

WILLIAM L. DAVIS *and*  
STEPHEN E. MARKS,  
*Department of Counsellor*  
*Education,*  
*Faculty of Education,*  
*University of British Columbia.*

## COUNSELLOR EDUCATION: A PARADOX

**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the nature and impact of paradoxical situations in counsellor education. The counsellor educator and trainee are the focus for defining and then examining these dilemmas. The counsellor educator is constantly forced to shift between the role of counsellor and that of educator. He also must resolve the conflict between his personal and professional growth needs and his commitment to a training program. The second area of paradoxes that are examined concern the counsellor trainee. He is confronted with two major dilemmas: first, the conflict between being both a student and a client; and second, the apparent incongruity between wanting information and specific answers which are either not available or unanswerable at his particular stage of development. This is analogous to the development of a tolerance for ambiguity. All these paradoxes contribute to making the process of counsellor education an endeavour that moves well beyond the simple transmission of counselling skills.

Counsellor educators face many conflicts and dilemmas as individuals and as members of a profession. The paradoxical nature of man is illustrated by the existential contradiction wherein he is at once unique, valuable, irreplaceable, and at the same time faces death from birth and is dispensable and soon forgotten. The agony of resolving this paradox can be seen as a man devotes consuming energy to his vocation until his health fails and he is forced to face the fact that he can be replaced. He finds that the structure he supported does not crumble and things progress smoothly without his services.

What are the nature of these paradoxes? Usually they consist of two parts which seemingly should be mutually exclusive but are in fact co-existent. This condition mitigates against their ready resolution. They defy our usual Aristotelian "either/or" frame of reference. Therefore we are forced to find other ways of resolving them. One of the most

obvious solutions is simply to ignore one side of the paradox. This type of action has functional short term rewards for the individual by simplifying the choices he must make, but eventually it must break down.

The individual will inevitably be confronted with and forced to acknowledge the other reality and when this occurs his compartmentalization will no longer be effective and he will experience considerable ambiguity, conflict, and discomfort. Attempting to live by accepting the consequences of both truths may create a greater degree of initial anxiety but result in a diminishing level of long term discomfort.

The dilemmas described above can pertain to any individual in any situation but they take a unique form when examined in relationship to the process of counsellor education.

The counsellor educator and the counsellor trainee are necessarily entwined in many paradoxical situations. Identifying these situations and knowing that they are not only natural but essential elements of a complex endeavour may reduce some of the anxiety and discomfort which is inherent in being pulled in two directions at once. Many functions and tasks in educating a counsellor involve contradictory characteristics or phases. The major paradox faced by the counsellor educator is contained in his title, because he is both counsellor and educator. As a counsellor his only concern is the growth of the client and to be effective this must be his only purpose. However, as an educator he has the formal responsibility for evaluating as well as promoting growth. The counsellor in training faces a complementary paradox, because he is concerned with professional knowledge as well as personal growth. He then faces the paradox of being both student and client. What are the ramifications of these two paradoxes? For the counsellor educator they are: first, evaluation versus therapeutic relationships with trainees, and second, his own personal/professional growth versus commitment to a training program.

Conflict for the counsellor educator begins when he realizes he is not just a counsellor nor is he just an educator. This basic paradox is exemplified in the counsellor educator's dilemma of being forced to evaluate while trying, at the same time, to create an emotional atmosphere conducive to personal growth and development.

During the natural progression of the counsellor educator-trainee relationship, the counsellor educator is presented with information about the student, comprised of impressions and clinical assessments of the trainee's behavior and of information shared through personal interactions. It is important for a trainee to experience a therapeutic relationship in the role of "client" and this most often happens with his supervisor in the role of "counsellor." Given that these interactions take place, what does the counsellor educator do with this information when he is no longer counsellor, but is educator-evaluator, and the evaluation procedure, which in many ways is subjective, intensifies this dilemma regardless of how well specified the goals and criteria are. The evaluation function seems to negate the counselling function and vice versa.

The counsellor educator is also in a double bind with respect to his own growth. His personal professional development very often conflicts with the nature of some of his responsibilities to students. As an educator he must retrace many steps and focus much of his time and psychic energy on cognitive learning dimensions and feelings associated with early developmental stages of the counselling process. This endeavour can mask the need and desire for pushing out the upper limits of the counsellor educator's own growth. Feelings of frustration, private thoughts and realizations that you no longer have any counselling skills, and an unwillingness to demonstrate those skills can be signs of expending too much energy in going backwards to help others move forward.

Issues surrounding evaluation and professional development are certainly not the only sources for generating dilemmas for the counsellor educator; however, they are representative, very troublesome, and must be dealt with.

But the counsellor educator is not the only one who has dilemmas to confront. The counsellor in training is also faced with these "annoying" double binds. The first is the conflict between being a student and being a client. For some, being a client will mean working on personal problems, but for all, most certainly, it will mean becoming involved in a relationship designed to accelerate the personal growth, maturity, and wisdom needed to be a counsellor. The second is the discrepancy between the need for concrete information and closure versus the often ambiguous, open-ended, on-going process of becoming a counsellor. The latter is also a dilemma for the counsellor educator but it is probably a more intense issue for the student.

The counsellor trainee is placed in a paradoxical position of being a student and a client because he will be required to be both if he is to meet the learning objectives of a counsellor education training program. As a student he must learn information pertaining to theory, diagnosis, and treatment techniques. However, in addition to the above content, the counsellor trainee will almost certainly become concerned about his own personal growth and, as a by-product, the development of more fulfilling relationships with other people. The paradox grows out of the condition that the former set of skills are learned by the student while the latter are acquired by the client. The student's involvement in personal growth and change can be equated with the commitment of a client.

Therefore, a counsellor trainee does not enter a training program for the sole purpose of learning how to deal with the problems of others, nor does he enter for the sole purpose of concentrating on his own personal growth. This paradox is intensified because evaluation and progress assessment decrease the likelihood that counsellors in training will attempt to be both students and clients, and yet both are needed. Having accepted personal growth as necessary and personally appropriate, the student's eagerness to learn by exploring his own "modus operandi" is counterbalanced by many realistic concerns about the safety and security of exposing such personal data for fear of its contributing negatively to his evaluation. The tension for

the student is increased even more when he becomes a client, because he does so with the realization that he is sharing himself and exposing himself to an educator and evaluator as well as to a counsellor.

But students do discuss vital personal areas because they recognize the need for personal growth and the counsellor's ability to facilitate that growth. At this point his desire to be a client (by our definition) is much stronger and takes precedence over his student needs and concerns. There are further complicating factors. Many situations in counsellor education programs have the potential to elicit either student or client behavior or both within a short period of time. The appropriateness of time and place for either role and the balance between being a student and a client are constant problems. It is the nature of the learning objectives that makes both student and client roles necessary, it is evaluation that makes the two roles mutually exclusive, and it is the training situation that makes evaluation necessary.

The second paradox faced by the student is also an inextricable part of the counsellor training program. The student very often finds himself in a position where he wants to move forward, develop skills, and become a competent counsellor, yet is confronted with the frustrating reality that concrete answers to all of his demands simply do not exist.

Specific answers and personal feedback are necessary but not sufficient in guaranteeing the growth and development of a counsellor. To complete the developmental process the counsellor in training must integrate content and personal feedback into on-going practicum activities. No specific program of behaviors and feelings exist to make him immediately effective in an experiential situation. And the exact affective and behavioral outcomes of this integration cannot be articulated for future events.

The feeling projected by the trainee very often can be represented by the statement, "You really do know what I have to do to become effective and you are purposely frustrating me!" As the trainee becomes more anxious, the persistence of his demands for clarification intensifies. He feels that the way to reduce his anxiety lies in getting concrete answers to questions he poses and this procedure consumes much of his energy. However, an appropriate response to his questions would be that he focus his time and energy on engaging himself in the activity rather than in asking questions about it and that answers lie within him and will come to his awareness in time. But this feedback only serves to aggravate his frustration. The counsellor in training must learn to be selective in his expectations for concrete solutions.

Although these are not the only paradoxes faced by counsellors in training, they are definitely central to the process. They form an important part of almost all his program related activities. The counselling trainee has many options as to how he might deal with them and his overall success as a trainee will be closely related to the choices he makes in this respect.

The paradoxes outlined above create cognitive and affective dissonance for both counsellor educator and counsellor trainee. Tension, anxiety, doubt, indecision, and ambivalence may accompany this dissonance. The paradox can easily burn away all the psychic energy available to the conflicted individual and leave little energy left for active involvement. Resolution by denial of one aspect of the paradox is not possible. One truth cannot exist in isolation, so excluding one results in denying a necessary learning experience. Accepting both truths as separate and unrelated is also unfeasible because compartmentalizing the opposites and filtering behavior in order to acknowledge both positions requires understanding of the roles, knowledge of potential conflicting situations, and ability to pair roles and situations successfully. The resulting psychic fatigue can produce behavior ranging from aggressive confrontation to withdrawal and immobility. It is not unusual then to find counsellors in training and counsellor educators who are characterized by anxiety and fraught with inner conflict over role identity. The initial decision to become involved in a process engendering paradoxical roles creates anxiety which increases until the individual (either counsellor educator or counsellor trainee) experiences growth in adjusting to both extremes of the paradox.\*

The ability to become involved, in spite of these compulsory and yet mutually exclusive roles is suggested as an assessment device. The duration of stalling and blocking behavior (non-involvement) is a suggested measure of overall present anxiety as well as a predictor of eventual growth and success.

**RESUME:** Cet article traite de la nature et des effets de situations paradoxales dans la formation du conseiller. Les responsables de la formation du conseiller et les étudiants en counseling sont au centre de la définition de ces paradoxes ou dilemmes. Les responsables de la formation des conseillers se voient continuellement obligés de passer du rôle de conseiller à celui d'éducateur. Ils sont aussi obligés de résoudre le conflit entre leurs besoins de croissance personnelle et professionnelle et leur engagement à un programme de formation. La deuxième série de paradoxes que l'on étudie concerne l'étudiant en formation. Il doit faire face à deux principaux dilemmes: d'abord, il y a le conflit relié au fait d'être à la fois un étudiant et un client; il y a ensuite le désaccord apparent entre le fait de chercher des informations et des réponses spécifiques et le fait que ces informations et ces réponses ne sont pas disponibles à cette étape particulière de son développement. Ceci est analogue à ce qui se passe dans le processus de développement de la tolérance à l'ambiguïté. Ces paradoxes contribuent à faire du processus de formation des conseillers une entreprise qui se situe bien au-delà de la simple transmission de techniques de counseling.

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\*In keeping with the model presented in this paper, no solutions to the dilemmas of the counsellor educator and trainee will be offered; we are confident that you will be able to resolve them for yourselves!