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Jumping off the couch: Infusing creativity into counselor education

Christopher Lawrence
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JUMPING OFF THE COUCH:
INFUSING CREATIVITY INTO COUNSELOR EDUCATION

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
The College of William & Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Christopher Lawrence
April 2012
JUMPING OFF THE COUCH:

INFUSING CREATIVITY INTO COUNSELOR EDUCATION

by

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Dedication

Mom and Dad: To you, I could dedicate all I’ve ever done and all I’ll ever do. Eternally encouraging, you furnished an unending stream of horizon-expanding experiences and modeled the openness, courage, and enthusiasm that enabled me to capitalize on them. You are two of the most caring, creative, and capable people I know, and – to date – I’ve never received a compliment quite as powerful as “You’re just like your parents.” Thank you. For everything. I love you both.

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JUMPING OFF THE COUCH:
INFUSING CREATIVITY INTO COUNSELOR EDUCATION

Abstract

This study infused key elements of creativity into the process of counselor education, exposing students in a counseling skills and techniques course to a curriculum designed to promote tolerance for ambiguity, appropriate risk-taking behaviors, and improvisational skills. Employing a phenomenological strategy of inquiry, the researcher sought to explore the ways the participants made sense of their experience in the course, as well as the ways the experience informed their perspective of counseling and the role of a counselor. Participants recognized counseling as a profession replete with ambiguity and rife with personal and relational challenges. They came to appreciate a clinician’s role in establishing and maintaining rapport and developed an understanding of the need to read situations and reason “on the fly.” They realized counselors need to be self-aware and aware of their impact on others, open to exploring divergent viewpoints, and possessed of the divergent thinking skills needed to generate new perspectives. By connecting themselves to their students (through modeling), the students to one another (via experiential opportunities), and everyone to the subject (through lectures, interventions, and assignments designed as part of the curriculum), instructors and students alike recognized counseling as an interpersonal creative activity.

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THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY IN VIRGINIA
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Chapter One

Counselor competence in the 21st century requires more than just knowledge of psychological theories and techniques (Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002). According to D’Andrea (1988), it also requires counselors provide clients with counseling experiences that are novel, stimulating, provocative, and psychologically challenging. Such development can facilitate new ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving within clients, diversify adaptive responses, and bolster the ability to respond to the myriad dilemmas (e.g., medical, financial, multicultural) that complicate modern life (D’Andrea; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999). To aid in the generation of those new adaptive responses, the literature (Cole & Sarnoff, 1980; D’Andrea, 1988; Gladding, 2010; Mooney & Padesky, 2000; Newman, 2002; Wiener & Oxford, 2003) states counselors should explore the benefits creativity could have on counseling. The notion of such benefits is far from unfounded. In fact, given the similarities between the description of competent counseling provided by Brendel and colleagues (2002) – a process incorporating the evaluation of complicated interpersonal/multicultural interactions, an appreciation for (and ability to select) appropriate responses, and principled decision-making – and Yurtsever’s (2006) depiction of creative problem-solving – a process requiring an awareness of the diverse factors (e.g., social, economic, multicultural) that can impact perceptions of the presenting problem, an ability to approach a problem from varied perspectives, and a capability to challenge convention – a case could be made that competent counseling could be considered an advanced, interpersonal, creative problem-solving process.

Hecker and Kottler (2002) explain:
After years of practicing psychotherapy, and teaching it to others, we have come to realize that our work involves a blending of well-crafted skills that are theoretically grounded, with the clinical judgment to apply those methods in ways that are consistently helpful to others. It is the latter part of this mix that requires therapists (and their clients) tap into their own creative resources in order to produce successful outcomes. (p. 1)

Creativity in Counseling

Support for creativity in counseling can be found throughout the literature, and its utilization stretches back to the very beginnings of the field. May (1975) describes creativity as a component of both psychoanalytic and Adlerian theories, and Rogers (1961) stated therapists have a responsibility to establish safe, accepting relationships that will foster constructive creativity within clients. Maslow (1963) explained, “The concept of creativeness and the concept of the healthy, self-actualizing, fully-human person seem to be coming closer and closer together, and may perhaps turn out to be the same thing” (p. 1). According to Cole and Sarnoff (1980), Gestalt therapy, Transactional Analysis, and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy were all designed to “initiate rational cognitive processes” (p. 144) leading to the divergent thought so often emphasized in creativity research. Along similar lines, Hayes et al. (1999) – recognizing “life is full of contradictions, ironies, and things that cannot be entirely explained through deductive reasoning” (p. 271) – included creative processes (e.g., the paradoxical and metaphorical use of language) as a key component of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).

Borders (1998) said therapy is enhanced when it takes on the flavor of a collaborative, creative endeavor designed to create change for a client, whereas Hecker and Kottler (2002) state, “The generative process of creativity goes hand in hand with the
art and science of psychotherapy” (p.3). According to Bradley, Whiting, Hendricks, Parr, and Jones Jr. (2008), creative endeavors “give voice to the human internal experience and act as catalysts for learning about the self and the world at large (p. 45), a sentiment shared by Mooney and Padesky (2000), who encourage therapists to utilize client creativity to develop both a new vision for life and new rules intended to support that vision. Laughlin (2000) describes innovation as one of the hallmarks of a skilled therapist, Newman (2002) looks at creative therapeutic relationships as a vehicle for pursuing new and improved possibilities to foster hope in a client’s life, and Hunsaker (2005) argues creativity can help people manage the increasing complexities of society with self-control and composure.

Gladding (in Rosenthal, 2002) takes things a step further, claiming that creativity is a natural part of “all effective long-lasting psychotherapy”:

Counselors are catalysts. As such they are creative in their sessions and help their clients think, behave, and/or feel differently so that the clients are more aware, appropriate, and satisfied with life because they leave sessions with more choices than they began with. Sometimes the process of counselor creativity involves adding something to sessions that was not there previously – stimuli, such as thoughts. At other times, it is helping clients rearrange what they already have but may not be using effectively, such as words. Then, of course, there are times that to be creative, barriers must be eliminated, for example, excessive behaviors (p. 26).

Because creativity and creative problem-solving abilities are linked to heightened coping skills and improved mental health (Carson & Runco, 1999; Cohen, 2000; Cole & Sarnoff,
1980; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gladding, 2010; Pink, 2006; Wiener & Oxford, 2003), and creative experiences can promote psychological maturity within clients (Berk, 2002; Cole & Sarnoff, 1980; D’Andrea, 1988; Martin, 2007; Wiener & Oxford, 2003), counselor education programs need to train their students to think creatively. Doing so will not only equip them to deal with the challenges inherent in their role as professional helpers, but enable them to foster similar potentially beneficial experiences for their clients (Cole & Sarnoff, 1980; D’Andrea, 1988; Newman, 2002; Wiener & Oxford, 2003).

Such training, however, represents the exception, rather than the norm (Hecker & Kottler, 2002; Kottler & Hecker, 2002), as academic programs tend to gloss over training related to creativity within the therapeutic relationship (Bradecich, 2008). When creativity is referenced in the field of counselor education, it is – more often than not - considered either a “thing” (e.g., “Papers will be judged on comprehensiveness, composition, and creativity”) or a protocol (e.g., “Creative techniques like play therapy, art therapy, and cinematherapy will be discussed”). For creativity to meet its potential as a source of therapeutic change, it needs to be considered an approach, a means of perceiving the processes of counseling, as opposed to a series of techniques and interventions that can simply be distributed to counselors in training. In order to adequately address the complexities of human life and tap into the client’s potential (Mooney & Padesky, 2000), creativity in counseling must utilize nonlinear and non-sequential thought patterns (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003) in a systemic fashion (Maslow, 1963) to increase flexibility (Kahn, 2009). Thus, creativity must become more than just something counselors do, it must become an orientation (Laughlin, 2000) – a notion supported by Hecker and Kottler (2002):
[C]reativity is not just an in-born trait but a skill that can be learned, developed, and fostered over time...Indeed, people are creative every day...It is this everyday creativity that therapists can tap into in their clinical practice in order to enhance therapy, though most therapists are not trained to tap this resource. (p. 1)

Creativity and Education

Before a discussion of ways to incorporate teaching for creativity into a counselor education curriculum can begin, however, overall approaches to instruction should be considered. According to Lucas and Murry (2007), most teachers tend to teach as they were taught. Locked into an idealized perspective of their own educational experiences, teachers often utilize the same approaches, techniques, and – in some cases – examples their instructors used with them. Rather than critically exploring the conditions most conducive to student learning and organizing their instructional style to satisfy those conditions, many faculty members tend to “base their approach to teaching upon an uncritical adoption of the model that comes most readily to hand – their old professors” (Wright, as cited in Lucas and Murry, 2007, p. 40) Unfortunately, teaching to enhance creativity has never been a commonplace practice.

Counselor education programs aim to prepare students to become professional helpers by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to provide counseling (Woodside, Oberman, Cole, & Carruth, 2007), and although preparation/training in creative thinking strategies can improve the abilities of the specific strategies in which they are trained (Treffinger & Isaksen, 2005), a review of the ACA/ACES syllabus database suggests few counseling programs avail themselves of such strategies. At the time of this dissertation, only 5 of the 35 syllabi included in the
database categories for “Counseling Theories” and “Helping Relationships/Counseling Techniques” addressed the idea of fostering creativity among aspiring counselors.

Hunsaker (2005) wonders why, given that educational programs take great efforts to inculcate students with characteristics like integrity, tolerance, and respect, they do not train students to take appropriate risks and to be open to experience and tolerant of ambiguity – elements considered essential for creative behavior.

Kottler and Carlson (2009) suggest the potential exists. They state student counselors “start out eager and passionate about their work and are then forced to conform to established norms and rules that stifle any kind of innovation” (loc. 4142). Teachers require students to reproduce their lessons in session, adopting the espoused norms and rules as the “correct” approach to therapy, effectively closing themselves off to the existence of other creative possibilities. Kottler and Carlson assert teachers and supervisors often hamper creativity by emphasizing what students are doing wrong and admonishing them to avoid taking risks. “Students should be encouraged to push the boundaries of what is expected and the teacher should not limit the creative spark when students feel they can express themselves by submitting out-of-the-box solutions” (Lester, 2011, p. 133).

Though the literature indicates students appreciate instructors who employ a variety of creative and imaginative techniques and processes to stimulate classroom learning (Lucas & Murry, 2007), the authors of theoretical texts and research studies that target creativity “seldom extend their investigations to explore implications of research and theory for daily classroom life” (Starko, 2004, loc. 212). Laughlin (2000) states, “While many supervisors want to produce imaginative and flexible therapists, nothing in
the literature speaks to the orientations that supervisors bring to the contexts that foster learning to practice this way” (p. 74). Stanton (1996) suggests the field of education would benefit from redefining its notion of rational thought to include “creative ‘what if’ thinking, imagination, and intuition, and encourage students to seek ‘patterns of discovery’...There is room for passion, for caring, for imagination” (p. 33)

Starko (2004) breaks it down as follows:

Learning in pursuit of a goal makes the learning purposeful. Tying information to prior knowledge, understanding, and affect makes it meaningful. Because the ties created by each unique student must be original, and because goal-oriented learning must, by definition, be appropriate (if it meets the goal), the processes of learning themselves can be viewed as creative (loc. 486-491).

Creativity Training

But can creativity be taught? Research indicates it can. Scott, Leritz and Mumford’s (2004) meta-analysis indicates well-designed creativity training can contribute to divergent thinking, problem solving, performance, and creative attitudes and behavior across a wide range of demographics. In short, Scott and colleagues found “creativity training works” (p. 382). The meta-analyses offered the following insights into the procedures that contribute to the effectiveness of creativity training:

First, training should be based on a sound, valid, conception of the cognitive activities underlying creative efforts. Second, this training should be lengthy and relatively challenging with various discrete cognitive skills, and associated heuristics, being described, in turn, with respect to their effects on creative efforts. Third, articulation of these principles should be followed by illustrations of their
application using material based on "real-world" cases or other contextual approaches (e.g., cooperative learning). Fourth, and finally, presentation of this material should be followed by a series of exercises, exercises appropriate to the domain at hand, intended to provide people with practice in applying relevant strategies and heuristics in a more complex, and more realistic context. (p. 383)

Those findings mirror Starko's (2004) suggestions regarding teaching for creativity; i.e., that by organizing curricula around creative processes, teaching students relevant techniques, and fostering an environment that supports innovation and exploration, educators may enhance both content learning and creative thought. According to Kottler and Carlson (2009), the role of the educator and the therapist both involve assisting individuals and organizations in unblocking all the obstacles to natural creativity. Laughlin (2000) suggests teachers compel counselors-in-training to attend to the interrelationships that exist between therapeutic techniques and imagination.

However, a teaching activity that produces a creative outcome cannot be said to enhance creativity unless it provides students an opportunity to engage in creative thinking. As Starko (2004) notes, a considerable difference exists between teaching for the purpose of enhancing creativity and teaching creatively. The latter places the focus for creativity primarily on the instructor, whereas the former bestows the responsibility for creative thought/behavior upon the students. "When teaching to enhance creativity, we may well be creative as teachers, but we also provide students the knowledge, skills, and surroundings necessary for their own creativity to emerge" (Starko, 2004, loc. 577-9).
What might this look like? Research indicates the value of using experiential
teaching to foster improvisational opportunities (e.g., in-class counseling sessions) that
can awaken students to their creative capacities (Gale, 2002; Laughlin, 2000; McAuliffe,
2010; Shurts et al., 2006). Such opportunities can prompt students outside their comfort
zone, which can trigger the kinds of disequilibrating experiences that, in the presence of
sufficient support, can lead to growth in cognitive complexity (McAuliffe, 2010).

Relational action, contextual sensitivity, and problem-solving experiences provide
clinicians with new strategies and techniques. In particular, these types of
improvisational activities can help individuals better accommodate and adjust to
the fluidity of rules and roles of daily living. Improv practices can assist people in
experiencing the boundaries of familiar behaviors as they practice novel
behaviors. People can learn that their identity beliefs are not intractable scripts,
but composed in social performances. (Gale, 2002, p. 85-6).

In addition, when educators can offer students suggestions that are sufficiently
ambiguous to allow room for creative problem-solving, yet are relevant enough to their
own situations that they can find or create a connection, transformative experiences can
occur (Kottler & Carlson, 2009). As Langer (1989) explains: “uncertainty creates the
freedom to discover meaning. If there are meaningful choices, there is uncertainty. If
there is no choice, there is no uncertainty and no opportunity for control. … uncertainty
and the experience of personal control are inseparable” (p. 130). Real-world situations do
not routinely involve clearly delineated problems that have one simple – and correct –
solution, and incorporating such ambiguity into training (i.e., having students access their
everyday experiences while working on problem-solving skills) can augment the
educational process (Cramond, Martin, & Shaw, 1990). "If students are to solve real problems, teachers have the responsibility not only to teach them the necessary knowledge and skills, but also to set problems for which the teachers have no answers and to work together with students to find the solutions" (Starko, 2004, loc. 589-91)

Modeling also plays an important role. According to Kottler and Carlson (2009), creativity can be accessed by helping students move beyond the confines of familiarity, encouraging them to experiment with new relational approaches toward self and others. For that to happen, though, teachers need to demonstrate the courage that sets the stage for creative action (Kottler & Carlson, 2009; Shurts et al., 2006; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003) Through lectures, activities and discussions, instructors have opportunities to demonstrate their own uncertainty and allow students to observe models of thinking in action. According to Belenky and colleagues (1986), such modeling of imperfection encourages students, a notion reflected in the old adage, "Teachers teach more by what they are than by what they say."

The Williams Cognitive-Affective Interaction Model

Citing research indicating that the ability to think/act creatively requires breadth and depth of knowledge (i.e., content) as well as the skills necessary to draw upon that knowledge (i.e., behavior), Williams (1970, 1986) devised The Williams Cognitive-Affective Interaction Model. As suggested by its title, the model accounts for development in the cognitive (i.e., factual information, subject content) and affective (i.e., attitudes, values, and motivation involving emotions) domains, while also considering the convergent and divergent aspects of educational curricula. Williams (1986) identified 18 strategies/teaching styles (e.g., paradoxes, analogies, discrepancies, etc.) that can be used
to present subject matter content in order to promote eight processes associated with
creative/divergent thinking. Said processes are broken down into cognitive-intellective
behaviors (i.e., fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration) and affective-
temperament behaviors (i.e., risk-taking, complexity, curiosity, imagination).

Though initially intended for use with pre-collegiate students, then adapted for
applications within gifted education, the Williams Model’s focus on the strategies and
behaviors identified as contributing to creative problem-solving (e.g., risk-taking,
tolerance for ambiguity, originality), combined with its focus on the skills/attributes
characteristic of competent counselors (e.g., creative listening, intuitive expression,
provocative questions, flexibility), suggested it would provide an ideal foundation from
which to redesign a counselor education curriculum.

**Purpose of the Study**

Nearly half a century ago, Maslow (1963) observed what he considered the
increasing demands of society and ruminated on humanity’s need to keep pace:

What some professors have done at M.I.T., I understand, is to give up the
teaching of the tried and true methods of the past, in favor of trying to create a
new kind of human being who is comfortable with change, who enjoys change,
who is able to improvise, who is able to face with confidence, strength and
courage a situation of which he has absolutely no forewarning...[W]hat I’m
talking about is the job of trying to make ourselves over into people who don’t
need to staticize the world, who don’t need to freeze it and to make it stable, who
don’t need to do what their daddies did, who are able confidently to face
tomorrow not knowing what’s going to come, not knowing what will happen,
with confidence enough in ourselves that we will be able to improvise in that situation which has never existed before...The society which can turn out such people will survive; the societies that cannot turn out such people will die (pp. 4-5).

Given the literature referenced previously in this chapter, a case could be made that Maslow’s call for an educational system generating students who are flexible, courageous, and creative has gone unheeded. In fact, Ross (2010) argues that, despite the tendency to hail creativity as an essential aspect of modern education, many forms of teaching actually “conspire to minimize creative thought in the classroom” (p. 55).

No individual study could expect to align all educational systems, at all levels, in all domains with Maslow’s developmental vision. However, this study sought to infuse Maslow’s key elements into the process of counselor education, exposing students in a counseling skills and techniques course to a curriculum designed to promote tolerance for ambiguity, appropriate risk-taking behaviors, and improvisational skills. Employing a phenomenological strategy of inquiry, the researcher sought to explore the ways the participants made sense of their experience in the course, as well as the ways the experience informed their perspective of counseling and the role of a counselor. Data gathering for this study consisted of qualitative observations, interviews, document collection, and digital audio/visual recording.

The next chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the concepts involved in this study, expanding upon the researcher’s efforts to redesign an introductory course in counseling skills to incorporate the research-supported elements of creativity training.
Chapter Two

The 21st Century is an increasingly complex time. Marked by wars and natural disasters, social uprisings and economic downturns, an exponentially expanding knowledge base and ubiquitous advances in technology, one could make the case that describing the nascent millennium as “increasingly complex” represents an understatement of considerable order. Research indicates creativity – more specifically, creative thinking skills – are essential to keeping pace with such mounting complications. Creativity aids and augments adaptability and problem solving (Cohen, 2000; Cole & Sarnoff, 1980; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gladding, 2010; Kahn, 2009; Pink, 2006; Runco, 2004); assets the literature (Beghetto, 2007; D’Andrea, 1988; Hayes et al., 1999) describes as critical for tending to the broad array of individual, interpersonal, and societal demands extant in modern life. Hunsaker (2005) states that, as a life skill, creativity can help people manage change with self-control and composure. Starko (2004) agrees:

If we want our young people to be successful in the world they will inhabit, they will need more than the knowledge we can measure on traditional tests. They will need the skills, attitudes, and habits required for solving problems unimaginable today. They will need to see varied viewpoints and understand people across the globe. They will need to think flexibly and with imagination. They will need to be creative (loc. 257-8)

The value of creativity has been demonstrated in the arts and humanities (Dudek, 2003; Feist, 1998), the sciences (Dudek, 2003; Feist, 1998; Simonton, 2009), architecture (Piirto, 2004), business (Bierly III, Kolodinsky, & Charette, 2009; Scott,
Leritz, & Mumford, 2004), morality (Werhane, 1998; Ciulla, 1998), education (Starko, 2004), and personal wellness (Carson & Runco, 1999; Runco, 2004). The construct's far-reaching applicability, combined with the aforementioned explosion in socio-evolutionary demands, offers credence to Runco's (2004) assertion that "creativity is more important now than ever before" (p. 658).

But what is creativity? The definitions vary, with many (Cicirelli & Cicirelli, 1970; Gladding, 2010; Glaveanu, 2011; Grossen, 2008; Ross, 2010) agreeing the concept is difficult to define. Creativity has been called a form of cognitive restructuring precipitated by a block in the problem-solving processes (Bierly III et al., 2009). It has been described as the combining and recombining of ideas or seeing new relationships among ideas, which can lead to original and adaptive notions, solutions, or insights (Runco & Chand, 1995). Rogers (1961) defined it as "the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on one hand, and the materials, events, people or circumstances of his life on the other" (p. 350). Some have even taken a more creative approach to the definition, suggesting "creativity is what is most novel and interesting, almost always generated out of uncertainty, ambiguity, and a position of creative indifference. Or not" (Kottler & Carlson, 2009, loc. 756-7). In general, however, descriptions of creativity within the literature describe it as an ability to generate ideas that are, at once, innovative and useful (Feist, 1998).

This study builds upon a definition generated by Yun Dai and Shen (2008) that posits creativity as a developmental concept wherein creativity "originates from envisioning new possibilities and making persistent efforts to realize these possibilities" (p. 84); a conceptualization that bears the following specifications:
First, creativity efforts involve the tension between the known and the unknown; in other words, one would inevitably experience uncertainty when making a creative product, be it writing an essay or designing a research study. This is a subjective experience that can be characterized as being “at the edge of chaos.” Second, it involves prospective imagination of what is possible and persistent thinking regarding how it can be realized and what obstacles need to be overcome. Third, it involves judgment and decision regarding likelihood of success and risks. In other words, one needs to know when to take risk and push ahead, and when to take alternative pathways. Fourth, novel products and expressions typically meet with resistance because people are not familiar with them or/and because they are still in the developing stage (p. 84).

Thus, Yun Dai and Shen (2008) define a creative act as one that is goal-directed and instrumental, involving a dialectic interplay of playfulness and seriousness, spontaneity and deliberation. “It involves well-formed intention, persistent efforts to pursue specific goals, and decision and choice regarding the meaning and worth of the efforts for the self. It involves affect as well as cognition” (p. 85). The following research reflects Yun Dai and Shen’s definition, establishing an empirical foundation for the development in creative thought/behavior this dissertation intervention sought to encourage.

In a study of the cognitive processes involved in creative activity, Bink and Marsh (2000) argued creative activities/behaviors involve similar cognitive processes present in more routine, daily actions. They identified a number of variables used in everyday cognition (e.g., perceptual fluency, capacity of working memory, speed of retrieval, recollective ability, inhibition of irrelevant concepts) and suggest individual variation in
those phenomena leads to the novelty that distinguishes creative processes. Though the study accedes people will vary in their overall ability to generate creative products, it also provides support for the notion that the capacity for creative thought/activity/behavior is not limited to a select special few.

Seeking to elicit possible connections between creative behavior and personality characteristics, Feist (1998) conducted a meta-analytic review of empirical literature in both fields. The study found creative individuals tend to display higher levels of autonomy, introversion, openness to new experience, self-confidence, ambition, dominance, norm doubting, hostility, and impulsivity. One of the largest effect sizes involved openness:

Openness is closely related to having a flexible cognitive style when approaching problems. That is, being able to think outside the box and not being tied to any one perspective (functional fixedness). Openness and flexibility are in turn related to having the imagination to think of how things could be, not just how they are. By being receptive to different perspectives, ideas, people, and situations, open people are able to have at their disposal a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and problem-solving strategies, the combination of which may lead to novel and useful solutions or ideas (p. 300).

Though the study did not explore the possible causal role of personality in creativity or the cognitive processes accounting for the correlations between personality and creativity, it did provide an informative snapshot of the creative personality, i.e., one that was consistent regardless of the creativity/personality assessment measures used. Feist’s conclusion, that the expression of creative behavior is linked to an individual’s
disposition toward social interaction and their ability to convey ideas socially, is complemented by Eisenberger and Shanock's (2003) analysis of the impact of reward on creativity. The study reexamined the research on creativity and motivation, turning a critical eye toward the methodological deficiencies that led to the literature's perceived inability to reach agreement on the effects of reward on creative processes. Eisenberger and Shanock found evidence to suggest rewards can enhance creativity:

The expectation that creativity will be rewarded causes individuals to define the task as requiring creativity, to become immersed in it, and to search for novel ways of carrying it out...Reward for high performance increases perceived self-determination and perceived competence, both of which increase enjoyment of a task for its own sake. In contrast, the expectation that reward depends on conventional performance causes people to define the task as involving conventional performance, hampering creativity (p. 128).

Thus, the disposition toward social interaction, the ability to convey ideas socially (Feist, 1998), and the social definition of appropriate task performance (Eisenberger & Shanock, 2003) can help steer everyday cognitions toward creative ends (Bink & Marsh, 2000). Considering Hennessey and Amabile's (1988) caution that environments conducive to creative work are not easily established and "must be constantly reshaped and controlled" (p. 12), it stands to reason that the socioemotional encouragement of creativity, taking place in a fluid setting designed to support innovative production, may strengthen the openness/flexibility often associated with creative processes.

**Creativity and Problem Construction**
As part of their landmark study aimed at conceptualizing creative processes, Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels (1971) sought to isolate specific motivational correlates of creative work in an effort to obtain a heightened understanding of creativity. For the study, the researchers placed 27 objects on a table, then – one at a time – charged 31 art students with selecting objects from the presented assortment, arranging their chosen objects on another table, then creating a pleasing illustration. The products were evaluated on craftsmanship (independent of originality), originality (independent of craftsmanship), and overall aesthetic value. Each artist was interviewed about their subjective experience, with their answers being scored in terms of a concept the authors refer to as “concern for discovery.”

Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels (1971) describe “concern for discovery” as a component of discovered-problem situations (i.e., situations in which a problem does not have a known formulation, no already known method of solution, and no known solution). Thus, problem solvers must discover both the problem and the solution, which cannot be compared against a predetermined correct answer. The researchers hypothesized individuals who approach an indeterminate situation with openness rather than preconceptions (i.e., with a high concern for discovery) would arrive at more creative results.

The findings supported the hypothesis: artists who reported approaching the assigned task without a set problem in mind produced drawings rated as significantly more original and higher in overall aesthetic value than the artists who utilized more preformulated approaches. The study’s generalizability can be called into question (the sample consisted solely of men attending the same art school) and the measures used to
assess concern for discovery were exploratory in nature. However, it does emphasize the importance of the problem-finding (or problem-constructing) stage in the creative process. Despite its limitations, the study suggests that, given the necessary technical skill and knowledge, individuals oriented by a mindset characterized by openness and flexibility are more likely to arrive at original outcomes.

Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels' (1971) "concern for discovery" can prove essential beyond the artistic realm, for – as Reiter-Palmon, Mumford, and Threlfall (1998) state – "many situations and decisions that the individual has to deal with every day can be construed as ill-defined and ambiguous, with vague goals and no consensus on what a good solution is" (p. 188).

Reiter-Palmon et al. (1998) set out to determine whether problem construction is relevant to solving everyday problems, and whether it provides individuals with a means for interpreting a situation in a way that fits their personality. The authors cite previous studies indicating creative individuals possess the ability to tolerate – and benefit from – conflict, tension, and ambiguity. Asserting that conflict and tension result when individuals are exposed to a situation that does not fit their personality, Reiter-Palmon and colleagues hypothesized that individuals better able to construct a problem to fit with their personality will be more likely to benefit from the conflict and ambiguity. Their study asked 195 students to complete measures that would identify their personality type and their problem-construction ability. They were also charged with solving an ambiguous, real-life problem. Judges rated students' answers in terms of quality and originality (for problem construction and problem-solving) and solution fit (for problem-solving), and then the scores were averaged for use in analysis.
The statistics indicate problem construction ability contributes to successful problem solving both directly and indirectly. In the case of the former, problem construction has a direct effect on solution quality and solution originality. In the latter case, those with higher levels of problem-construction ability are more likely to generate solutions that align with their personality type:

Individuals with high problem-construction ability are able to construct an ambiguous or ill-defined problem in a way that they can relate to or understand. They can then provide a higher quality, more original solution because they are dealing with a familiar problem or drawing on their own expertise (Reiter-Palmon et al., 1998, p.195).

Though the study does not directly test the impact of problem construction in real-world problem-solving scenarios, it does suggest problem-construction ability aids individuals in structuring ambiguous problems in ways that have personal meaning – an accomplishment one could consider essential for counselors. By instilling a concern for discovery in students and encouraging them to appropriately incorporate life experience/personal expertise into their professional work, counselor education programs can better prepare students to successfully navigate the ambiguity emblematic of their chosen field.

**The Creative Counselor**

D’Andrea (1988) states counselors possess a responsibility to create an environment that increases clients’ personal competencies to facilitate greater success and satisfaction in their adaptation to a rapidly changing, complex society. “For counselors to amplify and sustain their impact, they must learn ways of utilizing the totality of clients’
life experiences to more effectively guide them toward higher levels of psychological maturity” (p. 23). A counselor who can structure ambiguous situations in personally meaningful ways (Reiter-Palmon et al., 1998) may be better suited to stimulate clients’ perspective of self and others in an effort to promote heightened creative (and creative problem-solving) abilities.

To do so, D’Andrea suggests counselors consider the effect novelty plays in the counseling process, recommending they foster an environment that utilizes stimulating, provocative, and psychologically challenging experiences to promote growth. By interacting with a counselor in an atmosphere of acceptance and warmth, D’Andrea and others (Bradecich, 2008; Cole & Sarnoff, 1980; Rogers, 1961) hypothesize clients can learn adaptive skills.

Gladding (2008) expounds upon the notion of novelty in the therapeutic relationship, suggesting that creativity in counseling can help clients overcome obstacles and attain a greater degree of self-actualization. Building from Frey’s (1975) assertion that “counseling is actually a creative enterprise within which client and counselor combine their resources to generate a new plan, develop a different outlook, formulate alternative behaviors, [and] begin a new life” (p. 23), Gladding calls creativity “crucial” to the future of counseling:

In most professions today, including counseling, creativity is a necessity.
Environments and the needs of individuals and groups change. Society evolves.
The helping strategies of yesterday are not always appropriate today... If counseling is to continue to be on the forefront of the helping professions, it must continue to promote creativity (p. 103).
Though Gladding acknowledges therapy does not always have to be creative to be effective, he states that with persistence, calculated risk-taking, and a sense of playfulness counselors can draw out the creative abilities of their clients (Rosenthal, 2002).

A “good” use of creativity in therapy is not simply an expressionistic self-indulgence on the part of the therapist, nor is therapeutic creativity without form or context. Rather, it is a clinical strategy executed within a framework of understanding the client that has hypothesized benefits for these individuals who entrust the therapist with their psychological care. A creative technique has the power to stimulate a client’s interest in the process of therapy, and perhaps aid in his or her retention of important information across sessions so that new understanding and knowledge can accumulate (Newman, 2002, p. 311-12).

Kottler and Hecker (2002) indicate creative therapy involves a combination of unique personalities, the change/growth process (often involving novel, imaginative approaches), and the therapeutic product (that which is different about clients at the end of the counseling relationship). Such an combination is embodied in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes et al., 1999), a mindfulness-based behavioral therapy that utilizes creative techniques (e.g., metaphor, paradox, humor, irreverence) and mindfulness skills in conjunction with a diverse array of experiential exercises and interventions (Harris, 2006) to increase psychological flexibility and aid clients in creatively developing new strategies for life (Hayes, Levin, Plumb-Vilardaga, Villatte, & Pistorello, 2011; Hayes et al., 1999). As a therapeutic modality, ACT has considerable empirical support; its efficacy having been demonstrated in the treatment of depression, psychosis, anxiety, substance use, work- and health-related stress, chronic pain,

In addition, the literature demonstrates training in ACT has a positive impact on the clinical effectiveness of master’s-level therapists (Strosahl, Hayes, Bergan, and Romano, 1998), and has also been linked to positive changes in students’ psychological flexibility (Muto, Hayes, & Jeffcoat, 2011) as well as a reduction in counselor burnout (Hayes et al., 2004). A full review of the history, philosophy, and evidence-based applicability of ACT is outside the scope of this dissertation; however, ACT provides empirical justification for the assertion that the inclusion of creativity in a theoretical therapeutic approach can be advantageous for both clients and clinicians.

Klagsbrun et al. (2005) examined the efficacy of a focusing and expressive arts therapy intervention on the quality of life of women with breast cancer. The study (N=18) involved a two-day retreat in which complementary and creative treatment modalities (e.g., focusing, writing, art) were provided in an intensive group format. The researchers hypothesized that the multimodal approach would “facilitate emotional expression, foster group interaction, encourage, play, deepen spirituality, and enhance vitality” (p. 114). Quantitative and qualitative measures were employed to assess physical, spiritual, emotional, cognitive, creative, and social well-being, including the Experiencing Scale, which rates the quality of an individual’s experience of self, and the Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy for breast cancer (FACT-B) Scale, which measures the quality of life for breast cancer patients. Observations, interviews, and a case study were also used.
JUMPING OFF THE COUCH

Participants showed improvement on both the quantitative and qualitative measures, demonstrating significant improvement in stress reduction, as well as in physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well being. According to the researchers, “many of the women reported that they continued to write poetry, move to music, make art, and ‘clear a space’ in order to reduce their stress levels and express emotions” (p. 133). Though the study was not designed to separately assess the results of the focusing activities and creative therapies, the findings suggest both a quantitative and qualitative therapeutic value in accessing clients’ creativity.

Using an online methodology, Carson and colleagues (2003) investigated therapists’ perceptions of the role creativity plays in couples and family therapy. A total of 142 marriage and family therapists in 36 states in the United States participated in the study, completing a quantitative measure assessing creativity in their work and responding to open-ended questions exploring the meaning of creativity, characteristics of a “creative” family therapist, and barriers to their creativity as a family therapist.

Participants noted multiple themes in addressing the meaning of creativity in family work, including the capacity to think and act spontaneously, a willingness to improvise/take risks, and the ability to connect with the intuitive part of themselves and their clients. The top three characteristics of a creative family therapist included flexibility, risk-taking, and sense of humor. When discussing blocks to creative therapy, participants referenced the therapist’s personal inhibitions, a lack of confidence, fear of liability from clients and/or ethical breeches, fear of negative response from clients, and a lack of contact with other creative therapists.
Though 36 of 50 states were represented in the study, its relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, and the response rate of 8 percent poses a threat to the study's external validity. However, the study offers valuable insight into couples and family therapists' perspectives on their field, and suggests counselors and their clients would benefit if therapists would learn to identify with and develop their creativity.

Seeking to explore the views and experiences of counselors about creativity and relational experiences, Duffey, Haberstroh, and Trepal (2009) conducted a survey of open-ended questions involving 131 members of the Association for Creativity in Counseling (ACC). Utilizing the techniques of grounded theory, the researchers isolated three themes in the responses: relational competencies, creativity in counseling, and power. The competencies identified by participants included "mutuality and awareness," "other and personal growth and promotion," "authenticity and honesty," and "social connections," which involved specific skills, such as perseverance, patience, the ability to engage in personal reflection, and the ability to let go of damaging or unproductive relationships (p. 101). Participants acknowledged a link between creativity and particular qualities of relationships, stating creativity deepens connections, increases intimacy, and fosters new ways of thinking about therapeutic work. The researchers concluded relational competencies and creativity in counseling "mutually empower one another and function systemically; as a person focuses on one specific area, the others develop in tandem" (p. 107).

Though the study's sample was limited to members of the ACC and utilized questions that initially guided participants' responses, the qualitative design provided the
researchers with the richness of data vital in constructing a grounded theory model. That model – supporting the systemic intersection between relational competencies and creativity in counseling – suggests a potential value to incorporating creativity training into courses dedicated to the development of interpersonal/relational skills.

**Promoting Creativity in Counselor Education**

Hecker and Kottler (2002) state counselor education programs emphasize neither the construct of creativity nor the role of creativity and creative thinking in mental health practice. Though they describe creativity as central to the process of therapy, the authors suggest most counselors receive little-to-no training to aid them in accessing their creative resources and using them with clients.

According to Carson and Becker (2004), success as a graduate student often requires a degree of self-constraint that quashes creative thinking:

The very mechanisms that are perpetuated in higher education may be counter to the conditions necessary for developing counselors who are able to explore and find their “creative voices,” whether they pertain to faculty and supervisors or counselors-in-training. The time to introduce conversations about creativity is not postgraduation, but rather at the first moment that an individual decides to become a professional counselor. Rather than being viewed as the “icing on the cake,” creativity should be viewed as a necessary foundation for effective counseling and counselor training. Helping trainees to discover, develop, and be able to freely express creative talents (and personality) in working with clients is crucial (p. 114).
Though working with creativity does have its cautions – Carson and Becker (2004) note it invites heightened levels of intimacy, creates more complicated relationships, generates increased therapeutic power, and “involves an acceptance of the mysteries and incongruities of client pain and conflict as well as the complexity of the counseling process itself” (p. 114) – the authors maintain the inclusion of creativity in the theory-building, research, and clinical aspects of counseling is a critical issue in counselor education.

Being able to access our own creativity at peak levels in an effort to help clients tap their own creative problem-solving abilities (internal and relational) and creative resources is a prerequisite to effective therapy. Creative problem solving involves the four critical steps of preparation (chance and opportunity perhaps favoring the prepared mind and heart), incubation (periods of rest in which no conscious work is done on the problem), inspiration (when lightning hits), and verification (confirmatory evidence of movement or change). High-level professional training and “training” from our clients (because they are our best teachers) are essential aspects of therapy (Carson & Becker, 2004).

Having conducted a survey of programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) intended to gauge the levels of interest in (and support for) therapeutic practices that fall outside the traditional realm of medical, psychiatric, and psychological practice, Lumadue, Munk, and Wooten (2005) state there is “a growing interest in creative, complementary and alternative approaches on the part of clients, practitioners, students, and counselor educators,” one that requires a
"more conscious and intentional dialogue" about the role of such approaches in professional practice and counselor education (p. 16).

Despite such recommendations, literature looking at the efficacy of infusing creativity in counselor education programs is limited. Bodenhorn and Starkey (2005) utilized a quantitative approach to explore the use of creative means (i.e., theater exercises) to foster the development of empathy in counseling students. Eighteen students at a CACREP-accredited counseling program completed two empathy assessments, the Davis Empathy Scale (Davis, 1980) and the Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998), during the course of the study. Following the pre-test on the aforementioned measures, the students took part in a semester-long counseling techniques class during which a theater professor led the students in acting exercises designed to increase their empathic abilities. Post-tests on the empathy and emotional intelligence measures were administered at the end of the course.

Though no significant differences were found between the pre- and post-test scores – a finding the researchers attribute to the small sample size – the researchers did find that participants’ mean scores on the Davis Empathy sub-scales were higher than the mean scores reported for general population college students. Additionally, participants’ mean scores on the Emotional Intelligence Scale matched the mean score for the therapists reported in the validation processes. A qualitative follow-up five months after the study asked the participants to reflect upon their class experience in writing. The researchers identified four themes throughout the responses: empathy, trust, risk-taking, and the importance of non-verbal communication. According to Bodenhorn and Starkey (2005), the students’ reports “indicate the class experience impacted them and their
recollections were salient to the issue of empathy" (p. 25), suggesting that the utilization of creative activities can lead to an educational experience that is both memorable and relevant.

In response to the question “If, when, and how do [counselor educators] introduce expressive modalities to counselors in training?,” Waliski (2009) incorporated a variety of creative counseling approaches (e.g., art therapy, bibliotherapy, narrative therapy, psychodrama, visual imagery) into an Advanced Theory and Techniques course in a CACREP-accredited counseling program. The course, which was an elective, provided a mixture of theoretical underpinnings for the creative therapies and hands-on experiential activities.

According to Waliski (2009), students responded favorably to the course content, indicating they experienced an increased level of comfort as professionals as a result of their exposure to the new approaches, and identified said approaches as means for building rapport with clients.

Participants became motivated to learn more from the introduction of various expressive techniques. During a class discussion the students explained how the introduction and exploration of expressive techniques empowered them. It also gave them clarification regarding the counseling process because many felt strong emotions while participating in the hands-on activities. Students began to display more confidence in their work and this confidence continued for the duration of the class. Students identified ways of integrating expressive techniques in many additional theories we later discussed. (Waliski, 2009, p. 380).
To foster the empowerment, empathy, and sense of exploration discussed above – and to better prepare students for the complexities of the counseling relationship – counselor education programs need to reconsider their standards and focus, examining ways in which creativity can be incorporated throughout the academic process.

Creativity and the Educational Environment

Despite the gap in literature exploring the applications of creativity in counselor education, researchers have conducted extensive studies of creativity's applicability within the realms of K-12, undergraduate college, and – to a lesser extent – teacher education. Given that counseling programs are, by nature, graduate-level college courses, this review will focus on the collegiate and teacher education studies.

In an effort to investigate possible connections between creative thinking and lecturer effectiveness, Milgram and Davidovich (2010) conducted a pair of studies involving university students and faculty. The first, drawn from a questionnaire administered to 350 college students, assessed participants' evaluation of lecturer effectiveness from formal/academic and creative perspectives. The second, conducted with 64 university professors, involved measures of creative thinking and the degree to which lecturers use creative thinking while teaching.

The researchers found a high correlation between student evaluations of their instructors' creative thinking and their overall effectiveness as lecturers, as well as a strong relationship between the assessments of the creative and academic aspects of lecturer effectiveness (Milgram & Davidovich, 2010).

The study's generalizability may be, to some extent, limited by its setting (the research was conducted at an Israeli university), but the finding that students value
creative thinking ability in lecturers suggests universities could benefit from recognizing, encouraging, and augmenting creative thinking on the part of instructors.

Milgram and Davidovich's work compliments earlier research by Mohan (1973), who utilized a mixed methodology as part of a proposal for a course in creativity at a state university college. Using a review of the literature, a faculty survey, a needs-assessment questionnaire (given to student teachers and classroom instructors), and a review of the results of in-service creativity workshops, Mohan concluded such a course can be considered a necessary part of a teacher education program.

Using ten teacher education institutions in the northwestern United States, Mack (1987) sought to explore teacher educators' and student teachers' perceptions of the extent to which teacher-education programs include training in creativity enhancement. The study found both student teachers and teacher educators felt enhancing creativity was important. However, only 48 percent of teacher educators and 52 percent of student teachers believed teacher education programs incorporated creativity into the curriculum. Of the 20 topics traditionally included in an undergraduate teacher education program, teacher educators rated creativity enhancement fifth in importance, but only as tenth in how thoroughly it was taught at their institution. Student teachers rated it second in terms of importance, yet rated the actual teaching of the topic seventh. Overall, 23 of 62 teacher educators felt none of their courses involved instruction on the concepts of creativity, and 29 of 62 felt none of their courses included suggestions for methods of enhancing creativity. The study suggests that, within the field of education, the recognition of the value of creativity training outstrips its actual implementation. Mack (1987) speculated
that gap may result from a lack of knowledge about ways of teaching creativity – a problem few subsequent studies attempted to rectify.

Acknowledging it is “at best difficult” (p. 83) to define the mechanisms that will foster creative growth and development in college students, Bull, Montgomery, and Baloche (1995) sought to describe the components of college creativity courses and identify the perceived importance of those components (according to college instructors). The researchers performed a content analysis on 67 syllabi for college creativity courses, which led to the development of a list of 134 items related to creativity instruction. Those items were then distributed to educators who taught courses in creativity, who rated each item on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from unimportant to very important. The study’s authors interpreted the results according to the five dimensions of creativity proposed by Montgomery et al. (1992, 1993): social climate, personality characteristics, general theories/models, processes involved, and product variables related to end results. A mean rank of 4.25 or higher was considered a high-ranking item.

In assessing social climate, the study found the following items ranked highly: providing students with a climate in which they feel safe and free to explore their own creativity, setting a climate for creativity, eliminating or recognizing blocks to creative thinking, and dealing with other dimensions of creative climate. It identified openness to experience, inquisitiveness/curiosity, enthusiasm, internal/external openness, tolerance for ambiguity, high energy level, reflectiveness, independence, self-confidence, intuition as important personality characteristics. No theories or models attained scores that would qualify them as high-ranking (Cognitive-Developmental Theory came closest, at 3.81). In terms of processes involved, the study identified humor, increase in the psychological
understanding of the creative process, nurturance of creativity, imagination, creative problem solving, analogy/metaphor, problem defining, and divergent thinking, whereas insight and innovation attained high ranks on the dimension of end results.

Though the study was more descriptive in nature, it suggests some agreement exists among teachers of creativity as to the important elements of creativity courses. Analyzing the priority given to the climate and process dimensions, as well as the comparatively low numbers attributed to theories, Bull, Montgomery, and Baloche (1995) state “studying about creativity appears not to be as valuable as establishing an environment in which to create” (p. 88).

Whitelock, Faulkner, and Miell (2008) explored the establishment of a creative environment within the doctoral supervision process, using a series of qualitative interviews with students and supervisors to determine: perceptions of creativity during doctoral studies, methods through which supervisors might encourage creative thinking, ways students might support and develop their own creative thinking, and strategies that could assist with the development of creative skills. The researchers identified four sets of processes/activities that supervisors identified as contributing to the development of academic creativity: providing guidance while promoting autonomy, building confidence through the use of positive feedback, fostering appropriate risk taking, filtering knowledge and identifying problems, and modeling of creative approaches and practices.

The study emphasized the importance of creating an interpersonal environment characterized by trust in which risk-taking can safely – and in some cases, playfully – take place:
The findings from this small-scale study suggest that whilst the more formal instruction and monitoring processes that lead to the acquisition of transferrable research skills are both usefully and necessary aspects of doctoral training, the more open-ended and creative developments required at this level of study should be given equal weight. We would argue that the latter requires a less directive or restrictive form of pedagogy that mobilises the processes that take place during creative collaborations. There needs to be space, time and encouragement for the types of interactions identified here (e.g. informal reflection, relationship building with peers and supervisor, playful exploration and risk taking) as well as mandatory skills development. How we might develop a doctoral programme that ensures adequate monitoring of progress but that does not encroach on other important aspects of supervision for developing creative thinking remains a key dilemma for educators and researchers alike (Whitelock, Faulkner, & Miell, 2008, p. 151).

According to Harding (2010), resolving that dilemma is essential because, by and large, educational methodologies struggle to keep pace with societal changes. In order for teachers to assist students in developing their creative capacities, teacher preparation programs should utilize curricula that foster experiential academic environments infused with opportunities for creative thought and action.

The American Psychological Association (1993) made similar recommendations in its learner-centered guidelines for school reform, linking creativity to higher-order thinking ("Higher order strategies for 'thinking about thinking' – for overseeing and monitoring mental operations – facilitate creative and critical thinking and the
development of expertise,' p. 9), intrinsic motivation to learn ("Individuals are naturally curious and enjoy learning, but intense negative cognitions and emotions thwart this enthusiasm," p. 9), and characteristics of motivation-enhancing learning tasks:

Positive affect, creativity, and flexible and insightful thinking are promoted in contexts that learners perceive as personally relevant and meaningful. Projects that are comparable to real-world situations in complexity and duration elicit students' higher-order thinking skills and creativity. In addition, curiosity is enhanced when students can work on personally relevant learning tasks of optimal difficulty and novelty (p. 9).

To encourage creativity in the classroom, Goodale (1970) suggests instructors support activities that increase students' self-confidence and persistence. Student behaviors (such as questioning, voicing of opinions, and adopting nonconformist stances) can be signs of independence and curiosity, and teachers must learn to be tolerant of such activities.

Goodale's article is more than 40 years old, but its sentiments attesting to the need for teachers to develop consistently safe environments for creativity (i.e., "If creativity is to be encouraged, then the teacher should be alert to see that every effort in the direction of creativity, curiosity, independence and self-reliance is rewarded," p. 95) have been carried forward by researchers and creativity specialists alike. For example, author and creative thinking coach Roger von Oech (1998) asserts, "The amount a person uses her imagination is inversely proportional to the amount of punishment she will receive for using it" (p. 86).

Promoting Student Creativity
Brinkman (2010) proposes that, if instructors teach and model idea-generating techniques and pay heed to personality traits that might encourage creative expression and risk taking, students can be taught to incorporate creativity into their academic and/or professional pursuits. Drawing upon anthropological, phenomenological, experimental, neuroscientific, and classroom-based action research studies, Claxton, Edwards, and Scale-Constantinou (2006) identified six dispositions supportive of creativity: curiosity, resilience, experimenting, attentiveness, thoughtfulness, and environment-setting. By nurturing those dispositions in a classroom, the authors suggest instructors may heighten students' inclination and ability to think creatively.

According to Baer (1996), such instruction should be targeted at specific areas in which creativity/creative thinking is desired. In an effort to aid in the design of training programs that foster specific educational objectives, Baer explored the impact of divergent thinking training on a specific task (i.e., poetry writing), analyzing its effect on the creativity levels used in that task, as well as in a different, though closely related task (i.e., creative story writing).

Baer (1996) found the training had a significant impact on the creative performance of the participants (157 seventh graders), and that the impact was greater for the targeted task than for an alternative task in the same domain. Despite issues with its design (e.g., generalizability, length of training, lack of longitudinal analysis), the study's findings – i.e., that the cognitive functions underlying creativity are task specific – offer considerable implications for designing a creativity-enriching course curriculum. That is, if the intent of a curriculum is to improve creative performance on a particular task, e.g., counseling/therapy, the training should focus on the specific skill set related to that task.
Toward such an end, Denmead (2011) considered elements of pedagogies espoused by three practitioners within creative industries; specifically, a movement specialist, a weaver, and a visual artist. Denmead’s qualitative study isolated four components associated with the presence of a creative practitioner. These included “not knowing,” described as an openness to struggle and an acceptance of a lack of definitive answers; open-endedness, an ever-evolving, non-prescriptive approach; “playing like a child,” the importance of using uninhibitedness to disrupt norms and expectations in which clients often find themselves entrenched; and “becoming,” encouraging clients to revise their self-concept and act in ways representative of those revisions.

Denmead (2011) acknowledges caution must be taken when associating educators with creative practitioners, considering the differing requirements of the respective professions. However, given literature (Carson, Becker, Vance, & Forth, 2003; Carson & Becker, 2004; Gladding, 2008; Hecker & Kottler, 2002; Kottler & Hecker, 2002; Rosenthal, 2002) describing counseling as a creative practice, Denmead’s (2011) findings that creative practitioners utilize experimentation/appropriate risk-taking, appreciation of ambiguity, and playful (i.e., improvisational) skills to aid clients in gaining new perspectives on self and others offers considerable implications for redesigning a counselor education curriculum.

**Appropriate Risk-Taking**

Matson (1991) examined the nature of risk-taking within the college classroom, hypothesizing students better conditioned to failure will exhibit higher levels of creative behavior. As such, the author structured a course to promote creativity in which he gave students “unconditional permission to explore their creative unknowns” (p. 85). The
greater the risks taken within the confines of the course, the better the students’ grades.

Matson found the acceptance of failure aided students in recognizing their ability to be creative: “The discovery process became self-fulfilling. They [the students] learned to draw on this talent so that later on when real risks were involved, they had confidence to use their creativity” (p. 85). Matson’s course took place in a different academic discipline – it was a class in entrepreneurship taught at a university business school – but the results of the study suggest a counselor education curriculum that promotes appropriate risk-taking may provide students with a level of self-assurance that will enable them to consider/employ creative approaches within their clinical practice.

Ross (2010) described the nurturance of a positive outlook on risk-taking as a necessary quality for a classroom. Risk-taking behaviors, he stated, are “only possible when students feel empowered, when they feel they are being listened to and taken seriously. The risk involved should be taking creative chances, not as potential exposure to ridicule and censure” (p. 90). According to Turock (1980), one of the biggest risks presented to beginning counseling students involves immediacy, defined as “a counselor’s understanding and communicating of what is going on between the counselor and client within the helping relationship, particularly the client’s feelings, impressions, and expectations, as well as the wants of the counselor” (p. 168). In broaching emotions, responding to the here-and-now, and disclosing their own feelings, counselors take risks (e.g., being wrong) that carry not-inconsiderable consequences (e.g., unpredictable outcomes, damaging the therapeutic relationship). As such, it is imperative that counselor educators create a learning environment that allows students to be open, honest, and more vulnerable (Cole & Sarnoff, 1980; Rogers, 1954; Wheeler & D’Andrea, 2004).
Counseling students are reminded repeatedly to "do no harm"; therefore, it is not surprising that when faced with the possibility of angering, upsetting, or misreading clients, students are reluctant to do so. However, it is this potential to deepen the counseling relationship and provide the client with the insights and skills to grow and change in a positive direction that makes worthwhile the difficulty of teaching and learning immediacy (Wheeler & D'Andrea, 2004, p. 121).

By creating a safe and supportive learning environment (Cole & Sarnoff, 1980), providing students with opportunities to engage in risk-taking and creative experimentation (Lester, 2011), and providing specific instruction related to immediacy (e.g., defining the concept, acknowledging students' reluctance, helping students recognize cues, aiding them in the development of a "gentle" approach to immediacy; Wheeler & D'Andrea, 2004, p. 121), instructors can empower students to demonstrate the courage required of creative behavior (Maslow, 1963).

**Tolerance for Ambiguity**

According to Clegg (2008), creativity not only requires courage and an ability to accept risk, but also a willingness to live within a framework of ambiguity. Such willingness is an important asset to foster in novice counselors, for whom "anxiety and fear about the unknown are like a one-two punch" (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003, p. 47).

When a client walks into the therapist's office for the first time, neither of them know each other, yet, just like the two performers on stage, they immediately are in a relationship...[T]he nature of the therapeutic relationship is unknown to both
the therapist and client, and will be determined as the therapy unfolds (Pishney, 2010, p. 9).

In an effort to explore the relationship between tolerance for ambiguity and creativity, Zenasni, Besancon, and Lubart (2008) asked 68 volunteers (34 pairs of adolescents and their parents) to complete three independent measures of creativity (a divergent-thinking task, a story-writing task, and a self-evaluation of creative attitudes and behavior), as well as two measures for tolerance for ambiguity (i.e., the Measurement of Ambiguity Tolerance, Norton, 1975; Zenasni & Lubart, 2001; and the Behaviour Scale of Tolerance/Intolerance of Ambiguity, Stoycheva, 1998, 2003). Using correlational and factor analyses to examine links between distinct creativity measures, the researchers discovered a significant positive relationship between the two targeted constructs. “The more individuals are tolerant of ambiguity, the more they tend to be creative (generated original and unique ideas, produce creative stories, report creative characteristics” (Zenasni et al., 2008, p. 71). Though the study did not look specifically at creativity in counseling settings, the findings suggest therapists who possess a greater tolerance for ambiguity are better equipped to handle the uncertainties generated when helping clients change recurrent problems and patterns (Mooney & Padesky, 2000).

In turn, Bierly III and colleagues (2009) suggest creativity may increase an individual's level of comfort in situations characterized by ethical uncertainty. The authors set out to analyze the possible effects of creativity on developing complex solutions to different ethical problems. Their study, consisting of a survey administered to 899 undergraduate business students, found that – compared to non-creative individuals – creative people are less likely to follow universal rules (i.e., absolute tenets such as never
steal, *always* tell the truth, etc.) in moral decision making. They concluded highly
creative people possess an ethic of caring, a pragmatic decision-making style (in social
situations), and a higher level of social sensitivities. According to Bierly et al., such
individuals may be "particularly adept at handling complex moral problems that involve a
high degree of ambiguity...They generally indicated a preference for actions that avoid
harming others, and that they reject universal moral principles in favor of
idiosyncratically figuring out each moral situation on their own" (p. 108).

The study's sample size is a considerable strength, but the specific population
used with the study (university business students) places some limitations on its
generalizability. Even so, the study highlights the value of incorporating creativity into
educational processes (specifically into ethics courses), indicating the
capacity/motivation to think creatively may help individuals better formulate solutions to
complex moral problems. As research associates higher stages of moral development
with increased empathy (Cannon, 2008), a heightened ability to better consider the
extenuating circumstances of a problem (Obidah, Jackson-Minot, Monroe & Williams,
2004), flexible thinking (Endicott, Bock, & Narvaez, 2003), and improved performance
(i.e., ethical conduct) in counselors (Evans & Foster, 2000), an increase in creativity
could have implications for generating more competent counselors.

To engender a greater tolerance for ambiguity, Langer (1989) suggests educators
provide students an environment of openness, one that allows for the exploration of the
unknown: "Uncertainty creates the freedom to discover meaning. If there are meaningful
choices, there is uncertainty. If there is no choice, there is no uncertainty and no
opportunity for control. ... uncertainty and the experience of personal control are
inseparable (p. 130). Along similar lines, Yun Dai & Shen (2008) recommend instructors endeavor to avoid language that communicates the existence of “the correct solution” and “the right answer.” Such notions, they state, can lead to cognitive rigidity, which can be detrimental to creative behavior. As noted by Skovholt & Rønnestad (2003):

Searching through uncertainty via reflection has been described as the best method of novice professional growth. The novice is taught to proceed on the voyage within a framework of there being more than one right way to help another. Yet, within uncertainty, the mentor also introduces certainty via specific techniques, methods, and procedures that can be very helpful to the confused novice (p. 55).

**Improvisation**

Spolin (1999) defines improvisation as “setting out to solve a problem with no preconception as to how you will do; permitting everything in the environment (animate or inanimate) to work for you in solving the problem” (p. 361). Ross (2010) considers it an interpersonal transaction through which participants:

- go beyond the familiar, the comfortable, to reappraise the known in terms of the possible. Many forces, social and individual, conspire to lead us in well-worn paths: habit, ritual, language, as well as our own predispositions, all reinforced by routines and schedules adopted by others. The improviser eschews the security of a prescripted course for one more contingent and risky, an engagement that requires a dynamic, flexible response. (pp. 78-9).

Improvisational theater is based upon a directive to “accept all offers,” a notion Wiener and Oxford (2003) assert is key for effective counseling:
Characteristic of master therapists is their mastery of improvisation; their ability to spontaneously develop and implement interventions specific and unique to the person, setting, and situation “in the moment.” Their exceptional ability to integrate creativity, craftsmanship, therapeutic use of self, and what particulars each client system offers them infuses their work with an elegance and artistry (p. 269).

According to Pishney (2010), a positive therapeutic experience depends upon a combination of active listening skills and creative engagement utilized by the counselor to facilitate rapport. Then, as in improvisational theater, that rapport can be used to allow clients the freedom to explore their thoughts, behaviors, feelings and relational patterns without inhibition; a spontaneous expression that can serve as the catalyst for self-understanding and significant behavior change (Pishney).

In an effort to help novice therapists strengthen both basic (e.g., empathic listening) and higher-order counseling skills (e.g., creativity), Bradecich (2008) created a therapeutic training program utilizing acting and improvisation techniques. The pilot study for the program, conducted with doctoral psychology students, consisted of seven experiential improvisation exercises designed to bolster students’ self-efficacy in therapeutic scenarios. Following the completion of each exercise, the leader processed the experience with the participants. At the end of the two-hour program, the students discussed their overall experience and completed a feedback form.

Participants indicated improvisation afforded them opportunities for experimentation, enabling them to “move beyond their comfort zone” (Bradecich, 2008, p. 94). Themes identified by the researcher included the potential to increase self-
awareness, self-discovery, and interaction, as well as the potential to decrease anxiety.
Participants stated improvisational training could improve: “listening skills, empathy, non-verbal observation skills, self-awareness and self-reflection, attunement and rapport, interviewing, authenticity, emotional intelligence, and personal comfort” (Bradecich, 2008, p. 107). Though the study was limited in scope, involving only eight participants in a two-hour program, the findings offer promise that students exposed to a semester-long curriculum designed to promote creativity will recognize the value of improvisational training in their development as counseling professionals.

Laughlin (2000) explored improvisation, described as “the key to creativity” (p. 55), within counselor education. Utilizing an interpretive lens devised following a series of qualitative interviews with jazz improvisation teachers, Laughlin analyzed the ways in which a supervisor created a context with supervisees that fostered the development of improvisational skills. Further analysis resulted in the development of six categories for teaching improvisation: orienting toward improvisation, staying in conversation (i.e., heeding relational connections), being noncentral (i.e., remaining invested in an interaction that does not privilege the counselor’s voice over others), avoiding pigeonholes (i.e., attending to context at a relational, rather than linear, level), tolerating uncertainty, and finding freedom within limits. “Entering into a relationship (with music, with clients, with family therapy students) with an eye toward utilizing, rather than striving to defeat, relational limits fosters a context of improvisational play and opens the way to a greater range of options and flexibility” (Laughlin, 200, p. 71).

Laughlin (2000) acknowledges limits to the transfer that can take place between the domains of jazz and therapy, both in terms of purpose (entertainment versus service)
and media (music versus spoken word). However, the author presents her study as evidence that counselors would benefit from training that approaches therapy "as an art of engagement rather than as a conquest for technical mastery" (p. 73).

Although repetitious practice is necessary for the learning clinician, it does not ensure the acquisition of clinical skills sufficiently flexible to handle the profusion of diversity found in the world of human relations. Doing therapy, like playing improvisational music, is an ineffable skill not learned by technique alone or in a direct didactic manner (Laughlin, p. 56).

Sawyer (2006) recommends structuring education around "disciplined improvisation" (p. 41) that provides students with an opportunity to work collectively to generate a creative product. Such an approach would allow students to engage in the co-creation of knowledge, engage in processes of inquiry, and participate in productive argumentation, while being supported in a metacognitive reflective process. Said goals would appear to transfer well into the realm of counseling, where therapists and clients participate in collaborative knowledge building through inquiry, discussion, and reflection.

**Creativity and Mental Health**

Incorporating improvisation, tolerance for ambiguity, and appropriate risk-taking into counselor education could provide benefits beyond an increased ability to handle human relations – it may also aid counseling students and their clients in handling life stresses. Describing the association between creativity and personal characteristics such as openness, autonomy, playfulness, humor, flexibility and realistic self-assessment, Cropley (1990) cites literature indicating those properties are "highly favorable to the maintenance of positive mental health" (p. 175). To investigate such claims, Carson and
Runco (1999) examined the relationship between creative problem-solving/problem-generation abilities and coping skills in a sample of 74 students. They found common blocks to creativity (i.e., problem-generation and problem-solving skills) and effective coping (i.e., personal growth and fulfillment), including fear of failure, preoccupation with tradition, failure to recognize strengths in self and others, a tendency toward analyzing (rather than synthesizing), and a fear of playing and/or letting one's imagination roam. These commonalities led the researchers to conclude:

One of the greatest needs in today's world is to provide adults and children in different milieus with opportunities for creative expression and the development of creative problem solving and problem finding skills. The potential payoffs for enhancing coping abilities and reducing mental health problems are immeasurable (Carson & Runco, 1999, p. 185).

Carson and Runco's (1999) study did not specifically explore the relationship between creativity and coping abilities in adults, but its identification of creative thinking abilities as important components of an individual's ability to flex in response to stresses further endorses the need to include creativity enhancement training in counselor education programs.

**Creating a Creativity-Enhancing Curriculum**

In response to questions pertaining to the effectiveness of creative curricula, Scott, Leritz, and Mumford (2004) undertook a quantitative meta-analysis examining 70 studies of creativity training programs. Though the authors recognized their inability to account for all validity issues and, due to the study's narrow focus, the unfeasibility of
considering broader developmental issues, the meta-analysis provided strong evidence in support of the effectiveness of creativity training:

Creativity training contributed to divergent thinking, problem solving, performance, and attitudes and behavior for younger and older students and working adults, and for high achieving and more "run of the mill" students. In fact, even in cases where the effects of training varied by subpopulation, specifically showing less effect for gifted students and women, training was still found to have sizable effects on the various criteria under consideration. Thus, creativity training appears beneficial for a variety of people, not just elementary school students or the unusually gifted (Scott et al., 2004, p. 382).

Based on their findings, Scott and colleagues (2004) recommended creativity training programs attend to four criteria:

First, training should be based on a sound, valid, conception of the cognitive activities underlying creative efforts. Second, this training should be lengthy and relatively challenging with various discrete cognitive skills, and associated heuristics, being described, in turn, with respect to their effects on creative efforts. Third, articulation of these principles should be followed by illustrations of their application using material based on "real-world" cases or other contextual approaches (e.g., cooperative learning). Fourth, and finally, presentation of this material should be followed by a series of exercises, exercises appropriate to the domain at hand, intended to provide people with practice in applying relevant strategies and heuristics in a more complex, and more realistic context (p. 383).
To satisfy those criteria, the author of this study used the Williams Cognitive-Affective Interaction Model as the basis for the counselor education curriculum design. A morphological model that offers a practical diagnostic-prescriptive model for teachers, it relies upon the interaction of three specific dimensions operating along a pair of continua (i.e., cognitive-affective and convergent-divergent). According to Williams (1986), the model is "intended to portray how subject matter content (Dimension 1) can be arranged or presented through multiple classroom teaching strategies or styles (Dimension 2) in order to produce those various behaviors affective productive-divergent thinking and feeling (Dimension 3)" (p. 466).

For the purposes of this study, Dimension 1 will consist of the subject matter content of a counselor education curriculum; specifically, the introductory techniques/human relations course. Dimension 2 lists a variety of styles the instructors may employ while presenting content as a means of stimulating thinking-feeling divergent behaviors. Williams devised the strategies based on empirical studies of teacher performance. These include:

- Use of paradox (or examples of paradoxical situations)
- Attribute listing (to analyze inherent properties of a situation)
- Analogies
- Discrepancies
- Provocative questions
- Examples of change
- Examples of habit (i.e., build sensitivity against rigidity of ideas)
- Organized random search
• Skills of search (i.e., descriptive search, experimental research)
• Build tolerance for ambiguity
• Provide opportunities for intuitive expression
• Adjustment to development (i.e., learn from failures, develop possibilities)
• Study creative procedures and process
• Evaluate situations
• Creative reading skills
• Creative listening skills
• Creative writing skills
• Visualization skills (Williams, 1986, pp. 469-472).

According to Williams (1986), those strategies stimulate eight divergent cognitive-affective behaviors within students. The four cognitive factors – fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration – spin from creativity research by Guilford and Meeker (Meeker, 1974), whereas Williams (1986) identified risk-taking (i.e., willingness to engage in difficult tasks), complexity (i.e., ability to delve into complicated situations), curiosity (i.e., capacity for wonder), and imagination (i.e., ability to mentally move beyond boundaries) as the four affective factors.

The model's attendance to cognitive and affective process, both of which are vital to counseling, and its inclusion of techniques designed to employ/address the elements previously identified as critical to creative thinking and practice (e.g., problem solving, divergent thinking, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, appropriate risk-taking, etc.) made the Williams model uniquely suited to provide a framework for incorporating creativity into a counselor-education curriculum.
Research Overview and Conclusions

Creativity is a necessity of modern life. It can augment one's ability to respond to the increasing complexities of an ever-evolving society, aiding in the development of adaptive flexibility, the encouragement of psychological maturity, and the maintenance of positive mental health. Though professionals in the field of counseling aim to foster similar growth in their clients, they often do so without the benefit of any specific creativity training (i.e., exposure to theories of creativity, creativity-enhancing techniques). If counselors are to be prepared to truly operate as helpers – that is, if they are to assist clients in solving current dilemmas and promote clients' capacities to develop imaginative, successful responses to the problems of tomorrow – then counselor education programs must advocate creativity, providing instruction that cultivates students' creative resources and consistently encourages their use.

Chapter Three will provide an overview of the research design/methodology utilized in this study.
Chapter Three

The present chapter details the research design used for this study. In addition to providing a rationale for the utilization of a qualitative approach, it includes a justification for the specific design methodology (phenomenology) and describes the participants, setting, and data-collection and analysis procedures.

Research is a diligent or systematic investigation into a subject in order to discover or revise facts, theories, or applications (dictionary.com, 2011). According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), it is a form of inquiry in which key concepts and procedures are carefully defined in such a way that the inquiry can be replicated and possibly refuted, controls are in place to minimize error and bias; the generalizability limits of a study are made explicit; and the results of a study are interpreted in terms of what they contribute to the cumulative body of knowledge about the subject of inquiry.

Qualitative research draws from constructivist theory, which states social reality is constructed by the individuals who participate in it (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Assuming a naturalistic approach to its subject matter, qualitative research aims to interpret phenomena using the perspectives (i.e., ascribed meanings) of those who have experienced them (Creswell, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), analyzed by researchers charged with considering their own ways of experiencing the world. Given the latter, qualitative studies are often described as being reflexive in nature, meaning that the researcher's self plays a role in the social reality being constructed – a notion that requires qualitative researchers to demonstrate multidimensional (i.e., self and other) sensitivity and pay heed to the interactions between their personal experiences and the data. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), qualitative studies tend to involve small
samples, often explored via detailed verbal descriptions of observations occurring at a local and immediate level. The subjective, constructivist nature of qualitative research posits that variables cannot be easily measured or quantified, and as such, it routinely utilizes more of a verbal, visual, inductive approach.

Qualitative research, then, provides an alternative to the more traditional, objectivist methodologies that characterize quantitative educational research. Unlike quantitative studies, in which researchers state hypotheses, identify variables to be studied, select instruments for measuring those variables prior to the start of the study, and seek to measure differences among groups (or changes in individuals), qualitative research tends to be more flexible (Creswell, 2008), to the point some might describe it as ambiguous (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Whereas qualitative researchers do utilize research questions to gather information on a particular, those questions are viewed mainly as guidelines for study. Which is to say, qualitative research tends to be emergent in nature, and – depending on the responses of the study’s participants – researchers can, and often do, change the questions (if not the targeted phenomenon itself) entirely.

**Qualitative Goals**

Creswell (2008) explains qualitative research “tends to be shaped by philosophical notions, procedural developments, and participatory and advocacy practices” (p. 49). He states it represents an appropriate methodology when the research problem requires learning about the views of individuals, assessing a process over time, generating theories based on participant perspectives, and/or obtaining detailed information about a few individuals or research sites. Rossman and Rallis (2003) echo that assertion, stating “the ultimate goal of qualitative research is learning; that is, the
transformation of data into information that can be used" (p. 19). Toward such an end, the openness of qualitative inquiry allows a researcher to approach and do justice to the inherent complexity of social interaction. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest the qualitative processes of observing, asking questions, and interacting with participants can help researchers avoid simplifying social phenomena and explore behaviors and processes in a way that expands the understanding of the associated interactions.

**Study Goals/Research Questions**

Qualitative research begins with a focus on a single idea, concept or process, identified as a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2008), from which the researcher formulates a purpose statement (Creswell), problem statement (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), or research issue (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher’s purpose statement, in turn, leads to the development of a central question and associated subquestions.

The purpose of this study was to explore creativity in a Master’s-level counselor education program using a phenomenological design. It sought to answer:

- How will participants in a counseling skills course experience the infusion of creativity into the curriculum?
- How will students exposed to creativity training describe the role of a counselor?
- How will those students explore/experience the processes involved with becoming counseling professionals?
- How will the instructors responsible for the creativity training describe the role of a counselor?
- How will the instructors perceive the students' development toward becoming counselors?

In the above capacities, the term "creativity" refers to creative thinking skills intended to promote psychological maturity and aid in problem-solving processes.

**Strategy of Inquiry**

A phenomenology is a "systematic, explicit, self-critical, and intersubjective" study (Van Manen, 1990, p. 11) of lived experience (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Groenewald, 2004).

Phenomenologies explore the ways people make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning. It requires methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon – how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others. (Patton, 2002, p.104)

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), researchers utilizing a phenomenological approach "focus in depth on the meaning of a particular aspect of experience, assuming that through dialogue and reflection, the quintessential meaning of the experience will be revealed" (p. 97). Van Manen (1990) moves a step beyond, suggesting the goal of said approach is to "borrow" not only the experiences of the participants, but their reflections on those experiences, in order to deepen the understanding of a lived phenomenon. It is the unique strengths of a phenomenology – i.e., the exploratory and descriptive nature, the intent to capture and analyze the meaning of a lived experience within the context of a real-world setting – that made this approach
ideal for the current study, in which the researcher used the perceptions of the faculty and students involved in a counseling techniques course for the purpose of gaining perspective on the confluence of creativity and counselor education/counselor development.

From a phenomenological standpoint, the course involved two main elements: a faculty-led didactic portion (in which theories and skills were introduced) and an experiential portion run by doctoral-level teaching assistants in counselor education (during which the class dispersed into smaller groups to utilize the aforementioned skills via role-taking scenarios).

**Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative research is typically a prolonged, in-depth process, one that can involve extensive interaction between the researcher and the study participants. Given this proximity to the people and the phenomenon being studied, it is incumbent upon researchers to consider their own “biases, values, and personal background” (Creswell, 2009, p. 177) and how they may contribute to the investigation and the understanding of the phenomenon.

Patton (2002) offers a number of strategies intended to aid researchers engaging in qualitative interaction. Patton recommends researchers demonstrate “openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness” (p. 40) during interviews and observations as a means of maintaining a neutral and empathic stance. Researchers should attend to the dynamic nature of the studied experiences, heeding the uniqueness of each individual perspective, as well as the overall group experience, realizing the processes and relationships involved cannot adequately be described linearly. To better
appreciate that dynamism, researchers benefit from immersing themselves in the collected data, an exploratory (rather than confirmatory) process guided by analytical principles (as opposed to rules) that creatively synthesizes the data in an effort to elicit pattern, themes, and interactions. Researchers realize the phenomena being studied are complex, involving dynamic relationships that cannot be adequately described linearly. Finally, researchers must be sensitive to the context of the phenomenon; rather than seeking to generalize findings, they look to analyze comparative cases demonstrating patterns that may indicate the possible transferability of patterns.

For this study, the researcher utilized the above recommendations to enrich the understanding of the central phenomenon. At the inception of the study, the researcher composed a “researcher as instrument” statement (see Appendix A), a personal biography intended to address the sensitivities the researcher brings to the study. “The researcher needs to know who he is and what he is doing in the setting. This self-awareness allows the researcher to distinguish his sense-making from the sense-making of those he is studying” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 48). Recognizing one’s own biases, values, and presuppositions enabled the researcher to better account for his effect/role on the data collection and analysis.

The researcher immersed himself in the study experience, a process that included establishing rapport with the faculty, incorporating the instructors’ pedagogies/input into the curriculum design, training the instructors and teaching assistants, and building relationships with the students involved in the study. The researcher addressed the students during the first meeting of the semester, introducing himself, explaining the intent and parameters of the study, and seeking their participation.
Building upon the notion that participating in the course would help the researcher establish a commonality of experience with the students, thereby aiding in the rapport-building and interview processes, the researcher also served as one of five doctoral-level teaching assistants. Though the teaching assistants did participate in processing sessions during lectures, their primary function was to lead the experiential components, with each assistant taking responsibility for a small group consisting of six Master’s-level students. None of the students involved in the researcher’s experiential group participated directly in the study.

In addition, the researcher led the didactic portion during one of the 15 class sessions. Unforeseen circumstances prevented the instructors of record from attending the aforementioned session, and after consulting with his dissertation committee, the researcher conducted the lecture and facilitated processing.

**Methodology**

Given the intensive nature of qualitative study, it is not possible for researchers to gather all the perspectives of all participants about all of the experiences related to the central phenomenon. Nor is it possible for researchers to observe all the experiences associated with the study. “The extent to which a research or evaluation study is broad or narrow depends on purpose, the resources available, the time available, and the interests of those involved...[T]hese are not choices between good and bad but choices among alternatives, all of which have merit” (Patton, 2002, p. 228). Thus, it is necessary to detail the decision-making processes that led to the specific site and sampling selection.

**Site Selection**
According to Creswell (2008), "In qualitative inquiry, the intent is not to generalize to the population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon" (p. 213). Therefore, qualitative researchers purposefully (i.e., intentionally) select individuals and sites in an attempt to maximize the understanding of said phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). In this case, the use of a counseling skills course was particularly pertinent. As Eriksen and McAuliffe (2010) explain:

[The counseling skills course] is designed to introduce graduate or undergraduate students to ways of working and interacting with others that differ from what they have previously known. Beginning students' experiences with interviewing and helping have usually been restricted to parental admonition, religious prescription, and secondary school college advising. Or, "helping" for them, at its most concrete, might bring up visions of changing a flat tire for someone on the road, bandaging a wound, or washing the dishes. It usually surprises students that what we aim to teach them is not, at least initially, directive or advice-oriented, despite its goal of influencing others toward behavior change and good decision-making. We must not underestimate the pervasiveness of such a directive vision of helping on the part of neophyte counselors. (p. 41)

Foundational in nature, a counseling skills course provides an opportunity to develop student-counselors' worldviews, their ability to construct (and co-construct) knowledge, and their approaches toward problem-solving, as well as their interpersonal skill sets (Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2010).

The study's focus (creativity in counselor education) and unit of analysis (an introductory counseling skills course) determined the parameters of the selected site. The
observational component of the research was linked to the lecture hall in which the didactic portion of the introductory counseling skills class took place. Individual interviews were conducted on campus, in rooms reserved at the counseling center.

**Sample Selection**

As is common in qualitative studies, the researcher utilized a purposeful sampling method, which involved the selection of “information-rich” cases intended to illuminate the experience of the central phenomenon (Patton, 2002, p. 230). More specifically, this study involved purposeful random sampling, which can add credibility through the systematic collection of information when the overall purposeful sample is too large to be adequately studied and through the reduction of suspicion as to why certain individuals were selected (Patton).

**Participants**

Building from Boyd (2001) and Creswell’s (1998) recommendations that phenomenologies utilize up to ten participants, this study involved individual interviews with two faculty members (a doctoral-level instructor with more than ten years’ experience teaching counseling skills and a doctoral candidate who has both taken and served as a teaching assistant in the skills class at the institution being studied) and eight randomly selected students from a Master’s-level counselor education cohort. Each participant was interviewed at the beginning and midpoint of the semester, with a third interview taking place roughly a month after the final class session.

In an effort to triangulate the data (i.e., use multiple data-collection methods to increase the trustworthiness of a study; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), the researcher collected
weekly reflective journal essays from each of the participating students, built upon prompts linked to the curriculum.

**Data Collection**

Rossman and Rallis (2003) describe data collection as "a deliberate, conscious, systematic process that details both the products – the data – and the processes of the research activities so that others may understand how the study was performed and can judge its adequacy, strength, and ethics" (p. 179). Qualitative data collection involves a mixture of meticulous recording and detailed reflection. Creswell (2009) offers an overview of the four basic types of qualitative data collection:

- Qualitative observations – through which the researcher notes the activities/behaviors of participants
- Qualitative interviews – in which the interviewer attempts to elicit the perspectives of the research participants
- Qualitative documents – which can involve the collection of public or private documents
- Qualitative audio/visual materials – through which the researcher obtains recordings, tapings, photographs, or other objects pertinent to the study

Data gathering for this study consisted of observations, interviews, document collection, and digital recording.

**Qualitative Observation**

Qualitative observing is often measured along a continuum of participant observation, i.e., being a part of the social setting being studied. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explain that continuum ranging from "observer" at one end (the researcher has
little to no interaction with the people in the study) to "full participant" at the other (the researcher functions as both investigator and as a functioning member of the community being investigated). For the purposes of this phenomenology, the researcher occupied a position between those continuum extremes, namely the "observer as participant." In such instances, the researcher serves primarily as an observer, though the researcher does interact with those being studied (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). According to Creswell (2009), including an observational component in a study allows the researcher first-hand experience with the participants and enables for the recording of information as it occurs, including unique occurrences and unusual aspects of the central phenomenon.

The researcher recorded observations during the lecture portion of the course using the four types of field notes illustrated by Groenewald (2004):

- Observational notes – objective in nature, these will consist or remarks pertaining to "who, what, when, where"
- Theoretical notes – reflections on possible meanings associated with the phenomenon
- Methodological notes – process-focused, these could involve critiques of or recommended changes to the study
- Analytical memos – progress notes, summarizing a day’s work

**Qualitative Interview**

To conduct a qualitative interview, researchers must decide on the nature of the interview and the type of questions. In terms of the former, options include face-to-face interviews (conducted one-on-one, in person), telephone interviews, focus groups, and e-mail interviews. According to Creswell (2009), interviews can be advantageous in that
they provide researchers with information (i.e., views, opinions) that cannot necessarily be observed, offer a forum through which researchers can obtain historical information, and enable the researcher to control the line of questioning.

Such control can be exercised through the style of questioning used by the researcher. Rossman and Rallis (2003) detail three main types of interview styles. In the case of a standardized open-ended interview, researchers possess a list of fixed questions that are delivered to each participant in a previously determined order. Dialogic interviews are more conversational in nature, involving a mutual sharing of information between the researcher and the participant. In the interview guide approach, most typical of qualitative studies, the researcher utilizes categories or topics to explore a participant's worldview, but is open to pursuing issues raised by the participant. "The balance of talk...is in favor of the participant: The researcher poses open-ended questions followed by requests for elaboration; the participant responds with long narratives" (Rossman & Rallis, p. 181).

This study used an interview guide built around four main topics: the role of the counselor, tolerance for ambiguity, appropriate risk-taking, and improvisation. The initial questions posed to students (in both individual and group settings) included the following:

- How do you perceive the role of a counselor?
- What qualities make an effective counselor?
- What is it like for you to be in a position where you don't know "the right" thing to do?
• What thoughts might go through your head if a client were to ask, “So what should I do?” How would you feel?
• When talking about your interactions with others, how would you describe your comfort zone?
• Tell me about a time you moved beyond that comfort zone. What contributed to that experience?
• If I were to tell you I was seeing a therapist, and I described her as “playful,” how might you react?
• Tell me about a relational experience you’ve had that helped you.

Initial questions for the faculty members included:

• How do you perceive the role of a counselor?
• How do you make sense of the concept of creativity?
• How would you describe your impressions of a creativity-infused counseling curriculum?
• In your experience, what is the process of counselor development like at this level?

The complete interview guides can be found in Appendix D.

Each interviewee was asked to commit to three interview sessions, 30 to 60 minutes in length, over the course of the semester. Initial interviews took place within the first two weeks of the semester, with the second set staggered throughout a two- to three-week span following the mid-point, so as to widen the scope of the recorded experiences. The final interviews were conducted four weeks after the final class session; a timeframe
instituted to maximize the participants' opportunity to process their experiences in the course.

**Documentation**

Rossman and Rallis (2003) describe document collection as a "relatively unobtrusive and potentially rich" way of gaining insight into a lived phenomenon (p. 198). Creswell (2009) states this type of data gathering enables a researcher to obtain thoughtful data, as it requires the participants' attention to write or compile them, in the language and words of those involved in the study.

The syllabus for the counseling skills course required students to compose weekly journal entries, two-three pages in length, reflecting internal responses to course materials and activities. Journal prompts were provided by the researcher each week (a full list can be found in Appendix 1), linked to the topics addressed. For example, the first prompt assigned for the course read:

The blocks to creativity displayed in Monday's PowerPoint also represent barriers to effective counseling. Counselors of all ages and experience levels, for example, may struggle with the prospect of failure, the challenge of seeing issues from diverse perspectives, and the idea of being flexible in their practice. After reviewing the PowerPoint (available on Blackboard), please consider: Which of the blocks might pose the greatest challenge to your development as a counselor?

The journal entries were collected by the researcher as part of the material culture.

**Data Analysis**

As explained by Glesne and Peshkin (1992), qualitative data analysis involves the categorization and synthesis of data, the search for patterns among those syntheses, and
the interpretation of the results. Rossman and Rallis (2003) offer a number of suggestions for facilitating analysis. They state researchers should be focused, but open-minded, referring frequently to their conceptual framework and keeping their questions in mind while being accepting of new insights and possibilities. Researchers need to ask analytic questions from the outset of the study, and use them to modify the data-gathering processes based on what the researchers are learning. Additionally, Rossman and Rallis recommend researchers talk with participants, read about the topic being studied (to develop further insight), and utilize creative ways to characterize what is being learned.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher used a version of Hycner’s (1999) phenomenological analysis process, adapted by Groenewald (2004), which preferences the preservation of the integrity of the phenomenon studied.

**Delineation**

The first stage in phenomenological analysis involves delineation, a process that begins with “horizontalizing” each research interview (i.e., regarding every statement as possessing equal value; Moustakas, 1994), followed by the elimination of redundancies through an analysis of literal content, the frequency with which any particular meaning arose, and the circumstances, verbal and nonverbal, associated with its expression (Groenewald, 2004). The process also entails the “bracketing” out of the researcher’s presuppositions in order to reduce (to as great a degree possible) their influence on the expressed experiences of the participants (Groenewald).

**Clustering/Theme Development**

The second phase calls for the analysis of the non-redundant units of meaning in an effort to formulate themes that capture the essence of those units. Patton (2002)
experiments phenomenological research assumes the existence of an essence within a shared experience.

These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon, for example...the essence of being a participant in a particular program. (p.106)

According to Van Manen (1990), an essence describes a phenomenon so that "the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way" (p.39). In the case of this study, the goal was to access students' understandings of what it means to be a counselor in light of their training in creativity, and how teachers perceive counselor development after working from a creativity-infused curriculum.

Summary and Validation

The researcher summarized all the themes distilled during the analysis, providing a broad, systemic perspective. At that point, the researcher engaged in a process known as "member checking" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) within which the participants of the study were presented with a synopsis of the data they provided in an effort to determine whether the essence of their perspectives on the experience had been depicted accurately and adequately.

Composite Theme Extraction and Summary

When the member-checking processes were completed for all the interviews with all the participants, the researcher returned to the thematic analysis, identifying any common themes and taking care to note exceptions. As Groenewald (2004) states, "The
unique or minority voices are important counterpoints to bring out regarding the phenomenon researched” (p. 21). The researcher then composed a final, amalgamated summary of the study.

**Interpretation**

The interpretation of a qualitative study involves transcending the description of data and moving to a realm of storytelling in which researchers combine their experiences and the experiences of the participants to create a story about the central phenomenon that bears meaning for all parties involved (Patton, 1990: Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world (Patton, 2002, p. 480).

Kvale (1996) states three contexts are at work in any interpretation: participants’ understanding (a condensing of the interviewees’ statements), commonsense understanding (a consideration of what the story says about the phenomenon and the participants), and a theoretical understanding. Taken together, these form a “rich detailed story” that can connect the studied experience to “larger issues, theories, or phenomena” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 289).

Qualitative studies rely upon researchers to challenge their own interpretations, charging them to consider alternative storylines that might conflict – or even contradict – the original story. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), the goal is to present a story more plausible and compelling than the alternatives; a story that establishes sound
connections among its assertions, presents documentation in support of those assertions, then draws conclusions that link the story to the extant literature.

The story for this study detailed the value of the overall experience, enriching the perspectives about counselor development, and demonstrating the merit of incorporating creativity into counselor education programs.

Validity and Reliability

According to Flick (2006), the "problem of how to assess qualitative research has not yet been solved" (p. 367). Given the differences in foci and approaches separating quantitative and qualitative research (see introduction to Chapter Three), it would be unreasonable to expect the two methods of study to utilize the same validation procedures. Flick (2006) describes a pair of approaches for developing standards for assessing qualitative studies. The first involves reformulating classical criteria from quantitative research in such a way that it becomes appropriate for use in qualitative work. The second involves the development of criteria developed from one of qualitative research's specific theoretical backgrounds.

Due to the researcher's intent to maximize the relevance of this study's results to the counselor education community, a decision was made to apply qualitatively reformulated classical criteria (e.g., validity and reliability) to the data. Whereas quantitative researchers view reliability as consistency of responses and validity as the ability to draw meaningful and useful inferences from instrument scores, qualitative reliability suggests the researcher's approach is consistent, while qualitative validity suggests a researcher has employed certain procedures intended to gauge the accuracy of a study's findings (Creswell, 2009).
Validity

Creswell (2009) offers eight validity strategies, and recommends researchers use multiple approaches on any study.

- Triangulation of data sources – utilizes different data sources to provide support for established themes
- Member checking – involves allowing participants to review the descriptions and themes contained in the report of their data and allowing them to determine its level of accuracy. (If necessary, the researcher can conduct a follow-up interview to heighten the accuracy of the synthesis.)
- Use of rich, thick description – providing detailed descriptions and multiple perspectives on a phenomenon can add realism to the results of a study.
- Bias clarification – the researcher engages in self-reflection that clarifies how their interpretation of research findings may have been influenced by their personal story.
- Presentation of discrepancies – discussing data that contrasts identified themes can add to overall credibility of the study.
- Prolonged fieldwork – aids the researcher in developing an in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon.
- Peer debriefing – utilizes an individual other than the researcher to review and interpret an account that is part of a qualitative study.
- External auditing – employing an independent investigator (i.e., someone unaffiliated with the researcher or the project) to provide an objective
assessment of the study. Such auditing can take place during the course of a study or after the research has concluded. (pp. 191-192)

As detailed above, the methodology for this study incorporated triangulation of data sources, member checking, thick description, bias clarification, presentation of discrepancies, and prolonged fieldwork. Given this study was conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation, it underwent peer debriefing by members of the dissertation committee.

Reliability

Reliability procedures include rigorously documenting the implementation of the research methodology, checking the transcripts for errors, ensuring consistency in the meaning and application of the themes identified, and utilization of procedures for cross-checking the themes applied to the data collected. Due to the emergent nature of qualitative study, however, such themes cannot be identified until after the interviews have been conducted.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical sensitivity is one of the common principles of good practice that come into play for a qualitative researcher (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Expanding upon that principle, Patton (2002) composed a checklist of ethical issues in qualitative study:

- Explaining purpose – deals with the researcher’s responsibility to communicate the purpose of the inquiry and methods to participants accurately and understandably. For this project, the researcher detailed, verbally and in writing, the intent and manner of implementation for the study during the initial meeting of the class, and prior to the start of the
individual interviews. Said information was posted as a course document on the class Blackboard site.

- Promises and reciprocity – students participating in the individual interviews were given gift cards valued at $15.

- Risk assessment – pertains to the ways, if any, that participation in the research study could put individuals at risk. This study exposed students to the unconventional, e.g., participation in improvisational and risk-taking activities, and thus, could have challenged students’ cognitive meaning-making processes. The researcher balanced such potential disequilibration by providing (and training involved faculty to provide) support to the students.

- Confidentiality – Unless specifically requested otherwise, the names of all students and faculty participating in the study were altered to protect their privacy. Though the name and location of the site was generalized (a CACREP-accredited counseling program at a small university in the southeastern United States), the possibility exists that the names of the instructors could be deduced.

- Informed consent - all participants were provided with an informed consent agreement, which notified them of the purposes and procedures of the research, explained the risk and benefits of the study, detailed the procedures used to protect their confidentiality, and alerted them to both the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to stop participating, without penalty, at any time (Groenewald, 2004).
• Data access and ownership – all observation, interview, and document data was kept under dual-lock (i.e., in a locked box within a locked room/facility) when not in use. Digital data (e.g., transcribed interviews, reflection papers) were stored on two USB flash-drives which were kept under dual-locked conditions. Though participants had the right to remove their data from the study at any time prior to the study’s conclusion, the data remains the property of the researcher.

• Interviewer mental health – the researcher was the sole interviewer in this study, and received weekly supervision from his academic advisor.

• Advice – given the nature of the study (i.e., a dissertation), the researcher turned to the members of his dissertation committee when any issues, ethical or otherwise, arose.

• Ethical versus legal – the researcher in this study was guided by the code of ethics of the American Counseling Association (ACA), as well as the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

**Limitations**

Though this researcher attended to the standards of rigor in developing this methodology (see “Validity and Reliability” above), qualitative research is “rife with ambiguities” (Patton, 2002, p. 242) and, thus, contains limitations. There were limits to the observational component of the study (e.g., the observer may affect the phenomenon in an unknown manner, participants may not behave authentically under observation, the observer’s perspective may influence the data), the interview portion (e.g., distortion due to personal bias, emotional/mental state of the interviewer, recall error, interpersonal
conflict between the researcher and interviewee), and the document collection (e.g., records vary in quality and attention to the assigned prompts; Patton, 2002).
Chapter Four

This chapter details the creation and implementation of a creativity-infused curriculum for an introductory course in counseling skills. It will elaborate upon the generation of the syllabus and teaching interventions used in this study; the training provided to the course instructors and teaching interns, and the enactment of the activities designed to explore the research questions associated with this dissertation.

Course Conceptualization & Study Design

In 2009, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) released a revised set of certification standards for educational programs. These standards speak to common core curricular experiences of which all students educated in CACREP-endorsed institutions must demonstrate knowledge. One of those core components, classified as “Helping Relationships,” charges programs to provide students with:

- an orientation to wellness as a desired counseling goal
- an understanding of counselor characteristics/behaviors that influence helping processes
- essential interviewing and counseling skills
- an understanding of counseling theories that aids in both the conceptualization of client presentation and the selection of appropriate counseling interventions, enabling them to begin developing a personal model of counseling (CACREP, 2009)

Traditionally, programs utilize a pair of introductory courses – “Introduction to Counseling Skills” and “Theories of Counseling” – to address these requirements; an
assertion that holds true at the institution at which this dissertation study was conducted. With that in mind, the process of infusing creativity in a counselor education curriculum began by examining the pre-existing syllabi for both courses. Though the required theories course at the investigated institution does cover a number of theoretical orientations that utilize aspects of creativity (e.g., Gestalt, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, Narrative Therapy), the syllabus fails to directly address the creative aspects of counseling and/or examine creativity as an approach to therapeutic work. These findings prompted the researcher to include a creativity-centered theoretical component in the design of this study.

The extant syllabus for the techniques course overlooked the role of creativity in the therapeutic relationship and failed to specifically mention the elements of creative thought (e.g., tolerance for ambiguity, appropriate risk-taking, improvisation) identified in the literature as being key to the therapeutic process. However, the syllabus did reference “immediacy,” one of the areas routinely associated with risk taking among counselors, and allocated time to aid students in the development of a personal style of counseling. Given the existence of those components, the combination of didactic and experiential aspects of the course, and the opportunity provided to incorporate creativity training into the actualization of the aforementioned CACREP mandates, the researcher opted to focus this study on the introductory counseling skills course.

Syllabus

The redesign of the syllabus began with the addition of the following to the “Course Description”: 

...
This course will emphasize the creative processes associated with counseling, and has been designed to build students' confidence by introducing them to methods for innovation and problem solving and providing structured academic experiences that will enable students to develop their abilities to use those methods. This course is not specifically designed to "make students more creative"; rather, it will provide students with an understanding of what it takes to engender a creative environment, which can foster creativity and innovation.

Additional modifications included the incorporation of a second text (i.e., O'Hanlon & Beadle's *A Guide to Possibility Land: Fifty-One Methods for Doing Brief, Respectful Therapy*) and three new assignments. The first was the Idea Pad (or "I-Pad"), modified from a concept set forth by Matson (1996) to aid students in the generation of a creative counseling resource. Students were required to make three entries into the I-Pad per week, noting ideas/thoughts related to counseling (e.g., portrayals of counseling in the media, ideas for interventions, interesting metaphors), risks taken (e.g., efforts to stretch one's comfort zone), or quotations that could prove helpful in interactions with clients. Each entry was to be accompanied by an explanation of the entry's relevance to counseling. The second assignment required students to transcribe three counseling sessions conducted throughout the semester (i.e., a baseline transcript at the beginning of the semester, a midterm transcription, and a final transcript). Each transcript was to include an identification of the counseling skills being used, as well as a self-assessment of performance. The third new assignment asked the students to create and present their own counseling interventions, based on a series of "therapeutic themes" identified by the
students throughout the semester. Detailed examples of each of the new assignments were provided to all students via the course’s Blackboard site.

Teaching Interventions

To facilitate the infusion of creativity within the designated course, the researcher devised a packet of 29 interventions, which were provided to the course instructors for use during designated class periods. Based on the format established by Williams (1970) and involving a mix of activities both new and modified (Efran, 2008; Lawrence, 2010a, 2010b; Matson, 1996; Williams, 1970), the interventions included notations pertaining to targeted skills (e.g., risk-taking, flexible thinking, curiosity) and strategies applied (e.g., provocative questions, visualization, intuitive expression). Each intervention could include multiple skills and strategies. Of the 29 activities produced, 12 highlighted appropriate risk taking, 11 focused on improvisational abilities (flexible thinking, originality), and 10 emphasized tolerance for ambiguity. (A complete list of the interventions can be found in Appendix I.) Along with the designated intent/strategies, the write-up for each intervention supplied detailed instructions for the activity, as well as recommended processing questions intended to link the intervention to the lesson topic (as identified by the syllabus). Examples of the interventions presented to the class follow:

**Intervention: The Key to Good Listening** (modified from Efran, 2008)

- Encourage: Fluent Thinking, Risk-Taking
- Strategies: Provocative Questions, Tolerance for Ambiguity
This intervention has been used with counselors, counselor educators, supervisors and teachers to shed light on the deceptive capacity of language and to demonstrate the importance of asking for clarification.

After asking the students to take out a dollar bill (or handing out such bills), the instructors will challenge the students by saying, "Look at the front of the bill. I want you to find the small key." [Pause] "Please raise your hand when you’ve found the small key." If people are having trouble, allow other students to help them. Then, say "Now that you’ve found the small key on the front of the bill, I want you to flip it over and find the large one." [You MUST say "the large one."]

The students may struggle, as there is no key on the other side of the bill, though there certainly is a "large ONE."

Processing Questions: What were you searching for? What made you think you should have been searching for that? How might this situation have been avoided? What kept you from seeking clarification? How might you use this lesson with clients (or students)?

**Intervention: The One-Word Therapist**

- Encourage: Originality, Curiosity

- Strategies: Provocative Questions, Intuitive Expression

Instructors will tell of a client who would only utter one-word responses to questions, and explain how they turned the client’s monosyllabic approach to therapy into a training game. "Using one word responses kind of looks like fun. I wonder if I could do that as a therapist – spend an entire hour working productively with a client while only using one-word replies. I’ve got ‘who,’ ‘when,’ ‘why,’ ‘how,’ ‘because,’ ‘and,’
and...well, I’m sure I could come up with others. What do you say? Would you be willing to test my skills?” Instructors will model the experience, then students will break into small groups and engage in brief (<5 minute, one-word exchanges).

**Intervention: Two-and-a-Half Counselors**

- Encourage: Risk-Taking, Originality, Elaboration
- Strategies: Evaluate Situations, Organized Random Search, Visualization

The students will play “therapist to the stars.” After taking out paper and pen (or laptop), they will be asked to role-play the part of a therapist, summarizing excerpts from a televised interview with actor Charlie Sheen. Available here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5aSa4tmVNM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5aSa4tmVNM)

Processing Questions: What lessons might we learn from an activity like this? What might it tell us about summarizing? How might it feel to be faced with a “client” whose remarks seem non-linear (and possibly irrational)? How might you respond under such conditions?

**Intervention: Left Field**

- Encourage: Flexible Thinking
- Strategies: Provocative Questions, Creative Listening Skill

In an effort to introduce the class to the use of unusual questions to challenge ways of thought, the instructors will tell students about a technique in social psychology known as “the pique.” Researchers studying it conducted a pair of experiments in which they had students play the role of panhandlers, asking passersby for money. During the first experiment, the students asked questions like “Can you spare any change?” or “Do
you have a quarter?” During the second experiment, the students asked “Can you spare 17 cents?” or “Do you have 33 cents you could give me?” Three-quarters of the passersby in the second experiment gave the students money, whereas less than half the people in the first experiment responded.

Process questions: Why might that be the case? How would you describe the pique technique? What might its purpose be? [Asking unusual questions to bypass automatic resistance.] In what ways could we incorporate this into counseling? What purpose might asking unusual questions serve? What might we need to consider when constructing/using them?

The instructors will then show a video clip of a brief therapeutic interaction, and ask the students to “Think of an unusual question you might like to ask this client.”

Intervention: The Wheel

- Encourage: Flexible Thinking
- Strategies: Provocative Questions, Creative Listening Skill

Building upon Left Field, instructors can tell a story about a colleague who used to work at a carnival, running an attraction called “The Wheel.” Customers would walk up to the booth and hear this:

“Welcome to The Wheel. Here’s how it works. You give me a topic. Any topic you’d like. Preferably something you’re an expert about. Then I’ll ask you a question about your topic. If you get the question right, you get to spin the wheel and win one of the fabulous prizes listed on it. If you get it wrong, you can still spin...IF you do a physical challenge.”
The instructors would then wonder, “What kinds of questions do you think The Wheel worker had to ask? What qualities did they need to have?” [They needed to be topical, but unusual, looking at the topic from a different perspective. They also needed to be delivered confidently.] The instructors would follow the discussion by engaging the students in the game. “Okay, so if I come up to you and say, ‘My topic is botany,’ what questions might you ask to stump me?” [Questions could be “What’s my favorite flower? Who wrote the best-selling botanical book of all time?”]

‘My topic is my son.’ [Possible questions: “What did your son get on his most recent math test?” “What was your son’s third-period class in high school?”]

‘My topic is Star Wars.’ [Possible questions: “Who was the key grip for the first film?” “What was Luke Skywalker called in the film when it was dubbed for release in Asia?”]

‘My topic is me.’ [Possible questions: “How many bones do you have in your body?” “What’s the name of the nerve that allows you to move your little finger?”]

Processing: What was it like to participate in the game? How did you come up with the questions? How might this exercise relate to counseling? [Questions can help people look at things from alternate – and possibly very unexpected – perspectives.] How might it feel to walk up to the booth, and get hit with a question like this? In what ways might you use such an activity with clients?

**Intervention: Parts of a Whole**

- Encourage: Flexible Thinking, Complexity

- Strategies: Tolerance for Ambiguity, Skills of Search, Evaluate Situations
Instructors will break the class into groups. Each group will be assigned a particular microskill learned in the class (e.g., minimal encourager, paraphrase, reflection of meaning, confrontation) and asked to respond to a clip utilizing that specific skill. The groups will cycle through the microskills until they’re all covered.

Processing questions: What did you notice while participating in this activity? Which of the microskills seems to offer the biggest challenges for you, personally? To what do you attribute that? How does it feel to use them now, compared to earlier in the semester?

Reflective Journals

Following the completion of each class period, the instructors posted a prompt to the course’s Blackboard site. Linked to the creativity concepts/teaching interventions utilized in class, the prompts were used to guide students’ weekly journaling assignments. (For a complete list, see Appendix I.) As explained in the syllabus, the journals were intended to help students “focus on their internal responses to engaging in the experiential activities, demonstrating their reflection on the many issues involved in building strong helping relationships while incorporating personal style in a professional, authentic, and caring manner.” Examples of the prompts assigned include:

Prompt: Week 2. According to Matson (1996), people use résumés to tell others their professional stories. In reality, it may be more accurate to suggest people use résumés to tell employers one side of their stories. Résumés traditionally serve as vehicles for people to communicate their greatest accomplishments, without addressing any of the missteps they may have made. Matson (1996) suggests that behind every
successful individual is a failure résumé, which indicates their author's individual risk-taking style and the manner in which they handle failure.

For this reflection, please compose your own Failure Résumé. Include your two biggest successes, your two biggest failures, and a paragraph addressing the way you view risk taking. Then consider possible connections between those failures and successes. How might your failures relate to your accomplishments, and vice versa? How have your missteps (and your successes) influenced your subsequent decisions and actions?

**Prompt: Week 3.** Write a one-page essay on what it is like to be a person with a different racial/ethnic/cultural background (or other nature of differentness). For example, if you are a White American, what is it like to be African American? If you are African American, what is it like to be Asian American? If you are 25 years old, what is it like to be 80 years old? If you have your hearing, what is it like to be deaf? Then share your essay with someone of the background you wrote about, and write another one-page essay describing that experience for you.

Imagine the above scenario was presented as your journal reflection this week. How would you have responded to it? What reactions might that assignment have triggered? What might your reactions tell you about your perceptions and understandings of different others? What difference would have been most uncomfortable for you to write about? Why?

**Prompt: Week 8.** Reflect on your time as a client during this week's small group experience. Then, for your journal entry, please "continue" the session, casting yourself in both the role of the client and the counselor. Consider:
• What discrepancies do you notice within yourself?
• To what lengths do you go to hide (or excuse) them?
• How would you most effectively confront those discrepancies?
• What would it feel like to face those challenges?
• How might this experience impact the confrontations you offer your future clients?

**Prompt: Week 10.** A Rube Goldberg machine is a mechanism that performs a very simple task in an exceedingly complex fashion. Considering the specific population with which you’ll be working, please describe a situation (or situations) in which your clients might employ the essence of a Rube Goldberg machine (deliberately or otherwise) in their interactions with you.

• Why might they do so?
• How might you respond?
• What approaches, techniques and/or theories might you use to help a client in such a situation?
• How could addressing the overcomplifications aid in goal-setting?

The journals were sent to the course’s doctoral-level teaching interns, who subsequently provided the students with feedback in the form of developmentally themed processing questions. As detailed by Griffith and Frieden (2000), the teaching interns were instructed to encourage students to move beyond superficial descriptions of events and explore the themes and patterns associated with the assigned prompts. According to Griffith and Frieden, writing about learning experiences in such a way can familiarize
students with critical thinking processes, and may help foster a more-advanced level of self-awareness.

**Instructor Training**

According to Davis (2011), many of the barriers to creativity result from learning. More specifically, he states “everyone is born creative, but early years of social pressures at home, at school, and in the community destroy lively imaginations and promote conformity” (p. 115). Heeding Davis’ message— and building upon suggestions by Costa (2001), Starko (2004), and Yun Dai and Shen (2008), among others— the dissertation researcher met with the instructors involved in the study one month prior to the start of the semester to provide training in developing and maintaining a creative classroom.

The training began with an overview of questioning patterns, reminding the instructors of the value of disequilibration in promoting cognitive growth (Costa, 2001). To foster such development, Costa (2001) states questions should: be invitational, engage students’ cognitive operations at various levels of complexity, and address content (internal and external) relevant to the students. In addition, the instructors were introduced to a number of teacher response behaviors (e.g., pausing after asking questions, accepting students’ answers without judgment, praising outside-the-box thinking, clarifying, empathizing) that contribute to effective learning environments (Costa, 2001). By paying attention to these elements, Yun Dai and Shen (2008) suggest instructors can encourage a spirit of exploration within the classroom— promoting critical thinking, prompting reasonable risk taking, and providing “an experience of knowing rather than merely transmit[ting] knowledge as a product” (p. 89).
The researcher also provided tutoring on the theoretical underpinnings of creativity, utilizing a number of journal articles (Carson & Becker, 2004; Dattilio, 2006; Kottler & Hecker, 2002; Hecker & Kottler, 2002; Turock, 1980) to extend the instructors' understanding of the relationship between creativity and counseling. The instructors received and reviewed the teaching intervention packet designed for the study, and collaborated with the researcher in the development of a PowerPoint presentation on creativity for use in the initial class meeting. The researcher met with the instructors after each class to review the interventions used and to demonstrate and answer questions about the interventions scheduled for the following week.

In addition, the researcher and one of the instructors met with the doctoral teaching interns to outline the format of the class, expose them to the goals of the course/dissertation study, and apprise them of their expectations (e.g., conducting the experiential portion of the course, providing weekly written feedback to the students' journals).

Semester Breakdown

Of the 29 interventions designed for the course, seven were removed due to lack of time during the didactic portion of class (as a result of extended processing, student questions, etc.), and of those, one was repurposed as a journal prompt. Additionally, the instructors devised a creative intervention of their own and utilized it to complement one of the activities provided (i.e., Glass Houses), and the students (N=29) each described and enacted their own counseling intervention. In all, students were exposed to 52 creative counseling interventions, as well as the associated journal prompts, additional
reading materials linking creativity and counseling (Kottler & Hecker, 2002; Turock, 1980), and the "creativity theory" PowerPoint presentation.
Chapter Five

The purpose of this research study was to explore participants’ lived experiences of a creativity-infused curriculum for an introductory counseling techniques course. Employing a phenomenological strategy of inquiry, this qualitative analysis sought to understand the ways the curriculum informed participants’ perspectives of counseling and the role of a counselor.

This chapter begins with an individual analysis of the ten participants in the study, including an examination of the three interviews conducted with each participant and a presentation of individual case themes. The collective exploration of those individual themes will then be detailed in a cross-case analysis, which led to the emergence of two cross-case themes: The Art of Engagement (Counselor as Guide) and Imaginational Comprehension (Counselor as Adapter).

Individual Case Analysis

Each case presentation includes a brief biographical overview, detailing demographic information as well as historical data pertaining to the individual’s impetus for pursuing a career in counseling. An analysis of each of the participants’ three interviews follows, terminating in a summary of themes that manifested throughout the interview process.

Ann (Marriage, Family, & Couples Counseling)

Ann is a 28-year old Caucasian female from the Midwest. Having grown up in what she describes as a “very poor” community, Ann was very much involved in charity work throughout her youth, volunteering at food banks, getting involved in prison ministry, and engaging in charity walks for various causes. However, after earning a
Master’s degree in the physical sciences and starting a family, Ann had little time to engage in acts of service, which she says left “kind of a hole” in her life. “I was really missing that opportunity to help people,” she states, “to be a part of the community.”

Life in the Southeast has represented something of a struggle for her. “My mom used to say you could sit me in a room with ten people who didn’t speak my language and in 20 minutes I’d be friends with them all. Back home I just love everybody. I love everything. I am crazy. I’ll go skydiving. It’s like ‘New experience? Let’s do it!’ I don’t get embarrassed easily. I do stupid things all the time. I say, ‘Okay that was dumb,’ and then move on. Since I’ve come here, that’s changed a bit. I’m a little more self-conscious, a little more worried about people judging me, because I feel like I’ve gotten that a lot since coming here.”

That culture clash, combined with the loss of service work, left Ann feeling “disconnected” from her roots. Joining the Marriage, Family, & Couples Counseling Program was – to some extent – a way to reclaim herself, providing her with an opportunity to put her outgoing nature, her natural curiosity, and even her scientific knowledge to good use. Understanding chemical/biochemical responses and physiology offers Ann another perspective on people’s feelings and behaviors. “The biological perspective… it makes people make more sense.”

**Interview 1.** Ann began the initial interview describing her previous experience with counseling, which tended to be more directive in nature. Early in her first semester, Ann recognized the type of counseling set forth in this program sought to help clients figure things out for themselves. The counselor serves less as a problem-solver, and more as a guide. When discussing the characteristics of a counselor, she identified: an ability to
listen, patience, ability to understand the uniqueness of people, flexibility, and good perceptive skills. She stated it’s important for a counselor to be able to “to resist drawing boxes.”

At the outset, she explained she’s more comfortable with uniqueness than conformity, and stated that the almost homogeneous aspect of Williamsburg society proved particularly challenging to her.

Though she’s a scientist, Ann expressed she often listens to her intuition when interacting with others, that she’s comfortable with “going with her gut.” Despite that, she referenced a discomfort with not yet knowing how a therapist “should” operate in a counseling session. Ann shared several questions about the ways a counselor might serve as a guide, stating she wasn’t yet certain how to turn things back onto the client so they can come to their own solutions – “I wouldn’t know a way to [do] that supportively. I don’t know if that would feel like a rejection or a ‘Hey, you’re on your own’” – and didn’t yet know how to empower clients to enable them to handle the challenge/confrontation she, as a counselor, might offer.

Aspects like creativity, humor, playfulness were initially seen as okay “as long as I like I was taken seriously – not feeling patronized or talked down to.”

**Interview 2.** Ann focused more on the nature of the counseling relationship, and her role in it, e.g., ways Ann might help clients identify and address their own needs, rather than exploring what she herself is curious about. Along similar lines, she recognized the need to move beyond the evaluative role she’s developed as a professor and be more present.
Ann recognized the experiential component of the course as an arena for such
development, but acknowledged struggling somewhat with what she deemed the
artificiality of the small group sessions. “When we’re role playing, it’s not genuine. I
can’t ‘feel’ people and it makes it very hard to get a good picture of what’s going on.”

Though she admits a concrete approach to counseling could be “easier” (and play
to her scientific training), Ann said she’s developed a heightened appreciation for the
counselor-client working alliance and realized that takes precedence. When
conceptualizing family counseling, for example, Ann stated, “My sense is that you would
probably just have to make everyone feel validated first and then get them working
together, get them talking to each other. Once that is established, you can move on to
more concrete [approaches].”

The uncertainty that’s been with her since the beginning of the semester had, by
this point, become more specific in nature, and she explained it now surrounded her
ability to ascertain a client’s readiness for therapeutic work. “If somebody is not ready to
look at themselves and you try to force them you are just going to destroy the counseling
process.” At the same time, she stated “I am just a little uncomfortable with being
completely hands off and just reflecting.”

Near the semester’s end, Ann reiterated her excitement about working as a
counselor. Though her studies have challenged the counseling experiences she’s had in
her own life (“I have not seen this out in the real world”), a challenge that can be “a little”
overwhelming and confusing, Ann maintains “I definitely still want to be doing this. For
sure.” Though she has frustrations with the class and retains some measure of uncertainty
as to what the end of her path will look like, Ann admits her confidence is growing, and that she's enjoying the educational experience. “This feels good.”

Interview 3. When describing the attributes of a counselor, Ann nuanced her descriptions to expand upon each. She listed:

- Empathy: “I think it’s really important – in fact, I think it’s critical - but also at the same time a healthy detachment. You don’t want to get too involved. But it is important to really, I think, understand where your clients are coming from and why they might be acting in a particular way or doing things that they’re doing. A standpoint of compassion and an attempt at understanding ‘negative’ behaviors should be the starting point, not judgment.”

- Respect: “Even if you maybe don’t like your client, it’s still very important to respect them as a person and always be professional and treat them professionally. I think then if it gets to a point where you just really can’t deal with a client then you refer them on before it gets bad.”

- Thoughtfulness/Reflection: “In everyday life...when we’re trying to figure things out, we often get the answers when they’re on the back burner. We don’t really get the answers right away. You kind of marinate on them for a while and when you come back to them later and think about them, everything seems clearer. The ability to put down some issue that your client might be dealing with and then come back to it a little bit later before your next session or something like that would be very helpful.”
As for her own development, Ann said she found validation for some of the communication skills she’s used throughout her life, and her experiences in the class have reinforced her notion that she needs more patience. She recognized an ability to flex to meet unexpected situations, to think on her feet and avoid getting stuck on her own ideas. “I would have a goal. I would have a framework for how I’m going to get to that goal. But if it’s very clear that the client either needs to go a different way or just will not go your way, then I’ll try something else, try to work with them where they are.”

In terms of creativity, Ann acknowledges it plays a role in counseling in that each therapeutic situation is going to be unique. “You’re building a new relationship each time...a new method of therapy each time, to some extent. It might look really close to the last one that you did but it is going to be unique in some way, if you’re doing it effectively. So there has always got to be some sort of creativity in what you’re doing if you really are paying attention to your client. Every single person on this planet is different. Identical twins have the exact same genetics but they have a different environment to some extent or another. You know they might have the same parents, they might have the same classes but they’re going to have different friends, they’re going to have things that make them their own person and you need to be attuned to that. It really is kind of coming up with a unique kind of therapy for each family or person that comes in. So you definitely have to be creative in that.”

In discussing the notion of ambiguity, Ann linked counseling to her scientific past: “We say that evolution is not random, but it is directionless. I think that’s kind of how people behave too. It’s not random. You’re definitely taking things into account, but
it's more of instinct and survival. Survival is a direction, but it's not in that 'survival' going to be different for everybody.

"I think sometimes we see something maybe forty percent of the time - maybe even only thirty percent - but because we see it in a group of people, we start to think, 'Oh this is right,' because it stands out, because you've got more than one person or more than one family doing it. But then we forget that maybe the other sixty, seventy percent of people, they're all doing their own thing. So if the majority of people are doing their own thing, we can't just throw that out. We can't just say that, 'Well, this thirty percent are right because they're all doing the same thing.' And, so I think that that actually would be very helpful to me to keep from getting stuck on patterns."

As for the notion of there being a "right or wrong" in counseling, Ann stated, "The right thing is what makes people happier and healthier, whatever that is...As long as you are giving your best effort to try to help and try to follow the client's goals, not your own, then I guess that's probably the right thing - even if you get it wrong."

Though Ann assents to the importance of techniques, stating counselors need to have a good understanding of them, she states no technique is as important as being present/being yourself. "Ultimately, the rapport...the relationship...is more important than the techniques."

In summation, she concluded: "Psychology...how people interact...why people do what they do...is something people have been trying to figure out since the dawn of time. We're still trying to figure it out. So in that light, it's like 'How do you counsel somebody?' There's no good answer to that, no class you can take on that. I think that
emphasizing being yourself and just trying to do the best job that you can with what you have is important, and I like that.”

Individual thematic summary. As evidenced by the interviews, Ann moved from a more self-focused perspective of counseling, one that involved a struggle to choose between directive and non-directive tactics, to more of an adaptive, client-centered approach. The latter was characterized by tolerance for ambiguity and recognition of the need to adjust to each client’s individual situation. Throughout the interview process, Ann spoke of the counselor as a “guide” and stressed the need to develop a working alliance. As the semester extended on, though, she expanded her perception of the counselor’s role as a guide to include the importance of being authentic and present.

Brian (Community & Addictions)

Brian is a 25-year-old Caucasian male, studying in the Community & Addictions track. His interest in the field of counseling arose as the result of a personal journey marked by various health-related issues. Throughout Brian’s youth, his mother fought multiple battles with cancer (brain, lung, and pancreatic). Though her cancers went into remission, Brian explained they altered his mother’s mental acuity – though she remained loving, he said she became “very forgetful.” Those changes coincided with the adolescence of his older sister, who – according to Brian – “suffered depression and drank a lot of alcohol.” Though he wouldn’t dub her an addict, Brian said he “saw some of the things that she was doing that weren’t really healthy. She escaped a lot of potentially life-threatening incidents.”
From a more personalized perspective, Brian was born with a form of cerebral palsy that affects motor coordination and muscle strength on his right side. "Relatively speaking," he explained, "I’m more well-off than other people with CP, so I’m grateful, but growing up in social situations... it was tough." As a result, Brian admitted he’s experienced some self-consciousness, "constantly thinking about how other people were viewing me." College proved particularly difficult in that regard, a period of time further complicated by the fact that, as Brian said, "a lot of my friends got addicted to cocaine."

In the midst of those hardships, Brian began exploring the ways (and possible reasons) people turn to substances – an investigation that’s become an avocation. "That’s why I wanted to come into counseling in general, but addictions counseling specifically, because I’m interested in how an addiction affects the individual."

**Interview 1.** Brian explained a counselor’s role involves encouragement and the fostering of self-advocacy and self-esteem – guiding people through difficult times in their lives. His initial assessment of the qualities essential for a counselor included empathy, congruence/authenticity, unconditional positive regard, an appreciation for and knowledge of multiculturalism/diversity, as well as active listening skills.

At the outset of the semester, Brian acknowledged feeling self-conscious in his role as a counselor – a feeling he learned to recognize as a result of the aforementioned life experiences. Such feelings can be seen in his discussion of ambiguity in counseling, specifically in not knowing what’s right: "I’m afraid of those non-verbal things that may create some kind of damage to the relationship immediately. But, I’m also afraid that – and this is another fear of mine – that something I do or something I say that’s incorrect may negatively affect someone else’s life. And, that’s a big responsibility."
Simultaneously, though, he acknowledges the immense variability that exists in humanity: “I don’t think anyone knows all that there is to know about counseling and psychology...it’s interesting and fascinating but at the same time, it’s scary...You can have one person go to three different counselors with the same issue and get five different opinions.”

Brian has training in Motivational Interviewing, and is familiar with the concept of not giving advice – of allowing the client to draw their own conclusions, based on evidence the counselor may aid in bringing to light. Such knowledge/experience complicated Brian’s early counseling situations, however, as it added to his “background noise,” especially when practicing his skills during small group sessions. “My comfort zone is getting over that hurdle of worrying about what other people think of me, worrying about what I’m saying out loud, whether or not it’s being viewed or perceived as unintelligent. Even though I don’t care because I know that I’m not – it’s just there. I keep thinking about it. Because sometimes, actually most of the time, my brain goes faster than my mouth...”

“I have this fear of being viewed as unintelligent. I know that I’m not but I know sometimes that what I say may be off mark or may be misinterpreted or interpreted differently than what I had meant and that creates like a little bit of self-conscious fear in my own self.”

Brian recognizes the importance of relationship, and awareness within the working alliance. “I like to feel out situations, observe, get vibes from others, read and assess the situation,” then respond accordingly.
Though he acknowledges the potential value of humor as an ice-breaker, Brian expressed reservations about using it within sessions, depending on the context.

**Interview 2.** Brian discussed his biggest challenge – remaining present. As he explained, “Sometimes I can get ahead of myself and not really focus as much about what I’m going to say next before the client even responds to my previous question. Be in the moment, really focus on listening to what my client is saying, then responding to that rather than having an already preconceived reflection based upon what I think they’re going to say. So part of it is being mentally present and focused and calm, and part of it is also matching my tone of voice with the situation that they’re in so that it’s more inviting, more comfortable – the eye contact, the posture and so forth. Sometimes I use humor when it’s appropriate to ease the tension a little bit.”

Brian is aware of his tendency to engage in long – and sometimes excessively long – reflections with clients. He attributes that behavior to a pair of factors: first, he wants to ensure he’s not putting words in his client’s mouth (i.e., make sure he’s accurately capturing their experience); second, his habit of generating – and then getting caught up in - mental chatter. Clients who access deep emotions are in a vulnerable state, and he’s “afraid to say something in that moment that would just turn them off to the process and the relationship that we built.”

He stated: “It’s like a battle in my mind that I personally want to make sure I’m saying everything in the right way that doesn’t offend my client, it doesn’t create any kind of judgmental tone... It’s something I’ve been working on though. So that’s – I think that’s important for me to recognize but it’s also important for me to recognize that sometimes it’s still there.”
Brian also volunteered that he gets “nervous” when pushed outside his comfort zone as a counselor. Though he acknowledges struggling with the “feeling of anxiety that you’re not doing the right thing now, like a professional counselor would do,” he demonstrates a sense of perspective, even resiliency, telling himself “It’s okay because you’re not supposed to be a professional yet. You’re training...Being in that moment and experiencing those anxieties and that tension is bad. I don’t feel good about myself. After I process it, though, I begin to feel more comfortable with the situation and what I can do to learn from that little hiccup.”

A philosophical thinker, Brian ended the second interview stating he has confidence that – with practice and continued study – he will become “a decent or better professional counselor.” He explains, “I definitely have the passion to be one. I feel like I have the right mindset. I feel like I understand the complexities of being in this profession. I guess the biggest thing is I try and take each specific experience whether it’s practice or in class as educational. I try and learn from it and try to do things a little bit differently as time goes on.

“Being nervous can both be a good thing and a bad thing. Academically, anxiety, stress, and nervousness are motivating factors for me to make sure I’m in the moment.”

**Interview 3.** Following the completion of the semester, Brian stressed the value of empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard within a counseling setting. And though the specifics of the counselor’s role vary, depending on the client with whom the counselor’s interacting, Brian stated it’s essential for a counselor “to make sure that the client knows you’re listening to them, that you’re reacting to what they’re saying in a spontaneous way.”
So what does he feel it takes to be an effective counselor? "The utmost important thing is to put your client's interests and what they're asking for in terms of what they want from therapy ahead of your own and provide them that, whatever that may be.

"What really makes an effective counselor is how the counselor responds to the minute-to-minute interaction in each session and how the counselor's actions are congruent or incongruent with the client's goals. And that is obviously variable. It depends, given the situation. It depends upon the client. It depends on the presenting problem and the theory [the counselor uses], as well."

Brian recognizes the value of utilizing immediacy/risk-taking in the service of a relationship, even if - at the moment - he's not fully comfortably explicitly addressing the situation with a client. Similarly, he observed not every plan implemented by a counselor will succeed; as such, it's of paramount importance that the counselor: A. remain in the moment, and B. stay true to the client's vision/goal. "I have learned that if I am sticking to a plan that I have in my head - a roadmap, so to speak - without adjusting it to what a client is saying, then I'm digging myself into a hole I cannot get out of. The conversation falls flat, I look like a jackass, and it is just not pure...it's not as pure as it could be. And what I mean by pure is, it's not real. It's kind of made up and there's a lot of silence. Silence can be good, but not when the client gets the feeling that the counselor has no idea what he or she is doing.

"So being able to be in the moment, being able to react minute-to-minute to what the client is saying while also focusing on the goals that you set up for the client is something that I have learned is really important. It is something that has really helped
me to be more calm. Not really worrying about what is going to be said during the counseling session actually makes me more comfortable."

His philosophy of counseling remains nondirective, not far removed from the MI school. "I do not want to teach my client what to do. I do not want to tell them what to do. I want to allow them to gain insight as to what they could do in the future that could possibly change things for them. And I want to help them develop motivation to do various things that may help them in the future, regardless of what their problem is."

Brian describes counseling as a creative act, in the sense that every counselor has their own unique personal characteristics, as well as their own style of working. "No two counselors are the same. It is like we talked about that culture of one, you know? And in that way, you can be creative in terms of what works and what does not work for you, what works in terms of your own personal style. Not just counseling, but like how you are in terms of being yourself and integrating other theories and techniques and so forth into that framework of what you are comfortable in working with."

He expounded on the role creativity can play in the counseling relationship, saying a successful working alliance requires creatively implementing treatment strategies or techniques that fit the client’s needs. That is, a counselor needs to be present in the moment, read a situation, then utilize a flexible approach to adapt to meet the client’s needs.

Brian recognized growth, both in terms of his capacity to apply skills and his ability to be present in a counseling session. "[When faced with a situation in which he didn’t know what to say] Brian in the beginning of the semester would have red all over
his face and got really embarrassed, but would have compensated for that by making up something, by going on a long reflection.

"Now, I feel more comfortable and if I do not know what to say, I let silence play out and possibly ask them for some clarification. Something to keep the conversation flowing and to get me more information as to how I could, in the immediate future, make a better reflection or maybe a summary that will tie things together or maybe a summary that will tie things together. Being in the moment and taking a deep breath and not really worrying about that roadmap really has helped me in making sure I am accurately understanding what the client has said."

He evidenced acceptance of ambiguity: "There is probably no right response, but there is a response that, on a spectrum, could be better. There are responses that might be more likely to hurt the therapeutic relationship – those are things you don’t want to say. But in terms of the spectrum of what is better and what is "right," you could say that one may be more right than the other, but neither is an absolute right."

Throughout the course of the interview, Brian kept returning to the notion of being in the moment. "Over the course of the semester, I learned it’s okay to take your time in terms of making an effective reflection versus a not-so-effective reflection, to let silence play out, and really not worry about where you want the session to go. If you worry, worry about what the client’s saying to you and how can you integrate that into helping him or her achieve what they want to achieve."

**Individual thematic summary.** Though he recognized the value of the Rogerian principles of empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard from the outset, Brian’s interviews indicate he expanded his perception of the framework in which they
are used. That is, he moved from the notion of utilizing those principles in basic service of a relationship to the idea of employing them as part of a minute-by-minute process of “being present” with clients, a process that involves flexibility, patience, and courage.

Brian recognized creativity as a way of ensuring a counselor’s relational presence honors the needs of the client, and identified his own resiliency, confidence and acceptance of ambiguity within session, while acknowledging there are areas which, as a professional counselor, he still needs to grow.

Dewey (Instructor)

Dewey, 53, is a doctoral candidate in counselor education at a small university in the southeastern United States. He earned his Master’s degree in Marriage, Family, and Couples Counseling from the same university, after a long career as a pilot, both for the United States military and a variety of private institutions.

Though the class associated with this dissertation represents Dewey’s first as a college-level instructor of record, he has extensive experience with both the course (as former student and a teaching intern) and the role of a trainer. He served as a certified flight instructor for nearly a decade, and has conducted more than a dozen intensive training workshops for helping professionals, on topics ranging from substance abuse to older adult care.

Interview 1. Dewey described a counselor as “a facilitator of a person or of a system’s inner strengths, a mirror against which a family can help reflect the positive things - and the things that might not be so positive - and promote function, however that person defines function.” When discussing the characteristics important for effective counseling, he pointed to the Rogerian principles of authenticity, empathy, and
unconditional positive regard. Beyond those, he stated counselors need an awareness of their own biases/hotspots, as well as the ability to read a client’s situation and flex to meet those situational needs. He stated, “There needs to be a level of thinking – a level of development – that allows for multiple perspectives and is comfortable in the face of ambiguity, differences, and what might seem like competing demands.”

At the beginning of the semester, he observed students were still dealing with the challenges to their expectations of the program, the level of academic rigor, and their efforts to prove they belong to be in the cohort. He acknowledged the need to structure the course to support students through those challenges.

When asked about the topic of creativity, Dewey utilized a flight school analogy to liken it to technique. He explained, “There are standards and there are techniques...The standard is the standard, and if someone has a technique to get them to that standard, you would have no reason to get in the way as long as it is safe and it is effective. You should not teach someone your technique without making it very clear ‘This is my technique. One technique of many.’

‘I equate the creativity to that approach, because it gets away from the very rigid, ‘This-is-what-you-must-do’ approach that almost turns techniques into religion. You know, ‘You must say this, you must say that.’ When I show [students] my own [counseling] videos, I preface it by saying ‘You are going to see lots of close-ended questions, you are going to see all kinds of stuff, techniques that – in the early days of techniques class – you abhorred.’ There is no bad bad; something that wasn’t good before is now okay. The fact is that sometimes close-ended questions work just fine.” Such
sentiments embody Dewey's belief counselors must be able to see different perspectives and, when dealing with clients, recognize different options.

According to Dewey, the key to the students' development into effective counselors is their ability to join with a client or family. He stated he was less concerned with the actual approach students use to engage in that joining (e.g., open- or close-ended questions), preferring to remain hopeful the students will "have some idea of what they are going to be able to do and they have some degree of confidence."

"I hope they use the techniques," he said. "But I think it is far more important that they are able to feel comfortable in the framework of the techniques that exist, that they are able to use them all to join with that client."

**Interview 2.** Dewey validated the students' courage to "engage in the process" associated with counselor education. He offered, "I think they are starting to come to grips with the fact that this is more than a science. We are teaching the artful part of counseling. Before, we pretty much engaged just in the science, the input/output kind of thing...My experience with them is that they are becoming more and more comfortable with the fact that there is a process for things to happen. Counseling is not necessarily something that you can predict."

Having completed half of the semester at the time of the second interview, Dewey reflected upon the attributes he believes the curriculum is trying to promote, identifying empathy, flexibility, an appreciation for multiple viewpoints, and comfort with ambiguity – all of which will serve to move the students away from concrete thought patterns and more toward the realms of the abstract.
Though he felt “somewhat constrained” by the curriculum (“I wanted to be mindful of the validity of the study”), he felt the module fits well with his active, participatory teaching style. “The interventions are great. This is wonderful stuff that can be used in so many different classes.”

Dewey acknowledged the process has been challenging overall, as it represented his first turn as instructor of record at his alma mater. The role wasn’t as informal and free-flowing as he might have hoped, denying him the opportunity to be “more authentic and say, ‘I’m not the expert here. You all are the experts.’”

**Interview 3.** Ultimately, Dewey came to recognize creativity as “the ability to tap one’s resources to come up with novel approaches to routine ideas.” He explained, “Counseling is a creative act because no two people are the same. No two clients are going to be the same. No two concerns are going to be the same. Even the counselor himself is not going to feel the same from day to day. So yes, it is absolutely creative to be able to meet people where they are at. It comes in that real ability to read and flex with a client.”

Admittedly, that viewpoint represented an expansion of perspective for the instructor, who acknowledged that while he had thought of using creativity to enhance the learning process, he’d not previously considered it either in terms of how it might be used in a clinical context or how it might be taught to students. “This was my first exposure to having a real creative focus in any class. Haven’t been associated with any classes in counseling that really stressed how creative the process was. So it has been kind of a new experience. So I can see the role now, I like it. I’ll use many of the activities in the framework of this course for other courses.”
As for his observation of the students' reaction to the curriculum, Dewey said he would like to think it was "more interesting" for the students. "There was a lot more anxiety, I believe, in this class than with the others because of the ambiguity. Because of coming out from the start and saying 'Just let go of some of the conventions you have. Do not worry about taking notes – just plug into the process.' I think that added a little more stress, being the first class, first semester."

That said, Dewey suggests the students have handled the ambiguity and anxiety "quite well." "I believe they really won't learn to appreciate it until they get into practicum, and then it will become clear. I would imagine for many of them, a light may go off and they may say, 'Oh, it really does depend,' 'There isn't one way - I can let myself go, I do not have to worry about being so rigid,' 'I have these techniques I can fall back on.' I think they're going to realize they have more freedom than they think they have."

In an instance of parallel processing, Dewey admitted he felt challenged by the curriculum himself. "I felt very comfortable with the change and the paradigm that we are using to teach this course and stressing the creativity and getting away from the very objective 'check if you did it/It is always right or it is always wrong' approach. [At the same time] I could see what the interventions were, but the processing and getting to exactly how I might use that to put a little bow on the package at the end and really tie everything together...It was just a matter of not giving myself permission to be creative and let go and freewheel a little bit."
In conclusion, Dewey observed the creativity-directed curriculum can be used to promote cognitive development, to “introduce kinds of dissonance to have students get comfortable operating with ambiguity in a profession that is full of ambiguity.”

“I think creativity is a nice way to address that. You don’t say, ‘We are going to make you tolerate ambiguity,’ you say ‘We are going to teach you how to be creative.’ That’s a nice way of saying tolerate ambiguity, right?”

“I like the direction of it. I think it is a real positive direction. I like promoting the more free thinking, not holding people into the lock-step/robotic kind of responses.”

**Individual thematic summary.** In accordance with the intent of the curriculum, Dewey attempted to foster an in-class environment that promoted students’ courage, their ability to engage in improvisation, and their tolerance for the oft-indistinct nature of therapeutic work. Through the lectures, assignments, and experiential activities, he sought to aid students in developing to the point that they realize the client-helper relationship is paramount in counseling. Speaking to his own development, Dewey explained participation in the course challenged his own perspectives on counseling and creativity, which he previously had not considered as a clinical asset. Similarly, he gained an appreciation of the difficulties inherent in freeing oneself from “by-the-book” thinking, recognizing his own self-imposed restrictions as one of the most significant barriers to his performance as an instructor.

**Ginger (Instructor)**

Ginger is a 63-year-old Caucasian woman with more than three decades working in the field of education. She came into this dissertation study with 12 years’ experience teaching the introductory techniques course, and announced she would retire at the end of
the semester. A longtime academic administrator and school counselor, Ginger brings a practical approach to the course, as well as an understanding of the struggles students in the course typically face. She began teaching the class as a co-instructor, working alongside a senior faculty member, and has since become a fixture of the course, guiding it through multiple evolutions to the point she said, “I think we’ve got a pretty good model and delivery system.”

Interview 1. As explained by Ginger, a counselor is an advocate for a client, an agent of change for those with whom they work—“someone who can help people change by helping them come to better self-understanding” (i.e., how their life is working, how they are working, what things are causing their actions). To do so, counselors need to be nonjudgmental, which Ginger stated is not the same thing as being value-free. In addition, counselors need to be able to: establish rapport; think the best of people and help them believe in their best selves; listen well; and approach the world from a position of open-mindedness, excitement, and positivity.

Ginger suggested counseling isn’t so much about problem-solving as it is about seeing positive possibilities. “The power of change...power...does not come from control, it comes from positive energy,” she explained, “When you are talking about interaction between people, positive energy comes from the idea that whole is going to be greater than the sum of the parts. That if you can be positive yourself, if you can model positivism, if you can help others to see positive choices, that the sum of the people working together for life to be better is going to be greater than what either one of them brings to the table.”
In describing ways to create a positive self-experience, Ginger pointed to humor as an extremely helpful tool ("It can diffuse sadness, anger"), but pointed out it must be used delicately. "You have to have trust between people first before you can have humor. You have to be careful about that. What is funny to one person might not be so funny to another."

Ginger admitted she was impressed by the students early in the semester ("They really are coming in with a pretty good sense of how to act in a counseling situation. I will not say listen attentively, but they have a good sense of reflecting, not taking control"), though she acknowledged the experience of the counselor education process must be confusing for them. "I think the program probably feels a little kaleidoscopic to them right now because big things are coming at them, yet in these small pieces. They do not know how these pieces fit together and what the important things are.

"I think the other thing that pertains to our class very well is the idea of getting a tennis lesson after you have been playing tennis for 20 years. Or you're a pretty good high school swimmer and you go to a college team, now they want you to do your breaststroke kick very differently from how you have been doing it. We're making students go back and look at a little piece and how awkward that feels at first. Maybe you are pretty good at this, but you never really analyzed why or what it is you are doing when you actually reflect content, when you actually skillfully help people tease apart feelings that can be complex. We kind of know how to do it, and probably most people are in the program because they already do it.

"But now we are making them look at a skill. It is almost like we are making them do it with their non-favorite hand or something and put it under a microscope. And so it is
very disrupting and I think frustrating. So I think always this part of the class people are very frustrated because they just do not see how all these pieces come together. They feel like we are making them do things with their arms tied behind their back.”

Ginger likened the concept of creativity to the idea of “getting outside your box every once in a while.” Initially, Ginger voiced specific concerns about incorporating creativity into the class, as she feared it might add yet another lens to the students’ already-kaleidoscopic experiences. “Unless we’re always showing how it can relate to the basic things we’re talking about it, it may be yet one more thing like, ‘Oh my God, I have to be creative,’ ‘What is this I-Pad thing?’ or ‘How in the heck does this relate to any of the skills I am trying to learn?’”

However, Ginger also recognized that – in an environment characterized by trust – creativity can play a part in accomplishing any of the goals associated with a counselor’s role. “It is a really important, big idea,” Ginger said. “The need to be creative and take people where they are and find a creative way to help them in the ways that we talked about is very important to the big ideas of being a good counselor.”

Ginger admitted she often utilized creative thinking in her own work with students, employing art, writing, and physical activity to help students create a more positive life experience. “[Counseling] is about results and also being realistic. You are a helper. It is not about you. The client is the person who in the end makes it a success or not. There is a limit to how much good you can do. You do the best you can and you behave professionally and you always try to do better and learn ways of doing better. But you have to be realistic that you cannot control all the parts, and you cannot influence all the outcomes.”
To support that client-focused approach, Ginger referenced literature indicating the client’s perception of the counseling relationship is key to the overall success of the therapeutic process. “Your main job [as a counselor] really is to allow them to have a positive relationship,” she said. “Hopefully some insights come out of that and some possibilities of change. But that is about all you can purport to really manufacture in the long run.”

In the weeks preceding the start of the semester, Ginger sought regular reassurance from her co-instructor and the researcher that the creative curriculum would not obscure the focus of the class and overwhelm the students in the process. “My fear upfront was that creativity would feel like ‘One more thing I had to do’ – as it did to me – rather than ‘Oh, this is part of the way - the lens - counselors use to look out on the world.’” A few weeks after the course began, however, she was jokingly talking about rescinding her then-pending retirement. “It has been a lot of fun to do this class this way, and I am thinking like ‘Next year, we can do this’ and ‘Next year, we can do that.’ There is a part of me that is like ‘Man, I would like to do this again next year.’”

As for creativity, Ginger described it as a very positive and freeing lens to have. “[Students] have to have it introduced, see how it translates to counseling, then not worry about it. It is part of your lens now. It is not one more thing you have to do. You don’t need to prove you can be creative.”

**Interview 2.** Following the first interview (in which Ginger admitted she was pleasantly surprised about the students’ level of skill), the instructor hit highs and lows – or rather, lows and highs – in terms of her belief in the class’ collective capabilities. Following the midterm transcriptions, her confidence took a plunge (“I thought, ‘Oh, my
god. They don’t know how to reflect. It’s halfway through the semester and they’re not reflecting’), only to shoot back up after the submission of the final transcripts. “I said to myself, ‘They’ve got it. The students should feel confident. If they don’t we need to tell them they can feel confident about themselves.’”

In some ways, Ginger attested, imparting confidence was the goal of this dissertation intervention. She viewed the project as trying to give the students confidence in their personal counseling styles, so that when they find themselves in a situation characterized by ambiguity, they can find strength in what they can bring to the context of the session. “Anybody can think outside the box,” she said. “Doing so is part of being professionally prepared to work with different kinds of clients in all kinds of contexts, and to have ways to help yourself be positive and refreshed and not get bogged down and stale and maybe even bitter when you’re not having so much fun anymore.”

Though the course content was, to some extent, modified for the purposes of the dissertation, Ginger suggested it complemented her teaching style quite well. “I really do believe a lot in having students do more the work of teaching,” she laughed. “I don’t believe in PowerPoints.” That’s not to say she finished the semester without any moments of distress. “It was often hard for me to picture how things were going to be. It was a little unnerving to go, ‘God, I have no idea what’s coming back on this.’”

As such, she said teaching the course in this manner forced her to “let go a little.” By trusting herself and trusting her colleagues, creating her own in-class activity and engaging in some of the creative assignments herself, Ginger found herself invigorated by the class. “I had fun. It was challenging...I don’t think it would be an onerous responsibility for anybody to teach this class this way. I think if they’re open to it, they’ll
gain a great deal from it. I certainly think I did, even as someone who doesn’t intend to teach it again. I think there are lessons I’ve learned...it required me to be kind of open-minded about what teaching is all about and different ways teaching can be effective. Coming at your content from a completely different perspective. Thinking big picture and then seeing how your content can work into it.”

**Interview 3.** Looking back over the lessons of the semester, Ginger described creativity as “thinking outside the box.” “Kind of like ground zero budgeting,” she explained, “not just taking what you have done before and doing something incrementally with it, but literally going ground zero and re-thinking what creativity might be. Go at it from a completely different angle. Using all your modalities – head, heart, spirit – to come at a problem you are not seeing. Really approaching problems, courses, issues, client relationships...whatever you’re approaching...from all those angles and seeing which one connects best with the client, then going from there.”

Creativity in counseling, she continued, involves establishing a bond of trust and authenticity with a client within limits of being professional. Then – once that is established – it involves using techniques, methods, and resources from the outside in service of different approaches that can help a client grow in positive ways. “[Working with creativity] certainly broadened my perspective about techniques, and offered ingenious methods of breaking road blocks. It certainly expanded my ideas about how that might be done and how important it is to start thinking about doing that. If you seem to be getting nowhere in a counseling relationship, there’s a lot to try before you give up.”
Though she laughingly restated her plans for retirement, Ginger said the course helped her learn a lot, challenged her to think in ways she hadn’t thought before – and she believed the same held true for the students. “I think the course had the same effect on students that it traditionally had, but in a magnified way...in more dimensions. Having some of that ambiguity and learning to tolerate it, taking a risk and moving forward anyway – these are major, major, major values. Plus, the students walked away with more useful stuff.

“I’ll tell you something that almost hurts my heart when I think about it – the fact graduating students have looked back on their training and said ‘I thought what we learned in Techniques was all we could do.’ We drilled them so thoroughly in the basic skills that they didn’t realize there were any other skills. Oh my goodness. That was a shocker. Again, I think that is a programmatic, rather than a course thing, but we’ve got to fix that. That absolutely has to be fixed. I think an amazing way to do it would be to kind of infuse the whole program with this idea of thinking outside the box. Creating the challenge, but then putting in the support. I think that does happen, but I wonder if it is happening in as thoughtful a way as it could be done. That is an important thing to do.

“I think there was a lot gained in terms of the take-away, very helpful, hands-on stuff. I think it gave everybody confidence that ‘Wow, I don’t have to just read books. I can come up with stuff on my own. I can trust my own judgment.’ I am really glad that, my last time I taught the class, we got to do it a little bit differently. I really learned a lot. Not just for the course, but for life in general and for personal ways of looking at things.”

**Individual thematic summary.** Describing counselors as nonjudgmental agents of change, Ginger emphasized the importance of positivity in the development of a
therapeutic working alliance (i.e., a relationship in which the counselor acts in response to the client’s needs). Though skeptical—even fearful—of the impact of the curriculum’s creativity focus, her willingness to engage in the activities, assignments, and spirit of the course helped her recognize a link between creative processes (e.g., risk-taking, tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility, etc.) and the practice of counseling. In addition to expanding her own perspectives, she stated the class encouraged students to develop personal styles that could enable them to derive strength from their individual strengths, while demonstrating the value of incorporating all aspects of one’s being into the helping relationship.

**Jenna (Clinical Mental Health Counseling)**

Jenna is a 25-year-old female student of Asian/Caucasian descent, enrolled in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. She discovered an interest in psychology in college, and began exploring ways she might pursue further studies. She considered pursuing a Ph.D. in psychology, but—as she stated—“I’m more interested in the actual practice, so that’s why I went with counseling.”

**Interview 1.** At the semester’s inception, Jenna saw a counselor as someone who guides people past the difficulties holding them back, and helps them move their lives toward their desired goals. In aid of that process, counselors need to be empathic and open-minded, utilizing acting listening skills and an ability to assume other perspectives in order to create a safe, nonjudgmental setting for a client.

Jenna admitted the class—specifically, the experiential small group sessions—challenged her to move outside her comfort zone, a challenge she has enjoyed. Though participation in the experiential activities was “awkward at first,” Jenna recognizes the
value of the practice and the controlled environment. She admitted she would “get a little bit nervous” prior to her turn in the counselor’s chair, but once assuming the role felt “fine, because nobody’s judging.”

Early on, Jenna said she could understand the urge to give clients advice (“especially about something you feel strongly about”), but acknowledged she’s more likely to try and invite the client to help solve their own problems. When faced with dilemmas for which there are no “right” answers, Jenna explained she often overanalyzes things – a tendency she would like to overcome. “I have to think quickly and on my feet. I’m hoping my time in the program will help me learn how to trust myself enough to be able to make decisions without having to sit there and think about it.”

Two of the key ingredients for that self-trust is theoretical knowledge – Jenna stated that, the greater her familiarity with a subject, the greater her degree of comfort – and practical experience in said subject (e.g., working in the small groups).

Considering her own experience with the helping process, Jenna discussed a helping relationship with a former professor with whom she would meet to discuss a variety of topics. By assessing her exchanges with that professor, Jenna added to her earlier definition of a counselor’s role – explaining a therapist needs to provide clients with support (“one of the most important things”) and challenge (“you would have to be able to challenge your client in order to get them to change”).

As for creativity, Jenna stated “I don’t think playful and counselor really go together.” She explained: “While I do think that a good and positive relationship is definitely important and you should be able to make someone laugh and smile and not just sit there and be austere, I’m not sure that playful would be the right way to go about
it. I’d probably be wondering, ‘What’s going on here?’ If I’m coming in for a problem, I’d want them to take it seriously.”

**Interview 2.** In the second interview, Jenna said she’s utilized a combination of self-awareness and consideration of her own impact on others to create a “level of comfort” in her interactions with clients. “[At the beginning of the semester] I was just thinking so much about the ‘proper’ way to counsel and I was not letting any of my personality into it.”

She identified immediacy – sensing something is “not quite right” in a session and broaching it with her clients – as one of her ongoing challenges. Jenna said she’s held back by fear – in some instances, a fear of being wrong; in others, a fear of being right and not knowing where to take the conversation afterwards.

“I’m definitely a lot more prepared then I was when I came in,” she explained. “I definitely feel I have learned the really important techniques and I can get through a counseling session, but I know that there are still a lot of things I would not be comfortable with - not wanting to go into something if I cannot handle it. Also, coming at counseling from a theoretical standpoint. I am still not sure how to do that, so that is a problem for me.”

**Interview 3.** Following the end of the semester, Jenna revisited her definition of an effective counselor, describing an empathic individual, a reflective and self-aware listener who can appreciate a client’s perspective and “properly” utilize therapeutic techniques to help them attain their goals. She explained that proper utilization of techniques requires an ability to assess a client’s situation and respond accordingly. “If you try to use them without really understanding, that could cause problems,” Jenna said.
“Especially if you use the techniques just to use them, when it might not necessarily be an appropriate time.”

Jenna’s work throughout the course helped deepen her understanding of counseling – she continues to perceive counselors as guides who help clients figure out their paths – as well as her own development. “I’m more aware that sometimes I don’t want to take certain risks when I need to. It’s important to do that because I’m the type of person who doesn’t like conflict, but I’m sure that’s going to come up and I need to know how to handle it.”

She recognized counseling as a creative act, acknowledging counselors need to be able to improvise. “In other disciplines it’s very straightforward – ‘This is what you do’ and ‘These are the steps that you take,’ where this is more...you’re talking with a person, so it can go any sort of direction. You have to be flexible.” Jenna stated she’s comfortable adapting to “meet” a client, and admitted she’s attained a level of comfort with the ever-present uncertainty that surrounds work as a therapist. “[T]hat’s what life is like,” she laughed. “Everyone’s different.”

She detailed her ability to empathize and create a nonjudgmental atmosphere as her greatest strengths. Jenna stated “techniques are not the be all, end all” of counselor preparation. “It’s important to know them and work from them, but you have to be flexible so if one thing doesn’t work, you can try something else.” In addition, she said the course helped her realize she needs to be aware of her own feelings, which can be beneficial when empathizing with a client to build a relationship.

**Individual thematic summary.** At the semester’s start, Jenna depicted a counselor as an open-minded guide who utilizes perspective-taking and listening skills to
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creative a protective, supporting environment. By its end, she modified that depiction to include combining authentic presence (i.e., bringing oneself into the room) and creative approaches (e.g., improvisation) to deepen the counselor-client relationship. Jenna acknowledged that, early on, she sublimated her personality in pursuit of the idea of a “proper” way of working, and admitted to a fear of both failure and success, noting the latter could raise expectations to levels she was unprepared to meet. Ultimately, she stated the course (specifically, the practical components) helped her develop an appreciation for ambiguity, and brought to light the advantages of continuing to work on her ability to take appropriate risks in session.

John (Community & Addictions)

John, 40, is a Caucasian male who decided to pursue a degree in Community & Addictions Counseling following a career as a professional athlete. A husband and father of two, John’s former profession required he be away from home seven months out of the year. Stating “I could not stand to do it anymore and be away from [my family],” John decided he needed a new profession. His selection of a career in counseling originated in his own recovery from substance abuse. “I had gotten to the point where I was losing everything,” he said. “I’ve been to rock bottom – been some terrible places – and I got sober and I’m just seeing the rewards of it.” Acknowledging he had “a lot of help” getting to that point, assistance that came in the form of counseling and a 12-step program (Alcoholics Anonymous), John expressed a desire to offer support to other addicts, “helping people that are where I was get to where I am now.”

Interview 1. As someone who’s struggled with addiction, John has had both extensive – and varied – experiences with counselors. What he’s taken from those
experiences is the notion that an effective counselor operates as a listener, rather than a director. Counselors make an effort to understand a client’s situation and help a client figure out their own solutions/path.

Doing so requires awareness, authenticity, and honesty. John stated he’s always had an ability to listen to others’ stories and engage in perspective-taking. “I fail at that oftentimes because there are some things I just do not understand...I am going to need to develop a more working knowledge of some of the specific things that people come to me with.” Though he admits he doesn’t like the feeling of being unable to help someone, John believes it’s important to “never speak beyond your experience,” and is not above acknowledging there are situations in which he may require outside assistance.

In situations with which he’s more familiar (e.g., substance use/abuse), John admits he may feel an instinctive pull toward being directive. “The first thing that goes through my head [when faced with an alcoholic seeking help] is I would tell him what to do. That is probably not right.” Should John present such a direct challenge (e.g., “Do not drink), he stated he would likely follow it with a statement of relationship (e.g., “Now it’s our job to figure out how to do that together”) to determine in what direction things might progress.

John stressed the power of honesty in a relationship, a quality he detailed through a pair of anecdotes: “Years ago I attempted suicide. I shot myself with a shotgun, and it was a miracle that it did not kill me. I had put the barrel of the gun in my mouth and it had a light trigger on it. When shooting that gun, I never felt the trigger move without it going off. I was in my parents’ basement and I had the barrel in my mouth and I felt the trigger move. This thought went through my mind that if I shoot myself in the head my
mother’s going to find me and my brains are going to be plastered all over the wall. I did not want that, but I still wanted to die. So I shot myself in the stomach. Blew the whole side of my stomach out. It was a major thing. Probably about four years later, a young girl who was a co-worker of my mother’s daughter took a bunch of pills and she was in the hospital. She wouldn’t leave the hospital because she felt like such a tremendous failure. I told my mother, ‘Tell Mrs. So & So I’ll go and talk to her daughter if she wants.’ I did not have much in common with her. This was a young girl. I went in and sat by her bed in the hospital and we talked and we just talked. We talked for like six hours. I am a guy, I was not anywhere near her situation in life, she was not an alcoholic, she was not anything. But we helped each other so much. I know this because this is what she told her mother.

“I think what that experience did as much as anything is – it was probably one of the first times that I came to value the power of listening, because in that six-hour conversation she probably spoke for 90% of it. The power of just being present. I do not have to have done exactly what somebody else has done to be able to help them.

“I’ll give you another quick example. I used to coach high school lacrosse up in New York and one of our players’ mother drowned in the summer and they were very close. I was driving by his house once and he was sitting on the front porch and he was crying. This was shortly after his mother died. I wanted to go talk to him, I wanted to help him. I just went over and I sat next to him on his front porch and I could not think of anything to say. ‘I’m sorry’ seemed too small and I had not lost a mother. I literally just sat there next to him for an hour and did not say a word. He came up to me about three weeks later and he thanked me and he said how helpful it was and all I did was just sit
next to him. That was a long time ago - one of the first times that I really started to understand the value of being a “We.”

In terms of being creative in a session, John stated it’s context- and client-dependent. To elaborate, he used the story of a professional bass fisherman named Clay Dyer, who was born without lower limbs, no arm on the left side, and a partial arm on the other. John explained Clay refuses to utilize any kind of special equipment. “He does everything with one arm. That is all he’s got... I was at Lake Ouachita in Arkansas getting ready for a tour event, waiting in line and Clay comes rolling up in his wheelchair next to me. I was uncomfortable. It was not as if I was uncomfortable like ‘Holy shit, that guy has got no arms’ because I knew who he was, but there was a tension in the air for some reason. It’s hard to describe. Anyway, the lady hands me some papers and I drop one of them and it goes and it lands right under his wheelchair under the wheel.

“Clay looks at me and says, ‘You want me to give you a hand with that?’ That tension was gone just like that. I was like, ‘This is the world this guy lives in.’ There aren’t enough hours in the day for him. And I got problems. When he said that it was like – boom – the tension was gone. It was...it is pretty amazing. Humbling.”

John believe he has the ability to make a joke with a client, to behave playfully, but – more importantly – “I also think have a pretty good ability to read when it would be appropriate or not.”

**Interview 2.** John acknowledged he has both innate strengths (“I’m pretty approachable. I’m easy to talk to”) and areas in which he needs to improve (“I do too much thinking about what I’m supposed to be saying”). There are times in which he is so concerned with the process that he can miss the actual processing going on.
Practical experiences and practical advice have helped John turn down that background noise. He pointed to an encounter with his group professor in which the instructor asked John, who had been serving as a group leader at the time, “Are you better off digging ten shallow holes or two deep holes?” John took the message to heart. “You can sit in a group with ten people and just talk superficially and bullshit for two hours and then walk out and be like ‘Well, what the hell did we just accomplish?’ I need to be aware of that type of thing.”

John stated a counselor’s job involves trying to get clients to look at things a little differently, to be more open-minded. In some cases, that involves confronting clients’ ways of thinking. John maintained that he doesn’t like being confrontational with clients, but admitted he’s comfortable challenging them. “I like to argue. I’m not going to lie. I can be a confrontational person. But that’s not my goal. My goal isn’t to convince the client of anything. My goal is to hold him accountable and maybe get him thinking.”

The approaches used to get toward that accountability vary, depending on the client. John explained he’ll have to read each situation and adapt to match the client. To such an end, he expressed a need to work on his use of reflections. “From my experience, there is power in reflecting back what a client said and then just being quiet. I’ve had that happen where the counselor’s like, ‘So this is really...’ and I’d sit there and go ‘Shit, I didn’t even think of that.’ It’s definitely something that’s important, but not something that I’ve been doing much of. That’s something I have to work on. That and being more present – just listening when someone’s speaking to me. Listening to what they’re saying and not caring about the technique because if you don’t know what somebody just told you, technique doesn’t mean shit. That’s really what I’m trying to focus on.”
An additional area of targeted growth John identified involved immediacy. Should he lose focus with a client, he recognized that asking for clarification might damage the relationship. “I think if it happened, I would just either just have to ask them to clarify what they said or just move on and hope it wasn’t something important.”

John ended his second session expressing his belief that he’s ready to start working as a counselor. “I think I’ve got a lot to learn, but when I start my practicum I’m going to be totally comfortable sitting down with anybody. But I’m honest enough where if I screw something up, I’m just going to tell them, ‘I screwed up.’ That’s one of the things that I’m going to establish with my clients: ‘Hey, I ain’t perfect, either. I’m just a guy who’s been there.’ But I think I’m ready to start doing it. I’m sure I’m going to step in it plenty of times, and there’s going to be a lot of challenges. Like I said, I have a lot to learn, but ...there are people in my class who are scared to death, and I’m not feeling that.”

Interview 3. When considering the notion of effective counseling, John stated one of the most important elements is the ability to assume a client’s perspective. “Trying to understand the client... where they’re coming from, what they’re dealing with. Getting yourself to that level so you can establish some kind of empathy to work with them. There’s always going to be some kind of disconnect, obviously. But the more broad that disconnect, the more it limits what you can accomplish with a person.”

Reflecting back on the semester, John stated his perception of effective counseling changed considerably. He explained: “What I thought an effective counselor should and would be was based on my perspective as somebody in recovery. Somebody who was all messed up. What I wanted and what I thought an effective counselor would
be and would do. I wanted somebody to fix me and give me answers. What’s changed, and I guess I’ve learned it in this semester through my experiences here, but also in life with my work with people in AA - the longer I stay sober, that’s not what it’s about.

“I remember having counselors and thinking, ‘Just tell me what to do.’ But then when I think about it, that’s not really what I wanted. I didn’t want them to tell me what to do. If somebody was telling me what to do I was going to say, ‘Whatever,’ and roll my eyes. But at the same time I was so lost and messed up in the head and lacked direction, lacked everything, where I felt like I was spinning out of control. I needed somebody to get me back on the tracks. Having somebody that I could really empathize with, somebody that had experience with what I was going through. Or had experience dealing with people with it. Someone who looked at things like there was a collaboration; it was like they were a teammate of mine. ‘What are we going to do about this going forward?’ I guess that was a long way of saying, prior to this semester, I thought that the counselors should be much more directive and authoritative than what I think a really effective counselor is.”

He went on to explain a counselor is someone with whom one explores options. Someone who allows a client to figure out their own values and goals. “A counselor’s role is to help people figure out what the hell they want to do. Deal with any problems that they have and just kind of put it back on the client. ‘What I’m not there to do is solve your problems for you or tell you what to do.’ From my experience, we’ve all got our own road to hoe. If nothing else, coming in to see a counselor will get you a fresh set of eyes, something to put in your arsenal and somebody to work with. Just to work with
you. I think that would be the key for me. I would like to express, ‘I’m just here to work with you.’"

John reiterated his ability to be confrontational (and again admitted he’s comfortable in that role), and admitted his work in the class brought it to his attention that he’s very sensitive to certain issues. Often, issues involving women and children.

“Certain things really just strike a nerve with me. I have to develop a way to curb my emotions and my feelings about it while maintaining the feeling of empathy. I don’t want to become sterile.”

John views experience as a moderating factor in handling ambiguity, and expanded his impressions of the relationship between creativity and counseling.

“[Counseling is] not a black and white thing because it’s not a black and white world. It’s not something that you just learn from a book. It’s not A + B = C, ‘That’s how you become a counselor,’ and ‘That’s what you do.’ There’s a wrench for every nut out there but there’s a gazillion different nuts. You’ve got to be able to think outside the box and you’ve got to be able to do things tailored to the client.

“I read an article about this guy who does these outdoor things. He takes clients kayaking and rock climbing and all this shit. And I was like ‘That’s cool, man, that’s thinking outside the box.’ People think of counseling as just sitting there, somebody holding a clipboard, and this guy’s going rock climbing with them. ‘Counseling is creative’ probably means just to be totally open-minded and be flexible.”

He recalled one of his own experiences with creative counseling: “I remember being in rehab and they said, ‘We’re going to make gingerbread houses tonight.’ Excuse my language, but I was like, ‘What the fuck. What do you mean we’re going to be
building gingerbread houses? That’s the stupidest thing I ever heard in my life.’ I was in rehab with one of the New York Jets, he was a lineman and he’s standing next to me and he was like 350 pounds and he looks at me and we look at each other and we’re like, ‘Is she serious? We’re all real men. Going to make gingerbread houses? The dumbest thing ever.’ Everybody was just rolling their eyes. So we went for an hour to make gingerbread houses.

“It was awesome. First of all we laughed, which if you go to inpatient rehab, it’s a tough place to be. You’re not there with a couple hundred people at the happiest point of their lives. But we were laughing like kids again and it was therapeutic just to laugh and have fun. We just communicated and bonded with each other. When it was over, it was like there was a method to that madness. Even thinking about it makes me laugh. We just had a blast. But that’s the type of thing – who the hell would think of building gingerbread houses? It wasn’t even Christmastime. That makes it even more weird. But it was cool, man. We left there with a different rapport. This football player was just a great guy and he became a friend. I got real connected with some of these people that I was doing it with. I can really see the value in doing something like that, even if it sounds crazy at first.”

John is proud of his two years’ sobriety, and feels inspired to work with the people hardest struck by addiction. It’s when he’s working with someone who’s truly struggling – “somebody that reeks of booze, somebody that’s fresh off the streets” – that he feels most connected.

Looking back over the semester, John stated he took several important lessons from his experiences in class: “To be open minded. To try to be understanding of other
people. Where they come from, wherever they come from in life. To try to understand that the world does not revolve around John. The importance of just being where the client’s at. Collaborating with the client and realizing my role as a counselor is not to make the whole world a bunch of John Smiths in recovery. Their journey’s not going to look like mine. As a counselor, the job is help them find their path.”

**Individual thematic summary.** Experiencing a therapeutic relationship from the perspective of the helper aided John in clarifying his understanding of the counselor’s role, moving from that of a directive and somewhat authoritarian listener to an empathic individual who seeks to develop a connection with clients to help guide them to a new perspective. Authenticity and honesty are vital for counselors, and must be directed not only toward clients, but toward the counselors themselves (i.e., it is imperative they ask for help when needed). John admitted he tends to default to a challenging, almost confrontational persona in session, but recognized a genuine relationship can produce more significant impact than an in-your-face approach. Along such lines, John identified immediacy and emotional sensitivity (aspects of that authenticity) as two areas for growth. On the matter of creativity, John broke the concept into several facets: most notably, the ability to tailor responses, questions, and activities to each client; a degree of comfort with the unexpected; and a willingness to present clients with unexpected experiences of their own.

**Julie (School Counseling)**

Julie, 23, is a student in the Professional School Counseling track. Though she initially aspired to a role as a teacher (both of her parents are in education), Julie’s undergraduate studies in human development helped her “fall in love” with the idea of
listening to and helping others. She chose school counseling because it offers both an opportunity to work with diverse individuals and a personal challenge ("I’m an emotional person, and I knew the work would trigger me in certain ways – that excited me").

**Interview 1.** Julie represented a counselor as a sounding board, someone there to support and guide a client. "Let them lead but guide them in a way that might help them reach their goals." Among the qualities of an effective counselor, she included: a willingness to learn, a willingness to make mistakes, patience, respect for people and their differences, and spontaneity. "I would say it’s necessary as a counselor to be quick on your feet. When someone comes in and it may just not be working, you need to say, ‘This isn’t helping them.’”

Julie explained she’s “not very good” when presented with the unexpected, but hoped that – with two more years of learning and practicing – she’ll be able to pull something from her “back pocket.” “I don’t know if I’ll ever be fully prepared for every bomb because I can’t imagine every one that could happen in a counseling session. But I could be more comfortable. Not having that little person in my head saying, ‘Oh, what do you say? What do you do?’ Because that person is still there during a session when I’m practicing.”

In situations characterized by ambiguity, Julie admitted she’s “been known to be indecisive.” She would like to learn to be quicker, more flexible, while maintaining proper boundaries (i.e., not falling into “friend mode”). Though she might, at times, offer clients some suggestions, she would prefer to help the clients to use their own strengths to lead them through their issues.
Complicating such efforts is Julie’s worry about offending her clients. Though she’s comfortable with herself, she admits, “I’m oversensitive to other people sometimes. I find myself saying, ‘I don’t want to do that because I don’t want to offend anybody.’ Sometimes you have to not offend anybody, but take risks to learn. So right now I’m learning to be more comfortable with stepping out of the comfort box of myself. Learning to balance my comfort with getting overwhelmed with other people.”

In addition, she expressed concerns about her tendency to get emotional when clients’ stories get too deep. Once she gets sad, Julie explained, it’s hard for her to move beyond that emotional state. During a practice session, she got teary-eyed, and told herself, "Lock it up and try to think of something hilarious."

“That was horrible,” Julie said, “because then I left thinking if I have a client or student, I can’t look at the ceiling and think of something funny that happened last night.” She recognized student counselors need to go through a process of self-discovery in order to prepare them for their future endeavors, and addressed her need to “balance my personality with possibly future emotional clients.”

Her initial impression of creativity in counseling was positive – she stated it might provide her with a new perspective on a situation.

**Interview 2.** Halfway through the semester, Julie admitted she’s still trying to integrate her authentic self into her work as a counselor. “The first few weeks I had a different voice and I still do. I couldn’t quite wrap my mind around being the counselor - I was, like, in this little bubble. And I wasn’t reaching my clients because there was no Julie really in my character. So where I am now...I’m really trying to define a relationship that is real and has some form of genuineness. Because I think those first
couple of weeks it was like, ‘Did I reflect? Yes. Check.’ I had such mental chatter, no part of Julie really was there. So right now I’m really trying to define the therapeutic relationship as being genuine, ‘Can I be Julie and be a counselor?’ I’m very far from it, I’m just working on it.”

Despite that avowed desire for authenticity, Julie acknowledges she has no problem with immediacy. In fact, she considers her honesty about “not knowing” one of her strengths. “I’m good at asking for help.” In addition, she stated she’s confident about her abilities to make clients comfortable, and is improving at being more present with clients. “I’ve gotten a lot better about being real. Not being as nervous.”

Julie explained she’s made a deliberate effort to be more laid back in her practice sessions. About 15 minutes prior to the end of the didactic portion of the class, she would feel herself getting worked up about having to play the role of counselor once the experiential component began. It took her until the midterm before she allowed herself to coexist with the nervousness — a tactic she says has helped.

Though comfortable with self-disclosure, Julie identified “hunches” and risk-taking as skills that challenge her, mainly due to her ongoing fear of offending clients. She does acknowledge improvement, though. “I think the first time we did hunches and someone was like, ‘Actually, that’s not really it,’ I completely lost my train of thought. But now...I’m more willing to get shot down.” Through continued practice, she expressed a hope that she will be able to take conversations deeper, utilizing hunches and reflections of meaning.

The first half of the semester presented Julie with the idea that “I’m not as natural at this [counseling] as I thought I was.” She related that growth, in part, to the laid-back
attitude previously referenced. "I was so determined to be really good in the beginning - when I was making mistakes, it was harder to shake them off. Now I'm better about shaking off the ones that don't go well." She attributed that realization to the professors modeling that "everyone wasn't always a stud counselor right out of the gate." By acknowledging their own anxieties, the professors showed Julie that "every counselor has gotten nervous, completely dropped the ball, or messed up." As such, she said, "knowing that I didn't have to be this all-star, or write a dissertation the first week, made things easier to shake it off."

Julie pointed to the context of a session as a determining factor in her comfort level. At the time of the interview, she felt considerably more comfortable operating in a school setting than with an adult. "I know I can still do the same tricks and it probably would go equally as well but I freeze when the context's different." When she hits a block, Julie found she "gets opinionated."

"I just talk. I don't usually even ask a question. I just validate everything the client says. It's like a summary, but like I'm on her team - summarizing that she was great. I left the role [of counselor] and was completely like "friend Julie" and just kind of summed it up because I was panicking. That was really bad, but it was a good learning experience." From that encounter, she found an appreciation for slowing down and trying to keep things simple.

Julie wrapped the second interview by sharing her enthusiasm for developing as a counselor. "The first couple of weeks I was like, 'I don't even know if I can do this. Be a counselor or be a good counselor or be sufficient.' But now I feel I'm ready for the challenge. I'm ready for the blocks that at first I was so frightened of. I was embarrassed
to call timeout or ask for help. Or I would have tears in my eyes because I didn’t know
where to go with something. But now as a counselor it’s just - ask for help. You have to
ask for help to learn how to do this. And I feel better, happier than I’ve been.”

**Interview 3.** According to Julie, an effective counselor is authentic, genuine in
session. “You are not going to always get it right, but if you are true to who you are as a
counselor, I feel that makes you more effective. You are not trying to be someone else.
You’re being true to what you are comfortable with, your style. Being who you are. I
think being an effective counselor truly means meeting that person where they are, not
trying to introduce things that maybe are not their style. Trying to be yourself, and meet
them where they are.”

Looking back over the semester, she acknowledged just how far she’d come at
accessing that authentic self and dealing with ambiguity. “The first class, I do not think I
even knew what counseling was, and then, I learned, ‘There is no right thing,’ and that
was kind of terrifying. I like answers. It’s kind of comforting to know you did
something wrong, and how to do it correctly.” Now, however, when she speaks of the
“right way,” she means “Shooting for a way that is beneficial to the client, not ‘I did it
right.’” Counseling, she said, “is more about them, and less about me.”

The professors have reinforced those findings. “In the beginning I was so
cconcerned with being a really, really good counselor. I always wanted to be a really good
counselor. I kind of attribute the change to the professors shaking that up a little bit.
They made us really uncomfortable for like a month and a half, and I know a lot of us
were like shaking in our boots, but it was good.
"I did not know what I was doing. I did not know what they were purposely trying to do, but it was kind of nice that they did not give us many guidelines. In my undergrad, there were a lot of guidelines to check off, and it was nice, but now – as a counselor – I feel you have to have a little bit more room to grow. They gave us that, and it was scary at first, because I was like, ‘I do not know if I am doing it right,’ and they did not give a ton of feedback at first. I had no idea if what I was doing was even close to what they wanted, but then I realized they do not have anything they want. They just want you to be yourself."

In such a vein, Julie said she’s learned she needs to let go of her tendency to compare herself to others. She recognized the importance of the skills, but stated those skills need to be used in a way that corresponds with her personal style “As a counselor, Julie has to really try to be Julie, and not try to be another professor that I look up to.”

Considering the nature of therapeutic work, Julie said creativity plays a vital role in ensuring the work is more than just two people staring at one another, chatting. “As basic as it is, creativity can be anything - just connecting with the individual in the best way that they could possibly connect.” She took the professors’ assertion that counseling was a creative act as a challenge, one that required her to take the relationship beyond simply listening to someone else speak. “Making counseling a creative act means making it unique, taking a risk and failing miserably, and then trying that with a different person, and finding it works really well.” She admitted she’s still nervous about “failing miserably,” but is realistic about its inevitability – “I’m not going to connect with every client. You can’t..."
She went on to describe the value of that discomfort, not only in her practice sessions, but in the class itself. "Having that uncomfortable stage was great, because I think that would make this one [in practicum] maybe a little bit smaller." And though she’s uncertain as to how she may handle the more serious scenarios (e.g., death, divorce) that may arise in a school, she’s been able to identify some of her own triggers, a fact that – in conjunction with her integration of her professional and personal selves – will help her through any challenges that arise.

"Before Techniques, I knew counselors made mistakes, but I didn’t realize it was that often, that it was okay, and that everyone does it. I think I was more embarrassed to make a mistake, and now I am learning everyone is going to. Just make sure you make it a beneficial one, and learn from it."

**Individual thematic summary.** Humor was evident in Julie’s interviews from the inception, when she jokingly compared a counselor to “a dog.” She then corrected her analogy, for – in her mind – a counselor is not only a listening confidant (like a dog), but a guide who is patient, respectful, and creative (i.e., spontaneous, willing to make mistakes) in their efforts to help clients attain their goals. That focus on creativity matured throughout the semester – by the end of the term, she saw the associated risk-taking, improvisation, and navigation of ambiguity as means of improving one’s potential to connect with clients. Julie noted she’d made progress in overcoming her indecision in ambiguous situations, as well as surmounting her fear of overstepping her bounds and offending clients by probing deeper. In terms of growth, though, Julie stated the opportunity to negotiate her identity as a counselor may have been most important. She
learned that she can be herself while being a counselor, a discovery that enabled her to divert her attention away from her own mental chatter and direct it toward the client.

**Lauren (Clinical Mental Health Counseling)**

Lauren is a 46-year-old American Indian woman, specializing in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. She’d long thought of returning to school, but never made the time. When a change in circumstances provided her with more space in her life, she sought to make good on her interest in psychology and human relations, and said her choice of community counseling was “a no-brainer.”

“It just fits me - who I am, and what I do, and what I have always done as far as being involved in our [tribal] community,” she said. “I have always been trying to push our community forward, and this is one way for me to address our soul wound.”

Lauren described her tribe’s soul wound as the result of “400 years of being told that our thought process is incorrect. That our culture is incorrect. That we are pagan.” It is those internalizations of colonization that Lauren works to address. “The wound is carried through the generations,” she said. “We are born with it, so to speak. We have an understanding of it. So how do we address it? How do we bring healing, and not just for ourselves, but for humanity as a whole?”

**Interview 1.** To Lauren, a counselor is, first and foremost, a listener. She stated counselors should have the ability to empathize, to perceive connections in humanity (being willing to step outside their own perspective and be open to another’s), and aid the healing process by helping people give voice to their wounds.

Lauren looks to congruency within herself - aligning her thoughts, feelings, and actions – when dealing with the ambiguity often faced by counselors. She recognized
there are different aspects of herself that she can call forth as needed, and the goal of calling forth those aspects is to aid clients in figuring out who they are, helping them hear their "internal voice."

Lauren described her helping relationships with a traditional healer, who fostered insight and perspective exploration, and with teachers, who recognized her needs and talents, and showed her kindness and support. Those relationships provided Lauren with a model for some of the qualities she endeavors to infuse into the helping connections she develops with clients.

Though she recognized the value of humor in relationship ("Laughter is healing...when you laugh, your spirit feels so much better"), she stated its appropriate usage in counseling depends upon the context and the type of humor used.

**Interview 2.** At mid-semester, Lauren explained that, as a counselor, she seeks to foster trust and empathy with clients, a relationship in which she serves "a co-journeyman." "By my reflection of who they are, their true selves, they are better able to see who they are. It's like a true mirror. Sitting there, you can't see yourself, but in a mirror you can. And then you go, 'Wow! I didn't know that was out of place, or that was crooked, let me straighten that out.'"

She linked her potential to serve in such a role to her strength at making reflections, which she attributed to her desire to "give voice to the voiceless." In order to do that, Lauren said, the one who has been voiceless "really has to figure out what it is they want to say." By engaging in continual self-assessment ("I need to be congruent all the way through"), Lauren feels better prepared to act in a genuine manner with clients. "You can be authentic in the session because you are not really judging the other person"
sitting across from you, nor are you judging yourself. You are just being present in the moment.”

Despite that focus, Lauren admitted there are moments where she has missed the proverbial mark. She detailed a practice session in which she was charged with identifying discrepancies in a client’s story. Lauren focused on an initial incongruence to the point that she missed a second discrepancy entirely. “I completely ignored [it] because I was stuck on the first one...In my mind, I was not present really in the moment. I was stuck on the technique that I was supposed to be using, the example that she initially gave.”

Lauren acknowledged the difficulty of being present. “That is hard. Not always, but we all have our stuff,” she laughed. “I have stuff and then I come in and I’m expected to role play, and I may think to myself, “But I have stuff – I don’t feel like doing this.” The value of presence, however, is unquestioned in her mind. Lauren recapped her experience interviewing a 16-year-old girl who, judging by the way she was handling the session, had been in counseling before. Lauren acted upon her observation of the way events were unfolding. “She was making jokes and I said, ‘Look if this is something you do not want to talk about, or there is a question you do not want to answer, just say, ‘I don’t want to talk about it,’ and move on. That is all you have to do.” In such scenarios (i.e., working with children and adolescents), being authentic and present is vital to earning a client’s trust. “Using techniques out of the book, probably not a good idea,” Lauren offered. “Having that textbook in the back of your head is just going to screw you over.”
An experience running a group counseling session helped Lauren further nuance her conceptualization of being present. She’d planned to run a group on archetypes, and began with a centering activity – a visualization she’s used during her own meditations. Two members of the group began giggling uncontrollably; one actually stood up and left the group. Once the archetype activity began, one of the aforementioned students continued to behave irreverently, causing laughter in the rest of the group. Lauren explained, “The whole time I am being present. I did not get irritated or angry. I just kept going through. They were laughing, and I just kept going with the activity. He did what he did.” When she was driving home, however, she began to get irritated by the student’s behavior, wondering why hers was the only group in which the student acted up. “Was that about me?”

Lauren sought feedback from a supervisor, who pointed out the students may not have been ready for the type of environment Lauren created, telling her “You brought something new and different, and some spirituality to it that maybe they did not feel comfortable with.” Lauren admitted the challenge inspired some self-reflection. “Frankly, I thought I was going to introduce them to something new. Maybe teach them something that they might think about and use later. Maybe what I should have done is just really think ‘Who is the group?’ Who are the people in the group? What do you know about them so far?’ and tailor my group presentation to that, rather than to something I wanted to do. Because there was an “I” in that. That really made me think - that was a lesson for me.”

Lauren used the experience as an opportunity to remind herself to consider the impact she has on those with whom she works. “Even though the assignment was to lead
a group as though you were a counselor, I lead that group more like I was a teacher. That was not the role I was asked to do... If I had to do that assignment over again, I would try to think about who is in the group, and why is that group there? Actually knowing that group now, much later in the semester, I might have done a similar thing, but I think it would have been better received probably at this point.”

Observational skills – being aware and in the moment – are key to the process of taking a client deeper into their story. The deeper a counselor delves, the greater the risk for the client, and Lauren stated a counselor needs to really listen to what a client is saying – and how they are behaving – in order to determine a client’s level of comfort. “My first concern is to do no harm,” she shared. “And some people will not just say ‘I don’t want to talk about it.’ They will feel pressured to perform or answer the question. So it is really important to me they that they know they have the right to say, ‘Here is the line.’ Maybe tomorrow the line will move, but today, this is the line.”

Interview 3. Upon completing her first semester, Lauren revisited her image of a counselor. To be effective, she stated, a counselor needs empathy, honesty, trustworthiness, integrity, “and some life experience to help with understanding.” A helper is characterized by openness to differences, to others, and to oneself; and openness to change. Effective counselors also possess the ability to be flexible in one’s own thoughts, and to critically think about oneself, one’s values, and one’s own stumbling blocks and prejudices.

To that list, Lauren added “an innate gentleness,” a concept she says stands apart from empathy: “Empathy is more than just the ability to simply understand a person explaining a situation. It’s being able to experience in some way in your internal self, so
in that moment when you say ‘I understand,’ you truly do. When you say, ‘I understand your feelings,’ you truly do because you can feel them. Gentleness is being able to sit quietly and be still.”

Lauren admitted her work during the semester recommitted her to her own self-growth and self-criticism, stating “I see how important it is in the profession to do that, to not think I know something or get too relaxed and comfortable. It is important to always seek more education, to seek more self-knowledge because it is only through that that you become a better therapist or counselor. Also to seek experience, a plethora of experience, and those experiences that are outside your comfort zone.”

Part of that self-awareness involves recognizing her own “really heightened sense of fairness and justice that can almost become self-righteous.” She explained: “In the back of my mind, I ask, ‘Are they coming from a place of classism or racism or sexism or one of the many isms?’ I go there first, I ask that question first. Part of it is that all my life I have had to ask that question simply because of who I am, the way I was born. But I have to be careful because that is not always the case. I can ask the question, but I need to really be honest about the answer. Maybe the person is thinking about this in a different process that I have yet to comprehend and so it’s not, and maybe they are trying to get me to that point and I just don’t see that.”

Along those lines, Lauren discussed the importance of reading a situation before acting upon it, and shared how such a notion helped clarify her role as a helper. “I am here to assist you to get to where you want to be, whatever that is. I am your Anam Cara, your journeymate, and through reflecting what you are doing, I’ll help you to see whether what you are doing will get you to where you want to be.”
Lauren explained that counseling – a healing art – is an act of creation. “Counseling in particular has to do with the healing of the soul and the spirit, the internal self. We are creative beings, that’s who we are. That’s why the creative process is a human process. For me, it is sort of the same process that occurs when I’m doing art or I’m creating a good meal for friends. Before I begin a creative process, I am quiet. I am still. I settle myself and I listen to the medium and it informs me and then I start creating with the help of the Spirit. I do the same thing when we are doing the exercises in class. When someone is speaking, I am quiet and I am still and I am allowing myself to hear them and trying to connect to them on a soul level so that there is no chatter going on. The process, for me, is the same.

“It is the connection of spirit that is healing. I know they do not talk about spirit in class but that is my cultural perspective, and I have been through healing ceremonies and I have been through formal counseling. I went to see a therapist and I can tell, as we all innately can, when the therapist is present and when they are not and when they understand and when they do not. It is an innate soul connection, it is there or it is not. I think at the end, that is what counseling is, it is the Anam Cara relationship, the soul friend. That is who the therapist is, it is who they become.”

For Lauren, creativity is openness, the ability to “produce externally what the moment is feeding to you internally.” “If I am creating pottery, my hands are molding the clay, but there is an internal thing that is happening that gives me vision to say what this clay is going to look like in a form. If I am sitting and I am listening to someone who is talking about a loved one that has Alzheimer’s, for example, then I am listening with my entire being - including my spirit. Often when I am listening, visions come to me or ideas
come to me that can help this person heal. That is the creative piece of it, is making connections, internal to external, and then you have this product."

Overall, Lauren admits she’s facing her practicum experience with a mixture of confidence (“I’m going to be back in the community”) and nervousness (“I realize this is a graded exercise in which I have to show that I am integrating what I have learned in the classroom”). That said, she has an appreciation for the immediacy of the counseling process, as well as a tolerance for the ambiguity that often permeates the work (“Everything is transient and in flux and in process, and we have to be willing to go with that flow.”)

Reflecting on what she took from the techniques course was the knowledge that “I will get frustrated, and that’s okay.” She had experiences as a counselor where students she worked with came back to her after class and acknowledged she’d helped them. “It made me feel good, and I thought ‘Wow, maybe I can do this.’ But then, just when I’m thinking I’m getting cocky, I do a group experience and the person sitting in the chair is frustrating me to no end. Then I thought, ‘Well, that is real, if the person sitting across from you is making a life choice that you clearly see is not going to get them where they say they want to go.’ You are asking all these open questions to try to get them to see perhaps that is not going to be a good decision for them and they refuse to see it…well, what are you going to do? It’s their process. Sometimes people just have to hurt to grow.”

**Individual thematic summary.** To Lauren, counseling is an act of creation, a connection of spirit that involves openness and being present. She described counselors as companions on a client’s journey, providing a lens within which clients can view themselves. To promote that reflection, counselors need to be respectful of different
perspectives, open to change, flexible, and gentle. Lauren identified “being present” as an important component of a healing relationship – one she admitted struggling with at times – and stated counselors need to be resilient and aware of their own impact on others. The ability to read clients is essential, for it helps a counselor determine the appropriateness of the risks they take while providing a foundation for the interventions/approaches the counselor may use. Lauren recognized the immediacy and ambiguity associated with counseling, and committed herself to expanding her own boundaries, challenging herself to move beyond her personal comfort zone.

Lucy (Marriage, Family, & Couples Counseling)

Lucy is a 22-year-old Caucasian female, studying to be a Marriage, Family, & Couples Counselor. She drew professional inspiration from her own counselor, whose assistance provided Lucy with a way of defining the notion of “help.”

“I always say my therapist saved my life. I was drowning before I saw her, and what she was able to help be do and overcome…”

Lucy explained her biological mother is an alcoholic and a drug addict, and that “I was trying to save her.” Further complicating matters, Lucy resided with her aunt, whose husband was emotionally and verbally abusive to the point Lucy second-guessed herself at every turn. “I was really jumpy,” she said. “And I lost my voice.” Lucy said her counselor helped her create boundaries, ultimately giving her an opportunity “to live my own life.”

Interview 1. Lucy described a counselor as someone who supports people in getting through trying times and achieving their goals, someone who helps people help themselves. Discussing her own experience with therapy, Lucy said “My counselor
helped me to not only stand on my own two feet without feeling like I had to save everyone else, but to find my voice again. I think a lot of people go through that same thing where they need help just standing back up. Help can come in a lot of different ways - I think it’s just specific to what the person needs.”

At the semester’s start, Lucy wasn’t certain she knew what made for an effective counselor. Though she did say: “I know it’s not imposing your own views on the person. It’s helping them within their framework and listening. Respecting differences.” She likened the processes behind an effective counseling relationship to cooking: “The client is on one side of the table and you’re on the other, with the ingredients in the middle. Then I have all my tools, like a whisk, and the client has all of his. If I use my tool, it’s going to make a different product, a fluffier cake. We might eventually get to the same cake – it will still be a pound cake – but mine might be a lot fluffier than his, and he might want his thicker. That’s the way I’ve been trying to think of it – I’ve got tools, but [counseling’s] not really using my tools, it’s using the ingredients and the client’s tools. If I use my tools, the way I think things should go, it is going to make a product that I want and not be what they are trying to get out of it.”

Ambiguity, directivity, and creativity entered the conversation when Lucy considered the possibility of helping a client find new tools. “I worry about walking the line: by showing them new tools, are you imposing that you think they needed new tools? That’s the big gray area for me. I guess that’s where creativity comes in - deciding what do in each situation. I think that will just take experience.”

Though she asserted it is possible to navigate the “gray” of ambiguity, at this point in her studies, Lucy admits she has a hard time dealing with the uncertainty of
knowing the "right" thing to do. "I just sit there second-guessing myself and I'm so caught up on trying to do the right thing that I find myself going inside me and freaking out. I kind of tune the other person out and that is not beneficial. I think it's finding the balance of being present and still doing the right thing."

If pushed by a client for direction (e.g., "Tell me, counselor – what should I do?")

Lucy expressed self-confidence in her ability to deal with the situation. "I would appreciate silence and not feel like I had to say anything right away. I am not sure saying "I don't know" is the wrong thing and I think explaining why would be good to do. For how nervous I get, I actually do alright under pressure, so I think – with the background and experience – I could handle it.

"I think being honest is always what is going to be right... what's honest in working with that person."

**Interview 2.** When developing a counseling relationship, Lucy explained it's important to "let the client know that I'm going to fully accept them, try to hear them, and try to look through their eyes." She admitted she hasn't yet developed a set way about communicating those messages, but acknowledges having more of an understanding of how to do so – to use words and nonverbals to communicate empathy. "I have more of an idea of what I am hoping to do... It's still going to be hard, but it's not as terrifying."

The relationship between a counselor and a client is, to Lucy, characterized by mutual trust. "It's mostly the client directing where they want to go. It's client-driven. The therapist is there to help guide the client, to shed light on some areas that maybe the client cannot see."
Asked about her contributions to the counseling relationship, Lucy points to her ability to talk with others, to offer challenges, and reflect a client’s content, feelings, and meaning. Despite that, Lucy acknowledges she’s still uncomfortable with the risk associated with certain reflections. “I do not want to be wrong. But in practicing, I have been wrong, and it is not the end of the world. But for me it is hard to say, ‘Do you mean this instead?’ Or to label an emotion that the person had not said before.”

One of Lucy’s biggest challenges is learning to create professional boundaries to resist the temptation to “save clients.” To do so, Lucy states she has to remember to take the clients’ perspective. Seeing through their eyes, rather than her own, will – she believes – help her assist clients in navigating through their perspectives. She explained she’s doing “better” in the counselor’s chair, but is still hesitant to say much, because she feels “a lot of the things I want to say are not what I am supposed to be saying. Is this what I want for the client, or is it what they want? I have to stop and make sure that I am looking at it from their point of view and not mine.”

Though she acknowledged the associated anxiety, Lucy admitted she has “survived” the challenges presented to her through the mid-point of the semester. “It’s hard to push yourself outside your comfort zone. What happens afterwards is important. For me at least, it’s just seeing that I can do it. Maybe I didn’t do it great, but I did try and I am going to try again. A lot of times, it is just me not wanting to take that first step. It’s not even the technique or the exercise that we’re doing, just getting outside of your comfort zone.”

When she finds herself backed into a proverbial corner, Lucy stated she’s learned to embrace silence, take a step back, and consider ways to turn the situation back toward
the client. "I know it’s okay to do that...I am not totally comfortable with it, but I know
that I can do it now."

Looking ahead to future areas for growth, Lucy indicated she would like to be
more in-the-moment. "It would be nice to be able to just sit there and be present and do
the things that I have learned, instead of being so worried about what I am going to do."
She has learned, though, that silence can help herself through such situations. "I use the
pause to get it all together. I’m not present the whole time the client’s talking, but I have
gotten better at that."

**Interview 3.** Lucy began the third interview describing how the qualities that
make an effective counselor will, in all likelihood, be different for every counselor.
“What I learned this past semester is that bringing yourself, bringing your real person into
session is important...I do not think if you are trying to be something you are not, you are
going to be able to effectively help or listen to someone.” Initially, Lucy explained she
thought a counselor would be “someone else,” i.e., “I was going to become this counselor
and leave me. Two separate roles. But now I am realizing that it’s just shaping and
becoming me, the counselor; the counselor, me.” She attributed that discovery to the
experiential work for the techniques course. “Watching other people use the same
techniques, but in other ways, and seeing how they were still as effective as my way...that
was eye-opening. When I was the observer, watching Person A counsel Person B, I was
thinking, ‘Well, you should say this and you should say that.’ But then they got
somewhere that I could not have gotten. It was just really neat to see that her way was
just as effective as something I would not have done.”
Lucy described her initial semester in the program as “a roller coaster,” one that began with a false confidence as to what she was getting herself into (i.e., “I can do this”), then plummeting to the uncertainty of “Oh my God. What am I doing?” before climbing into the realm of knowledgeable self-confidence (i.e., “It will be work, but it’s doable”). Lucy admitted she’s made progress, and stated she’s trying to go easier on herself, particularly when faced with ambiguous situations. “I start thinking, ‘You could have said it this way,’ but now I think maybe there isn’t a right way. It comes back to being genuine and going with the flow.”

On the topic of creativity in counseling, Lucy explained: “As a counselor, you have to be able to pull from every direction. Every client is going to be different. You have these skills, these ideas, and these techniques, but to be able to find the right one for this specific client and help them, you’ve got to be fairly creative. It’s like a dance, being able to think of these steps as you go. It’s like ten or fifteen different dances, but the music might change, and you have to be able to go with it.”

There’s still a measure of fear, of anxiety, associated with counseling, but Lucy describes herself as undaunted. “I want to learn. In order to get anywhere, you have got to learn to take a couple steps and trip. And so I am ready to fall” – a resiliency born of her career in horseback riding. “I have fallen off in so many shows in front of people and been asked to leave the ring. You never stay off. You get back on, and you make your horse go over the jump like it does not matter. I have broken a crop in the ring, broken a stick. I’ve been crying in the ring, being told over the loud speakers to leave. But you just keep going. You have to. If you do not keep going, then you give up. You are not going to go back into the ring after you have left.”
As a person, Lucy explained she’s “very open, willing to listen, and not very judgmental.” While she recognizes those strengths within herself, she’s not yet sure how they might manifest in her role as a counselor. One of the most important lessons she took from her first semester was that counselor development is a process.

“I am not sure a month ago I could have told you I learned that much from Techniques. But now that I’ve had a month to look back and explain to my Mom some of the things that we did, I’m like, ‘Oh, now I get it.’ It just takes time. I know for me, I do not learn A-B-C-D. Somebody can teach me A-B-C-D, and I am not going to get A until I get D. Then I look back and it’s connecting all the dots.

“Looking back across the course of the semester, when I put all the different techniques we learned together, it makes more sense. Because learning one at a time it does not really work. Sure I can confront someone if they are sitting in front of me. That is all I am doing is confronting, finding the difference. But that does not really work. You have to practice it in real-life settings, and think about it and apply it. It just takes time.”

**Individual thematic summary.** In each of Lucy’s interviews, she expressed uncertainty – uncertainty about what makes an effective counselor, what a counselor’s allowed to do, what a counselor’s supposed to do; uncertainty about handling risks and ambiguity – but she followed each expression of the unknown with a statement of resiliency; a willingness, if not a confidence, that she will endure and, ultimately, overcome. She considers a counselor as someone who brings their honest/genuine self into session, developing a relationship based upon empathy and mutual trust. The course provided her with ways to navigate the grays of ambiguity, and though the semester was something of a roller-coaster, she admits she ended it at a much better, more well-
developed place. Counseling, she said, requires creativity in that counselors need to be able to improv, to read their clients’ unique situations and match them moment-to-moment, step-for-step.

**Sarah (School Counseling)**

Sarah is a 28-year-old Asian American female, who is pursuing a degree in School Counseling having just completed six years as a teacher at the high school level. While she enjoyed many aspects of her role – being in the classroom, serving as an advisor for clubs, getting to know students on different levels – she admitted being less enthusiastic about grading, more specifically “fighting the students and parents about grades.”

“My students said, ‘You’re always letting us talk to you – why haven’t you thought about being a counselor?’ That led me here.”

**Interview 1.** Sarah described a counselor as someone with whom people talk about their lives, feelings, and problems. The counselor helps clients not by giving direct advice or opinions, but by guiding them through their issues. Looking more specifically at her area of study, Sarah explained school counselors act as guides and advocates for students, as well as their parents, helping clients bridge the connections between family, school, and their social lives.

Effective counselors, she stated, are good, nonjudgmental listeners who can create an inviting warm environment in which to develop rapport.

She identified tolerance for ambiguity as a significant aspect of school counseling. Unlike in teaching, counseling does not involve well-defined benchmarks, and “every child is going to be different.” As such, Sarah said it’s important to actively listen to a
child's concerns, to see a "big picture" first, then identify smaller, more manageable areas on which the student would like to focus.

As a teacher, Sarah said she always tried to be open, and made a concerted effort to get to know her students, see them operate in different aspects of their lives. "In the classroom, I had my role, but at the same time the students could also see that I was a person. I was not just the fact-giver. I also had a funnier, more casual side." She utilized pop culture (e.g., music, television, etc.) to relate to the students.

Sarah imagined the situation as a school counselor will be somewhat different, as it will not afford her the same opportunity to get to know students on a daily level, but she stated she would try to develop a similar rapport. "No matter who I meet, I try to be the same person."

Sarah described her comfort zone in terms of her relationships, and said it often takes time and familiarity for her to appear as anything other than reserved and quiet. An exception to that, she explained, exists in her work for a charity organization through which she chaperones students in third-world countries. "There are usually 50 people, and when I get there, I do not know anybody. I barely even know these girls that I am chaperoning for two weeks – we've only just talked over the phone. That's a time when I have to be more open. I cannot be reserved and quiet, because I have to show them that I am in charge. At the same time, I really put in an effort to get to know the other 50 people on the first day. There is no warming up time – how have to know each other to work together for the next two weeks."
Interview 2. When working with clients, Sarah said she’s trying to develop a relationship “in flow,” an ongoing connection moving toward a goal (or series of goals) determined by the client.

Admitting she tends to focus more on areas she has to work on, such as her continuing use of a “mental checklist” of skills, Sarah said she expected to be more comfortable in the counselor’s chair by the midpoint of the semester. Despite that, Sarah stated those observing her sessions report she’s demonstrated an ability to track clients (i.e., listening to and processing the details of their stories) and developing rapport. Sarah described her biggest strength as her ability to engage in solution-focused counseling, i.e., walking clients through their stories, generating alternate possibilities, and assisting clients in assessing potential outcomes.

She identified reflection of emotion as a particular area of challenge, as she’s uneasy with the idea of “labeling” clients, offering them a take on a situation that differed significantly from their own. When presented with such a scenario, Sarah explained she thinks she “babbles.” “I keep talking in these long sentences, which is what’s weird – because usually in a conversation I don’t say very much. Here, though, I’m just trying to clarify, and I prolong things. Instead of just saying, ‘How are you feeling?’ I’m speaking in a long paragraph.”

As a counselor, Sarah said, “You have to be ready for anything. Be there for the person, but at the same time, have them continue talking things through. You cannot get all wrapped up in their story. You have to use all the different techniques that we learned to keep the conversation going.” She tends to use questions (“which probably isn’t the best way”) and paraphrasing to help clients move to deeper levels of processing,
identifying a particular strand of the conversation and expanding upon that. Her specific approach can vary, depending on the client’s situation, and Sarah said she encourages clients to generate their own answers/solutions.

She acknowledged having made some progress throughout the first half of the semester, but said she believes she would benefit from more experiential activities.

**Interview 3.** When asked to name the qualities that make for an effective counselor, Sarah offered “presence” as the primary factor. “As counselors,” she added, “you don’t really give advice, you just listen...and try to help them look deeper into what they have been saying.” Looking ahead toward her work in the schools, Sarah explained she would tell her students “I’m a person you can come to at any time. I’m here to help you if you want to talk through anything, whether it’s their academic work, social problems, or things going on at home.”

When assessing her own development, Sarah admitted she’s “not into really drilling down into someone’s feelings.” She identified herself as having more of a solution focus, and said that – with time – she would like to be more relaxed, not really worried about “trying to go by the book and do all the proper techniques.”

“My hope would be that I would just do it, talk like I’m talking in a regular conversation - not be worried that I am not doing this, this, and that; not be worried that I’m messing up.”

Every counseling scenario will carry unique challenges, Sarah observed, and as such, requires a level of creative thinking on the part of a helper. “You cannot use the same route with each person. Every situation is different, so you have to be more creative in thinking of ways to interact with that person.”
She acknowledged she can, at times, be creative – depending on the situation. “Sometimes I think it would be hard to think of things right on the spot. That is when I’d be thinking ‘I should have had a couple backup plans.’ Obviously, you cannot always predict that. You can have other options, but they might not always work. Then I would actually just wing it.”

Despite that capacity for improvisation, Sarah reported she would prefer to ease into situations that involve risk. For example, she would rather wait until she has “more information” before offering a hunch, “to see the clients wouldn’t feel offended if I went out on a limb.”

**Individual thematic summary.** According to Sarah, counselors specializing in clinical mental health counseling, marriage and family therapy, and school counseling are connected by their roles as guides – advocating for clients/students while providing a safe, nonjudgmental environment in which to negotiate life’s issues. By the semester’s end, Sarah had identified the importance of presence (i.e., being available, open, and focused on the client) in counseling, and acknowledged her own preference toward solution-focused approaches to the work. Throughout each of her interviews, Sarah referenced being uncomfortable in the counselor’s chair, disclosing that she needs more work on immediacy and reflections, and admitting she would like to distance herself from the tendency to “go by the book.” Creativity, she observed, comes into play when recognizing the differences of clients, as the ability to “read” a client and match their needs is essential in negotiating helper-client interactions.

**Cross-Case Analysis**
As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, a cross-case analysis of the themes presented by the individual participants resulted in the identification of two themes representative of the sample: Art of Engagement (Counselor as Guide) and Imaginational Comprehension (Counselor as Adapter). Each of those themes will be discussed, then dissected into subthemes culled from the participants' individual experiences of the creativity-infused Techniques curriculum.

**Theme One: Art of Engagement (Counselor as Guide)**

An examination of the individual case analysis indicates an overarching evolution in participants’ understanding of counseling. Initially, the student participants (hereafter, “students”) perceived counseling as a straightforward process involving the acquisition and application of tools and techniques, enacted according to a clearly delineated (though not always clearly expressed) set of rules. Students judged themselves – and their proficiency – in terms of their adherence to those rules, identified by several students as “the checklist.” Based on previous exposure to the course, the instructor participants (hereafter, “instructors”) anticipated the students’ need for structure and challenged them – and the notion of the checklist – early on by asking students to forego note-taking (i.e., no notebooks or laptops unless specifically instructed) in favor of focusing on the experience/dialogue of the class.

As the semester progressed, students grew to perceive counseling as more of a dynamic interplay between individuals, marked by an emphasis on empowering clients (i.e., fostering self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a sense of autonomy) and authentic behavior (on the part of the counselor). The checklist of tools and techniques continued to exist, but receded into the proverbial background for most students. Recognizing the clinical
tactics introduced in the course were not, as Jenna said, the “be all, end all” of counseling, the students emerged from the course with a perception of techniques as an interchangeable set of options a counselor may use – in combination with a genuine presence – to facilitate a client’s progress toward the client’s ultimate goal.

**Relationship**

Throughout the interview process, participants referenced the importance of developing a positive counselor-client working alliance. Whereas the instructors tended to use research to ground their assertions of the value of the therapeutic relationship, the students focused primarily on firsthand accounts, drawn from their initial semester in the counselor education program and/or their own personal experience with professional helping relationships. Some addressed specific aspects of helping relationships after which they might like to model their own in-session behaviors: Lucy addressed her counselor’s ability to center her, Brian spoke of the way his mentor encouraged him, and Julie spoke of a bond where conversation flowed freely and had an air of “simplicity.” The participants agreed that, for a counseling relationship to be deemed truly successful, the clients must experience a connection with their helper, a link that depends on both the counselor’s way of being and the environment the counselor establishes.

**Presence.** When discussing the establishment and maintenance of a working alliance, participants in the study made regular mention of the notion of “being present,” i.e., attuning to the client so as to communicate awareness, interest, and – from a Rogerian perspective – unconditional positive regard. “How can there be any hope unless a client really feels their counselor is there?” Dewey asked, paraphrasing systemic
theorist Salvador Minuchin. "How can a client feel that you can be of any help at all unless you are able to connect with them, let them know you are on their side?"

Students addressed verbal (e.g., word choice, tone of voice, expressions of curiosity) and nonverbal (e.g., posture, eye contact, nodding) ways of communicating presence, of fostering – as Ann explained – an atmosphere in which clients can feel interesting and important, cared for and connected. John shared his experience of just such a relationship: "After I shot myself, I was in the hospital for a long time. There was a male nurse there. He would come in every night and just sit next to my bed and talk for 15 minutes. This guy...we had nothing in common. He was probably late 50s and gay. I was a 19-year-old straight guy. We came from two entirely different worlds, but for those 15 minutes that he would come in and sit with me...I used to watch the clock just waiting for him to come in. He had never done what I did – he’d never shot himself – but... there was just kind of that human bond."

"Presence" represented the expansion of students’ awareness of the developmental processes involved in becoming a counselor, moving them beyond the techniques referenced in their textbook. Julie recounted a time in her small group when the observers referenced her "genuine warmth" in the session. "That meant a lot because it had nothing to do with skills," she said. "Well, that is a skill I guess, but not a strict skill on the sheet. It was more like presence, and that’s what I’d been focusing on." Lucy echoed Julie’s focus, stating her desire to "let the client know that I am going to fully accept them, try to hear them, and try to look through their eyes."

"I don’t know if I have a certain set way about going to do that," she explained, "but [I do have] more of an understanding of how to do it."
Supportive Environment. Students recognized that, in order for a relationship to develop – a relationship in which clients can expose their vulnerabilities – counselors need to create a safe space. They described that space as warm and inviting, open and nonjudgmental – qualities that speak as much to the person, i.e., the presence, of the counselor as they do the actual environment.

According to the students, the instructors modeled that support throughout the semester, structuring both the didactic and experiential components in such a way that they encouraged students to make their voices heard. Brian said, “I felt that it was perfectly acceptable – and it was – to basically voice any opinions I had about what was going on, and that it would not be met with judgment.”

Though the students acknowledged the instructors’ ability to create a protected place by welcoming questions, inviting student self-expression, and disclosing their own insecurities and flaws as counseling professionals, the instructors admitted they wish they’d been able to provide a forum even more conducive to such learning. “It would really be nice to have a smaller environment,” Dewey said. “I can see where I could have really had more fun, and presented the material in a more creative manner - in a more intimate manner – if I’d had [a smaller class].”

Several of the students included an alternative component in their discussion of a supportive environment – namely, the need to maintain boundaries. These students observed that it can, at times, be tempting to try to do too much to aid clients, and such overinvolvement can prove detrimental to the client’s progress. To be truly supportive, they explained, the counseling relationship should function as a secure and encouraging
place in which nurturance is matched by a degree of what Ann called “healthy
detachment” on the part of the therapist.

Counselor’s Role

For the participants in this study – the students in particular – the term
“counselor” appears synonymous with “guide,” a word used universally in students’
perception of the position. Though many further nuanced the description – e.g., John
called a counselor a “teammate,” Lauren used “co-journeyman” – counselors were
generally viewed as professionals who “shed light” on the possibilities of a client’s life
(Lucy), helping them hone their strengths (Julie) and devise their own solutions (Sarah)
in an effort to aid clients in finding their own way (Ann). As Brian explained during his
first interview, “A lot of people think they can be good counselors when they’re told by
their friends, ‘Oh, you’re such a good listener.’ I think that does help, but being here for
the first four weeks and going through all my classes...it’s just so much more than that.”

In addition to serving as an active listener, the students stated a counselor’s role
involves open-mindedness, a sensitivity to intercultural/interpersonal issues, empowering
clients, offering alternative perspectives, and aiding in the navigation of the client’s
personal situations – primarily (though not exclusively) through the use of a
nonthreatening, nondirective approach. For example, Brian – who works in an on-campus
substance-abuse clinic treating undergraduates referred by the dean of discipline –
recalled the impact of informing students his job involves neither telling them to stop
drinking nor threatening them with expulsion, but merely increasing their awareness of
the consequences that may arise from alcohol use. “From their stiff, cardboard box
posture and heavy breathing, they just slump down, relax, and say, ‘Oh, okay.’ From that
point on, they're more engaged, more involved – more willing to listen to what I have to say. Almost immediately after I finish my two-sentence introduction, they just relax and they see me as... not as a friend, not as an authority figure, but someone that they feel comfortable with in terms of hopefully – possibly – interacting with in terms of their alcohol-related beliefs.”

Judging from the participants' interviews, the most critical aspect of a counselor's role involves keeping the focus on the client, i.e., making the client the paramount figure in the relationship. Reflecting on that responsibility, Ginger recounted advice she received during her own training as a school counselor: “No matter what is going on, no matter what a student has done, your role is to be their advocate.” It's a message she carried throughout her career, and one she subsequently endeavored to pass on to her students – “Your job is to be looking out for the best interest of the students, no matter what. It’s not about being in control, and it is really not about you.”

As was true of several of her classmates, Julie struggled with that idea early in the semester. “In the beginning, my clients [in small group] said they weren’t comfortable, but I wasn’t even worried about them – I was so worried about where I was.” With more knowledge and more experience, though, the students came to realize it was incumbent upon them to ensure they were considering the situation from the client’s perspective, involving the client in striving for goals the client feels are attainable. As Lucy explained, she learned to assess her in-session interactions/interventions with a simple question, “Is this what I want for the client, or what they want?”

Be Yourself
Throughout the entire semester, the instructors reminded the students that their work is “all about building relationship,” a statement they reinforced with three words: professional, caring, and authentic. As evidenced by their responses in the interview sessions, the students took those words to heart.

Authenticity, in particular, represented a key component in the students’ discussion of an effective therapeutic alliance. Case in point, a complication with the financial aid process prevented Ann from obtaining the course textbook until a few weeks into the semester, a reality that often left her feeling like she was “winging” her way through the experiential sessions. “We talked about specific skills [in class] and I was trying to focus on that, but really I was just kind of doing my own thing.” Ann remembered one of the observers remarking “Well, the book said that Ann shouldn’t do this, this, and this, and she just did it. But it seemed so comfortable and natural – I didn’t think there was anything wrong with it.” That confusion – the struggle over retaining one’s personality while operating from the counselor’s seat – arose time and again during the interviews.

Julie said she arrived at the notion that it’s okay to be herself in session when her small group leader demonstrated his counseling approach during an activity. “I think a light bulb for our whole group went off. It was like, ‘Oh! He didn’t change.’ I didn’t see him stressing. I didn’t even realize he reflected at all – his presence was so natural. We asked, ‘How did you do that?’”

The group leader told them to begin by taking a deep breath. Julie explained, “We can take time out when we are lost and we can be ourselves while we’re doing this.”
For the students, part of that authenticity centers around admitting one’s limitations. John spoke to the idea of speaking within your experience (i.e., “If you haven’t experienced it, don’t act like you have and don’t say like you have”). “That’s one of the things I’m going to establish with my clients,” he said. “‘Hey, I ain’t perfect, either.’” Brian talked about admitting to his clients “I do not know all there is to know about counseling and psychology,” whereas Jenna addressed the need to be authentic with herself, stating that being forthright about her own feelings may prevent them from getting in the way of her presence.

As was the case with most of her classmates, Lauren admitted she’s at her best in session when she’s being her authentic self, “congruent in my thoughts and feelings toward the client.” Which is to say, the students recognized an effective counselor is one who honors the client by being respectfully genuine. As Ginger offered, “When there’s no right exact way to do things, it’s important to think about your own style and what you bring to the context of the session.”

Theme Two: Imaginational Comprehension (Counselor as Adapter)

The previous theme accounted for participants’ perceptions of what counselors do. This theme looks more specifically at how counselors do what they do, encompassing participants’ views of the mindset through which counselors approach their work. That mindset consistently included a depiction of counseling as a process wherein practitioners are required to respond to infinite diversity in infinite combinations. As Dewey offered, “no two people are the same. No two clients are going to be the same. No two concerns are going to be the same. Even the counselor himself is not going to feel the same from day to day.”
Considering that perceived variability of the counseling profession, participants began to address the concept of creativity, discussing their relative comfort with the phenomenon and its potential influence on (or parallels with) therapeutic work. “More so than in the past,” Ginger observed, “I see students using different ways of going at things. Anybody can think outside the box. Doing that is part of being professionally prepared to work with different kinds of clients in all kinds of contexts...The need to be creative, to take people where they are and find a creative way to help them is very important to the big ideas of being a good counselor.”

As evidenced by the interviews, participants identified four subthemes related to the “lens” of Imaginational Comprehension, including a level of comfort with the unknown, a willingness to extend oneself, an ability to adapt, and an attention to one’s own personal and professional development.

Self-Development – “Outside the Box”

Asked to assess the developmental ends of the course, Dewey expressed a hope that students would come to terms with the idea of uniqueness in counseling. He acknowledged the benefit in their realizing that the ideas proffered by classmates may be different than their own, that their own personal experiences as counselors may, at times, “collide” with the espoused counseling theories and techniques.

“This is,” he said, “more than a science.”

The students began the semester making repeated reference to the way of the “proper” counselor, i.e., operating in a fashion recognized as correct. “[When] you come in [as a student],” Ginger said, “there is a right way to do it, a wrong way to do it.” The students’ interviews supported that claim. For example, John observed, “I do too much
thinking about what I'm supposed to be saying. I'm thinking about the academic aspect of it and what you're supposed to do and that sometimes causes me to not be present with the client."

Ginger stated previous incarnations of the course may have actually encouraged that perspective. "Doing the course this way woke me up to the fact that the old way of trying to protect against value judgments and protect against leading the client made students just as constrained in basic listening techniques as in one theoretical approach to techniques." Recognizing students' tendency to spend more time worrying about "paraphrasing correctly" than listening, the instructors endeavored to make the classroom a place of interpersonal attentiveness, telling students, "Don't even take notes in here. Just listen. That is where you start to build a relationship -- being a good listener."

That focus (i.e., the broadening of perspective) brought up new challenges for the students, though. They began acknowledging mental battles waged around competing information, different experiences, and varied perceptions of the totality of counselor performance (ranging from the "right" type of questioning to the appropriateness of the way one sits in session). In several instances, those internal arguments resulted in what some students (Jenna, Lucy, Julie, Brian) described as a form of paralysis of choice, built upon the uncertainty of how to proceed with a client.

"It sucks," Lucy said. "I wish I could just be there and not be so overtly aware of what I am doing, just to be there for the person in front of me. But I am so self aware in thinking what I am going to say next, what I just said. It would be nice to be able to just sit there and be present and do the things that I have learned, instead of being so worried about what I am going to do."
Other students (John, Ann, Lauren, Sarah) acknowledged an academic aspect of their cognitive challenges, specifically speaking to the perceived requirements for the class. When working on a transcript assignment, for instance, Lauren admitted telling her client, “I just want to show them [the instructors] that I read the book, that I have been following class lectures.” As a result, Lauren claimed she felt “programmed” in session.

Over time, though, the students moved beyond their preoccupation with notions of rigid, right/wrong expectations for how a counselor “should” be. Julie, for instance, recognized the so-called background noise she experienced in her sessions still existed at the semester’s end, though she acknowledged it was less disruptive. Brian came to view his anxiety as a tool that could serve to keep him sharp. Jenna explained certain counseling situations remain “kind of awkward” and “uncomfortable” for her, but said she’s come to “enjoy being pushed into doing these things.”

**Appropriate Risk-Taking/Resiliency**

Building upon the self-development addressed in the previous subtheme, the interviews captured the expansion of students’ self-awareness of – and comfort with – the notion of risk-taking. Students’ initial conceptualizations of risk-taking activities within session tended to involve fear (i.e., unwillingness to make mistakes), anxiety (e.g., worrying about the implications of taking chances), and outright avoidance (i.e., an expressed desire to play things safe). “A lot of times,” Lucy said, “it [the avoidance of risks] is just me not wanting to take that first step.”

The curriculum’s progressive focus on the utilization of appropriate risks in counseling brought new ways for students to qualify their risks. In terms of using reflections of feeling and/or meaning, for instance, students expressed a preoccupation
with accurately capturing clients’ experiences. They possessed concerns about overshooting and undershooting emotions, broaching issues of immediacy (i.e., addressing the in-the-moment experiences during a counseling session), as well as introducing new descriptors into clients’ stories. Sarah referenced not wanting to “label” clients, whereas Julie stated, “I don’t want to offend anyone.”

The students noted that, with time, such interventions became easier to carry out, though doing so wasn’t always easy. “We’re all so fragile and nervous about the process,” Lucy observed, “but at the same time, we are not going to get any better unless we’re realizing what we’re doing wrong, or could be doing better.”

Brian overcame his reticence to using “strong emotion” words with clients, and began trusting his hunches. “When I do say ‘You seem to be distraught’ or ‘You seem to be feeling a little bit guilty about this’…it’s like a high risk, high reward. If you’re right, they do explain that feeling of guilt. When I did that and I was wrong, the client looked at me and said, ‘I’m not sure I feel guilt, it’s just the situation in general.’ I went for it based upon a hunch I had.”

Such statements of resiliency – which Julie described as being “more willing to be shot down” – appeared throughout the students’ later interviews. As Ann explained, “In the absence of any more information or data, I’m just going to go with what feels right and hope I did it right. If I make a mistake, hopefully it’s not too bad and I can go about trying to fix it. It’s like ‘Okay, where did I go wrong? How did I misjudge this? What can we do to you know try to turn things around from here?’”

That resiliency, combined with the greater comfort in utilizing immediacy, hunches, and reflections, enabled students to deepen the level of therapeutic discussion.
Which is to say that, though they acknowledged there are "tougher situations out there" (Brian) and areas of practice in which they still struggle, the students admitted they are "better at shaking off the [risks] that don't go well" (Julie), recognizing that "I'm just going to have to put my mind to it, and then once it is over, it will be okay" (Sarah).

The instructors spoke to their efforts at fomenting such growth ("we really covered risk taking pretty well," Ginger said. "There is not a right or wrong to exactly how risk averse you are. You can be aware of it, and maybe think about that when you're working with clients"), and recognized students' progress. Referring to the I-Pad assignments, Ginger recalled, "I had at least two folks that took a little bit of a risk that played out well. I'm not sure they would have done that if they hadn't been thinking about risk taking a little bit; where risk taking applies. Fortunately, both worked out. I gave them the feedback, but even if the risks didn't work, we'd just use some immediacy and process what happened. You go on from there. It doesn't mean it's a failure. It's not not good if it doesn't work."

Lauren discussed the importance of taking experiential risks outside of a counseling session to further expand one's comfort zone. "If you were asked to go counsel someone from a place characterized by lower socioeconomic conditions with a prevalence for violent crimes, what is your immediate reaction to that? What prejudices do you immediately bring? Do you say to yourself, 'I need to go do this because maybe it is something that I have not done before so that I can address my own stereotypes?'"

For Jenna, the biggest issue – and greatest growth – involved her perception of risks, specifically being "more aware that sometimes I don't want to take certain risks when I need to." She stated she knows "it's important to do that because I'm the type of
person who doesn’t like conflict, but I’m sure that’s going to come up and I need to know how to handle it.”

Ambiguity – “Okay with the gray”

The students began the semester with preexisting viewpoints on ambiguity, ranging from the uncomfortable (Brian said, “We all get questions, different, new social situations throughout our lives and every single time I have that same feeling of nervousness and anxiety”) to the philosophical (Lauren observed, “Base your decisions today on where you want to be tomorrow, and of course you get to tomorrow and you go ‘Hmm, I do not like this so much’”).

According to the instructors, the course curriculum elevated the level of ambiguity and their “Do-not-worry-about-taking-notes-just-plug-into-the-process” approach pushed it even higher. “During the middle of the semester,” Ginger explained, “students in this class always say, ‘Oh my gosh, what is going on here?’ We try to tell them at the beginning [about the ambiguity], but every single time we go up there they are like, ‘Why are you doing this?’” She stated that phenomenon has always been present in Techniques, likely because the course takes place at the very beginning of the program, when the students are “very unsure” of themselves.

“It seemed to be a bigger factor this time,” Ginger said. “That ‘I don’t know what is going on here’ [phenomenon]...There was an added dimension, not only in the basic skills and establishing rapport with clients – this expanded it to include how to think about clients in out of the box ways.”

Through their own interviews, students supported Ginger’s claim. “We got guidance,” Jenna said, “but at the same time, it was sort of up to us. It [the course] wasn’t
completely structured.” Likewise, Julie admitted, “I did not know what I was doing. I did not know what they were purposely trying to do, but it was kind of nice that they did not give us many guidelines...As a counselor, I feel like you have to have a little bit more room to grow. I think they gave us that, and it was scary at first, because I was like, ‘I do not know if I am doing it right,’ and they did not give a ton of feedback at first. So I had no idea if what I was doing was even close to what they wanted, but then I realized they do not have anything they want. They just want you to be yourself.

“Just having that uncomfortable stage was great,” she said, “because I think that would make this one [the upcoming practicum experience] maybe a little bit smaller.”

Overall, the students agreed ambiguity is ever-present in the counseling field.

“The way I perceived it was that it was not a black and white thing because it’s not a black and white world,” John said. “It’s not something that you just learn from a book and this is how you counsel. It’s not A + B = C, that’s how you become a counselor, and that’s what you do.” He elaborated, “There’s definitely going to be people who could walk in the door [to my counseling office] and I’d be like, ‘Oh shit. What do I do with this?’ But I don’t know that there’s any quick fix. I think the only answer for that has to be experience.”

Jenna agreed. “You can sit in a classroom and be told ‘You can always fall back on these things,’ but in the real world, you still don’t know what’s coming...I’m okay with that because I know that’s what life is like. Everyone’s different.”

In addition to the recognition of that uniqueness in clients, the students identified the need for patience on the part of the counselor. The ambiguity clients present can
routinely place counselors in a position of not knowing, because – as Julie said – “I’m sure not every situation will go as planned.”

“I think it is kind of nerve wracking not knowing,” Sarah said. “But I know going into this, that’s a typical thing.”

Ginger summarized the process behind students’ expanding tolerance for ambiguity as follows. “I thought it was this way. I don’t know what it is. I’m coming out in the end with insight.”

**Read & Flex – “Think on your feet”**

Given the responsibilities of their profession, counselors must do more than simply acknowledge the ubiquity of ambiguity – they must also respond to it. Participants identified a two-step process for accomplishing that task: reading a client (i.e., examining their situation from multiple perspectives) and flexing to meet them (i.e., adapting the therapeutic approach as guided by the aforementioned perceptions). “Help can come in a lot of different ways,” Lucy observed. “I think it’s just specific to what the person needs.”

As such, the students identified the counselor’s process of observation and assessment – whether based on verbals and/or nonverbals, observed diagnostic criteria and/or personal intuition – as key to the success of a therapeutic endeavor. “I think stepwise, you first have to figure out what is going on,” Ann offered. “That could take one session, that could take a lot of sessions...Then go from there and see what needs to be done.”

Responding to those observations, students agree, is not necessarily a straightforward matter. “Theoretically speaking, there’s no one simple solution to any given problem,” Brian explained. “So I think it’s just a matter of utilizing the method that
you think is best given that individual's certain circumstances and uniqueness." Flexing, Ginger stated, is about "approaching problems, courses, issues, client relationships...whatever you're approaching...from all angles and seeing which one connects best with the client."

The read/flex dynamic does not merely apply to the counseling intervention. As students observed, it applies to the person of the counselor, as well. "If the situation called for a calming or nurturing, comforting person, then that is what I would be," Lauren said. "If it called for being more direct, then that is what I would be. It would depend on the situation." That personal component also requires flexibility, even spontaneity, on the part of the helper.

"To be an effective counselor, I think you have to make sure that the client knows that you are reacting to what they are saying in a spontaneous way," Brian said. "Because if you go into a session with some preconceived notion about how you want the session to go, and you stick to that format without any deviation...if you stick to it too much or are too rigid in that sense, then you may miss areas for exploration, which could [in turn] provide you with a little bit more insight as to what may be causing the problem."

Jenna offered a similar outlook. "You have to be flexible and you have to be able to come up with things on the spot," she said. "In other disciplines it's very straightforward – 'This is what you do' and 'These are the steps that you take,' where this is more...you're talking with a person so it can go any sort of direction. You have to be flexible."

During discussions on flexibility and spontaneity, the issue of creativity surfaced. For Dewey, creativity is "absolutely" part of reading and flexing, because "you have to
know there are options for how you’re going to flex.” The other participants echoed Dewey’s assertions, recognizing creativity as an inherent part of the counselor’s approach.

“We talk about standards in terms of measurements and protocols...but then, like we said, they are just guidelines,” Brian said. “You have to adapt the situation at hand and meet the client’s needs. And you have to read the situation and try and quickly in your mind establish what the best course of action from here on. And you have to continuously do that over and over and over.”

“As basic as it is,” Julie said, “creativity can be anything - just connecting with the individual in the best way that they could possibly connect.”

“There’s a wrench for every nut out there but there’s a gazillion different nuts,” John concluded. “You’ve got to be able to think outside the box and you’ve got to be able to do things tailored to the client. That was the impression I got [of creativity in counseling]. There are no limits to what you do.”

**Summary of Findings**

The findings presented in this chapter resulted from detailed analysis of the ten participants’ lived experience of a creativity-infused curriculum in counseling techniques, as expressed in a series of interviews (three per participant). Each individual case was examined for themes, after which the researcher analyzed the cases collectively. Two overarching themes emerged: The Art of Engagement (Counselor as Guide) and Imaginational Comprehension (Counselor as Adapter). These themes will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.
Chapter Six

This chapter will expand upon the cross-case themes generated in Chapter 5, examining them in relation to the central phenomenon of this dissertation: creativity in counseling. The study utilized an introductory techniques course, selected due to its potential role in the development of student-counselors’ ways of knowing, as a vehicle for infusing identified elements of creative thought (e.g., tolerance for ambiguity, comfort with risks) into a counselor education curriculum. By incorporating a mixture of creativity-focused cognitive and affective challenges into an environment requiring active engagement, the researcher sought to promote psychological maturity within the participants, expanding their perception of the roles and responsibilities of a counselor, and inspire the generation of alternative perspectives on problem-solving processes.

The researcher collected data from ten participants in the course (eight students, two instructors), accumulated through a series of three interviews conducted at the beginning and middle of one semester, and immediately prior to the start of the subsequent term—a deliberate delay intended to provide participants time to process the overall experience. Additional data sources included the students’ weekly reflective journals, video recordings of both the didactic and experiential portions of the course, and observations by the researcher, who participated in the course as a teaching intern. The data were coded via an iterative process, and then condensed into a pair of cross-case themes: Art of Engagement/Counselor as Guide and Imaginational Comprehension/Counselor as Adapter.

This chapter will explore connections between those themes and literature in the fields of counseling, creativity, and education. It will then discuss implications for
counselor education, address limitations of the project, and offer recommendations for future study.

**Links to Literature**

Research on creativity in counselor education is limited, yet despite this study's relatively unique focus, support for the findings do exist in the literature. The following sections will provide more in-depth examination of participants' lived experiences of the creativity-infused Techniques curriculum, considering each of the discovered themes/subthemes in light of the pre-existing knowledge base.

**Theme One: Art of Engagement (Counselor as Guide)**

This theme described "the counselor in context." That is, it described participants' recognition of counselors as facilitators of a systemic process involving mutuality and genuineness aimed at enabling clients to navigate the issues and obstacles of their personal narratives. To that end, this study echoed the findings of Duffey et al. (2009) in which practicing counselors identified mutuality, awareness, "other and personal growth and promotion," authenticity, and honesty as key relational competencies, along with specific skills, such as patience, perseverance, and the capacity for self-preservation within unproductive alliances (p. 101). As Laughlin (2000) stated, counselor education would be more beneficial – and arguably, more effective – if it would approach therapy "as an art of engagement rather than as a conquest for technical mastery" (p. 73).

**Relationship.** Participants emphasized the idea of connection within a counseling session, suggesting a strong client-counselor bond represents the basis for therapeutic work. That alliance, participants suggested, may require considerable effort on the part of the counselor, who must attend not only to the quality of overarching relational
experience, but also to the client’s place – and counselor’s presence – within it. As such, the students treated the experiential component of each class as an opportunity to engage in and experiment with relation-building processes, and came away from the course with a greater understanding of their own impact on others.

The importance of relationship is well-covered in the counseling literature, perhaps most notably in the works of Rogers (1954, 1961), who stated safe and accepting relationships are imperative to successful therapy. In part, Rogers attributed that success to the potential for such relationships to encourage clients’ constructive use of their own creative processes. Duffey et al. (2009) provided further support for the positive confluence of a sound relational basis and creative approaches in counseling, suggesting the two can lead to systemic empowerment (e.g., increasing the intimacy within session and promoting divergent thought processes).

*Presence.* When discussing the counselor’s contributions to the therapeutic relationship, participants made frequent mention of the notion of presence. In layman’s terms, presence represents the means by which helpers communicate their concern for, acceptance of, and interest in clients – the Rogerian principle of unconditional positive regard enacted. Pishney (2010) highlighted the role of presence in a therapeutic encounter. By demonstrating a desire to creatively engage a client, by responding to their story with active listening skills, Pishney stated a counselor can lower a client’s inhibitions, providing them the liberty to share feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.

*Supportive environment.* Referencing an additional component crucial to a successful therapeutic relationship, study participants recognized counselors need to provide their clients with an open, warm, and nonjudgmental (i.e., safe) space – an
environmental extension of the abovementioned presence. The literature in the field of
counseling (Cole & Sarnoff, 1980; Rogers, 1961; D’Andrea, 1988) and creativity
(Eisenberger & Shanock, 2003; Hennessey & Amabile, 1988) acknowledges the value of
supportive and encouraging environs. D’Andrea (1988) states counselors have a
responsibility to create such settings, suggesting they play an integral role in clients’
personal development.

From a more creative standpoint, students in the techniques course credited the
instructors with producing a safe space within the classroom, referencing the value of
seeing more experienced helpers model the improvisational and risk-taking behaviors
required of the class. Instructors went on record as stating they wish they could have
further modified the environment – i.e., making it even more safe – to better demonstrate
the creative capacities. The value of modeling has been demonstrated throughout the
literature (Belenky et al., 1986; Kottler & Carlson, 2009; McAuliffe, 2010; Shurts et al.,
2006; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003), with Eisenberger and Shanock (2003) finding that
an environment that expects and rewards creative thought can increase perceptions of
self-determination and competence for those operating within it.

Several students indicated well-defined, “healthy” boundaries contribute to the
establishment of a supportive relationship. Understanding such limits, they suggested,
could be helpful for counselor and client alike. Laughlin (2000) agreed, entering into a
relationship with the intent of using relational limits “opens the way to a greater range of
options and flexibility” (p. 71).

Counselor’s role. The conception of a counselor as a “guide” was universal
among the participants – a notion not unique to this dissertation. D’Andrea (1988), for
example, described counselors as helping professionals who "guide [clients] toward higher levels of psychological maturity" (p. 23). To be effective in that role, the students stated counselors need to be active and open-minded listeners attuned to diversity issues. In addition, students stressed counselors must do the self-assessment necessary to ensure the client's needs remain paramount, and be willing to employ creative strategies to collaboratively explore new perspectives with clients.

Such collaboration has long been recognized in the field. Frey (1975) described counseling as a "a creative enterprise within which client and counselor combine their resources to generate a new plan, develop a different outlook, formulate alternative behaviors, [and] begin a new life" (p. 23). Nearly three decades later, Mooney and Padesky (2000) suggested therapists should encourage clients to access their own creativity to generate novel approaches toward life.

**Be yourself.** Bridging the counselor's position as a guide and the mutuality of the therapeutic working alliance is the concept participants identified as "being yourself." Over the course of the semester, students came to realize that allowing their personalities to surface in session and acknowledging – rather than fighting – their limitations can contribute to a more genuine therapeutic experience, one that may elicit greater authenticity from clients.

Research indicates the incorporation of a counselor's personality can lead to higher quality treatment. Reiter-Palmon et al. (1998) demonstrated individuals better able to examine issues in ways that fit their personality are more likely to benefit from the ambiguity often present in real-world problem-solving situations. Similarly, Wheeler and D'Andrea (2004) stated in-the-moment authenticity on a counselor's part has the
potential to "deepen the counseling relationship and provide the client with the insights and skills to grow and change in a positive direction" (p. 121).

**Theme Two: Imaginational Comprehension (Counselor as Adapter)**

This theme described creativity in counseling. Participants identified four aspects of creativity as essential for competency as counseling professional: openness to self-development, the ability to engage in appropriate risks, tolerance for ambiguity, and a capacity to respond adaptively within session. Though few of the participants admitted being comfortable in each of the four areas, they all acknowledged a greater appreciation for the characteristics and identified their value to counselors.

In a study of therapists' perceptions of creativity's role in counseling, Carson et al. (2003) found multiple themes, including the ability to engage clients spontaneously, a willingness to improvise and take risks, and the capacity for connection with their intuitive selves. Personal characteristics of a creative therapist identified in that study included flexibility, risk-taking, and sense of humor.

**Outside the box (Self-development).** The acknowledgment of self-development was a recurrent concept in participants' interviews. Through the experiential role-talking experiences, students came to recognize the need to transcend their initial conceptualizations of a counselor, to remove the constraints inherent in their rigid preconceptions. By loosening those restrictions...by incorporating components of their personality into the realm of professional performance...students acknowledged they are better able to creatively engage the clients and, ultimately, meet their needs.

Such findings agree with those of McAuliffe (2010), who stated experiential opportunities can disequilibrate students, paving a path toward increased cognitive
complexity. Similarly, parallels can be drawn between participants’ depiction of
counselors utilizing their individuality to improve creative relationships with clients and
Yun Dai and Shen’s (2008) description of creative action as a goal-directed dialectic
interplay of cognitive and affective components (e.g., playfulness and seriousness,
spontaneity and deliberation) involving well-formed intentions and determined efforts to
pursue specific goals. That, in turn, links the findings of this study to the works of Carson
et al. (2003), which listed personal inhibitions and a lack of confidence as blocks to
creative therapy.

**Appropriate risk-taking & resiliency.** Most participants expressed a need for
additional experience with appropriate risk-taking in counseling setting. All participants,
however, admitted possessing a more realistic understanding of both the rewards and
potential pitfalls of risks (e.g., immediacy, hunches, challenging comments, creative
interventions) within therapeutic work. Students acknowledged instructors’ efforts to
encourage experimentation with risks throughout the course of the semester, stating the
activities and assignments intended to foster risk-taking behaviors (e.g., the Idea Pad)
aided in the development of within-session resiliency. That is, the students felt better
equipped to bounce back after a risk failed to produce the results intended.

These findings lend support to the works of Cole and Sarnoff (1980), Matson
(1991), Kottler and Carson (2009), and Wheeler and D’Andrea (2004), which concluded
that – within the boundaries of a supportive learning environment – exposing students to
immediacy, risk, and failure can provide an opportunity for empowerment.

**Ambiguity – “Okay with the gray.”** As illustrated by the interviews, one point
of consistency exists in counseling: inconsistency. Participants pointed out the ever-
variable, always “gray” nature of the therapeutic working alliance, a protean phenomenon built around unique individuals (counselor, clients) in distinct circumstances (past experiences, present occurrences) collaborating in a constantly evolving relationship. They stated recognition of that ambiguity – and patience in the face of the uncertainty – is essential to a counselor’s well-being and their ability to successfully and creatively interact with clients.

The literature bears evidence backing those findings. Skovholt and Rønnestad (2003) describe a willingness to work within ambiguity as a quality counselor educators would be wise to promote within students. Similarly, Clegg (2008), Mooney and Padesky (2000), and Zenasni et al. (2008) state tolerance for ambiguity would improve counselors’ creative behaviors, better enabling them to handle the uncertainties inherent in helping clients discover new perspectives and develop new relational patterns.

Students drew a connection between their increased appreciation for ambiguity and the instructional approaches utilized in the course. That link echoes the assertions of Kottler and Carlson (2009) and Langer (1989) suggesting the utilization of sufficiently ambiguous, yet relevant scenarios in a classroom can lead to developmentally transformative experiences for students.

**Read & flex – “Think on your feet.”** Participants expanded upon the researcher’s conceptualization of improvisation with the notion of creative, contextual adaptation. Operating like a series of one-two punches, participants described an iterative process of perception (i.e., a combination of active listening and nonverbal awareness) and adjustment (i.e., selecting an appropriate intervention/interaction based on the counselor’s “read” of the client). That process, they stated, relies upon a combination of
in-session awareness (i.e., tracking clients), flexibility (i.e., openness to divergent thought/action) and spontaneity (i.e., an ability to generate alternative options in the moment).

A considerable body of research exists in developmental (Harvey, Hunt, & Schroder, 1961; Hunt, 1971, 1975) and counseling (Brendel et al., 2002; Cannon, 2008; Foster & McAdams, 1998; Sprinthall, 1994) literature in support of the value of reading and flexing for students and therapists alike. Research examining those areas from the standpoint of creativity exists, as well. For example, Wiener and Oxford (2003) identified the ability to devise and enact interventions specific and unique to the person, setting, and situation as a trait characteristic of “master therapists” (p. 269). Gale (2002) discussed contextual sensitivity and relational action as vehicles through which counselors can help clients “better accommodate and adjust to the fluidity of rules and roles of daily living” (pp. 85-6).

Implications for Counselor Education

The goal of a qualitative study is not generalizability; at least not in the empirical sense commonly found in quantitative research. For qualitative work, the focus is on what Karp called “analytical generalizations” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) and Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) refer to as “applicability.” Such concepts refer to an individual’s determination whether the findings of a qualitative project can be used to inform processes in settings outside those specifically studied.

Given the presentation of a rich, thick description of the phenomenon in question – and the selection of a “typical” case (in reference to sampling strategy) – Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) suggest that, ultimately, readers of a qualitative study will be able to
determine whether the phenomenon studied bears sufficient similarity to their situation of interest. Additionally, Gall, Gall, and Borg state readers’ exposure to qualitative studies can deepen their understanding of educational phenomena of interest, noting the speculations and insights offered by the researchers can aid in the developing readers’ capacity to assess and refine their educational practices.

That said, this study – which examined a representative group of counseling students (predominately Caucasian females in the 22-40 age range) enrolled in a CACREP-required course traditionally included in the first year of professional studies – represents a typical scenario for an accredited program in counselor education.

**Course-Specific Implications**

Woodside et al. (2007) state counselor education programs endeavor to provide students with the skills necessary to provide counseling services on a professional level. This study suggests techniques courses within such programs would benefit from expanding beyond the emphasis on skills to include a more metacognitive understanding of the creative processes involved in therapeutic work. The curriculum utilized for this dissertation challenged faculty members to more thoroughly examine the nature of counseling, and provided students with experiential activities and assignments that broadened their perspectives on the relationships between counseling/counselor development and the capacity for Imaginational Comprehension (i.e., risk-taking, ambiguity tolerance, and reading and flexing). For examples, see Table 1.

Additionally, students gained a more well-rounded understanding of the concept of creativity. In her final interview, Julie laughed at the memory of her initial reaction to the idea of working with a creative counselor. She recalled thinking, “They’re going to
Table 1

Participants’ Developing Perspectives, Identified via Study Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Subtheme</th>
<th>Earlier Perspective</th>
<th>Later Perspective</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity, Counselor’s Role, Be Yourself</td>
<td>“I think a lot of us were able to hang onto reality therapy because it’s so concrete. You do this, this and this, XYZ. Then when we got to Techniques and we were kind of more wishy-washy... just being more client-driven than counselor-driven. It was really hard to make that switch” (Ann, Interview 2)</td>
<td>“I think more than focusing on a specific technique, it’s important to be present and be yourself” (Ann, Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence, Read &amp; Flex</td>
<td>“I’ve experienced some difficulties in terms of actively listening to what someone is saying” (Brian, 1)</td>
<td>“[T]o be an effective counselor, I think you have to make sure that the client knows that obviously, you are listening to them, that you are reacting to what they are saying in a spontaneous way” (Brian, 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor’s Role</td>
<td>“I would tell him what to do. That is probably not right” (John, 1)</td>
<td>“[T]he job is help them find their path” (John, 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>“I’m not very good [with the unexpected]” (Julie, 1)</td>
<td>[The ambiguity] kind of made us really uncomfortable for like a month and a half, and I know a lot of us were like shaking in our boots, but it was good, that ... I really liked it looking back (Julie, 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk-Taking/Resiliency, Be Yourself</td>
<td>“I’ve been known to be indecisive [when I don’t know the right thing to do]” (Julie, 1)</td>
<td>“You are not going to always get it right, but if you are true to who you are as a counselor, I feel that makes you more effective” (Julie, 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence, Outside the Box</td>
<td>“I’m so caught up on trying to do the right thing that I find myself going inside me and freaking out and trying to say ‘What’s right?’ I kind of tune the other person out and that is not beneficial” (Lucy, 1)</td>
<td>“[M]aybe there isn’t a right way. I think it comes back to being genuine and going with the flow” (Lucy, 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ask me to paint,” then feeling nervous because, “I can’t paint.” Runco (2007) describes such an equation of creativity with artistic talent as an art bias, a social understanding of the concept which serves to distance creativity from scientific and common-sense thought (Glaveanu, 2011).

By the completion of the course, however, Julie stated creativity in counseling “can be anything – just connecting with the individual in the best way that they could possibly connect.” She explained, “Making counseling a creative act means making it unique [ambiguity, read & flex], taking a risk and failing miserably [risk-taking], and then trying that with a different person [resiliency], and finding it works really well. It is a challenge. It does not have to be simple. Some people say to me, ‘Why are you in school for two years just to learn how to listen? Two years, really?’ [Counseling] is so much more.”

Participants expressed particular appreciation for the Do-It-Yourself Intervention and the Idea Pad (i.e., I-Pad) exercises, with students noting the availability of both as self-generated resources during their practicum and internship experiences. From the instructor’s standpoint, Ginger admitted being “a little bit dubious” about the I-Pad at first, but – adopting the spirit of the course – deemed it an opportunity to engage in a little risk-taking of her own. “I kept an I-Pad myself for a week just to tell the students I did it,” she explained, “and I was like ‘Whoa.’ To me, it was really invigorating to do this. I had fun. It was challenging. It always is when you get outside your comfort zone.”

Overall, participants recognized the application of creative resources to theoretically grounded instruction in skills can improve the total learning experience,
both from the perspective of student self-efficacy (e.g., Brian's statement, "I feel like I understand the complexities of being in this profession") and instructor's evaluations (e.g., Ginger's admission, "The course had the same effect on students that it traditionally had, but in a magnified way...in more dimensions"). Such findings indicate instructors of counseling techniques courses would benefit from:

- Applying creative processes to their own work:
  - Introducing relevant sources of ambiguity, provide compensatory support
  - Devising and experimenting with new teaching interventions (risk-taking)
  - Assessing effectiveness of interventions/syllabus and adapting accordingly (read & flex)
- Attending to the subject matter using a combination of teaching styles (e.g., lecture, discussion, experiential)
- Emphasizing creative components of counseling via modeling, lecture, and supplemental readings
- Fostering an academic environment that welcomes differences among students (in terms of philosophy, experience) and encourages curiosity and appropriate risk-taking behaviors
- Generating assignments (e.g., reflective journal prompts, transcription-based self-assessments, risk-taking activities) designed to promote cognitive complexity and spur creative thinking
Engaging students in a semester-long process built around such concepts can provide them with:

- A more realistic perspective of counseling and the counseling relationship
  - Opportunities to expand and personalize conceptualization of counselor’s identity
- An educational experience that attends to both the art and science of counseling
  - Exposure to creative skills, approaches not traditionally emphasized in techniques textbooks
- A deeper, pre-practicum appreciation for the personal and interpersonal challenges present in real-world therapeutic settings
- An experientially supported perception of professional self-competence in the face of such challenges
  - “I’m just going to have to put my mind to it, and then once it is over, it will be okay” (Sarah)

**Programmatic Implications**

The interviews conducted for this study revealed participants exposed to a creativity-infused curriculum began to understand Imaginational Comprehension as an aspect of counseling. Given the literature suggesting that – in order to adequately respond to the complexities of modern life – creativity must become an orientation toward counseling – it appears incorporating creative thought processes into a techniques course represents a promising start. Scott et al.’s (2004) meta-analysis of creativity training programs, however, suggests the incorporation of a program-wide emphasis on creativity
could result in more efficacious and long-lasting results. Scott et al. recommended creativity training programs:

- Operate from an empirical conception of the cognitive activities associated with creative thoughts/behaviors
- Be lengthy and relatively challenging
- Include real-world examples illustrating the application of the creative processes
- Provide domain-specific practice in applying creative strategies in a complex, realistic context

Thus, a counselor education program would likely see increased relational Imaginational Comprehension in students by incorporating lessons and activities aimed at promoting appropriate risk-taking, improvisation and tolerance for ambiguity throughout the overall curriculum. To do so, the instructional recommendations offered in the Course-Specific Implications section above could be applied to the entire program. The courses would simultaneously require modifications to encourage the creative themes identified by this study. Possible variations include:

- Internship: Instructors may use metaphorical activities and nonlinear supervision strategies to process case conceptualizations (Guiffrida, Jordan, Saiz, & Barnes, 2007; Ishiyama, 1988; Sommer & Cox, 2003)

- Group Counseling: Students may be asked to devise group activities utilizing unexpected approaches to pique clients’ attention
  - Building gingerbread houses as part of in-patient substance abuse treatment
• Reading Dr. Seuss’ *The Sneetches and Other Stories* in adolescent self-esteem groups

• Substance Abuse/Addictions: Challenge students to devise metaphors, activities to demonstrate thematic understanding of the issues at play in substance abuse (e.g., powerlessness, fear, desperation)
  
  o Discuss alternative expressions of immediacy that may arise in substance-abuse cases

• Psychopathology: Students may be charged with finding non-clinical Youtube clips to guide discussion of particular psychopathologies
  
  o Class creates and presents a playlist of songs representative of DSM disorders

• Ethics: Encourage discussion of appropriate risks in conjunction with ethical decision-making models
  
  o Create a mock courtroom in which students testify about their treatment of assigned clients
  
  o Students may generate consent forms for an imaginary counseling center

• Assessment & Evaluation: Students will engage in role-play, acting as utilization reviewers defending treatment plan against insurance company
  
  o Students may create intake, assessment forms for counseling center (in collaboration with Ethics course)

• Human Development: Using a “Grow Your Own Human” project (Crothers & Coaston, n.d.), students will “birth” an individual and, over the course of the
semester, subject them to appropriate lifespan developmental challenges, culminating in death.

**Limitations**

Though the researcher observed recognized standards for qualitative validity and reliability (see Chapter 3), this study was subject to procedural limitations related to researcher involvement, sample parameters, observation practices, interview data, and data analysis. The following sections will address these potential limitations in greater detail.

**Researcher Involvement**

Operating from the framework of a "participant observer," the researcher was not only present for each of the class periods during the semester, but served as one of five doctoral-level teaching interns. The purpose for his attendance was well-known, as the researcher stood at the front of the class on the first day, explained the parameters of the dissertation, and furnished students with the informed consent documents. With that in mind, the presence of the researcher may have impacted instructors' performances (e.g., adding pressure) and student participation, as behaviors may change in quality and quantity due to awareness of the observer.

Despite efforts to limit active involvement in the routine operation of the class/study (the students in the researcher's small group were excluded from the individual interview sampling process), unforeseen circumstances pressed the researcher into duty as course instructor for one class period. As such, the continuity of instructor-class rapport was interrupted. In addition, the researcher was unable to take observational notes for that particular class period. To reduce the impact of that inability on the study,
the researcher asked the teaching interns to provide written observations of that particular session.

**Sample**

The course instructors had pre-existing relationships with the researcher. Dewey and the researcher were members in the same doctoral cohort at the participating university. Such contact resulted in Dewey coming into the semester with in-depth knowledge about the dissertation, as well as a personal interest in the researcher's success. In addition, the researcher previously served as Ginger's teaching intern for the techniques course. As a result, she, too, had a vested interest in the researcher's efforts. Given those relationships, both instructors may have felt more constrained by the parameters of the curriculum, feeling less inclined to engage in improvisation (or even modification of assignments and interventions) for fear of negatively impacting the validity and reliability of the study. To some extent, a parallel process can be drawn between the instructors' self-imposed restrictions and the students' early-semester inhibitions against incorporating their own personalities into their work.

In terms of the individual student participants, the issue of history came into play. One of the students had a child mid-semester, an event which (by the student's admission) added considerably to overall life stress. Following the completion of the data analysis, another of the participants admitted to the researcher that she had been under marital distress throughout the semester, and acknowledged that may have affected her attention and retention during class periods. Either situation could have colored/compromised the participant's involvement in the study (e.g., in terms of quality of interview responses, in-class participation, and written assignments).
The data triangulation for this study involved the individual interviews, member checks (see Appendix G), and reflective journal entries. However, not all student participants completed all of the required journal entries. Three failed to complete the final journal of the semester, which respectively removed one data point from the journal sets (13 entries in each) the researcher had anticipated. Within the 101 journals collected, the participants varied in depth of reflection, length of composition, and overall attentiveness to the assigned prompts.

Observation Practices

Despite the researcher’s presence in every class session and the availability of audio-visual recordings of classes and experiential meetings, limits did exist to the behaviors the researcher could observe. In addition to physical restrictions (only being able to lay eyes upon one aspect of the class at any given moment), the fixed nature of the cameras and occasional issues with microphones made it difficult to focus on individual participants at times. To reduce such limits to the observational process, the researcher enlisted the aid of the doctoral teaching interns/small group leaders, who provided feedback on participants’ performances.

Interview Data

Interview guides were used to explore the main topics of the study, beginning each round of interviews with a list of questions on which – depending upon a participant’s answers – the researcher could expand. In situations where multiple participants struggled with a particular question, the researcher modified the interview guides in an effort to make the queries more clear. While there were no readily discernible
differences in the intent of the original and replacement questions, the different
terminology/delivery could have potentially impacted the participants’ replies.

Likewise, the utilization of an outside transcription agency could have impacted
the quality and clarity of the participants’ responses. To limit any errors, the researcher
reviewed each transcription individually, checking the written documents while listening
to the audio recordings, and making corrections as necessary.

Data Analysis

Unlike most qualitative studies, which utilize multiple coders to establish
consistency throughout the iterative coding process, the researcher represented the sole
data analyst during initial coding endeavors. Though outside sources were used to come
to agreement on the themes and subthemes for the study, the reliance on a single analyst
at the early stages of the process could lead to questions about the consistency of the
codes used.

Additionally, though the findings appear to suggest exposure to a creativity-
infused Techniques curriculum fostered student growth in terms of relational
Imaginational Comprehension, the nature of the study makes establishing causality in the
findings impossible. Though Ginger attested that the growth observed during the
dissertation study seemed greater and more multidimensional than in previous semesters,
such development could have been attributed to students’ natural evolution.

Recommendations

As mentioned in the Limitations section above, the research design utilized for
this dissertation project prohibited the establishment of a definitive causal link between
the curricular redesign and the students’ self-perceived development. However, the
qualitative data analysis did suggest exposure to a foundational course in counselor education built upon the premise of relational Imaginational Comprehension may improve student preparation for future experiences as counselors – a possibility that warrants further exploration.

On the part of this researcher, further study will include a detailed analysis of the student output generated for the dissertation-related course. The researcher will conduct detailed examinations of the journal reflections, Idea Pads, and transcriptions collected from the entire class. Content and discourse analysis will be applied in an effort to:

- Identify evidence of possible developmental growth
- Evaluate the ways students handle immediacy, hunches within sessions
- Assess evolution in student self-evaluations of counseling performance
- Elaborate upon the various components of Imaginational Comprehension and better qualify students' perspectives of their relationship with counseling

In addition, the researcher will review his observational notes and personal memos written during the process of this study. Findings will be used to refine the individual lessons designed for the techniques course and reexamine the whole of the curriculum. The revamped curriculum will then be used to further investigate the central phenomenon (i.e., creativity in counseling) with future counselor education cohorts. The researcher has already been contacted by representatives from other academic institutions about the possibility of installing the curriculum (which could result in the acquisition of additional feedback to modify the course plan), as well as the possibility of engaging in comparison studies using similar syllabi, but different emphases of instruction.
Additionally, the notion of Imaginational Comprehension itself bears further exploration. Studies of its creativity-oriented components (e.g., risk-taking, tolerance for ambiguity) could be used to clarify the definition of the concept. Quantitative measures exist for risk taking, tolerance for ambiguity, and perceptions of creativity within the workplace (e.g., Oetting Michaels Anchored Ratings for Therapists, Oetting & Michaels, 1989; Situational Outlook Questionnaire, Isaksen, Ekvall, Akkermans, Wilson, & Gaulin, 2007; Social Problem-Solving Inventory – Revised, D’Zurilla, Nezu, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2007). These measures could be used (or adapted) to explore possible interrelations/interactions between the factors. Should the findings bear further study, the components could then be compared with measures of cognitive, moral, and intellectual development to examine possible relationships between an individual’s worldview, decision-making processes, and/or ways of knowing with their level and degree of Imaginational Comprehension.

Finally, it is recommended further studies consider ways to incorporate creative thought processes into other counselor education courses. The literature indicates prolonged exposure to creativity training produces more significant, longitudinal results, and as such, researchers should consider ways to extend the components of Imaginational Comprehension throughout a counselor education curriculum.

Conclusion

According to author and activist Parker Palmer (1999), good teaching requires more than just technique. He wrote:

I’ve asked students around the country to describe their good teachers to me.

Some of them describe people who lecture all the time, some of them describe
people who do little other than facilitate group process, and others describe everything in between. But all of them describe people who have some sort of connective capacity, who connect themselves to their students, their students to each other, and everyone to the subject being studied. (p. 27)

The data from this study support Palmer’s notion of connective capacity. Participants recognized counseling as a profession replete with ambiguity and rife with personal and relational challenges. They came to appreciate a clinician’s role in establishing and maintaining rapport and developed an understanding of the need to read situations and reason “on the fly.” They realized counselors need to be self-aware and aware of their impact on others, open to exploring divergent viewpoints, and possessed of the divergent thinking skills needed to generate new perspectives. By connecting themselves to their students (through modeling), the students to one another (via experiential opportunities), and everyone to the subject (through lectures, interventions, and assignments designed as part of the curriculum), instructors and students alike recognized counseling as an interpersonal creative activity.

*Some say that my teaching is nonsense.*

*Others call it lofty but impractical.*

*But to those who have looked inside themselves,*

*this nonsense makes perfect sense.*

*And to those who put it into practice,*

*this loftiness has roots that go deep* (Lao-Tzu, in Mitchell, 2006, p. 67)
Appendix A: Researcher as Instrument Statement

I am "the creative guy."

That's neither a boast nor an admission. Far from either. In actuality, that statement represents my best guess as to how the people in my professional life – my cohort mates, my academic colleagues, even my counseling faculty – would describe me if given the chance.

Over the last three years, I’ve become the idea generator, the intervention inventor, a walking wellspring of unusual counseling activities. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with any of that – it’s just not what I expected when I enrolled in a Ph.D. program at The College of William & Mary. Honestly, on Day One of my doctoral studies, the notion of creativity wasn’t something to which I’d given much thought. At least, not self-referentially. Having worked previously in a field surrounded by painters and illustrators of immense talent, the art bias (i.e., the misunderstanding of creativity as artistic talent [Runco, 2007]) dominated my perceptions. In my mind, creativity was for the folks whose works hang on museum walls and line the "Fiction," "Fantasy," and "Sci-Fi" sections at the Barnes & Noble, and things like ingenuity and innovation fell squarely in the domain of people other than me.

Sure, I’d used metaphors and analogies and pop culture references throughout my work as a counselor, but that was...different. Creating things interpersonally is, in my mind, a lot different than creating them artistically. Which is to say, I can channel my imagination into conversation in ways I can’t on canvas, a Microsoft Word screen, or the piano at my Aunt Flor and Lydia’s house. As I planned this dissertation study, the question I asked myself is, "Why?" What makes that which is normally unthinkable
thinkable in a counseling session? Do other counselors...other counselor educators...experience the same phenomenon?

Throughout history, poets, philosophers, and academics have put a great deal of thought into what creativity is and what creativity should be. The literature tells us it has to be novel and useful, that it can be denoted with a big C – for creative efforts that shift the societal paradigm – or with a small c – for “everyday” creativity – and that it can be broken down into components, such as originality, fluency, and flexibility. The more I read about it, the more I research, the more I wonder: who gets to have the final say on whether something’s novel? Or useful? And what society...whose society...determines the “appropriate” capitalization convention? This study does not presume to answer those questions. Instead, it seeks to explore how students make sense of the role of a counselor. To determine to what extent creativity may play a part in that role. How will the participants – within the context of a foundational counseling class – define creativity?

As I move through this study, I will – in all likelihood – encounter students who, like myself, say “I’m not creative.” Having a handle on my thoughts as they relate to the idea that a relationship can provide a forum for creativity will help direct the research. It will remind me to be patient (participants need time to develop) and nondirective/non-leading (to reduce the likelihood my own experiences will influence participants’ perspectives), and it will drive the curiosity fueling the dissertation.

Though it’s accurate to say this intervention endeavors to infuse creativity into a counseling course, it specifically seeks to promote tolerance for ambiguity, appropriate risk-taking, and improvisational skills. Those goals need to both stay on the forefront and the backburner of my mind as I move into the coding process. That is, I need to be
cautious, maintaining vigilance to ensure I’m not seeing those characteristics in the data because I want to see them there. Remaining open-minded is necessary — vital, even — as this qualitative study is intended to serve as an exploratory process, not a confirmatory one.

As will be true of the coding, I must be careful in composing my observations, making sure not to compare the instructors’ methods (e.g. their questions, delivery of the lessons) to “the way I would have done it.” One of the intents of this study is to see how instructors understand creativity and respond to its incorporation into the curriculum, and allowing them the freedom to interpret the associated lesson plans will give me an opportunity to see how professors might “make creativity their own.”

Overall, I need to keep my enthusiasm in check. I firmly believe the elements of creative thought highlighted by this intervention study have value in counseling, problem solving, and cognitive development. The literature supports that supposition, but this dissertation represents my opportunity to see how participants in a counselor education program perceive creativity’s value, and I have to remember I’m not looking at the data through a crystal-clear lens. Counseling is a huge part of my life, and — whether I choose to think of myself as “the creative guy” or not — creativity plays a considerable role in my counseling.
Appendix B: Informed Consent (Individual)

I, ________________________________, agree to participate in a phenomenological research study involving faculty and students in the Techniques of Counseling course (EDUC C33) at the College of William and Mary. The purpose of this study is to explore creativity in a Master's-level counselor education program. This study is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation. I understand that my involvement in this study is purposeful in that this class was chosen with the intention of exploring a variety of viewpoints related to creativity and counselor education.

I will be expected to participate in three interviews lasting no more than one hour (with follow-up interviews as needed) related to my understanding, perceptions and experiences regarding creativity. I understand that the honesty and accuracy of my responses are important for this study. I also understand I do not have to answer every question asked of me and I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time by informing the researcher. I agree that I will read and review summaries of the information that are generated during the interviews for accuracy.

I have been informed that any information obtained in this study will be recorded with a pseudonym of my choosing that will allow only the researchers to determine my identity. At the conclusion of this study, the key linking me with the pseudonym will be destroyed. I also acknowledge that the interviews will be recorded to ensure accuracy of information presented. These recordings will be stored on digital devices that will be password protected. The recordings will be erased after transcription and will no longer be available for use. All efforts will be made to conceal my identity in this study and to keep my personal information confidential.

By participating in this study, I understand that a possible benefit is an increased awareness of creativity in counselor education. In addition, the results of this study may inform future decisions within the counseling program. Because of the phenomenological nature of this study, I understand there may be minimal psychological discomfort directly involved with this research. My decision to participate or not participate will not affect my relationships with faculty, students, staff or anyone associated with The College of William and Mary. If I have any questions or concerns in connection to my participation in this study, I should contact Christopher Lawrence, the project director at 863-307-7030 or clawrence01@email.wm.edu. I understand that I may report any problems or dissatisfaction to Dr. Thomas Ward, chair of the School of Education Internal Review Committee at 757-221-2358 or tjward@wm.edu or Dr. Michael Deschenes, chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at the College of William and Mary at 757-221-2778 or mrdesc@wm.edu.

My signature below certifies that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have received a copy of this consent form, and I consent to participating in the tasks outlined above.

______________________________  ________________________________
Date                      Signature of Participant
______________________________  ________________________________
Date                      Signature of the Investigator

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (PHONE: 757-221-3901) ON 07-18-2011 AND EXPIRES ON 07-18-2012.
Appendix C: Informed Consent (Group)

I, ____________________________, agree to participate in a phenomenological research study involving faculty and students in the Techniques of Counseling course (EDUC C33) at the College of William and Mary. The purpose of this study, which is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation, is to explore creativity in a Master's-level counselor education program. I understand that my involvement in this study is purposeful in that this class was chosen with the intention of exploring a variety of viewpoints related to creativity and counselor education.

I will be expected to participate in weekly journaling activities (minimum 2 pages in length) and debriefing sessions (no more than 15 minutes in length) related to my understanding, perceptions and experiences regarding creativity. I understand the honesty and accuracy of my responses are important for this study. I also understand I do not have to answer every question asked of me and I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time by informing the researcher. I agree that I will read and review summaries of the information generated during the interviews for accuracy.

I have been informed that any information obtained in this study will be recorded with a pseudonym of my choosing that will allow only the researchers to determine my identity. At the conclusion of this study, the key linking me with the pseudonym will be destroyed. I also acknowledge that the interviews will be recorded to ensure accuracy of information presented. These recordings will be stored on digital devices that will be password protected. The recordings will be erased after transcription and will no longer be available for use. All efforts will be made to conceal my identity in this study and to keep my personal information confidential.

By participating in this study, I understand that a possible benefit is an increased awareness of creativity in counselor education. In addition, the results of this study may inform future decisions within the counseling program. Because of the phenomenological nature of this study, I understand there may be minimal psychological discomfort directly involved with this research. My decision to participate or not participate will not affect my relationships with faculty, students, staff or anyone associated with The College of William and Mary. If I have any questions or concerns in connection to my participation in this study, I should contact Christopher Lawrence, the project director at 863-307-7030 or clawrence01@email.wm.edu. I understand that I may report any problems or dissatisfaction to Dr. Thomas Ward, chair of the School of Education Internal Review Committee at 757-221-2358 or tjward@wm.edu or Dr. Michael Deschenes, chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at the College of William and Mary at 757-221-2778 or mrdesc@wm.edu.

My signature below certifies that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have received a copy of this consent form, and I consent to participating in the tasks outlined above.

________________________________________________________________________
Date                                                Signature of Participant

________________________________________________________________________
Date                                                Signature of the Investigator

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (PHONE: 757-221-3901) ON 07-18-2011 AND EXPIRES ON 07-18-2012.
Appendix D: Interview Guides

Student Interview, Round One

- How do you perceive the role of a counselor?
- What qualities make an effective counselor?
- What is it like for you to be in a position where you don’t know “the right” thing to do?
- What thoughts might go through your head if a client were to ask, “So what should I do?”
  - How would you feel?
- When talking about your interactions with others, how would you describe your comfort zone?
- Tell me about a time you moved beyond that comfort zone. What contributed to that experience?
- If I were to tell you I was seeing a therapist, and I described her as “playful,” how might you react?
- Tell me about a relational experience you’ve had that helped you.
Student Interview, Round Two

You’ve now been working as a counselor (to some extent) for half a semester. Taking into account what you’ve done in your small groups to this point:

- How would you describe the relationship between a counselor and a client?
- What do you perceive as your strengths as a counselor?
  - What do you think about those?
  - Any surprises?
- What have represented your most significant challenges thus far?
  - Limitations?
  - Surprises?
- How have you responded to being pushed outside your comfort zone?
- What moments (during small group) stand out for you? Good? Bad? Doubts?
- How do you problem solve in session? (Either with clients, or within yourself?)
  - What’s the self-talk like?)
  - Where/how did you learn to do that?
- How do you make sense of what a counselor does?
Student Interview, Round Three

- What are the qualities of an effective counselor? (What does it mean to be an effective counselor?)

- How has your perspective changed, if at all, since the beginning of the semester?
  - To what do you attribute that?

- What have you learned about yourself (in the context of becoming a professional counselor) over the course of the semester?

- How would you describe the relationship between a counselor and a client?

- On the very first day of class, the instructors referred to counseling as a "creative" act.
  - How do you understand/make sense of that now?
  - So creativity in counseling involves...? (So what does creativity in counseling entail?)

- How might you utilize that moving forward? (How might that impact you?)

- Look ahead to practicum. It’s going to be a new/qualitatively different experience. How do you feel about entering that environment?
  - What do you anticipate it will be like?
  - Which of your strengths are you most comfortable relying on?

- Your client drops a revelation on you, and you don’t know the “right” thing to say. What do you do? How do you handle it? What will go on with you?

- What do you consider the most essential lessons you took from this course?
Instructor Interview, Round One

- How do you perceive the role of a counselor?

- What qualities make for an effective counselor?

- As a counselor educator, how do you introduce the idea of perspective taking?

- How do you envision the process of counselor development?
  
  o Where do you estimate the students are at this point?

- How do you make sense of the concept of creativity?

- How would you describe your impressions of a creativity-infused counseling curriculum?
Instructor Interview, Round Two

- You've reviewed and returned at least two sets of transcripts now. What are your impressions of what you've seen?

- Where are the students, do you think, going into these last few weeks of the semester?

- You've run through at least a dozen weeks of the curricular activities put together for this course. What skills/attributes would you say the course is trying to promote?

- Run me through the processes/thoughts as you prep for a course.
  - What are you thinking?
  - Feeling?

- How does the processing you do for these activities compare with those you might have done in other classes/groups?

- How has this curriculum related/connected with your teaching style?
  - Changes/adaptations?

- What's your comfort zone as an instructor?
  - What are you most comfortable doing?

- What has this course required of you as an instructor?
Instructor Interview, Round Three

- What is creativity?
- First class, you described counseling as a creative act. How do you make sense of that now?
  - How might the semester have altered that perception, if at all?
- How do you teach students creativity?
  - Why might they need it?
  - What obstacles might they face in that process?
- What do you see as being the biggest change in the students, if at all?
- What were your impressions of the course as a whole?
- How was it teaching this course?
  - How does it compare to the other incarnations of the class in which you've been involved?
- How might the course have challenged you?
- What do you see as the most impactful of the interventions?
- What's your take on the assignments?
- What modifications might you make to the class?
- If you were to go on to teach another techniques course, how might your experience with this class influence it?
## Appendix E: Observation Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9-5-2011</td>
<td>The instructors did an excellent job of establishing rapport with the students. Their utilization of humor and creative nicknaming activities helped set the stage for the creativity overview that would follow.</td>
<td>It was hard explaining the nature/purpose of the study to the students during the informed consent. Don’t want to say too much to “color” the interviews. Afraid of coloring things.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The instructor introduced her own play on “The Box” activity. She took an onion. Built an analogy in which she talked about helping the students peel back the layers with their clients.</td>
<td>Despite initial worries, Ginger really seems to want to contribute to the creative portions of the course.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9-12-2001</td>
<td>In response to the Director’s Commentary activity, in which Dewey showed footage from one of his own counseling sessions, students observed:</td>
<td>Would have liked to have seen more processing of the students’ comments. For example, the instructors might have asked the first student “Is the different better?” or say “Talk about the differences.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“You seemed authentic and comfortable. You seemed like a guy talking to a guy, where in the role play she seemed like a counselor. It was different.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“You did a good job of masking the things you were feeling in a session. I think we’re all afraid of not liking our clients. It looked like you were having genuine sympathy for him.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It was nice to see you not afraid to go there, but do so in a caring way.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-19-2011</td>
<td>I led this class, conducting The King’s Table activity. It was easy for me to do, as I am intimately familiar with the curriculum, but it was</td>
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hard not to worry whether about the parameters of the "participant-observer" role. Taking part is one thing, taking the lead is something entirely different. Still, I think it went well. As I couldn't take observations during class, though, I asked the teaching interns to jot down notes for me.

Teaching intern's observation:

"While giving instructions for the drawing exercise, one girl did ask for clarification (even though it was "against the rules." Upon showing the drawings, discussion then commenced on our unique conceptualizations of the picture, clarifying that there is no wrong (as each perspective is true to the individual). This was also tied into taking the perspective of a client and realizing the subsequent vulnerability he/she might feel when showing us their "world." At the same time, being aware that some clients might try to tell us what they think we want to know."

Teaching Intern's observations:

"The class become more comfortable both discussing and the need for discussing diversity throughout the class and I would say due to the activity and how you thoughtfully facilitated the discussion. For example, beginning comments reflected a more simplistic, detached view "Because of diversity.....". By the end of class, the discuss had evolved to contain more serious remarks, such as a student sharing that she "doesn't like to be asked 'what she is'" and another suggesting it is there is an element of shame that makes it hard to discuss these issues."

"Students were challenged to think
concretely about how their plans for addressing differences with clients. What would you say? How would you address it? Is it better to not address it? Why or why not? I think students may have realized it is not as simple as they expected. Additionally the inherent power dynamic in the counseling relationship adds another layer."

“Activity and lecture seemed to constructively mismatch many of the students’ developmental level. Information was presented in a warm, honest manner that infused some humor when appropriate, but was also direct and challenging. Some homeostatic beliefs may have been shaken (not stirred) a bit.”

| 9-26-2011 | The students seem reticent to utilize their imaginations in working with clients. At least that’s the way they seemed after being asked for a response to the most recent journal prompt. |

| Student quotes: | Reading a situation? Perspective taking? |

| “As counselors, sometimes people will just come to them with their stories. They may come with the emotions, and they can be easy to read. Sometimes, though, they’ll come with just a list of facts. Then it’s up to us to read in between the lines.” | |

| “You have to make sure you’re really seeing the perspective of where the client is.” | |

| “Someone only tangentially involved in something can be impacted deeply by it.” | |

| 10-3-2011 | Risk-Taking. It was really hard not to jump out of my seat and yell, “YES!!!!” |

| Student quote: | |

| “One of the best ways to learn is messing |
up on your own. When we go into small groups, we’re afraid to speak. Afraid of messing up. But it’s a necessary thing.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity: The professor asked students to greet her (as if in a counseling session), listen, then respond to her statement with “I’m sorry.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This was an excellent way to address both the ambiguity of a counseling setting, as well as the need to read and flex. Any one event (e.g., the death of a parent) can trigger innumerable thoughts and variable emotions in a client. In all likelihood, that person is experiencing multiple thoughts and emotions all at the same time. The notion’s probably nothing new to them – they’ve all likely had conflicting feelings at one time or another – but reintroducing that idea to them and asking them to look at it from the perspective of a counselor? Excellent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The instructor stated, “My dad died yesterday.” Then, in different tones, she replied to their “I’m sorry” with a different statement:

- “It’s okay. He was a jerk.” (Angry)

- “I don’t know what to do.” (Despondent)

- “I am really, really, really worried about my mom. Don’t know how she’s going to deal with this.” (Anxious)

The instructor asked the class to hunch as to what’s going on, then provide the next therapist’s statement.
Appendix F: Coded Interview Samples

Jenna, Interview 1

tape's running, which adds to the anxiety level, and this is for a class and you know that people are going to be reading what you say. You have that first moment, you ask that first question, and it's like "Oh, my gosh, this is awkward." What do you do in that moment? How do you take things from there?

Jenna: I just kept going and I tried to bring it back to "Okay, I can do this" and tried to sort of get back to a level of comfort. I think the middle went okay, but then again when I was trying to close it - like close it out... I was thinking "I can't just say 'That's ten minutes, we're done.'" I was trying to think how can I end this in the proper way. [laugh]

Interviewer: Okay. So you were looking for - you were looking for the right way to start and the right way to finish.

Jenna: Yeah. [laugh]

Interviewer: What if I had told you that just go in there and just have a conversation with your friend and record it? What would that have been like?

Jenna: I think still videotaping myself might have been a little bit awkward. [laugh]

Interviewer: You said that there's kind of that little voice in the back of your voice that's going "How do I start this conversation? How do I close this?" When things were good - in the middle, you said - what was going through your head?

Jenna: I was trying to be more reflective and paraphrase, but I realized that I kept asking questions and so then I tried to do more reflecting.

Interviewer: So there was still an idea it sounds like "What should I be doing in this situation?" but it wasn't as nerve wracking as it was in the beginning or the end.

Jenna: Yeah.

Interviewer: All right. I'll tell you that gets better.


Interviewer: So now that you have a few classes under your belt and you've gotten a little bit of practice, how do you feel about the choice to come here and study counseling?

Jenna: I'm really glad that I did it. Because counseling is something that I really want to do. I feel that being here - even though it is kind of awkward and some things for me
you may have hit that speed bump where it's like, okay, I'm not sure what to do in this situation? How do you sort of problem solve or get yourself going again?

47 Brian: There's been a lot of speed bumps but a lot of small speed bumps, some big ones. One time recently I had a reflection, a really great reflection in my head of what I was going to say based upon what my client had just told me. And, the moment she stopped talking it just got completely erased from my mind. So at that point I had no idea what to say. So I basically just sat there and it was like seven, at least seven seconds where I had nothing to say. It was in small group so people were watching me. I knew I could be open about my own personal frustrations so I just looked down, then I looked back up and then it came back to me. So I took a deep breath and then I reflected. It was definitely an uncomfortable moment. I could have went way off course, said something that was completely irrelevant, just for the sake of saying something. And, I think that's an example where even though it was uncomfortable I didn't really divert or diverge from the presenting issue with the client. Another example may be like what would crying look like for you? On that deep level of emotion, it's like in my mind it's like a fine line of what to ask, what not to ask, whether or not to utilize a reflection. And, sometimes — in the past what I've done is I've utilized kind of all three of those things.

48 Interviewer: Okay.

49 Brian: So some closed questions to gather more information, see how they're feeling, open ended questions to maybe open up the situation a little bit more to let them explain to me why it is that they're feeling these deep emotions or just a small reflection. "You seem to be pretty emotional right now, tell me more about that." Then after that I get more of a sense of where they're coming from, I may better understand what may be the root of the problem.

50 Interviewer: Okay.

51 Brian: So I guess those three methods kind of help me.

52 Interviewer: Alright

53 Brian: But I don't want to say it's easy because it's not. I don't want to say that I'm a great counselor because I haven't been in any tough situations yet in my mind. So I mean, yes, these speed bumps have occurred and I think I relatively did a decent job getting over them but there are tougher situations out there that I have yet to be presented with.

54 Interviewer: Okay. So how do you respond when you're pushed outside your comfort zone as a counselor?
not always work. I guess I would wish I would be more prepared. Then I would actually just wing it, or think of something else.

Interviewer: How are you at winging it?

Sarah: [Laugh] Depends on the situation. If, early on with counseling, that situation came up, I think it would be quite difficult for me versus... maybe I'd feel more comfortable in thinking of something like that down the road.

Interviewer: With time, you think you will be okay in that situation, but right now [laugh] that could throw you for a pretty big loop.

Sarah: Yes, that is what I hope, in time. But I do not know. Who knows?

Interviewer: In class, we talked about hunches. Being in the moment. How big of a role - if any - does that play in what you try to do as a counselor?

Sarah: How big of a role? Is that what you are asking?

Interviewer: Yes. Are you comfortable putting yourself out there and going, “You know, we are talking about this but I do not really think that is what is going on here...”

Sarah: I would not say I am that comfortable enough to just go out and say that. Maybe I would be thinking it in my head, but it would take me a while to try to lead it into that situation.

Interviewer: You might notice that something else is going on, but you are not necessarily at the point where you are going to go out there and play that hunch. You will have it, but it is going to be more gradual to get to it.

Sarah: Yes, I feel like I would want to get more with the person. I would want to get more information to make sure it is leading there. To see they wouldn't feel offended if I would go out there on the limb.

Interviewer: You spent six years in a school that encompasses the elementary, middle, and high school levels, so you have this experience in various different environments. But even though you have teaching experience, being a school counselor is going to be a new role for you. How are you feeling going into that?

Sarah: Quite nervous. The whole situation is new. It is not like sitting in front of a classroom and I have this lesson and “Okay, bang, bang, bang, this is going to happen, this is what I want to accomplish in a day.” It is going to be different since I don't know what is going to... Like when a student comes in, you never know what it is going to be. And then also, it is like a larger environment that I am not used to, as well
Appendix G: Member Check Example

Researcher Text:
At the outset, she explained she’s more comfortable with [redacted] than conformity, and stated that the almost homogeneous aspect of Williamsburg society proved particularly challenging to her.

Participant Comment:
Uniqueness and diversity.

Researcher Text:
Aspects like creativity, humor, playfulness were initially seen as okay [redacted].

Participant Comment:
This sounds incredibly stupid when I read it. All I can concretely remember from this is that my mind went to the gutter when I heard the word “playfulness.” I think what I was trying to say was something like “I would have no problem using these aspects as a counselor as long as they were effective, and I would not have a problem with a counselor using them with me as long as I felt like I was being taken seriously and not feeling patronized or talked down to.”

Researcher Text:
She acknowledged struggling somewhat with what she deemed the artificiality of the small group sessions.

Participant Comment:
This had to do with reading and responding to what’s going on in people’s heads rather than what they’re saying. I didn’t know how to explain it to you in the interview. When we’re role playing, it’s not genuine. I can’t ‘feel’ people and it makes it very hard to get a good picture of what’s going on….not sure if you want to change anything or not.

Researcher Text:
Thoughtfulness/Reflection:

Participant Comment:
Wow! This quote is horrible. The writer in me must shred it.
Appendix H: Thematic Coding Tree

Art of Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<td>Presence</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Art of Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supportive Environment</td>
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<td>Trust – Relationship</td>
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<td>Multicultural Awareness</td>
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<td>Empathy-Perspective-Caring</td>
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<td>Curiosity</td>
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<td>Appreciation – Positive Regard</td>
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<td>Engaging</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guide</td>
<td>Counselor’s Role</td>
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<td>Good Boundaries – Client First</td>
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<td>Promote Development – Perspective Taking</td>
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<td>Listening</td>
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<td>Open-minded</td>
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<td>Foster Autonomy</td>
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<td>Self-Esteem Encouragement</td>
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<td>Promote Client Self-Efficacy</td>
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<td>Promote Client Self-Advocacy</td>
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<td>Prompt Reflection</td>
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<td>Promote Insight</td>
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<td>Explore</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skill Appreciation</td>
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<td>Solution-Focus</td>
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<td>Authenticity – Honesty</td>
<td>Be Yourself</td>
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<td>Thoughtfulness</td>
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<td>Innate</td>
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<td>Outgoing</td>
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<td>Teaching Style</td>
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<td>Self-Interest</td>
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<td>The Box</td>
<td>Self-Development – &quot;Outside the Box&quot;</td>
<td>Imaginational Comprehension</td>
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<td>Right/Wrong</td>
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<td>Advice – Directive/Nondirective</td>
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<td>Knowledge – Theory</td>
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<td>Self-growth – Awareness of Self-Development</td>
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<td>Patience</td>
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Appendix I: Course Materials

Syllabus

Education C33, Techniques of Counseling
Fall, 2011
4:30-7 p.m., Mondays

Texts


Course Description
This introductory counseling techniques course will provide master’s candidates with the core counseling skills needed to (1) establish client trust and a context of caring; (2) build a professional client-counselor relationship; (3) construct the environment for authentic client-counselor exchange; (4) enhance client exploration, expression, and insight; (5) assist in establishing the client’s goals for growth and personal development; and (6) provide the “platform” for a working relationship in problem solving regardless of specific theoretical approach. This course will emphasize the creative processes associated with counseling, and has been designed to build students’ confidence by introducing them to methods for innovation and problem solving and providing structured academic experiences that will enable students to develop their abilities to use those methods. This course is not specifically designed to “make students more creative”; rather, it will provide students with an understanding of what it takes to engender a creative environment, which can foster creativity and innovation.

Course Objectives
Enhance counselor characteristics and behaviors that influence helping processes (Standard II.G.5.b)
Enhance knowledge of strategies for use with diverse populations (II.G.2.d)
Enhance knowledge of methods for facilitating optimal development and wellness over the life span (II.G.3.h)
Increase knowledge of ethical and legal issues in professional counseling (II.G.1.j)
Develop and enhance essential interviewing and counseling skills (II.G.5.c)
Enhance knowledge of counseling from a systems perspective (II.G.5.e)
Increase understanding of the use of research to inform evidence based practice (II.G.8.e)
Develop characteristics and behaviors that influence helping processes including age, gender, and ethnic differences, verbal and nonverbal behaviors and personal characteristics, orientations, and skills (II.K.5.a)
Evidence an understanding of essential interviewing and counseling skills (II.K.5.b)
Increase knowledge of counseling theories that provide the student with a consistent model(s) to conceptualize client presentation and select appropriate counseling
interventions (II.K.5.c)
Enhance understanding of a systems perspective that provides an understanding of family and other systems theories and major models of family and related interventions (II.K.5.d)
Increase knowledge of a general framework for understanding and practicing consultation (II.K.5.e)

Course Overview
This course will utilize a mixture of lecture, discussion, interactive/multimedia learning, written work, reading, and experiential learning.

Course Requirements:

- **Class Attendance and Participation:** Students are expected to attend all classes on time, complete reading assignments, and participate in class discussions. Active participation is essential to learning counseling skills. Students who participate actively demonstrate openness to growth and willingness to share thoughts and feelings, both in experiential activities and in reflections. This course and its activities are a collaborative effort; your success depends heavily on your commitment, transparency, and interest. More than two absences will prevent completion of course requirements. Students should contact the instructors if they will be absent from a class.

- **Guided Reflections:** Students are responsible for writing weekly journal entries reflecting on their experiences of the counseling process. Prompts will be provided to direct students in this process. Rather than summarizing the particulars of each class, students will focus on their internal responses to engaging in the experiential activities, demonstrating their reflection on the many issues involved in building strong helping relationships while incorporating personal style in a professional, authentic, and caring manner. Each journal entry will be a minimum of 2 pages in length. Handouts will be provided with examples for student use in developing a style of reflection. Reflections will be sent via e-mail to the small group leaders, and are due by noon on the Friday immediately following class.

1. **Idea Pad** (excerpted from Matson, 1996): Our brains don't shut off. They're constantly recording data (consciously or unconsciously), analyzing that data, and processing it in the form of thoughts/questions/ideas. Given that millions of thoughts pass through our heads on any given day, it's rather easy to lose track of the ones we think are valuable. To prevent them from being lost forever, Matson states we need to get in the habit of writing them down. The “I Pad” represents a creative counseling resource students will create throughout the course of the semester. It will collect three elements:

   **Ideas:** Inspiration can strike anywhere. Whether you’re in Vegas watching David Copperfield’s sleight of hand, on a playground watching kids play games, or
sitting at home watching television – ideas for counseling interventions abound. The ideas included in the I Pad represent the foundational material for creative efforts in counseling – the thoughts recorded should be related to counseling, portrayals of counseling in the media, ideas for interventions, interesting metaphors, etc.

*Risks:* One of the best ways to become more comfortable with risks is by experimenting with them. This portion of the I Pad will allow you to do just that. Stretch yourself beyond your normal comfort zone – even if only a little bit. After explaining the risk you took, include a bit of reflection on your preferred style of risk-taking. Do you carefully weigh the pros and cons associated with the chances you take, or do you prefer to “go with your gut”? Matson explained his students have initiated a “Risk-a-Day” program, challenging themselves to take small risks (e.g., trying a new dish at a favorite restaurant) daily.

*Quotes:* Quotations, whether by television’s Dr. House or literature’s Dr. Seuss, Albert Einstein or William Shakespeare, Thomas Jefferson or Captain Kirk, are good to hold onto. Not only can they serve as the catalyst for ideas, they can be helpful in interactions with clients.

Students are expected to maintain the I Pad with at least three entries per week, consisting of the topics from the categories listed above. Each entry should be accompanied by an explanation of its perceived relevance. (Remembering “why” one wrote something down is often as important as remembering the “what.”) An example will be provided.

- **Transcripts:** Three (3) interview transcripts – i.e., verbatim records of counseling interviews – are required of each student: (1) a baseline against which progress can be measured (10 minutes); (2) a mid-term transcription (12-15 minutes) in which all specific skills covered to date are demonstrated; (3) a final transcription (15-20 minutes) in which all specific skills covered during the semester are demonstrated. This assignment will provide students with an opportunity to self-assess their interviewing skills. Detailed instructions and an example will be provided. Students who do not initially demonstrate each skill set to the satisfaction of the course instructors can be asked to engage in a session to demonstrate required skills. Failure is not an option! **ALL transcription assignments should disguise the nature of any individual whom you may have interviewed.** When videotaping/recording a session, be sure you have permission on tape for that interview to proceed.

- **Do-It-Yourself Intervention:** Students will be asked to monitor the relationships they have in their lives, keeping track of the problems/issues that are brought to them. Instructors will lead students through the process of identifying themes (e.g., responsibility, motivation, insight/discovery, relationship/communication, impulse control, psychoeducation) that exist in the problem stories. A list will be generated by instructors. Students will be asked to select one theme from the list,
JUMPING OFF THE COUCH

then devise a creative intervention based upon that theme with which to engage a client. Interventions will be presented to the class.

Evaluation

“A” Requirements
Satisfactory demonstration of all required skills; no more than one class session missed; consistent participation in all class activities, and completion of all reflection papers.

“A” Plus
A requirements plus outstanding class participation and/or exceptionally strong demonstration of counseling skills

“A” Minus
Satisfactory demonstration of all skills and completion of all assignments but below average class participation or missed sessions.

B or below
Unsatisfactory demonstration of skills and/or below average participation in class activities

Confidentiality and Ethics

In an effort to create a realistic setting for practicing counseling techniques, students are expected to bring personal experiences to discuss when serving as clients in the experiential sessions. Students have the right and personal responsibility to share only as deeply as they want, and may stop participating in an experiential interview without penalty. Given the essential role of these interviews in the learning objectives, students who are unwilling to engage in these exercises may prefer to drop the course. Students will not be evaluated on their roles as clients.

Because personal information may be shared during practice sessions, it is understood that all students will adhere to an ethical policy of confidentiality. What is shared by others in class is not to be discussed outside of class with anyone. Breaking the confidentiality of another student will be considered a serious violation of academic and professional integrity.

Please turn off or silence cell phones.

For the courtesy of others, please refrain from personal computing (e.g., social networking, e-mail, shopping) during class.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings Due</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/5</td>
<td>Introductions, course overview, and philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/12</td>
<td>Therapeutic relationship, basic attending skills</td>
<td>Kottler &amp; Hecker, 2002</td>
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<td>Exploring biases and the self as a helper across differences</td>
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<td>Reflecting feelings and review reflecting content skills</td>
<td>Young, Chapter 7;</td>
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<td>Young, Chapter 8;</td>
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<td>Young, Chapter 10</td>
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<td>Challenging skills</td>
<td>Young, Chapter 9</td>
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<td>Self-disclosure, Immediacy, Change Skills</td>
<td>Young, pgs. 61-64,</td>
<td>Reflection #8</td>
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<td>Focusing/Goal-Setting</td>
<td>Young, Chapter 11</td>
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<td>Integration of Personal Style, Part I</td>
<td>Young, Chapters 13-15</td>
<td>Reflection #10</td>
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<td>O’Hanlon</td>
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<td>Integration of Personal Style, Part IV; Intervention Presentations</td>
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Classes & Interventions

Class 1: Introductions, course overview, and (creative) philosophy

- Creativity in Counseling PowerPoint
- Interventions:

  **The Key to Good Listening** (Adapted from Efran, 2008)

  - **Encourage:** *Fluent Thinking, Risk-Taking*
  - **Strategies:** *Provocative questions, Tolerance for ambiguity*

  This intervention has been used with counselors, counselor educators, supervisors and teachers to shed light on the deceptive capacity of language and to demonstrate the importance of asking for clarification.

  After asking the students to take out a dollar bill (or handing out such bills), the instructors will challenge the students by saying, “Look at the front of the bill. I want you to find the small key.” [Pause] “Please raise your hand when you’ve found the small key.” If people are having trouble, allow other students to help them. Then, say “Now that you’ve found the small key on the front of the bill, I want you to flip it over and find the large one.” [You MUST say “the large one.”]

  The students may struggle, as there is no key on the other side of the bill, though there certainly is a “large ONE.”

  **Processing Questions:** What were you searching for? What made you think you should have been searching for that? How might this situation have been avoided? What kept you from seeking clarification? How might you use this lesson with clients (or students)?
**Inside-the-Box Thinking** (Adapted from Williams, 1970)

- Encourage: *Curiosity, Risk Taking*
- Strategies: *Skills of search, Adjusting to development, Evaluate situations*

After talking about questions – their importance in counseling and the ways to construct good questions - the instructors will place a box on the desk in the classroom, and challenge students to develop a hypothesis about what's inside, based on the answers to the questions asked of the instructor. (Kind of like the board game Clue.) Really emphasize the importance of the questions.

The instructors tell students they will be keeping track of the number of questions asked, and will compare that number to previous class performances. The current record is 14 questions.

(Note: “What’s in the box?” IS an acceptable question. One that is very rarely asked.)

Process questions: How did you determine what questions to ask? How might we get that number lower?

If the students ask “What’s in the box?” tell them they’re the first class to have done so, then discuss why the previous classes might not have asked. “What can we take from that?”
Class 2: Therapeutic relationship, basic attending skills

- Readings Due: Young, Chapter 1-3; Creativity in Counseling reading
- Interventions:

  **Director's Commentary**

  - Encourage: *Fluency, Flexibility, Complexity*
  - Strategies: *Tolerance for ambiguity, Examples of habit/change, Adjustment to development*

*Demonstration:* Instructors will show a videotape of themselves working as a counselor in a clinical setting. Throughout the course of the videotape, the instructor will disclose for the class the thought processes (e.g., concerns, fears, hunches, observations) that were taking place during the session, then engage in an open discussion about the segment.

*Assignment:* As modeled above, students will transcribe a 10-15 minute counseling session, one that includes internal commentary.

**Crash & Burn**

- Encourage: *Risk-Taking, Originality, Elaboration*
- Strategies: *Evaluate situations, Organized random search, Visualization*

During an early class on rapport building, students will watch brief counseling exchanges. Instructors will stop footage after a client response, then solicit questions/reflections from the class *most likely* to destroy the rapport. Students will vote on the most original.
The One-Word Therapist

- Encourage: *Originality, Curiosity*

- Strategies: *Provocative questions, Intuitive expression*

Instructors will tell of a client who would only utter one-word responses to questions, and explain how they turned the client’s monosyllabic approach to therapy into a training game. “Using one word responses kind of looks like fun. I wonder if I could do that as a therapist – spend an entire hour working productively with a client while only using one-word replies. I’ve got ‘who,’ ‘when,’ ‘why,’ ‘how,’ ‘because,’ ‘and,’ and... well, I’m sure I could come up with others. What do you say? Would you be willing to test my skills?” Instructors will model the experience, then students will break into small groups and engage in brief (<5 minute, one-word exchanges).
Class 3: Exploring biases and the self as a helper across differences

- Readings due: Young, Chapter 4.
- Distribute Assignment – *Grave Circumstances*
- Interventions:

  **The King’s Table**

  - Encourage: *Fluent Thinking, Risk-Taking*
  - Strategies: *Provocative questions, Tolerance for ambiguity*

Give each member of the class a piece of paper, and distribute several boxes of crayons.

Tell the class there are two rules for this activity: 1. “Please do as I ask,” 2. “Please don’t ask any questions.” Then say:

“On the piece of paper, please draw a table.” (Give them a moment.) “On that table, please draw a cage.” (Another moment.) “Next to that cage, please draw a bunny rabbit.” (Another moment.) “On that bunny rabbit, please draw a blue number eight.” Ask the clients to hold up their drawings, then ask, “What do you notice about the drawings?”

(Give them time to reply.)

You want them to identify that the drawings are, by and large, different. The tables, cages and rabbits could all be different shapes and colors.

“What element of the drawings looks the most similar on the most drawings?” They’ll respond with “The blue eight.”

*Processing Questions:* Instructors can ask students about the relative commonality of the blue 8, discuss the existence of different perspectives (“Which is the correct perspective?” “Which is the better perspective?” “What might this activity tell us?” “How
might we use it in counseling settings?""). It can also be used to illustrate the importance of being specific when we communicate.

**Intervention: The More You Know** (Adapted from Williams, 1970)

- **Encourage:** Flexible Thinking, Curiosity
- **Strategies:** Discrepancies, Adjustment to development

The instructors ask the students to think of the different ways—outside of direct questioning—that they might find out about clients, their support systems, and their culture. More traditional ways might include: talking to referral sources (with permission), speaking to parents (if client is a child). Instructors could then elicit less traditional ways, such as: show-and-tell using family photos, asking the clients to bring in passports (to look at stamps), asking clients to bring in important objects and getting them to share stories. Discuss the importance of researching culture, and how what you read on Wikipedia doesn’t make you an expert.

**Assign Grave Circumstances articles for next week:**

**Article 1:**

**Article 2:**

**Article 3:**
Class 4: Invitational skills, open questions, reflecting content, paraphrasing

- Readings due: Young, Chapters 5-6; Grave Circumstances articles
- Interventions:

Grave Circumstances

- Encourage: Fluent Thinking, Risk-Taking
- Strategies: Provocative questions, Tolerance for ambiguity

Being effective (and memorable) as a counselor sometimes involves taking risks, opening oneself to criticism, and conceiving different problem solutions by examining alternative possibilities from many angles.

This leads into a discussion of the three articles made available last week. The first two will be pieces on the funeral of John F. Kennedy. The last article will be by Jimmy Breslin, who wrote an article on the same topic, but from a decidedly different stance – that of the gravedigger

Processing Questions: What do we notice about the articles in the packet? In what ways could we characterize the overall themes/messages of the readings? Which, if any, stand out? For what reasons do they stand out? What might we take from this as counselors? Every conversation we have will involve facts, every story we hear will, too. In what ways might context be related to content?

Intervention: Jake & Amy

- Encourage: Fluent Thinking, Risk-Taking
- Strategies: Provocative questions, Tolerance for ambiguity
The intent is to show the students that, sometimes, clients can throw off even the most experienced and well-intentioned counselor.

After watching a scene from the television show *In Treatment*, the instructors ask the class to guess as many different scenarios as possible. (The clip will stop at the end of Amy’s story, and feedback will be sought from the students. When the instructors are ready, they will resume the clip, which will show Amy admitted she’s lying.)

*Processing questions:* Lessons? Morals of this story? What could we get from this? How would we feel as the counselor? How might those feelings impact our reflections/paraphrases?

**Intervention: Metaphorically Speaking...** (Adapted from Williams, 1970)

- **Encourage:** *Flexible Thinking*

- **Strategies:** *Attributes*

After discussing the use of metaphor/simile in counseling, the instructors will offer students a list of personality traits (e.g., “flighty”), asking them to create a metaphoric description related to said traits (e.g., “head in the clouds”), and a list of metaphors clients might say “I’m such a slug,” asking them to elicit possible meanings.

The instructors could then ask: “How might these work in a session?” “When might they not work?” “What are some things we may want to watch out for when using metaphor talk?”
Class 5: Reflecting feelings and review reflecting content skills (Risk Taking)

- Readings due: Young, Chapter 7; “Hunch” article
- Interventions:

Getting Some Air

- Encourage: Fluent Thinking, Risk-Taking
- Strategies: Provocative questions, Tolerance for ambiguity

Begin the session by showing a YouTube-captured commercial featuring Michael Jordan. Use it to open a discussion on risk taking. “People who hold back from taking risks constantly miss opportunities.”

How might we relate that clip to the readings for today? [Reflecting emotions involves risks. Introduce undershooting, overshooting, and the impact they can have on rapport.]

Talk about what distinguishes “appropriate risks” from “inappropriate risks.” Introduce the notion of hunches.

List-en Up (Adapted from Williams, 1970)

- Encourage: Complexity, Curiosity
- Strategies: Intuitive expression, Adjustment to development, Creative listening

After a discussion introducing students to the idea of “hunches,” they are asked to watch a clip of a counseling session. As they do so, they are to make two lists – one on the information they acquired, and another on the guesses or inferences they could make from what they had heard.
How might you use hunches in your session? How might they impact a session if used externally? What purposes might they serve internally (e.g., might tell us things to remember for future sessions, could inform the questions we do ask)

**Intervention: Face Off** (Adapted from Williams, 1970)

- **Encourage:** *Flexible Thinking, Curiosity*
- **Strategies:** *Evaluate situations, Intuitive expression*

Discuss nonverbals and the role(s) they have in communication. (Instructors may consider asking the students to address the way emoticons function in texting/instant messages. Elicit scenarios from the students to add color to the discussion.) Given the importance of emotions in the therapeutic relationship, it’s necessary for counselors to be able not only to identify feelings, but recognize the differences that exist among their outward manifestations (e.g., tears can represent joy, fear, sadness; smiles can represent happiness, anxiety). The instructors will show the students photographs and ask them to “Give different reasons for the looks on the people’s faces.”

**Processing Questions:** “For what reasons might we have done this activity?”

(Reference one of the photos) “What is the actual reason this person is showing this emotion?” [We don’t know.] “How could we find out?” [Ask them] “Think we’ll always get an answer?” “An honest answer?” [Could then be linked to the notion of filing things for later discussion, confrontation, ways of deepening the conversation, metaphors/analogies.]
Class 6: Summarizing

- Readings due: Young, Chapter 8; Metaphor in Counseling

- Interventions:

Two-and-a-Half Counselors:

  - Encourage: Risk-Taking, Originality, Elaboration

  - Strategies: Evaluate situations, Organized random search, Visualization

The students will play “therapist to the stars.” After taking out paper and pen (or laptop), they will be asked to role-play the part of a therapist, summarizing an interview with Charlie Sheen.

Processing Questions: What might we take from this?

Intervention: In The Make Up Chair

  - Encourage: Risk-Taking, Originality, Elaboration

  - Strategies: Evaluate situations, Organized random search, Visualization

Students will be reminded of the concepts of fluency, flexibility, and originality, after which instructors will show a counseling clip/segment. Students will be asked to reflect on the client’s statement with an emotion/metaphor. Responses will be posted to Blackboard – students will vote on most original response.
Class 7: Initial interviews & assessments

- Readings due: Young, Chapter 10
- Interventions:

**I Saw the Sign** (Adapted from Williams, 1970)

- **Encourage:** *Original Thinking and Complexity*
- **Strategies:** *Organized random search, adjustment to development, visualization*

This intervention/activity is designed to act as a review of the skills learned thus far, encouraging students to think about the content of the course in a different format (i.e., how they visualize/make sense of the skills being taught).

The students would be given a list of counseling skills, and – after breaking up into small groups – asked to develop a new and unique set of symbols of communication for expressing those skills. Each group would have an opportunity to draw two or three of their symbols on the board, and after each group has done so, the class would attempt to decipher the symbols, explaining the thought processes behind their deductions. The instructors would then check in with each group to hear what went into the designs.

**Take 5**

- **Encourage:** *Fluent Thinking and Risk-Taking*
- **Strategies:** *Creative writing skill, Intuitive expression*

Students will be asked to take out pen and paper (or laptop) and write nonstop for five minutes. The goal is to capture whatever the mind is producing, whether it’s connected or not.
They will then review what they’ve written and share/discuss their thoughts about it. (The specifics of what they’ve written DO NOT have to be shared. We’re looking for metacognition.)

Processing: This activity can be tied into note-taking, assessment. (How do we select from the thoughts running through our minds as we formulate an assessment? How do we decide which elements are most pertinent?)
Class 8: Challenging skills (Risk Taking, Part II)

- Readings due: Young, Chapter 9

- Interventions:

**Pill Poppers** (Excerpted from Matson, 1996)

  - Encourage: Risk-Taking
  
  - Strategies: Discrepancies

To aid students in understanding how they deal with risk, instructors will invite them to play “the poison pill game” (Matson, 1996, p. 55-6).

“Imagine that I have a bowl containing one thousand medicine pills. One of the pills contains enough poison to kill you. The other nine-hundred-ninety-nine pills are harmless. Assume also that I have a large sum of money. How much do I have to pay you to select and ingest one pill? Will you play for one-thousand dollars? Ten thousand? One hundred thousand? One million? Ten million? Or not for any price?” Instructors will ask students to write down a number.

Tell the students the creator of this scenario has simulated playing the game with about one-thousand students over the years. Roughly one-third of the students say they will play for one hundred thousand dollars or less, one-third for between one million and ten million, and one-third refuse to play at any price.

Instructors will then ask the students how many of them drive automobiles. What are the odds of being killed in a car accident in a large city? One in a thousand, the same as the poison pill game.

Matson reports, “Are the rewards for playing the automobile game greater than the rewards for playing the poison pill game?” I ask. "No," is the universal reply. They
have to ride in automobiles. Or do they? Isn’t alternative transportation available? What about buses and bicycles? The reality, of course, is that each student is used to riding in automobiles and does not even think of the odds. But the poison pill game is new and different. The poison pill game highlights two dilemmas involved in risking. First is the newness of a risk. If a risk has not been taken before, it has a bear-under-the-bed quality to it. One-third of the students absolutely refuse to play the poison pill game, even with huge monetary rewards at stake. Second, the students have unrealistic attitudes about everyday risks. The dangers of commonly accepted risks such as riding in automobiles are largely ignored. Reckless and careless disregard of risks can be deadly.”

Process Questions: What does this tell us? What are some of the dilemmas involved in risking? How do we respond to new risks? How do we perceive everyday risks? How might this impact clients? How might it impact how we proceed as counselors? At what point, for you, do new risks become everyday risks? If reckless and careless disregard of risks can lead to trouble, how do we make sure we’re being careful with the risks we take?

Left Field

- Encourage: Flexible Thinking
- Strategies: Provocative questions, Creative listening skill

In an effort to introduce the class to the use of unusual questions to challenge ways of thought, the instructors will tell students about a technique in social psychology known as “the pique.” Researchers studying it conducted a pair of experiments in which they had students play the role of panhandlers, asking passersby for money. During the
first experiment, the students asked questions like “Can you spare any change?” or “Do you have a quarter?” During the second experiment, the students asked “Can you spare 17 cents?” or “Do you have 33 cents you could give me?” Three-quarters of the passersby in the second experiment gave the students money, whereas less than half the people in the first experiment responded.

Process questions: “Why might that be the case?” “How would you describe the pique technique? What might its purpose be?” [Asking unusual questions to bypass automatic resistance] “In what ways could we incorporate this into counseling?” “What purpose might asking unusual questions serve?” “What might we need to consider when constructing/using them?”

The instructors will then show a video clip of a brief therapeutic interaction, and ask the students to “Think of an unusual question you might like to ask this client.”

The Wheel

- Encourage: Flexible Thinking

- Strategies: Provocative questions, Creative listening skill

Building upon Left Field, instructors can tell a story about a colleague who used to work at a carnival, running an attraction called “The Wheel.” Customers would walk up to the booth and hear this:

“Welcome to The Wheel. Here’s how it works. You give me a topic. Any topic you’d like. Preferably something you’re an expert about. Then I’ll ask you a question about your topic. If you get the question right, you get to spin the wheel and win one of
the fabulous prizes listed on it. If you get it wrong, you can still spin...IF you do a physical challenge.”

The instructors would then wonder, “What kinds of questions do you think The Wheel worker had to ask? What qualities did they need to have?” [They needed to be topical, but unusual, looking at the topic from a different perspective. They also needed to be delivered confidently.] The instructors would follow the discussion by engaging the students in the game. “Okay, so if I come up to you and say, ‘My topic is botany,’ what questions might you ask to stump me?” [Questions could be “What’s my favorite flower? Who wrote the best-selling botanical book of all time?] ‘My topic is my son.” [Questions: “What did your son get on his most recent math test?” “What was your son’s third-period class in high school?”]

‘My topic is Star Wars.’ [Questions: “Who was the key grip for the first film?” “What was Luke Skywalker called in the film when it was dubbed for release in Asia?”]

‘My topic is me.’ [Questions: “How many bones do you have in your body?” “What’s the name of the nerve that allows you to move your little finger?”]

Processing: What was it like to participate in the game? How did you come up with the questions? How might this exercise relate to counseling? [Questions can help people look at things from alternate – and very unexpected – perspectives.] How might it feel to walk up to the booth, and get hit with a question like this?
Class 9: Self-disclosure, Immediacy, Change Skills

- Readings due: Young, pgs. 61-64, Chapter 12
- Interventions:

**Glass Houses** (Adapted from Williams, 1970)

- Encourage: Fluent Thinking, Curiosity
- Strategies: Discrepancies, Evaluate situations, Intuitive expression

The students would take part in a discussion about what it would be like to live in a glass house. The instructors would ask students to list all the things they could think of that might happen as a result of living in a glass house, rather than a regular house. [Could be everything from privacy to heating bills to working out more frequently (so they look better to passersby).]

*Processing Questions:* “If you had to use a single word to describe living in a glass house, what would it be?” “Why that word?” “How might this activity inform who you are as a counselor?” “What might you reveal in a session?” “How might you remind yourself to limit yourself?” “How might people look at coming into therapy like living in a glass house?” “How might you respond to that?” “How might it inform your approach to rapport building?”

**The Look in Their Eyes**

- Encourage: Fluent, Flexible, and Original Thinking; Curiosity
- Strategies: Evaluate situations, Intuitive expression

To expand upon the notion of immediacy, the instructors will discuss the four “primary” feelings (mad, sad, glad, scared). “Why might we need more than these in a
counseling session?" The intent is to explore the act of nuancing emotional talk. The instructors will show photographs of people in emotional situations, and ask the students to throw out all the descriptive phrases that might describe the individuals pictured. The instructors will write the descriptions on the board. Following a discussion of the differences in the phrases offered (they may fall into different “primary” categories, have differing levels of severity, etc.), the instructors will ask the students to make a “hunch” about the person/people in the photo. “Which description/depiction feels right to you? Where does that hunch come from?”
Class 10: Focusing/Goal-Setting

- Readings due: Young, Chapter 11
- Interventions:

**Intervention: The Language(s) of Love**
- Encourage: *Tolerance for Ambiguity*
- Strategies: *Evaluate situations*

Instructors will tell the story of a married couple referred for counseling. The counselor greets the couple, leads them back to the therapy room, and – upon beginning the intake interview – discovers the husband and wife don’t speak the same language. Literally. The husband speaks English and only English, whereas the wife speaks Spanish and only Spanish.

At this point, the instructors ask the students to suggest ways (usual or unusual) for the counselor to proceed. [Goals aren’t always obvious.]

**Intervention: Fun with Rube-ics**
- Encourage: *Original Thinking, Risk-Taking*
- Strategies: *Tolerance for ambiguity, Adjustment of development, Visualization*

To talk about the utilization of complication and simplification in counseling, show the students a video clip of a Rube Goldberg machine. “What did you think of that?” “How would you describe the purpose of that machine?” Tell the class the example just shown is an example of something called a “Rube Goldberg Machine.” Then ask them to explain what a “Rube Goldberg Machine” is. Solicit opinions, then ask someone
to look it up on Wikipedia. [It’s defined there as “a deliberately over-engineered machine that performs a very simple task in a very complex fashion.”]

Processing Questions: For what reasons might we be including this in a counseling techniques class? How might the essence of a Rube Goldberg machine apply to clients? [e.g., They sometimes over-complicate things, deliberately or otherwise.] How might a counselor use it with clients? [Counselors can deliberately break down a seemingly simple act of a client into numerous parts, much like Ellis’ ABCDE model. “How might this help a client?”]
Class 11: Integration of Personal Style, Part I

- Readings due: Young, Chapters 13-15
- Interventions:

  Parts of a Whole
  - Encourage: *Complexity, Flexible and Original Thinking*
  - Strategies: *Provocative questions, Tolerance for ambiguity, Evaluate situations*

  Instructors will break the class into groups. Each group will be assigned a microskill and asked to respond to a clip utilizing a skill learned in the class (e.g., minimal encourager, paraphrase, reflection of meaning, confrontation). The groups will cycle through the microskills until they’re all covered.

  *Processing questions:* What differences might you have noticed while participating in this activity? Which of the microskills seems to offer the biggest challenges for you, personally? To what do you attribute that? How does using them feel now, compared to earlier in the semester?

  Public Relations
  - Encourage: *Original thinking*
  - Strategies: *Attributes, Organized random search, Visualization*

  Students (still broken into groups) are asked to design a way to promote the field of counseling (commercial, infomercial, billboard, YouTube video, etc.). They will present this to the class.
Class 12: Integration of Personal Style, Part II

- Readings due: O’Hanlon

- Interventions:

  Intervention: Measure for Measure

  - Encourage: Flexible Thinking, Risk-Taking

  - Strategies: Attributes, Tolerance for ambiguity

Instructors will remind students of the notion of counseling as “art” and “science.” They will then explain: In the case of the latter (science), there are many things psychological/counseling researchers measure: personality, degrees of depression, anxiety, addiction, etc. It's the art that helps us with the things that are difficult, if not impossible, to measure. Case in point, a student in this program is going through live supervision, working with a little girl who’d been abused/abandoned by her father. At one point, the little girl looks at the counselor, teary-eyed, and says, “Does my daddy love me?”

  Process questions: What are some ways we might respond to that?

Assignment: Transfer Time (Adapted from Williams, 1970)

- Encourage: Fluent Thinking, Curiosity

- Strategies: Discrepancies, Provocative questions, Creative reading/listening

The instructors ask students to choose a story which appeared in some form of media in the past week that interested them from a counseling perspective. The students
would come up with 2-3 questions about the story, inquiries that could be used to start/guide a discussion.

Students will e-mail their topics and questions to the professors by 11:59:59 p.m. the day before class.
Class 13: Integration of Personal Style, Part III

- Readings due: O'Hanlon, Creativity in Counseling
- Interventions:

  **Reality 101** (Adapted from Williams, 1970)
  - Encourage: *Fluent Thinking, Complexity*
  - Strategies: *Paradoxes, evaluate situations, creative reading/listening*

On the board, the instructors will write "The way counseling really is." Students will then list as many common, current notions people have about counseling that are NOT true.

*Processing questions:* How might you respond to these points when you hear them from a client of your own?
Journal Prompts

WEEK 1
The blocks to creativity displayed in Monday's PowerPoint also represent barriers to effective counseling. Counselors of all ages and experience levels, for example, may struggle with the prospect of failure, the challenge of seeing issues from diverse perspectives, and the idea of being flexible in their practice. After reviewing the PowerPoint (available on Blackboard), please consider: Which of the blocks might pose the greatest challenge to your development as a counselor?

WEEK 2
It's been said that in the professional world, we use résumés to tell employers our stories. In reality, it's probably more accurate to say we use résumés to tell employers one side of our stories. We use our résumés to broadcast our greatest accomplishments, without any mention of our missteps. Matson (1996) suggests that behind every successful individual is a failure résumé, which indicates how risks are taken and the manner in which failure is addressed.

For this reflection, please compose your own Failure Résumé. Include your two biggest successes, your two biggest failures, and a paragraph addressing the way you view risk taking. Then consider possible connections between those failures and successes.

How might your failures relate to your accomplishments, and vice versa?
How have your missteps (and your successes) influenced your subsequent decisions and actions?

WEEK 3
Write a one-page essay on what it is like to be a person with a different racial/ethnic/cultural background (or other nature of differentness). For example, if you are a White American, what is it like to be African American? If you are African American, what is it like to be Asian American? If you are 25 years old, what is it like to be 80 years old? If you have your hearing, what is it like to be deaf? Then share your essay with someone of the background you wrote about, and write another one-page essay describing that experience for you.

Imagine the above scenario was presented as your journal reflection this week. How would you have responded to it? What reactions might that assignment have triggered? What might your reactions tell you about your perceptions and understandings of different others? What difference would have been most uncomfortable for you to write about? Why?

WEEK 4
Jimmy Breslin's article on the burial of President John F. Kennedy is an example of a literary form known as "creative nonfiction." The word "creative" refers simply to the use of literary craft in presenting nonfiction—that is, factually accurate prose about real people and events—in a compelling, vivid manner. To put it another way, creative nonfiction writers do not make things up; they make ideas and information that already
exist more interesting and, often, more accessible.

According to Boone & Bowman (1996), counselors use a variety of tools to help clients conceptualize the issues they face and devise methods for change. One such method involves storytelling. As Lankton (2002) explains, "There is something about stories and metaphors that has a profound effect on listeners: they teach, inspire, guide, communicate, are remembered, and, most of all, are everywhere."

For this week's reflection, ask yourself "What metaphor might I use to explain counseling to someone visiting a therapist for the first time?" or "What sorts of metaphor might I use to introduce my role (as a therapist) to those clients?"

Then, utilize a creative nonfiction approach to describe your turn as a counselor in Monday night's small group sessions.

WEEK 5
Bring a piece of paper to your small groups tonight. When you're in the role of the observer, make two lists - one on the information you acquired, and another on the guesses or inferences they could make from what you've heard.
For your journal this week, reflect on what you observed.
Consider:
How might you use hunches in your session?
How might hunches impact a session if used externally (i.e., if you broach them with a client)?
What purposes might they serve for you internally?
How might you respond, both internally and externally, if a hunch falls flat?

WEEK 6
Assume the interview we watched in class today was a counseling session, and as a result of the questioner's inability to foster positive rapport with her client, she referred Mr. Sheen to you. In an effort to help you out, she gave you a videotape of their last session. (Available here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5aSa4tmVNM)

What do you imagine the next session with Charlie would be like? Begin by summarizing the session we saw in class, identifying some of the meanings you arrived at, and laying them out as a foundation for the conversation to come.

What areas would you want to investigate?
How might you use reflections of meaning to take things to a deeper level?
What might you be feeling in the moments before the session begins?
What issues would working with Charlie bring up for you?
How (and how easily) would you keep those feelings/issues from getting in the way of your work with this new client?

WEEK 7
This journal entry will require you to tie previously discussed skills (e.g., summary, reflection of meaning) with the topic for last week's reading, namely assessment. Please monitor/reflect upon your current relationships, paying particular attention to the issues others may bring (or have recently brought) to your attention. From there, develop a list of themes that may run across your relationships, identifying similar meanings in interactions both personal (e.g., friends, family, significant others) and professional (e.g., work colleagues, classmates, small group members). Explain how you arrived at those themes, provide examples to support them, and discuss how the ability to recognize "common threads" may impact your work as a counselor.

Note: the themes generated for this reflection will ultimately form the basis for the Do-It-Yourself Intervention assignment mentioned in the syllabus... you might want to review this requirement.

WEEK 8
Reflect on your time as a client during this week's small group experience. Then, for your journal entry, please "continue" the session, casting yourself in both the role of the client and the counselor. Consider:

- What discrepancies do you notice within yourself? To what lengths do you go to hide (or excuse) them?
- How would you most effectively confront those discrepancies?
- What would it feel like to face those challenges?
- How might this experience impact the confrontations you offer your future clients?

WEEK 9
Please compose your own "Closet of Good/Bad Experiences" list. Then, for this week's journal, select at least three challenging items from that list, and consider ways you might use them as a positive disclosure in a session.

What advantage(s) do you see to having "appropriate self-disclosure" in your counseling toolbox?

Note: You do NOT need to send your entire Closet list with the journal.

WEEK 10
A Rube Goldberg machine is a mechanism that performs a very simple task in an exceedingly complex fashion. Considering the specific population with which you'll be working, please describe a situation (or situations) in which your clients might employ the essence of a Rube Goldberg machine (deliberately or otherwise) in their interactions with you.

Why might they do so?
How might you respond?
What approaches, techniques and/or theories might you use to help a client in such a situation?
How could addressing the overcomplifications aid in goal-setting?

WEEK 11
"Angry," "condescending," and "controlling" were three of the words offered to describe Alex (i.e., the Madrasah Murderer/Resurrected Runner of tonight’s activity) in his first therapy session - qualities that could provide therapists with quite a challenge. For this week’s journal, begin by writing about counseling from the viewpoint of a client you wouldn’t like. Then, putting yourself in the role of the therapist, consider possible reasons for the client’s perspective. How might you challenge their perception of counseling within the confines of the therapeutic relationship? When (or for what reasons) might you not challenge it?

WEEK 12
The little girl mentioned during today's class ("Does my daddy love me?") just completed her session with you and walked out of your counseling office. Detail your thoughts. Describe your feelings. How might you process the session, assuming your next client will be arriving in 15 minutes? At the end of the day, what steps might you take to tend to your own self-care?

WEEK 13
In your first journal for this course, you reflected upon a PowerPoint detailing some of the blocks to effective counseling (e.g., struggling with the prospect of failure, seeing issues from diverse perspectives, and being flexible in practice).

Please review the PowerPoint again (still available on Blackboard), as well as your first reflection, and reconsider the blocks that might pose the greatest challenge to your development as a counselor. How might your perspectives have changed? To what do you attribute any such changes?
Sample Idea Pad

Week: August 28 – Sept. 3, 2011

Entry 1: Idea
Picked up a copy of Eat, Pray, Love (Gilbert, 2006), and found the following passage:

Don’t you know that the secret to understanding a city and its people is to learn - what is the word of the street?
Then he went on to explain... that every city has a single word that defines it, that identifies most people who live there. If you could read people’s thoughts as they were passing you on the streets of any given place, you would discover that most of them are thinking the same thought. Whatever that majority thought might be - that is the word of the city...
"What’s Rome’s word," I asked.
"SEX," he announced... "What’s the word in New York City?"
I thought about this for a moment, then decided. "It’s a verb, of course. I think it’s ACHIEVE." (Which is subtly but significantly different from the word in Los Angeles, I believe, which is also a verb: SUCCEED.)
"What was the word in your family when you were growing up?"
That one was difficult. I was trying to think of a single word that somehow combines both FRUGAL and IRREVERENT. But Giulio was already on to the next and most obvious question: "What’s your word?"

I think this might be useful in a session – it could be useful to know what word clients/families might use to describe themselves. Try it in session, see what they come up with, then ask them to think more about it over the course of the week. I could check in and see whether they’ve found a word they feel fits better.

Entry 2: Idea
I caught an episode of Dirty Jobs on television today. It’s a show where a guy (Mike Rowe) engages in all sorts of jobs that most people wouldn’t want, or – as he says – the “kinds of jobs that make civilized life possible for the rest of us.” Wonder if I can tie this into the “dirty jobs” clients may face in their own lives? The things they may not like doing, but have to be done in order for “regular” life to go on. How does Rowe handle these disgusting jobs? Maybe show a clip. How does Rowe’s approach compare with the clients’ approach to their yucky tasks?

Entry 3: Quote
“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? ...Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do...And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other
people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

-Marianne Williamson

I really like this. It speaks to esteem, to risk-taking, and potential.

Week: September 4-10

Entry 1: Risk
I went into the ocean this week. Went into it up to my neck. May not sound like a lot for some people, but I’ve always been terrified — absolutely terrified — of getting caught in one of those “suck you out to sea” riptides. With each step out into the water, I could feel my heart beat faster. Yet I managed to push the anxiety from my mind, to the point I was actually able to have fun throwing a Frisbee around with my friends.

Entry 2: Quote
“I am Me. In all the world, there is no one else exactly like me. Everything that comes out of me is authentically mine, because I alone chose it — I own everything about me: my body, my feelings, my mouth, my voice, all my actions, whether they be to others or myself. I own my fantasies, my dreams, my hopes, my fears. I own my triumphs and successes, all my failures and mistakes. Because I own all of me, I can become intimately acquainted with me. By so doing, I can love me and be friendly with all my parts. I know there are aspects about myself that puzzle me, and other aspects that I do not know — but as long as I am friendly and loving to myself, I can courageously and hopefully look for solutions to the puzzles and ways to find out more about me. However I look and sound, whatever I say and do, and whatever I think and feel at a given moment in time is authentically me. If later some parts of how I looked, sounded, thought, and felt turn out to be unfitting, I can discard that which is unfitting, keep the rest, and invent something new for that which I discarded. I can see, hear, feel, think, say, and do. I have the tools to survive, to be close to others, to be productive, and to make sense and order out of the world of people and things outside of me. I own me, and therefore, I can engineer me. I am me, and I am Okay.” -Virginia Satir

This could be a good quote to share with a client who’s getting ready to terminate.

Entry 3: Idea – “In the cards”
Work with a client to create their own baseball-style trading card. Baseball cards have stats on the back — what stats might the client find important? Maybe include a brief biographical statement, as well as a list of the personal goals they would like to track through the counseling process.
Do-It-Yourself Intervention Template

TITLE:
(Include source attribution – website, book, movie – if necessary)

EFFECT AND METHOD
Here you explain the theme you’re addressing and the overall goal of the intervention

PATTER & PROCESSING
“Patter” is the running commentary used by magicians as they perform magic. The patter may be a story, simple instructions, or a series of questions. Patter is of paramount importance in interventions:

- Good patter gives your intervention relevance
- Good patter asks your client/supervisee to do some interpretive “work”

The processing questions help to drive the point of the intervention home. Note: realizations/insights are more likely to become effective agents of change if the clients arrive at them on their own (as opposed to being told by the counselor). As such, “Why do you think I may have done this with you?” has a better chance of being therapeutically productive than “Let me tell you why I did this with you.”
Do-It-Yourself Intervention Samples

TARGET PRACTICE

EFFECT
To demonstrate the often-chaotic nature of rage.

METHOD
You need a balloon, and a piece of paper upon which you draw a target. Tell the client the balloon represents their anger and ask them to blow it up. When they get it to a good size, taking care not to burst the balloon, you ask them to aim it at the target, which you can either hang on a wall opposite the client or hold it yourself (a good distance away from the client). When the client believes they've got the balloon well-aimed, tell them to let it go.

PATTER & PROCESSING
"Everybody gets angry at one time or another. Sometimes we get so angry we have to let it out. [As they begin to blow up the balloon] The anger builds and builds and builds, and when that happens, our logic gets a bit fuzzy. We think we know what we're aiming at, but when we let fly with our anger [tell them to let the balloon go], what happens? Where does the anger go? [The most common answer is "All over the place." Note: The further the target from the client, the less likely the balloon is to hit it.]"
BLOWING IT OFF

EFFECT
To help clients practice deep breathing skills.

METHOD
Introduce your clients to a “revolutionary method” of calming down: blowing bubbles. [You may want to allow your clients to create a label for the bottle of bubbles, preferably something with a snappy title (e.g., “Column of Calm,” “Potion of Peacefulness”) to help them identify the intent of the activity.

PATTER & PROCESSING
“You’ve identified that you can feel yourself starting to get upset. How might we keep ‘upset’ from becoming ‘angry’? [Let the client offer solutions, and validate them when they do.] It’s been said that focusing on something else is another way. One way I like to do that – and this may sound a little crazy – is by blowing bubbles. [Take out a bottle of bubbles, preferably two – one for you and another for the client. Then demonstrate by attempting to blow a bubble quickly. It will burst.] What happened there? Why didn’t it work? Because I didn’t take my time. How can I do it better? [Allow them to tell you to try it more slowly]. Go slower? Like this? [Blow a bubble.] When you feel yourself getting upset at home, go to your room, take out your bubbles and try to blow five really large bubbles in a row.”
IN THE CARDS

EFFECT
Collaborating with a client/supervisee to create a baseball-style trading card.
The following is an example created by copywriter Ben Henry, who used it as his business card. (http://baseballcardblog.blogspot.com/2007_08_01_archive.html)

It reads:
Ben’s a left-field creative at heart who thrills to write ads that leave his audience wanting more. He had a banner ‘01, winning 2 creative awards as well as the first Syracuse Poetry Slam. His former clients include the Real Estate Bar Assoc. of Mass., the MassArt Graduate Film Dept., & various student groups. He can be reached at ben.henry@gmail.com.

His statistics include: Ads, Campaigns, One-offs and Ads Published.

METHOD
As a reflective homework assignment, ask a supervisee/client to provide information for the back of such a card. It should include a brief biographical statement, as well as a list of the personal goals they would like to track through the supervision/counseling process.
References


Gale, J. (2002). Five (plus or minus 2) guiding principles of improvisational performance relevant to the practice, research and teaching of therapy. *Journal of Clinical Activities, Assignments, & Handouts in Psychotherapy Practice, 2*(2), 77-88.


Lawrence, C. (2010a, September). *Counsel like your hair is on fire: Creating dynamic counseling interventions.* Paper presented at the Association for Creativity in Counseling Conference, Portland, OR.

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Williams (1970, 1986)


