

Book Review / Compte rendu

Paré, D. A. (2013). *The practice of collaborative counseling and psychotherapy: Developing skills in culturally mindful helping*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage. ISBN: 978-1-4129-9509-2. 477 pages

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ABSTRACT

This book provides a clear framework for developing a collaborative counselling approach with clients. Dr. Paré espouses an alternative view of counselling as a conversational practice that considers power, meaning, and social justice when working *with* rather than working *on* clients. He delivers tools for practitioners to mindfully step away from deficit-based views of clients toward client agency. This accessible text focuses on building a foundation of collaboration with clients, explores the practice of collaborative meaning making, and provides empowering practices for assessing client concerns and promoting change. Students and practitioners alike will appreciate this guiding compass for the complex counselling conversations that lie ahead.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage fournit un cadre clair et cohérent pour le développement d'une approche collaborative avec les clients. Dr. Paré favorise une autre vue de counseling comme une pratique conversationnelle qui prend en compte le pouvoir, le sens, et la justice sociale en travaillant *avec* plutôt que *sur* les clients. Il fournit des outils pour les praticiens qui, à la pleine conscience, aimeraient s'éloigner des vues axées sur le déficit du client vers l'habilitation du client. Ce texte accessible se concentre sur la création d'une base de collaboration avec les clients, explore la pratique de construction de sens en collaboration, et fournit des pratiques autonomisant en évaluant les préoccupations des clients et en facilitant le changement. Les étudiants et les praticiens apprécieront ce compas qui peut servir à orienter les conversations de counseling complexes qui surviennent.

The Practice of Collaborative Counseling & Psychotherapy by David Paré is about developing a collaborative counselling approach with clients while forefronting power relations and cultural diversity. The author depicts counselling as conversational, forged only through careful consideration of language and keeping the client at the centre of treatment at all times. The book is intended for counsellors, psychotherapists, counsellor educators, and students-in-training—particularly those appreciative of a contemporary lens that challenges traditional practice and considers meaning-making in talk therapy.

Paré is a full professor of educational counselling at the University of Ottawa and has a longstanding relationship with postmodern approaches to therapy and supervision; he has written prolifically in this area, is founder of the Glebe Institute, and has a strong presence advancing collaborative practice in many counselling communi-

ties. Inviting the reader to mindfully step away from deficit-based views of clients, Paré heightens our awareness of the often unspoken, less visible processes within the culturally laden dialogue that is counselling.

Section 1 orients us to cultural location and therapeutic conversation as a specialized form of talk. In Chapter 1, attention to culture, meaning-making, power, collaborative dialogue, and mindfulness are but a few things that should guide intention. In Chapter 2, the author portrays therapy as conversation, closely examining the way “talk,” including therapeutic talk, operates to construct meaning and shape experience.

Section 2 builds a foundation for collaboration with clients. Counselling is not a “technical craft” with distinct linear steps. With this premise, the author encourages us to always be with the emerging moment to focus on how “conversation” can guide us and how trust and rapport “make helpful collaborations possible.” Chapter 3 is succinctly captured by “we can’t go there (a preferred future) until we are here (the present), as it’s currently experienced.” It is about centring the client through hospitality, compassion, empathy, listening, transparency, silence, and stillness. Chapter 4 celebrates the well-established importance of the therapeutic relationship; however, Paré invites us to consider the myth of neutrality, reminding us that counselling instead involves joining clients as allies amidst challenges they face.

Section 3 explores collaborative meaning-making. Chapter 5 presents the challenges of discerning client meaning, given the shape-shifting quality of language and inevitable cultural divides. Chapter 6 offers practices that consolidate mutual understanding, such as verifying clients’ intended messages and consulting clients on the joint counselling process. Counsellors can help clients articulate their experience through a stance of curiosity, suspending the rush to understanding, and orienting clients as experts in their own lives.

Section 4 regards developing concrete pictures of client concerns that invite an agentic rather than a deficit view of the client. Chapter 7 begins with “unveiling the problem definition,” where we are cautioned about pitfalls of rushing to “fix” and not “slowing down to watch the picture develop.” Practices here are intended to keep the client at the centre of conversation, such as separating person and problem. The following chapters on assessment devote as much space to assessing what is “working” as to determining the dimensions of “the problem.” Chapter 8 considers assessing—through the problem story—previous counselling experiences, the client’s theory of change, risk of harm to self/others, and client competencies. An interesting distinction emerges between “effects questions” that focus on the impact of the problem on the individual versus “response-based questions” that help foreground client agency in response to distressing events. Chapter 9 broadens the scope of assessment to consider complexity of experience represented in multiple cultural contexts, nested social systems in which client experience is embedded, and the many layers of experience.

The final section comprises six chapters promoting change in clients’ lives. We are introduced to concepts related to “influence,” and the idea that what is often called “client resistance” can be understood as a form of collaboration. The remaining chapters separately consider interventions to facilitate movement—Working with Actions (Chapter 11), Working with Thoughts and Beliefs (Chapter 12), Working

with Emotions (Chapter 13), Working with Stories (Chapter 14), and Working with Endings and Beginnings (Chapter 15)—once again, always keeping meaning-making and client cultural situatedness at the centre through a collaborative ethic.

Each chapter has engaging features: reflection boxes, chapter recaps, and generously rich discussion questions that ground one's learning in personal experience. Suggested activities help bring chapter concepts to life. "Student voices," a unique feature, may bring solace to the beginner counsellor with certain wonderings in early practice; I reminisced fondly reading about "technique overload" where we may become preoccupied with technique at the expense of more relationally oriented practice.

Rather than merely stating the challenges of capturing and responding to meaning in an evolving cultural context, the author exemplifies the very way of being he puts forth in the book. With his transparency around the challenges of practice, I felt like an active participant rather than the passive recipient of information that would appear practical. While the content was seemingly intuitive, I particularly appreciated his presentation of counselling as conversational. Unpredictability within our work is both the beauty and the bane of counselling practice. Acknowledging that any position within counselling conversations has its strengths and limitations is significant motivation for collaboration. We start to appreciate the complexity at play depending on our situatedness: theory can guide but also overshadow a collaborative process; language can be rich but also ambiguous and open to interpretation; power can be generative but also oppressive.

We can acknowledge that there are a variety of ways from which counselling skills can be approached and taught. This book may not be a good fit for those who believe skills should be taught with a heavy emphasis on empirical support for the practices listed, or who still believe the most ethical practices are those that have the most quantitative studies to prove their efficacy. In a similar vein, those who value delivering skills according to strict sequential protocols corresponding to those used in manualized treatment trials might feel challenged by the highly contextualized focus of this book. Moreover, the book is not likely to resonate with practitioners and educators who embrace traditions of therapist "expertise," who approach skills as assessment and treatment of pathology, or who organize their practice largely around the DSM.

Most counselling skills texts are deeply rooted in a Rogerian foundation and often provide detailed steps, interventions, and "dos and don'ts" somewhat disconnected from a clear and cohesive framework. Interventions characterized without grappling thoughtfully with crucial questions about the enterprise of counselling itself strike me as showing a disparity between the field's accumulated body of instrumental intervention on the one hand, and a growing cultural consciousness about social justice and its relationship to the "helping professions" on the other. To learn theory-driven interventions in the rapid exchange of counselling conversations often leaves learners overwhelmed and with the impression they need to become "expert" in techniques that have little to do with daily relational and conversational practices. Texts to date also rarely identify conversation as *the* practice through which helping happens, or make reference to power. If not relegated to the status of add-on, the crucial theme

of culture in conversation is often treated in terms of race and ethnicity, or as a challenge of “fit” when “helping someone who is different,” rather than as the substance of practice itself. Paré views the counselling process through a more contemporary and contextually-reflective lens to promote working *with* rather than working *on* the client. I anticipate that once students and seasoned practitioners alike grasp the postmodern epistemology behind his proposed framework, they will be grateful for the compass that will help guide complex conversations ahead.

About the Author

Cristelle Audet is an associate professor of educational counselling in the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa. Her main research interests are counsellor education, social justice, and international counselling.

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