The spiritual conditions for adult development in counselling training

Patricia Sherwood
Edith Cowan University
Yehuda Tagar
Persephone College

The complex issue of incorporating spiritual values into the training of counsellors is addressed in this paper. A non-sectarian model of spiritual conditions applicable to the personal and professional development needs of counsellors and trainee counsellors, is presented herein. It is derived from Rudolf Steiner's indications for spiritual development. It has been developed and incorporated into a professional Advanced Diploma in Holistic Counselling by Yehuda Tagar, and implemented over the past eight years. The seven conditions are: commitment to personal health and well-being; to understanding others from their own viewpoint and within a context which includes oneself ; to regarding thoughts and feelings as realities; to distinguishing one's inner self and truth from outer pressures and expectations; to strengthening the connection between resolutions and action; to developing gratitude for the gifts of life; and to the unity of all of the above in a consistency of character. We suggest that these seven conditions are directly correlated with the professional competencies demanded in the counselling profession namely: self-care, empathy, awareness of and integrity in regards to non-verbal communication, awareness of oneself and of one's own boundaries, self-responsibility, unconditional positive regard, and integration of these competencies into the unique character of each counsellor trainee, and into the commitment for on-going personal development. The benefits, from the viewpoint of the trainees of this counsellor training practice, are expressed broadly as: developing a greater consciousness of myself and issues I need to resolve, as a basis for the on-going development of empathy, the development of self-care, developing better communication /counselling skills, a better understanding of clients' needs and developmental potential; and the ability of assisting clients to deal with issues effectively.

Introduction

As adult educators involved in training counsellors, we have wrestled with the challenge of incorporating overt spiritual values into our curriculum compatible with the ethos of our person-centred counselling training, namely respecting individual freedom and value diversity, empowering the individual to direct their learning and personal development, pacing personal and spiritual growth according to the trainees timing, and providing spiritual values that are relevant to their life as a trainee and ongoing professional. In addition, counselling competencies demanded by employees must be considered, so that trainees are prepared for the workplace. Persephone College initiated this Advanced Diploma in Counselling in 1991, and it is broadly based on anthroposophical and humanistic philosophy, practice and values. Tagar developed a spiritual/personal development values curriculum, derived from the work of Rudolf Steiner, that was explicitly process rather than goal oriented. It prescribes seven conditions of personal spiritual practice, which are seen as compatible with the counselling process, and which can be adopted as a spiritual practice in differing degrees, depending on the needs of the trainee. This practice provides the conditions for the trainees to develop spiritual values, and standards of integrity and well being in their personal and professional life. The spiritual values curriculum is process rather than goal focused. Herein lies its strength. It aims to develop Kohlberg's stage 6 moral person (1984) who can review each ethical situation in light of specific moral dilemmas. It avoids cultivating prescriptive behaviours which are proving inadequate to deal with an increasingly chaotic and complexly changing world.

The seven spiritual conditions for the balanced development of adults

The seven conditions were conceived by Steiner (1994) as the basic level of preparation for the meditative, focused self-educational process.

These seven spiritual conditions of adult development are:

1. Commitment to self-guided personal health and well-being,

2. Commitment to understand others from their own point of view and to view them within a greater context which includes the viewer,

3. Commitment to regard one's own thoughts, feelings, intentions and emotions to be at least as real as outer objects,

4. Commitment to distinguish our inner identity and truth from external realities, expectations, truths and pressures,

5. Commitment to develop one's ability to implement the connection between one's resolutions and one's action,

6. Commitment to the on-going development of gratitude for the gifts of life; and

7. The unity of all six in a consistency of inner character.

1. Commitment to personal health and well being

Steiner (1994:97) describes this condition as having "the will to lead a healthy life...the improvement of our physical, mental and spiritual health.". Adherence to the opinions of experts is not the guideline here, but rather, the trainee is encouraged to adhere to his/her inner guidance. The development of self-reliance in matters of personal development is at the basis of this condition, which is the foundation stone for all the other conditions. It embodies the concept of self-care, in an integrated model of body, mind, heart, and spirit.

2. Commitment to understand others from their own point of view and in context of the whole

The second condition recognises the all embracing interconnectedness of all living things. It is in Steiner's (1994:99) terms, " that we feel ourselves to be a part of the whole of life." This invokes the great quality of compassion, where we are able to withhold judgement and hold others in the arms of understanding. In our longing for a more compassionate world, and recognition of the interconnectedness of all humanity, we must first become the qualities we desire to see around us. This involves a deep commitment to a constant striving to move out of one's habitual, "normal" judgmental response to people and to situations into seeing things from other peoples' viewpoints, and into allowing space for the coexistence of a diverse range of views. From the heart of compassion is born empathy, long established by Rogers (1957), as the key to a successful therapeutic process.

3. Commitment to regard thoughts and feelings as realities

A pre-condition to being able to become effective and practical in regards to people's inner life requires a constant self-education towards regarding this inner life as absolutely real. This self education, to be credible, must start from oneself. This is described by Steiner (1994:100) as " the recognition that when we hate our fellow human beings it is just as destructive as when we physically strike them...we must know that what we feel has as much impact upon the world as the work done by our hands." Research is emerging demonstrating the connection between what we think and feel, and the quality of our physical health (Borysenko, 1994). The methodology in our counselling training program recognises non/verbal expression and experience awareness both within oneself and within others. This condition is intended to encourage the development of such a counselling competency. By revealing inner experience through sensation, gesture, movement, visualisation and sounds, the reality of thoughts and feeling becomes tangible, and also available for practical review and for change.

4. Distinguishing our inner identity from outer entities and forces

At the core of the seven conditions is the striving for individuation, of distinguishing oneself from others in order to develop relationship on the basis of personal identity. Steiner (1994:101) succinctly defines this condition as being "free of the urge to do only what those around us recognise and approve of". It is the capacity to be true to oneself, and to know that fidelity to one's spirit is more important than meeting the expectations of others. At the same time it entails the capacity to refrain from imposing oneself on others. It seeks the balance between these two extremes. Self-awareness is the outcome of the practice of this condition, which is widely regarded as essential to becoming a good counsellor. Maslow (1971:54) argued that the ability to provide conditions for the client to discover him/her self is central to successful therapy:

> What the good clinical therapist does is to help his particular client to unfold, to break through the defenses against his own self-knowledge, to recover himself, and to get to know himself. The best way for him (the client) to lead a full life is to be more fully himself.

5. Implementing the connection between resolution and action

This is the educational standard for the will, the least conscious aspect of the psychological dynamics. It seeks to awaken to the nature and quality of the motivation for action, as well as to strengthen the ability to lead resolution into actualisation. Steiner (1994:101) defines this condition as " steadfastness in following through on a resolution once it has been made. Nothing should lead us to abandon something we have decided upon except the insight that we have made a mistake."

6. The development of gratitude

An essential part of self education consists of the awareness of what builds the psyche and what destroys it. According to Steiner, criticism destroys the soul forces and gratitude nurtures them in the same way that healthy food nurtures the body. Steiner (1994:102) defines the sixth condition as "the feeling of gratitude for all that we receive." In this concept of gratitude, there is the image of the recognition of life's opportunities, gifts and abundance and building upon these. There is the concept of

embracing the other person in their beingness without judgement. This condition is very close to the quality that has been described by Rogers (1957) as unconditional positive regard, and as essential to maximising the client's benefits from the counselling experience. It is an essential quality in the counselling process to be able to observe, without judgement, the rich tapestry of the client's life, with its warp and its weft, and to seek the power of what Maslow terms the client's "growing point."

7. The unity of all six in a consistency of inner character

Steiner (1994:102) describes this as integrating the above qualities into an authentic expression of our unique character. As a consequence of this condition, the different expressions of our life will then be in harmony and not contradict each other. "And this will prepare us for the calm, inner peace..." This reflects the quality of integration, the process towards wholeness that is encouraged in the training of our counsellors. In the degree to counsellor trainees move towards this integration, so are they effective in their personal and work lives. They are then capable of being fully present for the problems of their clients, a quality Maslow (1968) identifies as characteristic of self-actualisers.

The seven spiritual conditions: teaching and learning processes

The seven spiritual conditions are introduced in the second half of the first year of the Diploma, in a 20-hour weekend workshop. They are revisited and used as referents throughout the three-year training program. In the introductory session it is emphasised that undertaking the practice of these spiritual values is entirely voluntary. It is pointed out, that while these promote personal development, they form the basis of foundation qualities required to be an effective counsellor. Both Gothard and Bojuwoye (1992) recognise the central role of personal development in the counselling training process. Bolger (1985) argues that the theoretical dimension of the training, needs to be integrated into the trainee's personal development, and such views are strongly supported in this training program. It is also pointed out that the practice of the seven spiritual conditions is a life-long personal and professional journey, and it is sufficient initially to make a commitment to them. Approximately 3 hour segments are given to exploring each of the conditions. Tagar has designed a process which involves conveying a picture of the quality, exploring the quality through leading questions that identify costs of not practising the condition. This is followed by experiential segments of practice. The trainee identifies particular issues associated with not practising the condition, and devises and rehearses possibilities for change. Benefits of such a change are then explored. This work is initially done individually followed by sharing in small groups.

A concrete example is illustrated through the fourth condition, which is distinguishing my inner life, my self from the expectations of others and the external forces on my life. The leading question would be have I compromised myself for the outer world and if so, what has been the cost? The practice would involve working with boundary maintenance techniques so that one could hold one's personal space in the assertive gesture. Working with sound and gesture expressed through clay, may be helpful to enable the trainee counsellor to explore the inner movements required to restore personal boundaries and space. The benefits would be brainstormed, and include responses like being upright and connected to one's higher potential, being present, being visible to others, and manifesting one's potential.

Following the workshop, trainees complete a review of the conditions, the place and challenge they represent in their personal life, and the strategies they may develop to counter any difficulties. They keep a log over a period of six weeks of one condition that they have chosen to give their concentrated attention. They record their successes and challenges.

Outcomes: relevance to needs of trainees

Outcomes of this program of integrating spiritual values into counsellor training are considered from the viewpoints of trainees.

Thirty six of our student counsellor trainees' logs on their personal experience of working with the 7 conditions, were analysed for common themes. All gave concrete examples of how particular conditions had substantially improved their self-care skills. They all also demonstrated that they had developed a greater consciousness of themselves, and the issues that they need to resolve in their lives. Student logs demonstrated that in the process of personal reflection on these spiritual conditions, they developed a better understanding of some of the key issues that face clients. Also they developed a range of counselling tools to work with their own issues which would be transferable to clients. It is significant that these dominant themes are supported by a survey of intending counsellor trainees. When potential trainees were asked what they wanted to gain from counselling training the five top rated categories were: develop greater consciousness of myself and issues that I need to resolve (16.1%), learn about self-care; (14.4%), develop better counselling skills (13.6%).deliver a better service to clients (13.6%) understand clients better (12.7%). (Sherwood: 1996:24) .Our value-based training appears to contribute substantially towards meeting trainee counsellors needs.

References

Bolger, A.W. (1985) Training and Research in Counselling. British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 13 (1), 112-121

Borysenko, J. and Borysenko, M. (1994) The Power of the Mind to Heal. Hay House, Carson, CA.

Gothard, W.P. & Bojuwoye, O. (1992) Counsellor training in two different cultures. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling 15, 209-219

.Kohlberg, L. (1984) The Psychology of Moral Development. N.Y. Harper and Row

Maslow, A.H. (1971). The Farther Reaches of Human Nature. N.Y. Viking Press.

Maslow, A.H. (1968). Toward a Psychology of Being. N.Y. Van Nostrad.

Rogers, C.R. (1957) The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. Journal of Consulting Psychology, 22, 95-103

Sherwood, P.(1996) Needs surveys for Counselling training: Melbourne and the South West of W.A. Melbourne, Persephone College.(unpublished)

Steiner, R., (1994) How To Know Higher Worlds. N.Y. Anthroposophical Press.