

EDUC 5500

# Final Report

Introduction to Counselling Skills

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One of the counselling skills that I have struggled with the most is challenging. I find it difficult to strike a balance between being gently, empathically confrontational and being aggressive. As the Ivey and Ivey text states, empathic confrontation requires nonjudgmental empathy, which I do try to convey to the client (Ivey & Ivey, 2014, p. 237). I feel I struggle with being culturally competent, in the way that I feel unsure about using certain skills with people who are not culturally the same as I am. I fear using confrontation with my international classmates because I worry about offending them. I would benefit from researching the cultures of my classmates and potential clients to learn more about what is and is not appropriate in a counselling situation. Facilitating a discussion about this with my classmates or potential clients would also be beneficial for me in my role as a counsellor. I feel that I excel in my attending skills, though I worry that the impact of those is much smaller than words are.

My understanding of who I am has been shaken by the topics discussed and readings completed in this course. In my first reflective practice journal, I mention that the readings that first week “kind of messed me up” with the discussion in the Corey text of the helping profession being specifically suited to certain individuals (Corey & Corey, 2011). I still feel that way, that I am not certain that this profession is for me or that I have enough skills and confidence to do it well. In my development as a counsellor, I feel I have learnt how to be more understanding, how to not jump into a judgement or suggestion. I believe I am more competent at using certain skills, such as asking thoughtful questions and reframing what a client has said. I also feel that I am now more careful of what I say and who I say it to, I am painfully aware of how fragile people can be. I do understand how strong and resilient we are, but I do not want someone to go home and think about something that I said in a negative way. I strive to be a positive impact on

people's lives, a beacon of happiness and strength. This does not mean that I am afraid to show when I am sad or upset, because I know that those are very valuable emotions as well.

I have learnt that I am a good listener, that I can calm someone with my voice, that I can be vulnerable in front of a class full of my peers. From being a client, I have discovered my thoughts about religion, my family, how I see myself and how I feel about where I am in my life. This is much more than I ever thought I would learn about myself when I clicked the button to enroll in this class in July. I believe that going through this process, learning about myself and my peers, has made me more understanding of people who are different than I am. This is a much more powerful learning experience than I could have ever had with someone standing at the front of the room lecturing.

Through this process, I have also discovered that being a counsellor is much more difficult than it seems. Since I have started this course, I have had several people ask me what classes I am taking. When I tell them, I have had two people say "Oh, are you going to ask me how that makes me feel?" The first time this happened was near the start of the semester, I laughed it off and said something along the lines of "Oh sure, and how DO you feel?" The second time this happened was approximately a week ago and my reply was much different than it was the first time I was asked this question. I promptly launched into a monologue about counselling being a delicate way of guiding a client through their experience and that this person had a very narrow view of the world of counselling. I may have jumped down that person's throat a bit too much, but I truly believe in what I told them. Counselling is much more than sharing feelings, though feelings are a very important part of the process.

Being an observer in this class was very beneficial to my own counselling process. Hearing both questions that really made me sit up and listen and questions that made me cringe had an

equal impact on me. Both made me reconsider what I was saying in my own practice. Cherry-picking questions from my fellow classmates and professor was an easy way to get across what I could not find my own words for. Being an observer helped me to understand that sometimes there is a need for silence, to help the client sort through the things in their head. It has also taught me the importance of having a dense emotional vocabulary. It has shown me the sigh of relief you can see on a client's face when you put a word to their feelings, and I have experienced that myself.

While participating as a client, I was asked questions that really intrigued me and made me think as well as questions that made me wonder if the counsellor was even listening to me. I found that very beneficial to my process as well, I made a mental note of these questions, both the ones I liked and the ones I did not. I used or avoided these when I was the counsellor, as I saw fit. The questions that I did not like, that made me wonder if I was being heard, had a special impact on me. I would never want one of my clients to feel that I was not really hearing what they were saying, but I fear I may have done that to my clients in this course anyways. The cultural barrier between myself and some of my clients forced me to really think about what I was going to say next, and that thought process distracted me from what the client was saying.

Speaking of cultural differences, Viktor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, enabled a profound learning experience for me. I have read many books about the holocaust and the tragedies that took place in concentration camps but never have I read a book about the holocaust so deeply introspective. Frankl's writings made me analyze previous literature I have read about the holocaust, looking into how these people who wrote books dealt with the constant trauma of the camps. I find logotherapy a little hard to wrap my head around, possibly because I have never been in an extreme situation where I have wondered if my life is meaningful. Of course, I

do wonder what the meaning of my own life is, but I do not feel that that question is my main motivation for surviving. Overall, I found Frankl's book to be both disturbing and enlightening.

This course has taught me that to be a counsellor, you need to be a special kind of person. Those people have astounding listening skills, they are attentive and kind, but they also know how to separate themselves from their clients struggles. I found that once I was home from class and lying in bed at night, I would worry and fret about my classmates, who's stories I was privileged enough to hear.

This course has also taught me that being a client does not mean baring your soul to a stranger but accepting a hand to help guide you through your troubles. Being a client means learning things about yourself that you did not know before and learning how to release the pressure that you put onto yourself. When I demonstrated as the client in front of the class, I spoke about my grandfather. During this, the counsellor used a word that I had been afraid to put to my feelings before that. The word was guilt, and when the counsellor used that word I felt a release of pressure, that someone was acknowledging my struggle. This is what I think counselling is about. It's about putting a word to a feeling, and letting the client be free in that feeling. Letting someone say or be the things that they are afraid to feel or be otherwise. That is what this course has taught me.

## References

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