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## Exploring Inner Dialogue in Counsellor Education

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### ABSTRACT

The overt aspects of dialogue, especially the spoken exchange, are the focus of most counsellor education interventions. However, in addition to its visible and audible aspects, counselling conversation also features covert dimensions. This article describes an educational exercise designed to heighten counsellors' awareness of one of these covert elements—counsellors' inner dialogue. After a review of some theoretical views regarding the dialogic self, a counselling exercise devoted to an exploration of inner dialogue is described. Specific examples of dialogic exchanges and students' comments on them illustrate the diversity of inner conversation. The article concludes with some suggested variations on the exercise for counsellor educators.

### RÉSUMÉ

Les interventions en formation des conseillers se concentrent pour la plupart sur les aspects apparents du dialogue, en particulier sur les échanges de vive voix. Toutefois, en plus de ses aspects visibles et audibles, la conversation de counseling se caractérise aussi par des dimensions cachées. Cet article décrit un exercice de formation conçu pour augmenter la sensibilisation des conseillers à l'un de ces éléments cachés—le dialogue intérieur du conseiller. Après étude de quelques perspectives théoriques sur le soi dialogique, un exercice de counseling consacré à une exploration du dialogue intérieur est décrit. Des exemples précis d'échanges dialogiques et de commentaires d'étudiants à leur sujet illustrent la diversité de la conversation intérieure. En conclusion, l'article suggère des variations de l'exercice pour les formateurs de conseillers.

Despite the staggering array of distinct counselling and therapy approaches—more than 250 by one recent count (Wampold, 2001)—it is safe to say that these diverse models are centred on dialogic exchanges between practitioners and clients. Whether one's primary focus is cognitions or affect, bio-chemistry or energy, the prime vehicle for the practice we call counselling is dialogue. Approaches to counselling education typically reflect this observation: novice counsellors dialogue about dialogue, watch experienced practitioners engage in dialogue, and practice dialogue through conversational role-plays.

Despite this attention to the *visible* and *audible* exchange of utterances, a vast terrain of dialogue that plays an important role in conversational exchanges is typically neglected in counsellor education. We are speaking of inner dialogue—the internal conversations that accompany outward dialogic exchanges. The intent of this article is to explore the significance of internal dialogue in counselling and to share some responses from students to a counsellor education process devoted to inner dialogue.

We think it is important to encourage student counsellors to develop processes for attending to and becoming mindful of inner dialogue because we believe it deserves the attention accorded to the overt, external dialogue that is the more obvious feature of counselling conversations. Both forms of speech have the potential to be both helpful and hurtful in counselling practice. We also believe that practitioners who devote marginal attention to their inner dialogue risk the possibility of not acting in accordance with their preferred values. Like Ivey and Ivey (1999), we regard *intentionality* as a key feature of competence in helping conversations. Ivey and Ivey propose that “the intentional individual has more than one action, thought, or behaviour to choose from in responding to changing life’s situations. The intentional individual can generate alternatives in a given situation and approach a problem from different vantage points” (p. 14). Mindfulness of inner dialogue is an important feature of intentionality.

In this article, we will present a process we have developed for helping novice counsellors attend to their inner dialogue through the use of a web-based interface. We will also share their responses to the exercise and suggest further modifications and variations to the exercise.

#### INNER SPEECH AND OUTER CONVERSATION

The notion of human consciousness being configured as interior conversation or inner dialogue can be traced back to early philosophers and thinkers in Greece and elsewhere who examined its role in the art of rhetoric (Billig, 1996). Many writers in the history of literature have used the landscape of inner conversations as a portal into the consciousness of persons. Perhaps no other figure has explored the possibilities of this approach as extensively as the Russian writer Dostoevsky, whose literary journeys through the labyrinth of inner conversation and outer dialogue and their intersections are featured in works such as *Crime and Punishment* (1867/1951) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880/1982).

The literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986) and psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1986) devoted considerable attention to investigating the character of thinking as inner dialogues, and inquired as to how inner and outer conversations are related to one another (Emerson, 1983). More recently, researchers have drawn upon this work in order to reconceptualize psychology as focused on the interactional rather than the individual (Shotter, 1993; Shotter & Billig, 1998), and the “self” as dialogical (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992).

The notion of the relationship between inner and outer conversations has also contributed to recent developments in approaches to counselling (Penn & Frankfurt, 1994, 1999), couple therapy (Tomm, Cynthia, Andrew, & Vanessa, 1992), family therapy (Lysack, 2002), and working with trauma and interrupting cycles of violence (Kamya & Trimble, 2002). Still others have focused their attention on the ways in which these ideas of inner/outer dialogue might contribute to enhancing a counsellor’s responsiveness to clients (Paré & Lysack, 2004) and a practitioner’s reflexivity in therapeutic conversation (Rober, 2002, 2005).

## THE DIALOGICAL SELF

It is common practice in counsellor education to promote the importance of the “person of the therapist” (Aveline, 2005; Deacon, 1996; Laireiter & Willutzki, 2003; McConnaughy, 1987)—most commonly construed as a unitary “self” who speaks with one voice. This univocal construction of the self is strongly associated with humanist traditions (White, 2001) and strongly represented in the work of Carl Rogers (Aveline). The humanistic view of the self resonates with Descartes’ view of a self-contained and self-sufficient individual, who declares “I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses ... I will regard all such images as vacuous, false and worthless” (Descartes, 1641/1984, p. 24).

As we will elaborate here, we are inclined to understand persons differently: as manifest in a polyphony of voices, both inner and outer—as dialogical selves (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans et al., 1992). Bakhtin depicted this multivocal self as “a conversation, often a struggle, of discrepant voices with each other, voices (and words) speaking from different positions and invested with different degrees and kinds of authority” (as cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 483).

Those voices are associated with a variety of beliefs and values that may “speak through” the counsellor in inadvertent ways if overlooked. Noticing and attending to inner dialogue thus helps practitioners to, in Bakhtin’s (1984) words, “find one’s own voice and to orient it among other voices, to combine it with some and to oppose it to others, to separate one’s voice from another voice with which it has inseparably merged” (p. 239). We see this as an important component of developing a reflexive practice (Schön, 1987).

In an educational context with novice counsellors, our intention is to support students in identifying the different voices within their awareness as they are listening and responding to a client, while also developing their ability to decentre themselves from these positions and to develop their own “voice(s)” as counsellors. With this understanding of the dialogical self as a conceptual framework, we have developed these pedagogical exercises regarding inner dialogue in the hope that these learning activities can contribute to an increasingly reflexive awareness on the part of student counsellors.

## COORDINATING TALK

To represent counselling conversations as the unilateral application of a model consisting of a sequenced program of speech is to render an impoverished account of a remarkably complex, multivocal exchange (Strong & Paré, 2004). To converse is to improvise (Bohart, 1998; Strong, 2005). With each utterance, the terrain shifts, often in unpredictable ways, and speakers are called upon to adjust tone, pacing, and content accordingly (Bavelas & Coates, 1992; Paré & Lysack, 2004). And the process is not uni-directional. In hermeneutic terms (Anderson, 1997), conversations involve an ongoing commingling and co-constructing of meanings between dialogic partners. Inner dialogue is thus profoundly relational. In his examination of the work of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin (1984) says that every experience

and thought is accompanied by consideration of another person, so that “dialogue has penetrated every word, provoking in it a battle and the interruption of one voice by another” (p. 75).

Counsellors therefore do far more than merely respond to the client’s vocalizations (and nonverbals). They also respond to their own interpretations, judgements, questions, and so on, as prompted by the other’s voice. As Rober (2002) says:

the words of the speaker are not just received, they are met and welcomed by the inner voices of the one who listens. The words resonate in the inner conversation of the listener; they evoke something, all while the listener is preparing a response. (p. 468)

In other words, counselling conversations involve ongoing dialogue with others *and* ourselves (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).

So-called “mundane” conversation is filled with a breathtaking array of spontaneous conversational moves in response to the other (Bavelas & Coates, 1992). There is method to talk, as Garfinkel’s (1967) landmark work persuasively demonstrated. But this is not to say that we always *notice* the process in action. To respond mindfully (as we make sense of it) is to be reflexive: to notice what we are doing while we are doing it and to deliberately choose a course of action. In the parlance of emerging approaches in cognitive therapy (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002), rather than focusing on the *content* of one’s cognitions, a person is able to make a shift in perspective through “decentering” him/herself in the relationship with his/her thoughts, such that these thoughts “could be seen as passing events in the mind that were neither necessarily valid reflections of reality nor central aspects of the self” (Segal et al., p. 38).

Faced with seemingly infinite possibilities for responding (Rober, 2002), the counsellor is compelled to make choices. For novice counsellors, this barrage of information may be experienced as overwhelming, as our students continually relate to us. To illustrate, consider the example of the game of squash—a racquet sport characterized by extremely quick exchanges between players, and thus reminiscent in some ways of conversation. As a beginner, it is enough to get to the ball and make contact with it. Deciding how hard or in which direction to hit the ball seems beyond the scope of one’s capacity in the minuscule time available. As a player’s game develops, she finds herself both anticipating her opponent’s shots before they are made, and selecting from a range of possibilities for her return volley. Some of this development is related to what is sometimes called “muscle memory”—through repeated experiences the body learns to perform certain movements without conscious direction, related in ways to how Bavelas and Coates (1992) describe spontaneous spoken dialogue.

But something else is happening that relates to intentionality, and this is of particular interest to us in relation to counselling. Counsellors are deliberately trying to *accomplish* something through spoken dialogue. And while we frequently accomplish things through talk (e.g., encouraging a friend to come to dinner) without noticing the nuances of the exchange, we are more able to align intention and effect when we monitor the conversation as it unfolds in order to adjust to the emerging content and process. This attention enables us to be responsive, utterance

by utterance, to the person consulting us as well as to our internal reflections on the unfolding conversation (Paré & Lysack, 2004).

As educators, we are interested in supporting our students in both identifying and evaluating their inner dialogue for its utility in relation to the purpose at hand. In our experience, pathologizing (e.g., “this client’s problems are fundamental and innate”) or self-critical (e.g., “I don’t know how to empathize”) voices are not useful and inhibit interaction in the counselling relationship—a conclusion echoed by Lyubomirsky and Nolen-Hoeksema (1995) in their explorations of the effects of negative thinking on the individual’s ability to engage in productive interpersonal problem-solving. In contrast, we find it is more helpful to have students decide for themselves what voices within their inner dialogues contribute to effective counselling practice. To that end we have developed the following assignment devoted to attending to inner dialogue.

#### DIALOGUE IN SLOW MOTION

The context of the exercise we will describe is a graduate-level course in “Micro Counselling”—the core skills-based course in the Masters of Educational Counselling program in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. The exercise is one of several practice-based assignments in the three-credit, 39-hour course. It calls upon students to conduct a counselling session with one of their classmates, and to record their inner dialogue during that conversational exchange.

It is worth mentioning that the very act of turning attention to one’s inner dialogue inescapably affects that dialogue. And to the degree that the inner conversation is being shared under the scrutiny of an instructor—what Foucault (1979) might call an institutional “gaze”—students might be inclined to foreground certain reflections over others. This shaping of inner conversation seems to go with the attending to it: to be mindful of inner conversation is to adopt a reflexive posture that in turn influences what goes on internally. Like Wallace (2001), we believe this is an inescapable but not unwelcome circumstance:

The issue of observer-participancy is obviously crucial to the first-person examination of mental states, and it should by no means disqualify such introspective inquiry any more than the fact of observer-participancy has disqualified exploration in the field of quantum mechanics. (p. 216)

Given that conversations typically proceed at a fast pace, wherein speakers incorporate complex interpretations into often subtle responses, sometimes within micro-seconds (Bavelas & Coates, 1992), the first author devised the strategy to introduce a text-based medium in order to create the possibility for a dialogic exchange in slow motion. Students were asked to pair up and to begin a conversation outside of class in which one participant played the client and the other the counsellor. This original spoken conversation was intended to provide the beginning of a conversational exchange in which the “client” broadly outlined the presenting concern being brought forward. This also provided the opportunity for client and counsellor to develop some degree of rapport through direct verbal contact.

The students were then instructed to continue the conversation online. As registrants in the course, they had access to a WebCT<sup>1</sup> site that, among various other features, provided the possibility for private “chat room” conversations in which conversational partners “speak” by typing to each other. For many of the students, this process was already familiar through their use of publicly available chat rooms on the Internet, which they chose to utilize instead of the course website.

To facilitate the process, the instructor developed an in-depth set of instructions with the help of a research assistant. Because they included technical directions on the use of WebCT, chat lines, word-processing windows, and so on, the final instructions were detailed and lengthy and will not be included here. However, readers are invited to contact the primary author if they would like a copy of those instructions.

Technical details aside, the assignment was not complex: following each utterance from their “client,” the students acting as counsellors were asked to type notes in their word processor offline to remind them of their inner dialogue (thoughts, feelings, images, ideas, etc.<sup>2</sup>) prior to typing a response to the other student. Following this, they were asked to respond to their client in a manner they considered helpful by typing the response online. The online exchange and the offline notes on each utterance were combined in the written assignment presented by students. In that finished document, students were also asked to expand on their typewritten inner dialogue notes in cases where they were cryptic, and to choose three instances when they noticed a marked discrepancy between their inner dialogue and what they ended up saying to the client.

#### A DIVERSITY OF VOICES

The assignments garnered a startling array of inner dialogue for the students, ranging from expressions of simple curiosity to carefully considered hypotheses about the client’s situation and speculation about how best to proceed. Also notable was the diversity of inner dialogue styles among students. Some identified a range of voices in response to their client’s utterances while others found themselves to be relatively unloquacious in the inner domain.

Of the many utterances transcribed and submitted by students for the assignment, we have selected a handful to reflect the diversity of responses. We do not mean to be representing the scope of the inner dialogue submitted, let alone the scope of possible varieties of inner dialogue. Our intent here is to reflect on a training exercise rather than to develop and count a set of categories. Here are some samples of inner dialogue that emerged, along with headings we’ve attached to characterize their content.<sup>3</sup>

##### *Adopting a Curious Posture*

Much of the inner dialogue featured speculation about what was going on for the client. In many cases, the students expressed hypotheses to themselves, but proceeded with broader curiosity rather than attempting to confirm a hunch.

Counsellor: Hi Mary, how are you doing?

Client: I'm doing OK. Actually, I just found out my best friend is pregnant.

Counsellor: *I could say "Oh that's wonderful; your friend must be excited." But what if she isn't? How do you feel about your friend's pregnancy?*

The counsellor's curiosity here uncovered Mary's sense of "jealousy," which led the conversation into Mary's concerns about not having a partner and wanting children. A posture of curiosity had been encouraged in the skills course, and the decision to respond in that manner may have been the outgrowth of that training.

### *Pacing the Conversation*

In some cases, students were tempted to inquire specifically about the client's preceding utterance, but decided to proceed with another question they felt was more appropriate at that juncture in the conversation. In the following example, the counsellor noted that her overwhelmed client had just referred to a sense of "responsibility," but the counsellor chose instead to ask about something the client had said earlier in the conversation about being "restricted":

*Asking why she feels responsible could lead to a more sensitive area. Before I can delve further, I need to get a better idea of how she feels restricted. This would give me a clearer picture of what she is going through at the moment. I feel the feeling of "responsibility" could even be personal or cultural. I do not know Alice very well and think it would be better to touch on more sensitive issues in the future.*

This decision represented a choice between two options encouraged through the counsellor's training: (a) to "unpack" client's language by delving further into key words (in this case the "sense of responsibility"), and (b) to pace the conversation in a manner that maximized the chances of harmony between counsellor and client. The student here seems to have been informed by the latter value.

### *Refraining from Assuming an Expert Stance*

In some cases, students chose not to share their opinions, even in the form of simply agreeing with the client, wishing to avoid adopting an expert stance (Anderson & Goolishian, 1993) that might compromise the client's self-explorations. Here are some comments from a counsellor about steering clear of agreeing with the client's statement about accepting limitations.

*Agreeing with him in this instance would make me, the counsellor, appear as though I have all the answers and that I am in a superior role. I am not here to judge or tell Scott what is right and wrong. Scott needs to come to his own conclusions and I am to facilitate or guide him.*

This intervention, like the others cited, reflects a choice the counsellor made and also resonates with some of the learning in the counsellor's skills training. It is impossible to sort out for each of the examples that the students provided which responses were the outcome of their judgement and which were attempts to practise in a manner prescribed by the instructor. Of course these issues persist

past formal education; dialogue with the inner “voice of the supervisor” unfolds alongside the various other voices (e.g., of parents and other key figures, of dominant cultural discourses, psychological theories, etc.) that engage practitioners as they converse with clients. We are drawn to Bakhtin’s (1981) notion that we are all faced with the task of sorting out what is ours among these: “the word in language is half someone’s else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent ... [This] is a difficult and complicated process” (p. 293).

The examples here provide a limited view of the various possible insights into practice that students may gain from the inner dialogue assignment. We have found the assignment gives students a glimpse of what is often otherwise an unnoticed process in the early stages of their developing practice. In addition to uncovering some of the thoughts, feeling, images, ideas, and values that influence their work, it gives them a view of how those play out, utterance by utterance, as they engage in conversation. Following the course, the instructor conducted a focus group interview with the students to gather their comments on the inner dialogue assignment and to engage in some collective brainstorming in order to adapt and improve the exercise for future classes.

#### PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK AND REFLECTIONS

The focus group discussion was conducted by the first author and attended by the majority of students in the class. Students were encouraged not only to provide informal summative feedback on their experience of the assignment, but also to speculate about ways of modifying and adapting it. The 90-minute, tape-recorded, and transcribed conversation covered a broad territory; for the purposes of this article we will highlight themes with implications for utilizing and/or modifying the exercise.

##### *The Importance of Nonverbals*

Perhaps the most forcefully and frequently stated conclusion was one obliquely related to the main intent of the assignment, a byproduct of a conversation deliberately devoid of a visual element. Many of the students spoke of their frustration with the lack of nonverbal input.

*And maybe if she had been with you sitting right beside you, you could tell by her mannerisms—that helps a lot, I find. I know that at a certain point I thought to myself: “I wonder what she means by this.” It is a sentence, but it could be positive, it could be negative. You don’t really know. I would like a facial expression or something.*

*See, in the case what Lara was talking about, like maybe I should have gone a different way. I sort of get that feeling when I am seeing somebody because I will ask a question and I can see them face to face and I can see their reaction and it looks like “Oh, I should not have gone there.”*

However, students were not uniform in this conclusion. As mentioned earlier, the assignment uncovered different practice styles and, as one observer put it, different learning styles as well:



*I didn't think it was too unnatural. I felt—I think it also depends on what kind of... learner you are. Like now that I think back on my past sessions, I can remember the written ones much better because I had it there in my face.*

### *Slowing It Down, for Better and/or Worse*

Discrepancies in counsellor styles also emerged clearly in relation to the pace of the text-based dialogue. For some students, the slower pace was facilitative, while for others it hampered the process.

*I was just still overjoyed by having the time to think in between responses ... my thoughts were clearer. I wasn't preoccupied with interpreting the person's facial expressions and body language and tone of voice. So that wasn't interfering at all with my thinking. Plus the time, the response time: it allowed me to think over my response and ... be further aware of my inner dialogue, which I don't have time for.*

This student reported that she was able to slow down in a later session and to deliberately sit with the silences that, as she had discovered from the exercise, make her feel uncomfortable. In contrast, another student felt immobilized by the opportunity to deliberately choose a response from many possibilities:

*I was questioning myself too much. Like I would get her response and I would go "Oh, I think this, oh, but should I ask her about this, should I ask her about this." ... Sometimes I wasn't sure exactly where I wanted to go because I was actually thinking about it.*

Much like meditation practices, which makes manifest the "mind chatter" (Bennett-Goleman, 2001) that is the backdrop to thoughts in immediate awareness, the exercise places students in the company of covert conversation not normally noticed. Because the assignment calls for a recording of inner dialogue, it does not merely uncover "what is there" but also prompts additional reflection. The deliberately reflexive nature of this process provoked interesting discussion on the distinction between intentional choice-making and "intuitive" responding in counselling.

### *Making Intentional Choices versus "Going by the Gut"*

To what degree should practitioners merely identify and consolidate their "natural" or "intuitive" styles versus working at adapting those styles to become more reflexive and deliberate? The students had a range of positions on this question. One student clearly articulated the former view:

*Like I don't spend a lot of time wondering what I am going to ask, or questioning myself ... because I kind of go by the "gut" ... like this is what I am feeling I should ask and I ask it. But then when I am trying to do a specific skill, that doesn't work because ... it's counter-intuitive for me. So [the] assignment was a little weird for me because I don't really have a whole bunch of "Should I ask this? Should I ask this?" I think something and I ask it.*

Our bias on this issue is probably clear by now. We believe "intuition" is frequently mystified in the culture of counselling and it is used to account for practice short on reflection. This is not to say that all of a counsellor's utterances should be the outgrowth of on-the-spot reflection any more than all of a squash player's shots should be carefully considered. Nor is it to suggest that the dialogic

aspect of language is somehow missing if a practitioner fails to pay attention to inner conversation. When we orient to meanings and respond with meanings of our own, deliberately or not, we do so in the context of language that resonates with other meanings present and past. In this sense, conversation always involves layers of dialogue. The key distinction, though, is whether this dialogic process is reflexive or automatic.

### *Reflexivity and Ethics*

It is possible, as in the case of the student above who privileges “going from the gut,” to converse without making active choices. However, this limits options. The deliberate reflection on choices made in a counselling conversation helps to counteract a monologic (Penn & Frankfurt, 1994) automaticity that constrains possibilities. The notion of intuitively and unreflexively “going with the flow” fails to capture the deliberative process. Attention to inner dialogue expands the options available, helping to maximize the repertoire of helpful responses and to minimize the risk of inadvertent harm to the client. In this sense, reflexivity is a key element of ethical practice.

This raises an intriguing paradox as it relates to counselling—one that we frequently encounter in discussions with our students. While we prefer to construe counselling as a conversational practice (Anderson, 1997; Strong, 2005, in press), as opposed to a technical/instrumental one, this is not to say it does not differ from ordinary conversation. Counsellors are attempting to influence their clients (Paré & Lysack, 2004; Strong, 2000) in ways that are helpful. To do this effectively requires the development of a craft. And this means letting go of habits that may feel “natural.” The following exchange with a student illustrates the experience of this movement towards intentionality.

*I tend to over ... I don't know if over-empathize is the right word. But I tend to want people's pain to go away right now and that really came out for me that Judy was describing something she was struggling with and ... my inner dialogue is like “Oh, I want to fix it for her.”*

I (DP) asked this student whether noticing this habit through the inner dialogue exercise had influenced her subsequent practice.

*Now it comes up but I am kind of like, “Oh, here it is again.” But then I sort of can intellectualize and say, “Okay, well you know it is not time to do that yet. It is not time to amplify the positive.”*

By attending to her inner dialogue, this student is *responding* intentionally rather than *reacting* automatically. For us, the key question is not whether this is “natural” or not, but whether it is useful to the task at hand. Unfortunately for novice counsellors, the process is particularly awkward in the early days of developing their skills. But much like a violinist who has rigorously studied theory and practiced scales for a number of years, there comes a time when some of a counselor's complex responses are enacted with the seeming effortlessness of a concert musician in a moment of inspiration. In a sense, “instinct” has not been banished, but rather it is now the expression of a more rich and nuanced practice.

*I am trying to like learn how to be intentional in what I do, and even though it feels kind of like it is not instinctive ... I tend to not use a skill until I feel like I can do it very well [yeah]. So, it is not going to feel—none of this is going to feel natural and instinctive for me for a while.*

In evaluating the course at the end of term, a number of students cited this inner dialogue exercise as a useful contribution to their learning. But as the reader can garner from the variety of comments included here, this conclusion was not unanimous. Our own conclusion is that the exercise gives rise to intriguing reflections that contribute richly to the learnings of student counsellors.

#### FURTHER SUGGESTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

We have generated some suggestions for counsellor educators based on both the students' comments and our own ongoing reflections about the process. In a sense, this represents some of our own inner dialogue that has arisen in response to the many voices involved in the discussion of this educational practice.

In order to ensure that students are well oriented to the issues and to the process, next time we will conduct an in-class demonstration prior to the assignment by way of preparation. This could be done by the instructor interviewing a "client" live and sharing inner dialogue aloud between utterances. Or it could involve students generating their own inner dialogue as they imagine themselves to be the counsellor. Alternately, they could do the same thing in response to viewing a videotaped counselling session. Asking students to share their own inner dialogue would give them a first try at the process and might also reduce the pressure to "get it right" by demonstrating a rich multiplicity of inner voices. A further variation involves students breaking into groups of three with a counsellor, client, and witness. The counsellor turns to the witness between utterances and shares her/his internal conversation aloud. The witness in this trio can also pause the conversation between counsellor and client to ask about the counsellor's thoughts and assumptions (C. Novy, personal communication, August 3, 2004). These face-to-face processes would be less cumbersome than the web-based conversations; however, they might not create the same amount of "learning space," both physical and temporal, for generating reflection.

In some cases, we found that students presented segments of counselling conversations that mostly featured clients providing an overview of their presenting concerns. We had asked students to do this preliminary phase face-to-face or at least by telephone before their web-based conversation so that the segment of dialogue captured would be less about information sharing and more about a counsellor's attempts to be helpful. In the future we will make this request more emphatically.

There are various possibilities for transcribing the inner dialogue itself. Should it be guided by orienting questions from the instructor? Should students organize it into categories? To what degree should it be rewritten later prior to presenting it? Following discussion with the students, we have concluded it would contaminate the inner dialogue in an unhelpful way to impose structures on it, or to substan-

tially rewrite it retroactively. Instead, we will continue to ask students to “clean up the text” when it is incoherent, but to try to capture the spirit of the initial dialogue at the moment it entered awareness. This approach allows them to see the process unfolding in a less mediated manner.

Because cultivating a capacity for reflexivity can be challenging for a practitioner just beginning to develop a skill, several students have suggested the exercise might be tried twice during a semester. The rationale here is that by revisiting the exercise, students might discover the degree to which their practice has evolved over the term. We also wonder if the exercise could be further extended by providing some guiding questions for later reflection. For instance, it might be useful for practitioners to attempt to identify their idiosyncratic patterns of self-reflection and to identify the values implicit in that inner speech.

Clearly an assignment like the one shared here gives rise to a wide array of rich and challenging questions about the practice of counselling. Certainly we do not purport to have answered the questions so much as shared some of our current views and posed new questions for consideration. Our central intent in this article has been to stimulate ideas for further explorations of inner dialogue by counsellor educators and their students; we look forward to hearing from others as the dialogue continues.

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### *Notes*

1. WebCT is the copyrighted name of educational software developed by WebCT, Inc., 6 Kimball Lane, Suite 310, Lynnfield, MA, 01940.
2. Inner dialogue is frequently characterized solely in cognitive terms, that is, as “self-talk” (cf. Morran, 1986; Morran, Kurpius, & Brack, 1989). We believe the notion of “dialogue” extends beyond cognitions and we were deliberate in not limiting students attention to cognitions alone.
3. Students’ names have been altered to preserve their anonymity.

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