework of instructional counselling. The overall goal of the subsequent discussion is to demonstrate how views of each of these areas may be extended by considering counselling as instruction.

An Instructional View of Counselling Practice

The basic purpose of counselling is to instruct (in the sense of facilitating, and arranging for, client learning). The counsellor is thus, first and foremost, a teacher and should possess all of the conceptual, organizational and practical skills which define an expert instructor. Furthermore, counsellors may govern their counselling activities by what is known about effective learning and instruction across a broad array of client, problems, situations, and goals.

The notion of counsellor as teacher does not originate with us nor does the observation that the field of instructional psychology has much to offer the counsellor. What is unique about our position

is the use of an instructional perspective as a subsumptive framework from which to view counselling, counsellor effectiveness, and counsellor training. Katz and Ivey (1977) refer to "counsellor-as-teacher" (p. 176), however in their discussion the label is used primarily to distinguish between a one-to-one remedial counsellor role and a group oriented developmental or preventative counsellor role. West (1977) discusses the possibility of viewing the counsellor as a teacher, but does not integrate this concept with an elaborated instructional model. Osborne (1978) emphasizes the importance of instructional psychology for counsellors. However, he confines his remarks to "what you should know about instruction to help you do a more effective job" rather than elaborating the utility of viewing counselling as instruction. The implications of adopting a subsumptive instructional framework for counselling practice are extensive.

First, counsellors can conceptualize counselling as an instructional process and acquire explicit skills in the broad instructional areas of assisting clients to formulate goals and objectives for counselling intervention; preassessing client repertoires (behaviors, feelings, cognitions, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, etc.) in relation to statements of desired learning contained in counselling goals; planning and executing (with the client's full involvement) instructional activities likely to lead to client learning consistent with counselling objectives; and evaluating client progress in relation to counselling objectives. In practice, this instructional process may be made explicit, and the client helped to understand and acquire skills in using the generic instructional process itself. Like any good instruction, the overall goal is to teach clients how to teach themselves in a self-directed manner (Rogers, 1969). If counsellors understand the basic process of instruction, and learn to teach this process to their clients, they may increase their effectiveness in relation to this long-term goal.

Second, counsellors, knowledgeable about basic principles of learning and instruction, can operationalize these principles through their counselling interactions. Instructional counselling requires that counsellors know how to make instruction meaningful, how to provide opportunities for client activity (practice) in the areas being addressed, how to provide valid and useful instructional feedback to client activity, and how to organize and sequence counselling activities in instructionally valid ways.

Third, counsellors can acquire extensive repertoires of discrete counselling, skills in three basic teaching areas (cf., Gage & Berliner, 1979) of structuring instruction (e.g., providing overview, stating objectives, providing models for cli-

ent self-evaluation, summarizing and reviewing counselling activities, stating clear transitions from one activity to another, using verbal markers of emphasis), soliciting client activity (e.g., asking specific factual, conceptual, valuing, or judgemental questions; probing and prompting responses; re-directing questions from one client to another; controlling pace) and reacting to client activity (e.g., providing informational feedback. using empathic reflection, incorporating client statements into the counselling process, using confrontation techniques, coaching, using descriptive praise, responding with self-disclosure). Counsellors can learn about the typical instructional effects produced by these counselling skills and how to select and sequence such skills to produce counselling strategies appropriate to the learning needs of individual clients in relation to specific problems and difficulties (e.g., job search techniques, decision making strategies, anxiety control procedures, cognitive restructuring, participant modelling, cognitive stress innoculation).

Fourth, instructional counsellors can systematically evaluate their own effectiveness through combining a careful evaluation of client learning with an ongoing analysis of their own counselling performance in terms of basic instructional processes, skills, and strategies. As instructors, counsellors must continuously be concerned with an evaluation of their instructional actions from the functional perspective of "What client learning is associated with my counselling actions, and is this consistent with negotiated client objectives?" Effective counselling (instruction) is not a matter of "good form" alone, but is defined in a functional manner in relation to client learning (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974).

There are, of course, numerous additional implications for counselling practice which emanate from the adoption of an instructional counselling viewpoint; however, even this brief list should be sufficient to indicate that much contemporary counselling practice can benefit from conceptualizing counselling as an instructional process.

Research on Counselling

An extensive literature has grown over the last two or three decades dealing with counsellor training and the effectiveness of various counselling skills and strategies. As is typical of most applied behavioral science research, these studies tend to focus on either a very specific question using a highly controlled experimental research design, or they investigate a problem at a much more molar level analogous to curriculum evaluation in educational research. Much of this body of literature has as its departure point a comitment by the investigators to a particular approach to counselling. Studies are then designed to test the

efficacy of components of the model to which the author is committed. Thus, for example, there are studies of the effectiveness of client-centered counselling, as embodied by research, say, on empathic responding; or studies investigating the area of behavioral counselling, as reflected by research on, say, the effects of social approval. We sidestep here the more general problems associated with such "mission oriented" research in the behavioral sciences. However, there is one critical problem raised by this approach to research on counselling which we do address. Researchers who design their studies on the basis of a commitment to a particular school of thought make assumptions about various phases of research on counselling, from counsellor selection and training to client outcome, frequently without empirical or logical justification for these assumptions. As a result, critical lacunae appear in our knowledge about counselling.

These gaps in our knowledge can be illustrated by mapping the current state of the art onto a model of research on counselling. Such a model is illustrated in Figure 1. The model is adapted from Duncan and Biddle (1974), who proposed such a paradigm for the study of teaching, and from Winne and Marx (1977), who modified it to address cognitive variables.

A model such as the one depicted in Figure 1 is valuable primarily as an heuristic device. Such a model can be used to organize existing research findings and to point to directions for future research independent of the particular theoretical stance taken by the researcher. The arrows in the model depict general sources of influence. The strength and direction of specific relationships are more properly estimated through research on specific variables in the clusters outlined in the model. The various clusters are defined below.

Presage variables. This class of variables contains all of those experiences which deal with the personal characteristics of counsellors and the educational and training activities leading to their professional competence. Counsellors, like all other adult numbers of a society, have been treated in systematic ways because of their age, ethnic group membership, sex, etc. Such general formative experiences are not very adequate theoretical constructs, at least in regard to their explanatory power, but they do stand as proxies for potentially more proximal variables. For example, sex, by itself, cannot be used to explain differences in behavior across people, but a substantial literature exists on the psychology of sex differences (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) which can be used to index behavioral differences.

On the other hand, education and training experiences frequently can be defined in a much more operational manner than can counsellor

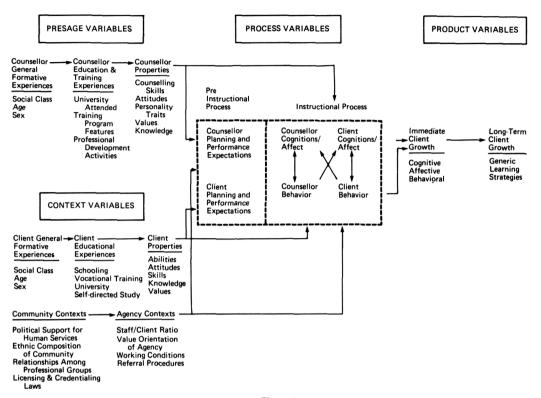


Figure 1.

A model for the study of counselling effects (after Dunkin & Biddle, 1974).

formative experiences. Although writers frequently do not define complete training programs according to their structural and functional features, shorter training activities often are defined in such a manner. This is true, for example, of training activities embedded in competency based programs, such as those using micro-counselling formats (Ivey, 1971).

Formative and training experiences result in counsellor properties. This category includes those trait-like variables, such as personality characteristics, which are frequently claimed to be related to counsellor effectiveness and have been occasionally suggested as possible criteria for counsellor selection (Patterson, 1967). Also included here are the cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills which ought to be the products of training, including the skill clusters of structuring, soliciting, and reacting.

Context variables. The variables included in the client's general formative experiences, education and training experiences, and properties are essentially the same as those included under the same categories for the counsellor. The effects of these variables on the counselling process, however, are quite different. Whereas presage vari-

ables lead to the professional competence of the counsellor, context variables, particularly those associated directly with the client, can be conceived of as factors contributing to the client's presenting problem to be dealt with by the counsellor at the first three stages of instruction (i.e., determination of goals, preassessment, and statement of objectives). These classes of variables also serve as aptitude variables in research on aptitude-treatment interactions (Cronbach & Snow, 1977).

Community context variables deal with the political, economic, and sociological milieu in which counselling takes place. For counselling which occurs in agencies and institutions, the organizational factors, both administrative and interpersonal, are included in agency contexts.

Process variables. Those variables that deal with counselling per se are included in the box in the center of Figure 1. Following Jackson's (1968) distinctions about teaching, the counselling process is divided into two components, Pre-instructional processes deal with the counsellor's planning prior to working with clients. Included also in this group are variables dealing with both counsellor and client performance expectations. Current theoretical work in the area of expecta-

tions does not provide a clear formulation of how performance expectations affect behavior, but the extensive work on teacher expectations stimulated by Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) work has facilitated the development of such theoretical models. According to Cooper (1979), perceptions of environmental control by both teachers and students are related to communication and feedback patterns in classrooms. The adaptation of Cooper's model to the study of individual and group counselling may provide answers to the perplexing questions surrounding the effects of performance expectations on behavior in counselling situations.

The interface between the client and the counsellor occurs during the interactive phase of the *instructional process*. It is at this point that counsellors integrate their knowledge and skills to create instructional environments as outlined above. A goal of research on the instructional process in counselling is to describe casual relationships during the instructional process. Such descriptions must link overt counsellor and client behaviors, as practised in the behavioral tradition, and they must also include links between overt behavior, cognition, and affect.

Product variables. The aim of counselling is to teach clients to think, feel, and behave differently. These classes of outcome, then, are included under immediate client growth. Of course, the ultimate aim of counselling is long-term client growth, which is most probably best attained through the acquisition of generic learning strategies for decision-making, problem-solving, self-instruction, etc., which provide a basis for adjustment to the myriad pressures encountered as a social being. Such generic strategies also provide clients with the ability to modify environments in order to create more favourable psychological development.

While one of the major concerns of counsellor educators is between presage and process variables, the ultimate payoff in counselling lies in the relationship between process and product. A concern only with process variables may lead to elegant artistic counselling interventions, but if this artistry does not translate into functional utility, that is, if clients do not learn to think, feel, or behave differently as a result of counselling, then this elegance is of little value. The distinction between artistic process and functional utility holds for the evaluation of an individual counsellor's personal effectiveness just as it holds for theory testing research. It is important that individual counsellors attend to the clusters of variables described in the model depicted in Figure 1 when analyzing their own work. Such an analysis can provide localized empirical support (if not support for more general theories of counselling) for counsellor effectiveness at the really critical level of impact, that is, client learning.

Training Instructional Counsellors

If counselling is seen as instructional in nature, counsellor training may be viewed similarly. This implies that counsellor educators should demonstrate the same attitude, approach and manner when interacting with their counselling students as the student counsellors are expected to demonstrate with their clients, that is, the counselling program must model an instructional orientation. If the task of the counsellor is to teach the client, then the task of the counsellor educator is to teach the counselling student how to teach the client. The five component instructional framework presented in the initial section of this paper is an appropriate model for both counselling and counsellor training.

Generally, counsellor training programs have embodied two broad foci: the development of, or in some cases preselection of, certain counsellor characteristics (e.g., warmth, congruence, empathy, understanding); or the development of certain counselling skills (e.g., questioning techniques, verbal and affective reflections, confrontation skills). Recently, there has been a move towards competency-based counsellor training models where the behavior components of counsellor characteristics and discret counselling skills are identified and established as criteria for effective counselling (cf., Conklin, Altman, & Boak, 1976; Duncan, Korb, & Loesch, 1979; Meene, 1975; Springer & Bramer, 1971; Winborn, Hinds, & Stewart, 1971). The implication in all of these approaches is that counselling can be defined in terms of counsellor behavior. The move towards a competency based approach makes the task of observing counselling behavior easier, and facilities establishing specific objectives for counsellor training programs (cf., Winborn et al., 1971). However, the implication remains the same. Counselling is seen to comprise a set of counsellor characteristics or behaviors, and counsellor effectiveness is the degree to which counsellors demonstrate these characteristics or make appropriate use of those counselling skills. From our instructional perspective, such approaches overlook one essential element in counselling, namely client behavior. To measure the effectiveness of counselling, it is necessary to measure both what the counsellor is doing and how the client is changed —i.e., both process and product variables need to be assessed in order to determine counsellor effectiveness.

In discussing counsellor training, we focus our attention on the "Counsellor Education and Training Experience" portion of the presage variables in Figure 1. From an instructional perspective, the task of the counsellor educator is to specify goals, preasses the behavior of counsellor trainees, establish process and product objectives

for instruction, design instructional materials and programs to teach process skills and procedures for evaluating product outcome, deliver instruction, and assess the degree to which counsellors-in-training have acquired process skills and procedures for evaluating counselling outcomes. These steps are elaborated below.

Goal Setting

Three necessary conditions must be met in order for learning to occur: what is to be learned needs to be meaningfully specified, appropriate practice needs to be arranged, and learners need to received feedback about their practice. The instructional counterparts of these three conditions are structuring, soliciting, and reacting. To provide specification, practice, and feedback for client learning, the instructional counsellor structures, solicits, and reacts to client activity. Similarly, counsellor educators must structure, solicit, and react to provide specification, practice, and feedback to student counsellors learning counselling skills and strategies. The counsellor educator's first task is to identify subject matter content and general program goals. These are usually related to the theoretical orientations of the instructors involved in the counselling program (e.g., Adlerian, behavioral, cognitive, Rogerian, etc.). Specifying content and program goals helps to add meaning to the universe of possible inclusions in a counsellor training program, influences the subset of practice experiences used in the counselling program, and affects the type and manner of feedback the counselling student receives.

Preassessment

A fundamental aspect of sound instruction is the tailoring of instructional experience to the needs and abilities of the learner. This is possible only when an instructor determines the learner's present repertoire of relevant skills and knowledge. This task is no less important when the instructor-learner dyad consists of counsellor educator-counselling student. Attempts to determine entering behavior typically include such things as personal interviews with prospective student, written papers on counselling orientation, submission of tapes depicting counselling style, references from supervisors, written examinations, and undergraduate grade point average. The attempt is to screen out unsuitable candidates, rather than to match program to levels of student expertise. Once admitted to a program, students typically receive the same experiences regardless of different levels of entering behavior. As counsellor educators we should pay more attention to preasessment data as a basis for tailoring counsellor training experiences to student entry capabilities, thus increasing the probability that what we do as counsellor educators will be effective in promoting desired student learning.

Objectives

After program goals have been established and learner entering behavior has been determined, specific instructional objectives can be set. In counsellor education, it is helpful to consider two types of objectives: process objectives, where the main focus is on what the instructor is doing and how the learner is responding, and product objectives, where the main focus is on the effect that the process activities have on learner behavior.

In the counsellor educator-counselling student dyad, two levels of process-product objectives are necessary with two categories of skills. Counselling students must develop counselling process skills (e.g., skills in communications, relationship building, specific intervention strategies) and counselling evaluation skills (e.g., skill in observation, monitoring, recording, charting). In other words, counselling students must know "how to do things" (counselling skills and strategies) and how to determine whether any client change is occurring (evaluate the effects of the counselling skills and strategies). These two categories are overlaid on two levels of counsellor educator process-product objectives. There are process objectives that give rise to what activities the counsellor-educator will engage in with the counselling students, and there are first level product objectives that address the results of those activities. For example, counselling students may engage in role-play activities with counsellor educator feedback (counsellor educator-counselling student process) for the purpose of developing the ability to accurately perceive and reflect verbal content (counsellor educator-counselling student product). The above process objectives concern the degree to which the counsellor educator is able to engage the students in meaningful activities and provide specific and supportive feedback. The product objectives concern the degree to which students are able to demonstrate accurate verbal reflection. The objectives in this case can themselves be further divided into process and product objectives; that is, can the counselling student demonstrate an appropriate use of the skills with clients (process) and is the use of those skills accompanied by client change (product)?

Delivery of Instruction

Instructional procedures for the delivery and evaluation of counselling apply to the delivery and evaluation of counsellor training programs, since both cases involve an instructor and a learner. Thus, counselling students are constantly exposed to suitable examplars after which to model their

own counselling. Emphasis on process and product objectives and procedures for their evaluation in the counselling program provides valuable observational learning for counselling students wanting to incorporate similar procedures into their own practice.

The counselling practicum is perhaps the most central component of most counsellor training programs. Within an instructional framework, certain levels of expertise are required prior to engaging in direct counselling practice. The instructional counsellor must have a knowledge of learning theory, instructional methodology, and counselling theory, and must have attained a repertoire of basic counselling skills and strategies. These are all necessary preconditions if the counsellor is to know what to teach clients, how to teach it, and how to tell when learning has occurred. Once these preconditions have been attained, counselling students are ready to interact with clients in a supervised practicum. If the practicum is to be a learning experience for the student, it must provide the opportunity for careful skill specification, focussed practice, and precise feedback. We suggest (following Cogan, 1973; Goldhammer, 1969) that a threefold approach, consisting of a precounselling conference, the counselling session, and a postcounselling conference, can ensure that the three necessary conditions for learning are present in the practicum setting.

Evaluation

Within an instructional framework, evaluation is carried out in the manner specified in the objectives. When objectives contain both a statement of intended outcome and a statement of the procedure for determining whether the outcome has been achieved, evaluation procedures are decided prior to intervention. This puts the instructor in the position of being able to evaluate counselling or training on an ongoing basis. The goal of counselling, the purpose of the specific instructional activities used, remains a constant focus. Ellis (1977) points out that teaching skills to clients without maintaining a clear notion of the purpose for acquiring such skills is likely to result in superficial changes in client functioning in association with client self-deception and ultimate retrogression. We suggest that counselling from an instructional perspective, and structuring counsellor training programs according to the same criterion, promotes a goal oriented focus where such problems are less likely to occur.

Conclusion

We have argued that counselling may be viewed as an instructional process, and that when this view is taken, counselling practice, research on counselling, and counsellor training may be significantly affected. The paper contains many statements of implications arising from an instructional counselling viewpoint. Of course, in the final analysis, whether or not such a viewpoint is profitable will depend upon its ability to stimulate the development of effective and humane counselling interventions and counsellor training experiences.

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