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## Barriers and Facilitators of Reflective Practice in Counsellor Education: Critical Incidents from Doctoral Graduates

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### ABSTRACT

This qualitative study involved five doctoral counselling students from a major Canadian university who shared critical incidents of barriers and facilitators of reflective practice in their graduate experiences. Sixteen incidents engendered reflection while eight hindered open reflection. Conditions found to facilitate reflective practice included (a) experiencing a trusting relationship, (b) opening up with fellow students, (c) engaging in reflective tasks, (d) having self-trust/risking, and (e) interacting with supportive academic personnel. Conditions found to create barriers to open reflection included (a) experiencing mistrust/unsafe relationship, (b) interacting with non-reflective fellow students, (c) receiving unsupportive/jarring feedback, (d) facing a systemic barrier/unsafe educational landscape, and (e) interacting with unsupportive academic personnel. Research limitations as well as implications and recommendations for counsellor development and directions for future research are provided.

### RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude qualitative traite de cinq étudiants au doctorat en counseling, à une université canadienne importante, qui ont communiqué des incidents critiques faisant obstacle ou facilitant la pratique réflexive au cours de leur vécu d'étudiants diplômés. Seize incidents ont aidé tandis que huit ont nuï à une réflexion libre. Les conditions constatées qui facilitent la pratique réflexive comprenaient (a) vivre une relation de confiance, (b) s'ouvrir à ses collègues étudiants, (c) s'engager dans des tâches de réflexion, (d) risquer ou avoir confiance en soi, et (e) échanger avec du personnel académique qui n'offre pas de soutien. Les conditions constatées qui nuisent à une réflexion libre comprenaient (a) vivre de la méfiance ou une relation peu sûre, (b) échanger avec des collègues étudiants non disposés à la réflexion, (c) recevoir une rétroaction discordante ou qui n'offre pas de soutien, (d) être aux prises avec un obstacle systémique ou un environnement éducatif qui manque de sécurité, et (e) échanger avec du personnel académique qui n'offre pas de soutien. Les limites de la recherche, des répercussions sur le perfectionnement des conseillers, et des recommandations à ce sujet ainsi que des orientations de recherches futures sont fournies.

Socrates espoused the inherent worth in living an examined life, a philosophy that fits with the common decree: "Counsellor, know thyself." The use of self and staying in touch with one's values, beliefs, and experiences are asserted for ensuring multicultural competencies (Collins & Arthur, 2005; Collins, Arthur, & Wong-Wylie, 2006), maintaining ethics of practice (Corey, 1996), effectively analyzing issues of power and oppression (Heron, 2005), and personal development. Hanna and Ottens (1995) connected the wisdom accrued through reflective practice (metacognition, deautomatization, dialectic reasoning, and sagacity) to the essential quality distinguishing mediocre counsellors from exemplary ones.

Nevertheless, there is a dearth of research on the experiences, processes, practices, and prevalence of reflective practice in counsellor education.

#### REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflective practice involves an active process of examining personal experience. The primary association of reflective practice is with Schön's highly esteemed and seminal writings (Schön, 1983, 1987). He described the reflective practitioner as one who "reflects on the phenomena before him [sic] and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his [sic] behaviour" (1983, p. 69). Reflective practitioners therefore enter a dialectic process of thought and action and actively shape their professional growth (Osterman, 1990). Schön (1991) proposed that practitioners and educators take a *reflective turn* and begin a process of observing, describing, and illuminating their practice actions, particularly those that are spontaneous. He outlined two different modes of reflection: *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. Reflection-in-action can instantaneously alter counsellors' practice (Taylor, 1998) through thinking about what they are doing in the moment, critically evaluating, shifting, reframing, and questioning tacit knowledge. Reflection-on-action, on the other hand, is carried out after and usually away from the practice situation (Schön, 1983). This mode of reflection is intended to improve future practice while reflection-in-action emphasizes improvement in current and future practices.

A third practice of reflection, which this author coins as *reflection-on-self-in/on-action*, is in close relation to Schön's notions of reflection-in and -on action (see Wong-Wylie, 2006). This third practice emphasizes salient *personal* experiences that influence and shape the professional and her or his actions and decisions, rather than focusing only on practice situations. This practice is further anchored in Clandinin and Connelly's (1991) narrative perspective that a practitioner's personal awareness promotes professional growth, for which they coined the term *personal practical knowledge* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). These authors identified stories as intricately tied to personal practical knowledge. Likewise, Mezirow (1997, 2000) proposed transformational learning as a process of evoking change to one's frame of reference. A frame of reference includes associations that come from concepts, values, feelings, and conditioned responses and are composed of *habits of mind* and *points of view*.

#### *Reflective Practice in Counsellor Education*

Brookfield (1994), Gerson (1996), and Magnuson and Norem (2002) have promoted the primary aim of counselling programs to be the development of self-awareness through reflective practice. Nevertheless, counselling programs appear to be focused primarily on what Kramer (2000) referred to as the outer world of therapy.

The outer world of therapy is our everyday domain. Taught and practiced everywhere, it fills our professional journals, makes up the majority of training programs, and dominates our confer-

ences. It is the world of many theories, many methods, many techniques for doing therapy. It has to do with diagnosis, treatment outcome, grants, reimbursement, organization, standards, credentials, and so on. This is a familiar bread-and-butter world. For some therapists it is the *only* world. (pp. xiii)

In contrast, Kramer juxtaposed this domain with the inner world of therapy, involving the subjective realm of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behaviour, therapeutic experiences, life history, inner cast of characters, personal story, family life, and philosophical beliefs. Jevne (2002) concurred that the counselling profession, which for decades has espoused the significance of the person of the counsellor, has paradoxically avoided direct reference, with rare exceptions, to personal development in textbooks, counsellor development models, training programs, and evaluative processes.

Research lends compelling support that a reflective practice orientation is vital to professional counsellor development. In her biographical accounts of 6 long-time (25 years or more) male Canadian counsellor educators, Larsen (1999) found that being open and intentional about self-reflection was consistent among participants. Apparently, reflective practice nurtures positive changes and builds professional stamina and sustaining power for long-time counselling practitioners (McMullen, 2001). In the United States, Furr and Carroll (2003) confirmed the benefits of reflective practice and personal growth in a study involving 84 beginning master's-level counselling students. Furthermore, Kramer (2000) insisted on the importance of counsellor self-knowledge that facilitates reflective processes in clients and can enhance the quality of interaction and contribute to "accelerating therapy" (p. xii). Indeed, an organized focus on the development of reflective counselling practitioners in graduate counselling education is necessary.

In the United States, Schwebel and Coster (1998) researched student well-being from the perspective of 107 psychology department heads. Although student self-awareness was rated as most important, it was determined that courses and curriculum minimally focused on this intent. According to the department heads, obstacles to offering a program with student self-awareness in mind were as follows (in order of rating): no time or space in the curriculum, budgetary constraints, faculty resistance, student resistance, and faculty not trained.

In this study, the researcher focused on what fosters and what hinders reflective practice in graduate counselling education from Canadian doctoral students' perspectives. The purpose was to identify barriers to and facilitators of reflective practice on the counsellor education landscape. Intrinsically, this research explored ways that counselling pedagogy encourages or discourages student development as reflective practitioners.

## METHOD

### *Sampling*

Purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) was utilized to gain the richest insight into the inquiry at hand. To this aim, participants had to be graduate students who

completed at least one year of doctoral study in counselling, had experiences of reflective practice in their counsellor training, were willing to share personal experience, and were comfortable with audiotape recording of research conversations and the potential for dissemination of research findings. Beyond these criteria, the researcher selected participants on the basis of ease of accessibility and willingness to participate.

### *Participants*

Five participants from a Canadian educational psychology department (Sean, Dawn, Holly, East, and Crystal) were involved. Sean graduated from the doctoral program in counselling two years prior to commencement of this study. Of the four female doctoral counselling students, Crystal graduated from the program prior to completion of the study. Participants ranged in age from 27 to 50 years. Those who value reflection were attracted to participate in this study and thus created a homogeneous sample. A homogeneous sample of reflective participants enriched the research in that individuals were highly attuned to the topic under investigation

### *The Critical Incident Technique*

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was developed by Flanagan and is a well-established method for documenting and understanding human experience (Burns, 1956; Flanagan, 1954; Mayhew, 1956; Sawatzky, Jevne, & Clark, 1994; Wong-Wylie & Jevne, 1997). The CIT is a qualitative method of research that generates comprehensive and detailed descriptions from first-person accounts and illuminates a specific content domain. Flanagan defined a critical incident (CI) as any human activity that is significant to those involved. It is a form of interview research in which participants are invited to share descriptive accounts, from their subjective experiences, of situations that facilitated or hindered a particular aim.

In this study, the CIT was utilized to explore salient experiences of reflective practice. This technique assisted in exploring students' perceptions of incidents in the educational setting that influenced their practice of reflection. The focus was on counselling students' experiences and their perceptions of the CIs in their education that facilitated or hindered reflective practice.

Critical incidents in this study were generated from individual research conversations with participants in which they were asked within the interview conversation to write about "powerful experiences of reflection being facilitated or hindered in your counselling education." Follow-up questions to each CI enhanced the richness of description (e.g., Who was present during the incident? Describe the setting in which it took place. What impact did the incident have?). *Critical requirements* are the resulting set of descriptive requirements or features that constitute necessary elements for facilitating or hindering a particular aim (Flanagan, 1954). In this study, the focus was on reflective practice and the critical requirements (or conditions) in counsellor education experiences that encouraged or discouraged reflective practice.

*Data Collection and Analysis*

Five participants met for an individual research conversation with the researcher. Semi-structured interviews with closed and open-ended questions guided the conversations. Collecting CI accounts included inviting participants during the interview conversation to clearly and descriptively recount (in writing) salient experiences of times in their doctoral counsellor education when reflection was either significantly facilitated or significantly hindered.

In advance of interviews, the researcher e-mailed the interview guide to participants. All participants arrived for the interview with at least four incidents in mind. Participants also brought documents demonstrating or corroborating incidents to the interview (e.g., past doctoral course assignments that had a reflective component). As such, they were able to provide rich, descriptive written accounts of each incident during the interview and responded to questions pertaining to reflective practice in general.

Various sources were used to establish the conditions that facilitated or hindered reflective practice in counsellor education within this educational psychology department. These sources included written CI accounts, research conversation transcripts, researchers' memos, and an unordered representational meta-matrix (Merriam, 1988), which is a large conceptualization of each CI in a time-sequenced representation. Data were content analyzed using a data reduction technique (Miles & Huberman, 1984, 1994) that included multiple reviews of the data set and reduction of incidents into categories of themes/conditions. The conditions emerged inductively through a constant comparative method of analysis (Patton, 1990). That is, once regularities began to emerge, the researcher worked back and forth between the data and emerging categories to verify salience and number of times each condition appeared.

The conditions found were applied to four (two foster and two hinder) remaining CIs to determine whether new conditions arose. As a result of this splitting of the data, one condition was altered to fit a broader context. Two other labels of conditions were changed to reflect greater semantic meaning. For example, the condition "experiencing a supportive relationship" was changed to "experiencing a trusting relationship (challenging/supportive)". The derived conditions were shared with each participant as a member check to determine whether they resonated and captured what was salient in their experiences to engender or hinder reflective practice in counsellor education. No changes were requested; all participants expressed that the conditions reflected their lived experiences at the time.

## RESULTS/INTERPRETATIONS

Overall, 24 CIs in five participants' experiences of barriers to or facilitators of reflective practice in counsellor education were collected. Sixteen were facilitative incidents and 8 were barriers to open reflective practice. Nine of the 16 facilitative CIs occurred in the context of a counselling course and 5 occurred in the relationship or context of counselling practicum or thesis supervision. One oc-

curred with a fellow student and one other during course instructing (see Table 1). Likewise, participants' perspectives of eight hindering CIs occurred four times in the context of a course and twice in the context of counselling practicum supervision. Additionally, one CI involved a university counselling centre in representing an interpreted lack of support for students receiving counselling; one other CI involved a university administrator.

Table 1  
*Context of 24 Critical Incidents*

Context	Facilitative	Hindering
Counselling course	9	4
Counselling practicum or thesis supervision	5	2
Miscellaneous	2	2

### *Conditions Hindering Reflective Practice*

Of the 24 CIs, 8 were identified as barriers to open reflective practice. Five conditions (see Table 2) were derived whereby one or more condition was critical in thwarting open reflection. That is, multiple conditions could be found within one CI. Conditions included: (a) experiencing mistrust/unsafe relationship; (b) interacting with non-reflective fellow students; (c) receiving unsupportive/jarring feedback; (d) facing a systemic barrier/unsafe educational landscape; and (e) interacting with unsupportive academic personnel (supervisor, instructor, administrator).

Table 2  
*Hindering and Facilitating Reflective Practice in Doctoral Counsellor Education*

Condition	Frequency Across Critical Incidents
<b>Hindering</b>	
Experiencing mistrust/unsafe relationship	5
Interacting with non-reflective fellow students	2
Receiving unsupportive/jarring feedback	3
Facing a systemic barrier	4
Interacting with unsupportive academic personnel	5
<b>Facilitating</b>	
Experiencing a trusting relationship	6
Opening up with fellow students	6
Engaging in reflective tasks	14
Having self-trust/risking	12
Interacting with supportive academic personnel	9

*Experiencing mistrust/unsafe relationship.* This condition represents participants' experiences that a particular relationship thwarted reflective practice. Experiencing mistrusting relationships perceived as unsafe were identified in five of the eight CIs.

For the most part, this condition was most closely linked with the requirement of “interacting with unsupportive academic personnel.” Supervisors, instructors, and administrators were involved in these incidents, as were fellow students.

One example of this condition involved a series of events that contributed to Dawn “shutting down” toward an instructor. The incident began in a doctoral course when a classmate presented a videotape of work with a client. Dawn described that, after seeing 30 seconds of the session, the instructor commented, “Well, it’s clear that the client’s crazy and like must be either schizophrenic or manic. This client needs some drugs...” Dawn described:

If you’re at all aware of group process ... you could see the class just drop. Like people were ... we started getting quiet. I didn’t even say it in a confrontational voice, I said it in just a very ... “I just feel really uncomfortable with the language that we’re using and... this is why I feel uncomfortable with it. Couldn’t we find other ways in which to talk about the client that are going to be more helpful, rather than so labeling and elitist and that hierarchy of I know best and [the client is] just crazy and stupid?”

It was then Dawn’s turn to show a videotape of her work with a client.

After watching my video, [the instructor] turns to me and for 2 minutes straight hammered me on it. “Do you see what you’re doing? Do you see how bad this is?” [Instructor] made it very clear that I was making huge mistakes with this person and what I was doing was wrong, and who did I think I was ... [Instructor] made it very clear that there was a hierarchy between me and [instructor] and that I was just the student and [instructor] was going to show me how bad I had done in my video.

Dawn said that she humbly accepted the comments, but it was clear to her that the instructor was putting her in her place. She shut down to that instructor for a couple of weeks.

I just felt ... like why should I risk now, after that? And there is this power differential that [instructor] made perfectly clear.

It was particularly difficult because this instructor was also her counselling practicum supervisor. After considering it for several weeks, Dawn decided to try to end the tension by broaching the topic during a one-on-one supervision meeting.

[Instructor’s] response was “Yes, I’ve been feeling the tension. I thought that was cheeky of you to speak to me like that.” And I was just like ... did you just call me cheeky, like in a professional supervision ... like that’s what I was thinking (laughter). And the fact that [instructor] had been also feeling the tension, but that I had to be the one to bring it up ... [I thought,] you’re useless, I’m not even going to ... [I] ended my relationship with [that] instructor. I never turn to [instructor] for anything—ever! It was very clear to me right then that there is not a mutual understanding about what’s going on. There is not a willingness to talk about it, there’s not a willingness to grow from it, there’s not a... it was me, it was all me. It was just that I was cheeky and loudmouthed and outspoken and ...

The unwillingness to talk openly appalled Dawn. This account clearly captured how lack of trust in a relationship hindered open reflection with another.

*Interacting with non-reflective fellow students.* This condition captured fellow students as hindrances to reflective practice in two of eight CIs. Although not

overly represented in the number of incidents, it was described as significant by participants. Crystal shared her initial excitement about a structured self-awareness course consisting of all-new counselling students when she first entered the program at the master's level. Crystal conveyed that she became increasingly apprehensive given her experience of the reluctance of other students.

[The] second day, I just remember having this group and some not very reflective people [in it] and we had to go individually and do this little assignment thing and then meet up with our group and talk about it. And I did it and I went first, I think, and told them all this deep stuff and then the other people went, and every single one of them was done in like 20 seconds ... such superficial things. And their attitudes, you could tell on their faces that they didn't like it and they didn't take it seriously. And that's the moment I went "Phff, forget this, what's up with these people and this class!?"

She discussed the difficulty in gaining self-awareness in this course and attributed it to a combination of her experience of other students' attitudes and the structure of how it happened. Crystal shared that being evaluated for reflection and her experience of the contrived nature of reflecting at university was challenging. She expressed that there is typically competition between students in the educational setting, which made open reflection difficult for her. Crystal hypothesized that this may have led to the discomfort and blatant objections to this course by other students.

I may not trust necessarily and then ... I share something deeply personal and then I pass by them in the hallway all the time in the mailroom and it's not ... like it's not the same as just a counselling group where you only see each other and you only connect on that level.

With respect to faculty involved in facilitating this course experience, she added, "I guess, down the road, if you've really spilled your guts and stuff, you never know if you will be supervised by them." Crystal had a suggestion around this systemic barrier.

They need to find a way to do it that is non-threatening to students and maybe private. I think a lot of them are worried about the whole evaluation component.

*Receiving unsupportive/jarring feedback.* This condition arose from incidents, including feedback or comments from academic personnel, that led participants to shut down to open reflection. For example, one incident involved a comment from a counselling supervisor that was perceived as particularly inappropriate and unsupportive.

I remember just following my regular way of being with supervisors, which had become very... just honest, here's the problem, here's me... help me. I was going on about my philosophy of life... and that my client was saying something that I totally disagree with and I was trying to give her (the client) hope and focus more on the good things that are going on. I sort of went off on a little tangent about that. [Supervisor] said, "What are you supposed to be? A guru?" or something like that. I was just immediately like, "Oh my God!" [Supervisor] thinks I'm being preachy or something.

She conveyed how it was startling and disempowering to be criticized when she was authentically sharing her thoughts in relating to a client.



And it was so me at that moment in what I was saying. And [supervisor] just says that and I was like whoa, punch me in the stomach. I felt attacked for being myself, which is horrible but true....

She articulated that she developed a protective stance, on guard from this supervisor.

Then every supervision session I had with [supervisor] after that, I was careful. And if I'd been with [supervisor] all year I would have learned diddly squat because I would have told [supervisor] nothing. So that shuts down your opening up of what you're thinking and feeling. And made me more reserved for the following supervisions [with this supervisor].

*Facing a systemic barrier/unsafe educational landscape.* This condition that emerged from the data was a barrier to reflective practice and seemed to be inherent and embedded within the structure of the system and politics of education. These barriers can typically be described as invisible, uncomfortable, and unnamed boundaries that are blurred within the academic system. The four accounts of incidents representing this condition included systemic barriers such as assigning standard grades for reflective exercises, instructors and supervisors playing dual roles, placing students into contrived situations for self-reflection with fellow students, and students attempting to gain self-awareness on their own and feeling less able to access personal counselling support because of confidentiality concerns and financial barriers.

For example, Sean shared his conviction that counsellor education should support students experiencing what it is like to be a client as part of reflective practice; however, this was not his experience. In one of his negative CIs, he described taking a risk by accessing counselling for himself at the university counselling centre only to be turned away due to service constraints.

Additionally, a systemic barrier of faculty playing dual roles was evident when Holly shared her feeling of extreme discomfort in a course with a large reflective component that was run by a faculty member. She spoke about a series of negative occurrences that fostered her apprehension about this individual and impeded her desire to openly reflect.

I went to talk to [instructor] because I was feeling very out of place in the department with the lack of feminist focus. I was abhorred when [instructor] told me that I needed to repress my outward declaration of feminist ideas because it would prevent me from going places in this profession. She specifically told me about a psychologist who identified herself as feminist and how people wouldn't even shake her hand at conferences.

Holly went on to describe other startling interactions with this individual. She spoke about how the instructor, during class, had listened for less than a minute about a client that a classmate was working with and offered expert labelling interpretation.

[Instructor] said, "Well, obviously he's [client's] gay and won't admit it." Just like that, [instructor] had undermined all [classmate's] work with the client and [classmate's] possible reflections on the client and chimed in with statements to solve it all.

In the last interaction, which solidified this perspective, Holly spoke about how the instructor had talked in class about working with clients who had experienced childhood sexual abuse.

[Instructor] said that there's no room for hope for clients who were sexually abused. [Instructor] said that it takes years and years of therapy and even then it's an upward battle of undoing the trauma. I, and another classmate, challenged this perspective. We said that even though there may be some merit to what [instructor] was saying, shouldn't *we* see the possibility and hope in working with these clients? [Instructor's] response was that we were neophyte counsellors and experience would show us that [instructor] was right.

In the experience of taking the course with this instructor, Holly stated:

For obvious reasons, I had no respect or trust for [instructor]. I felt unsafe around [instructor]. I shut down. There was no trust. How was I going to open up in a [interactional] course with [this instructor] as the facilitator? So this was a barrier to self-reflection, [my] lack of trust for the instructor and the other students and just the academic setting itself. It just didn't feel right.

*Interacting with unsupportive academic personnel (supervisor, instructor, administrator).* Academic professionals were involved in five of the eight incidents that were barriers to open reflection. Many CIs already discussed have highlighted participant experiences of this condition hindering student reflection. In the following CI, an administrator was perceived as unsupportive.

I ended up having to go and talk to [administrator] ... I remember walking to [administrator's] office [seeking support to talk to faculty member] because I was a little nervous. And it was useless, [administrator] did nothing to help me, nothing! [Administrator] looked at me and you could tell got nervous with what I was saying ... and [administrator] just said, "I think you should go back and try to work it out [with faculty member] ..." And I said, "I will try again, if you want me to. But if I can't ... then will you help me?" "Well, then we'll see what ..." [administrator] was useless! I will never ask for [individual's] help again.

### *Conditions Facilitative of Reflective Practice*

Of the 24 CIs, 16 were classified as engendering reflective practice. Five conditions (see Table 2) were derived from these CIs whereby one or more of the conditions were found in each CI that facilitated reflective practice. Conditions determined were (a) experiencing a trusting relationship (challenging/supportive), (b) opening up with fellow students, (c) engaging in reflective tasks, (d) having self-trust/risking, and (e) interacting with supportive academic personnel.

*Experiencing a trusting relationship (challenging/supportive).* From participants' perceptions, this condition contributed to enhancing reflective practice. Participants conveyed that a basis of trust with another person opened them up to feeling challenged within a supportive relationship. At other times, they experienced the trust as a leap of faith, as was described in the case with some instructors. These trusting relationships were characterized as challenging and supportive and were found in 6 of the 16 facilitative CIs. In one CI, trust was central to getting the most out of a reflective assignment; that is, the student would not have opened up as much if she did not trust the instructor.

We were to write 10 critical incidents in our lives that affected who we were personally and professionally and then weave together our developing personal theory of counselling. That was a huge facilitator of reflective practice in my training. I got a lot out of that exercise. I wrote this small journal book. It was so much fun doing it. For one I crumpled up a leaf and pasted it in there all crumpled up. I just enjoyed it so much. The process ... it's kind of a book that if someone read it they would know the essence of who I am .... They are the stories that make up a lot of who I am as a person.

*Opening up with fellow students.* This condition demonstrated that participants' perceptions and interpretations of incidents were most salient in defining whether reflective practice was perceived to be facilitated or hindered. That is, fellow students were involved in two negative CIs and were also part of six positive CIs. In relationships with fellow students that fostered reflection, Crystal commented on the poignancy of this connection.

I think that also it stands out to me, just because colleagues, who think like me, also impact how reflective I am. Like I learn from them and get support from them. How important they (colleagues) really are ... I can't imagine not having people there that I trust to talk things over with and even if it's my personal life, or with clients. I think it's so valuable.

Dawn spoke about her close friendship with a fellow student with whom she had completed a degree at a different university.

And when she transferred for the first two and a half months, she lived with me in this small apartment. We'd have lots and lots and lots of conversations with respect to work. Like I'd be working in the kitchen and she'd be working in the living room and then something would trigger for me and I'd be like, "What do you think about this?" And then we'd get into these huge discussions about our understanding with respect to counselling and theory and like it really helped having her and she's really, really good at ... She's one of the first people I will call if I have an ethical dilemma or am struggling with a client or in my personal life if I'm struggling. She's so good at listening and then in asking you what do you need from her. And in helping you reflect what's going on for you about stuff.

*Engaging in reflective tasks.* From participants' perspectives, trusted instructors who integrated reflective assignments or discussions into course content were found to be successful in fostering a reflective process. Participants described these instructors as valuing reflective practice and as reflective individuals within their own lives. "Engaging in reflective tasks" was evident in 14 of 16 CIs. All five participants shared at least one reflective assignment as part of coursework from an instructor that led to greater self-awareness and facilitated reflective practice. The following statement captures how a participant felt she grew from the reflective assignment and in her relationship with an instructor:

[Instructor] got me to think about what are all the different things in my life that have really helped to nurture, focus, and develop my hope. It was the whole process of reflecting because just doing it: having to pick the pictures, having to decide what to write about, having to pick the songs, having to write and pick the inserts, having to pick the colors of paper that I wanted to have it written on.... The effect that it had has been lasting ... as well as the influence [that instructor] has had on my life. [Instructor] was just so good because ... like [instructor] plants the seed and then lets you nurture it in the way you want.

Sean also recalled a reflective assignment that involved thinking and writing about his life experiences and how they influenced his practice. The students were

asked to get together in small groups outside of class and share their reflections with each other.

But I remember we had ... [student] cooked a roast or something. He loved cooking roasts, that guy and so we had a nice dinner and it felt like ... you know what it felt like? It felt like the kind of thing you want to do with friends a lot more often. You just want to sit down and get real with them and forget about all the rest of the hogwash, but let's get down to talking about who we are and what we believe in and what's important to us. And that's how it felt. It felt like I was having this breaking of bread ritual with two people that were closer to me than my own family. And so that was unique.

*Having self-trust/risking.* The element of self-trust and risking was determined in 12 facilitative CIs. Sean expressed many risks he took while pursuing his doctorate. He spoke about coming out to classmates.

Although I didn't know them very well ... so it was a big step ... But I did look at university as an experiment, as a chance to try out some different things. And I knew that, in my own growth, I needed to become more able to talk about who I am without being embarrassed or scared. And so that was just another step along that journey.

Sean also shared the personal risk he took in engaging in heuristic research for his dissertation.

And I was at some level frightened by heuristics and I wasn't sure I wanted to go there because it meant being much more out than I had been before. And [dissertation supervisor] actually challenged me a bit to say, "Well, you know I think you would stand (to gain) the most if you did heuristic research." And I thought about it and thought about it and reflected (laughter) and came to that decision. But even in the practicums that I chose, I wanted to be in places that would force reflection and also for the internship. I wanted to be in a place that I felt I'd be able to do more of that too. So I looked for self-reflection as I reflect on it, I looked for it everywhere and found it.

Crystal spoke about her experience of risking when she was paired with a counselling practicum supervisor who had a reputation of being challenging. Crystal conveyed that, because of her own desire for personal and professional development, she would choose a point in her videotape of a session with a client to show a point where she felt stuck.

And even, you know [it was] this weird dichotomy. I'd be sitting there, showing my video ... scared of what [supervisor's] going to say to me and at the same time "Bring it on," "Let's do it, let's look at me." There's something ... I just liked it. It taught me to look at myself when I was counselling, because I wasn't ... I don't think I was (looking at myself) up until then. [The experience] helped me to risk more. And it would make me self-reflect.

*Interacting with supportive academic personnel (supervisor, instructor, administrator).* In this condition determined to contribute to open reflection, participants shared how particular academic personnel were inextricably linked to their reflective process. Nine CIs included this condition. This condition was often paired with the condition "experiencing a trusting relationship." For example, East described a practicum supervisor whom she trusted and whom she perceived as extremely encouraging and challenging in helping her to get a client to continue counselling. Through encouraged reflection East was able to think about why this was such an issue for her.

And you can see it was to a high degree, because I really, really wanted to get to the bottom of it, for my own values and beliefs, in how I could best help [client] because I felt that I wasn't giving [client] the best that I could.

Again, I think it's just shown the reflection of when I come into troubles and I'm not feeling good about the situation, I've got to do something about it . . . talk to the people who do more research, come up with some sort of plan of action. And always look at my own values and beliefs [and] what's happening for me.

I didn't necessarily agree with all that [supervisor] was saying in terms of my high expectations, but it sure helped and coached in kind of working with getting client back in. If it hadn't been for [supervisor], I don't think I would have been able to get [client] back in.

### *Overall Perspectives on Reflective Practice in Counsellor Education*

Four of the five participants indicated that support for self-reflection in their counsellor education was low relative to their expectations. This data emerged from research interviews where participants were invited to complete the sentence: "With regard to self-reflection, my counsellor education has . . ." One participant responded positively by indicating that reflective practice was supported in her counsellor education.

[Self-reflection has] been enhanced by my professors that ensure we do reflection by making it one of the projects that we have to do. That's very good incentive to keep building that in because again it's competing time, competing priorities [as a student].

The following quotes are from four participants who were disappointed with the degree of reflection emphasized or felt that their self-reflection was independent of their doctoral training.

Parts of it [counsellor education] have [fostered self-reflection]. I think that it really depends on the type of professor that you have whether someone believes that it's important or not important. So, in the courses where it's been promoted, it has, and in those where it hasn't been promoted, it hasn't. I'd say that percentage-wise fewer classes support it. I learned much more about how to be a counsellor in my master's program [at a different university] than I have in my Ph.D. In the courses that I took there [different university], the emphasis was on what was happening for me.

One participant echoed this sentiment through her experience of reflective practice.

In some ways [my counsellor education] has helped it [self-reflection] and in some ways not because it couldn't be stopped. But I think, overall, I had more experiences that were disappointing. Certain situations and professors have supported it [self-reflection]; others have not.

Likewise, another participant indicated that she experienced disappointment with the lack of focus on self-reflection in her counsellor training.

My counselling education has not been as present [in my self-reflection] as I would have liked it to be. A lot of the self-reflection I have done as a counsellor has been of my own impetus. It hasn't come directly from my training. However, in [instructor's] classes there have been assignments on reflection so in that way I would say it was intentional and very directive to be reflective. But in other classes, it wasn't the case. It has been disappointing because I thought there would be more. And for me, it ties into feminism because reflective practice—and just giving voice to the self—is a very feminist concept. And I was very sad at the beginning of the program because I found that a feminist focus and reflective practice [orientation] just weren't

part of the training. So I was very disappointed because I had wanted it to be so much about self-discovery.

Lastly, another participant spoke to how the counselling program had not specifically engendered the self-reflection and awareness gained.

My counselling education has been superb, not so much because of the program, but because of what I put myself through and how I responded to the program ... I don't think that you're going to really get what you need to get out of a Ph.D. program in counselling psychology if reflective practice isn't the most important piece of it ... I think when you are in graduate work, you can get as much out of it as you want and you can also get as little out of it as you want. And the choice really is yours. So I chose, partly because of my own inner work I was doing in still trying to complete more of my journey in coming out ... And also because of the philosophical shift that I made, which largely occurred after coming out—I decided that I wanted to do a lot of reflection and I decided to pick a methodology for my dissertation that would force that.

With respect to the quotes that highlight the perceived lack of reflective practice focus experienced in this counsellor graduate program, it is counterintuitive that 16 facilitative CIs and 8 hindering CIs were shared in this research. One would expect more hindering CIs. Two hypotheses for this discrepancy are that negative incidents were most jarring and made a lasting impression on one's overall experiences or that, from the many and varied experiences of reflective practice in their lives, participants were able to select more incidents in their counsellor education that fostered reflection.

#### IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNSELLOR EDUCATION

Typical to qualitative research, these findings cannot be generalized to all student experiences. However, preliminary recommendations for counsellor education programs interested in fostering development of reflective practitioners can be suggested. For example, counselling programs would benefit from examining curriculum practices that foster students engaging in reflective tasks, taking self-risks, and experiencing a trusting relationship (i.e., supportive as well as challenging) that allows one to open up and interact with fellow students and/or supportive academic professionals. These conditions were found to engender reflective practice. Further, facing systemic barriers, experience mistrusting relationships with non-reflective fellow students and/or unsupportive academic professionals, and receiving unsupportive/jarring feedback served as barriers to reflective practice.

In this exploratory research, CIs perceived as facilitative of reflective practice (16) outnumbered shared incidents of hindrances (8); however, four participants were clear that the degree of reflection and tenor of a reflective orientation in their counselling department was low relative to their expectations of a doctoral program in counselling. As well, some classmates were reported to be reluctant and opposed to personal exploration in counselling courses. This is consistent with a longitudinal study (Stewart & Richardson, 2000) involving undergraduate students (non-counselling) where the anxiety-provoking nature of reflecting as well as the vulnerability experienced in disclosing personal information for grad-

ing generated a negative experience. Students' reluctance may contribute to the hesitancy by some counsellor educators in engendering reflective practice.

Looking around the globe at our counterparts, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) requires accredited courses to include a personal development component (Wright, 2005). Since the early 1980s in the United Kingdom, most counselling education programs include writing in reflective journals as part of developing reflective practice. Canadian programs also promote reflective writing. Nevertheless, clear constructs of "personal development" and assessment practices for reflective writing are missing (Bleakley, 2000). In the United States, Wright expressed the need for national benchmarks and assessment standards of reflective practice for counselling students and how accreditation bodies can take the lead on this. Canadian graduate programs would also benefit from clear and consistent national directives.

As Schwebel and Coster (1998) revealed, educational policies and practices may not be designed to facilitate reflective practice in the context of formal counselling education. Indeed, systemic barriers, which impede reflective practice, were identified in the present study. Schwebel and Coster hypothesized that over and above the practical and logistical barriers to a reflective program was the modernist epistemology of practice undergirding curriculum and pedagogy that undermined the value of reflective practice. At the core of modernism is a belief in a knowable, objective world with universal properties and laws (Gergen, 1992) focused on direct, objective, and systematic observations of the world (Palys, 1992). Schön (1991) advocated for an epistemological shift or a *reflective turn* in education where students are not treated as containers waiting to be filled (Freire, 1970), but are encouraged to focus on their own experiences to contextualize new knowledge. This reflective posture is what Freire called an epistemological relationship to reality, which involves being a critical examiner of personal experience, questioning, and interpreting one's life and education (Shor, 1993).

In essence, a reflective turn is required to engender and facilitate a learning environment where self-reflection is valued and supported. A relational component to reflective practice was identified in this study; as such, reflective educators are necessary conduits. Recruitment of faculty who place value on reflective practice is integral for modelling and facilitating reflective experiences for counselling students. Furthermore, facilitating a learning environment where reflective practice is embraced requires open dialogue about how to empower students to reflect and how to foster a reflective curriculum. This can be accomplished by sharing tensions, challenges, and rewards collaboratively among faculty, supervisors, and students in a continual exploration of the issue. Zeichner and Liston (1996) underscored that education should be self-renewing in that students and teachers continually reexamine curriculum, organization, pedagogy, and authority relationships, and work toward ongoing improvement based on experience and program evaluation. A thrust toward students being actively involved in their learning and development is represented in the learning cycle originally presented by Kolb (1970). As well, Knowles's (1978) concept of the adult learner and

Schön's (1987) vision of professional artistry in the reflective practitioner suggest that adults characteristically reflect and draw on accumulated life experiences (Jennings & Kennedy, 1996).

#### LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations recognized in this study include focusing on one counselling program and involving a small number of homogenous participants. Gathering similar information from other students within the program and from doctoral students in other counselling programs would be meaningful. Furthermore, including experiences of those with different views of reflective practice would help determine if the conditions found are common across Canadian programs and perspectives. Second, the results were based on one group of students recruited through purposive sampling. Longitudinal research would permit an examination of reflective practice and the impact of CIs over time.

Counsellor education is part of a larger context of the profession. As such, research that examines and deconstructs multiple levels and spheres of influence, to understand how each level impacts the development of a reflective counselling professional, is necessary research. For example, document analysis of curricular policies within Canadian counselling departments would be informative as to the emphasis on reflective practice within formal graduate programs.

Indeed, a closer look is required into the epistemology of practice underlying counselling pedagogy and whether modernist, postmodernist, or other educational practices are followed. Modernist practices have tended to emphasize skills and theories more than the development of the person of the counsellor. We could also learn from counselling programs found to successfully foster reflective practice by examining how they navigate this focus and how barriers to a reflective orientation may be alleviated.

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