An Interpretive Account of Counsellor Development
Compte rendu interprétatif du développement des conseillers

Jeff Chang
Athabasca University

ABSTRACT

Using a hermeneutic approach to inquiry, the author interviewed 8 counsellors in training to gain an understanding of the question, "How do counsellors in training develop, and how do they make sense of what they are doing/what is happening to them?" Their accounts were integrated into a single emerging story that captures their experience and the meaning they attached to their counsellor education experiences. Organized temporally, this story of counsellor development was divided into four phases: foreshadowings, opening chapters, denouement, and final chapter (conclusions). Finally, implications for counsellor education practice are discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

En se servant d'une approche d'enquête herméneutique, l'auteur a interviewé 8 conseillers en formation afin de comprendre « Comment les conseillers en formation se développent-ils et quelle signification accordent-ils à ce qu'ils font et à l'expérience qu'ils vivent? » Leurs réponses ont été intégrées sous la forme d'un compte rendu unique qui rend compte de leur expérience et de la signification qu'ils accordent à leurs expériences de conseillers en formation. L'organisation temporelle de ce compte rendu du développement des conseillers a permis de le répartir en 4 phases : Présages, chapitres d'introduction, dénouement, et conclusions. On discute en terminant des incidences sur la pratique de formation des conseillers.

Counselling is a complex endeavour. Competent counsellors operate from a coherent theoretical framework, observe clients' verbal and nonverbal behaviour, make sense of it from the perspective of their theory, act on it in session, and evaluate the results, all within the context of an overarching treatment plan. How do counsellors in training learn all this? Orlinsky and Rønnestad (2005) note that therapists' research has mostly been directed toward outcome and process, with little attention given to the development of therapists. They chide the field for assuming that "therapists, when properly trained, are more or less interchangeable" (Orlinsky & Rønnestad, 2005, p. 5). Although there are exceptions (Henry, Sims, & Spray, 1973; Kelley, Goldberg, & Fiske, 1978; Norcross & Prochaska, 1982, 1983, 1988; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1995), "these works stand out like islands in a relatively empty sea when compared with the amply settled ocean of studies on therapeutic processes and outcomes" (Orlinsky & Rønnestad, 2005, p. 5). As one who has trained counsellors in one way or

another for over two decades, I have wondered, "How do counsellors in training develop, and how do they make sense of what they are doing/what is happening to them?" This question guides the present study.

LITERATURE REVIEW: APPROACHES TO COUNSELLOR DEVELOPMENT

Career development theories, theories of counselling, expertise, stage models of counsellor development, and a lifespan model of counsellor professional development provide conceptual frameworks for counsellor development.

Career Development

Type models of career development (e.g., Holland, 1996) assert that people seek work environments that fit their personalities, and they explain counsellors' career choices in terms of predispositions to social, helpful, and empathic functions and environments. Super's (1994) approach suggests that career choice and development is a fluid process over the lifespan. Super would suggest that nodal events (e.g., receiving counselling) and successive exposure to counselling-like activities contribute to counsellors' career choices. Social learning-based career development approaches (Krumboltz & Henderson, 2002; Lent & Brown, 2002) assert that individual person variables (e.g., genetic predisposition, specific talents), environmental factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, culture, access to job or educational opportunities, family, geography), and learning experiences combine to form a career orientation. Narrative and interpretive approaches to career development (Savickas, 2005) focus on meaning-making and identity formation in the career development process.

Model-Based Approaches to Counsellor Development

Counsellor educators and supervisors often conceptualize the development of counsellors through their own theories of therapy. Published accounts include Bowen family systems theory (Papero, 1988), cognitive therapies (Wessler & Ellis, 1983), person-centred therapy (Patterson, 1983), psychodynamic therapy (Symington, 1996), social learning/social cognitive theory (Larson, 1998), and narrative therapy (Crocket, 2004; Winslade, 2003). Model-based approaches to counsellor development represent a historical moment that has largely passed. Describing the state of supervision a decade and a half ago, Watkins (1995) stated, "Psychotherapy-based models of supervision have generally shown … stability over the last 25–30 years, with … no truly new therapy-based theories of supervision emerging" (p. 570). Other than the narrative approach, this has not changed, likely due to a decade-long trend toward psychotherapy integration (Norcross, Karpiak, & Lister, 2005) and common factors (Duncan, Sparks, & Miller, 2006), which has driven pragmatic, rather than model-specific, counsellor education.

Expertise

Glaser and Chi (1988) described seven common cognitive characteristics of experts. First, experts excel mainly within their own domain and they do not

achieve expertise in unrelated domains. Second, experts perceive meaningful patterns in their domain of expertise. Third, experts perform more quickly than novices do. Fourth, experts have superior memory within their area of expertise, allowing them to perform with automaticity. Fifth, experts conceptualize problems according to overarching abstract principles more than novices do. Sixth, experts are less prone to jump to conclusions, and develop more accurate conceptualizations than novices. Finally, experts have stronger metacognitive skills than novices. They are better at knowing the limits of their expertise, evaluating the difficulty or complexity of problems, and explaining their reasoning.

With respect to counselling, some (Dawes, 1994; Fook, Ryan, & Hawkins, 1997; Robinson & Halliday, 1988) suggest that a cognitive model of expertise may not be applicable since counselling requires emotional sensitivity. On the other hand, a core of studies of counsellor cognitive complexity (Cummings, Hallberg, Martin, Slemon, & Hiebert, 1990; Martin, Slemon, Hiebert, Hallberg, & Cummings, 1989; Mayfield, Kardash, & Kivlighan, 1999; Skovholt & Jennings, 2004, 2005; Spengler & Strohmer, 1994) found that experienced counsellors' case conceptualizations were more parsimonious, theoretically consistent, subtle, and generalizable than those of novices, which occurs when counselling students actually acquire counselling skills (Duys & Hedstrom, 2000; Granello, 2002; Little, Packman, Smaby, & Maddux, 2005; Lyons & Hazler, 2002; Welfare & Borders, 2007). It may be that when counsellors are more cognitively efficient they can be more emotionally available.

Stage Models of Counsellor Development

Stage models of counsellor development rely on two premises. First, as counsellors develop, they progress through a series of stages. Second, counsellors at each stage require a qualitatively different approach to supervision (Chagnon & Russell, 1995). Although there are at least 22 published stage theories of counsellor development, Stoltenberg and colleagues' (Stoltenberg, 1981, 2005; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2009; Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998) Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) is presented here, given that it is the best elaborated and researched.

The most recent iteration of the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2009) distinguishes four stages of counsellor development. Beginning trainees are typically anxious and are focused on themselves (Level 1). Anxiety is a function of their lack of confidence and apprehension about being evaluated. Supervisors should assist the trainees to develop basic counselling skills and control their affect. When trainees can focus more on the client and less on themselves (Level 2), they can implement basic skills and demonstrate increased empathy to clients, enhancing their sense of motivation and autonomy. In Level 3, the trainee can exhibit empathy for clients, and engage in metacognition about hypotheses, feelings, and counselling behaviour, applying their knowledge "in the moment." Level 3 (Integrated) represents readiness for independent practice.

Russell, Crimmings, and Lent (1984) suggest that stage models of counsellor development are overly simplistic, which Stoltenberg (2005) retrospectively acknowledged. Holloway (1987) asserted that stage models ignore the trainee's larger social context and lack cross-sectional validation. Moreover, empirical support is slim; the most recent comprehensive review by Ellis and Ladany (1997), now almost 15 years old, found that methodological problems rendered most studies "largely uninterpretable" (p. 483). More recently, Goodyear and Guzzardo (2000) opined, "Surprisingly, there is little new to report … beyond what was reviewed by Holloway (1992) in the last edition of the *Handbook* [*of Counseling Psychology*]" (p. 95).

Lifespan Model of Counsellors' Professional Development

Skovholt and Rønnestad (1995; also Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003) had over 120 individuals in their 5-year grounded theory investigation. Their sample spanned individuals from lay counsellors with no graduate education to counselling and clinical psychologists with 25 or more years of postdoctoral experience. They found 14 themes intersecting six phases of counsellor development. These describe how counsellors change, their influences, the role of theories and models, their predominant affect, and their relational stance toward clients. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) distinguished these phases: the lay helper, the beginning student, the advanced student, the novice professional, the experienced professional, and the senior professional.

METHOD

Hermeneutic Inquiry

Hermeneutic inquiry was the method for this study. The term "hermeneutics" is derived from Greek, including the name Hermes, the "trickster," who carried messages from the gods to humankind, inviting human interpretation and opening space for multiple meanings and creativity (Caputo, 1987; Grondin, 1994). Accordingly, hermeneutic inquiry can produce multiple interpretations from different perspectives. Hermeneutics relies on how language constructs understanding of any human endeavour. "[L]anguage is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 39). For Gadamer (1989), "knowledge" is not an objective reality awaiting discovery, but the outcome of the creative dialogue between an interpreting subject and "another"—another person in conversation, a text, a work of art, and so on. In this study, I am the interpreting subject engaging with the accounts of the participants (Chang, 2010). My purpose was to arrive at a credible and evocative, but not necessarily generalizable, account.

Participants and Recruitment

The 8 participants had completed the coursework and practicum in two Master's programs in counselling psychology in western Canada. They were recruited via

personal request and visits to practicum seminars. There were 6 Caucasian women, 1 Latina woman, and 1 Aboriginal man (ages 26–46; $M = 33.75$). All reported their mother tongue as English, except the Latina woman ("Heather"; all names are pseudonyms selected by the participants). She had completed undergraduate and graduate studies in English, and had worked mainly in English as a family support counsellor, so her English fluency was adequate to participate in this study. Participants are described in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Race	Age	Years of pre-Master's human service experience	Practicum placement
Liz	Caucasian	27	03	Family service agency
Carla	Caucasian	31	05	University counselling centre
Sue	Caucasian	42	15	School guidance counselling department
Heather	Latina	29	05	Private practice
Ken	Aboriginal	46	17	Aboriginal alternate school
Kate	Caucasian	32	03	Community college counselling centre
Linda	Caucasian	27	02	Family service agency
Kelly	Caucasian	36	02	University counselling centre

Eliciting the Accounts

I reviewed participants' written documents describing their development as counsellors: application materials (e.g., statement of intent, curriculum vitae), theory of counselling papers, practicum journals, reflection papers, and evaluations. I then interviewed each participant for about three hours, usually in two interviews separated by several days, giving me time to review the interview and prepare follow-up questions. Kate was interviewed once because she was soon to move out of the country and had only one day available to participate. In this case, I took a break to formulate follow-up questions.

I recorded the interviews with a digital audio recording device as I made notes. A professional transcriptionist transcribed the interviews. I verified each transcript while listening to the audio recording, and compared it to my notes. There were only six times in approximately 22 hours of audio recording when I found the transcript discrepant from what I had heard on the audio recording or had recorded in my notes. I corrected these discrepancies in the transcript.

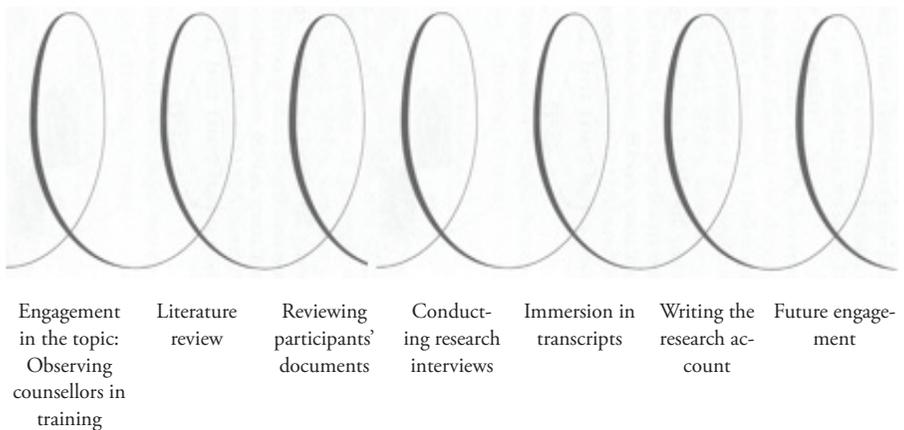*The Process of Interpretation: The Hermeneutic Circle*

Interacting with a phenomenon based on one's preunderstanding, negotiating successively new interpretations, and returning to the text to start anew, is a

recursive process—"the hermeneutic circle" (Gadamer, 1989; Heidegger, 1962). As Heidegger (1962) says, the important thing is "not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way" (p. 195). Gadamer (1989) elaborates:

> To try to escape from one's own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible but manifestly absurd. One must enter the circular structure of understanding by not failing to recognize beforehand the essential conditions under which it (the interpretation) can be performed. (p. 397)

Because it is impossible to escape from our preunderstanding, we must actively utilize it as the basis for new understandings. Because the process is recursive, it is more apt for us to think of hermeneutic interpretation as a spiral with multiple loops, rather than a discrete step of "data analysis" following "data collection" (Ellis, 1998). Figure 1 illustrates loops of interpretation in this study.

Figure 1
Loops of Analysis in Hermeneutic Interpretation

| Engagement in the topic: Observing counsellors in training | Literature review | Reviewing participants' documents | Conducting research interviews | Immersion in transcripts | Writing the research account | Future engagement |

Nor is the process of interpretation synonymous with locating themes based on the frequency of their occurrence (Patton, 2002). Although participants presented some threads of the story frequently, other parts of the story were notable by their evocativeness. As Gadamer (1989) asserts, "The meaning of the word cannot be detached from the event of the proclamation" (p. 427).

RESULTS: AN EMERGING STORY

It is convenient to tell this story of counsellor development, and to present it graphically and chronologically. This approach may inadvertently invite the reader to see it as a stage model of counsellor development. My purpose, however, is to present the intertwined accounts of the participants in order to reflect their complexity and context. Themes (see Figure 2) are named based on participants' words.

Figure 2
Themes in Counsellor Development

Time			
Fore-shadowings	Opening Chapters	Denouement: Practicum	Conclusions: A New Professional
Emotional attunement Standing up for "the underdog" Personal predisposition "I could do so much more"	A high calling Managing new learning Self-doubt and dissonance Peers: Competition and collaboration Disjuncture of theory and practice Theoretical confusion	Anticipation "I'm in over my head": Self-doubt revisited Peers: "I'm in the same boat" The influence of clients Dilemmas of practice Theory comes alive Diversity in practice The role of the supervisor and supervision "Doing" ethics "Taking the bull by the horns" Self-care "It's coming together"	Skill development and growth Professional recognition Personal transformation

Foreshadowings

Foreshadowing is a textual clue in a literary work to an upcoming event or character change. Retrospectively, participants described experiences that impelled their decision to enter counsellor education.

EMOTIONAL ATTUNEMENT

Most participants had life experiences, pleasant and unpleasant, that sensitized them to the affect of others. Ken described how dealing with his father's volatile and harsh behaviour both motivated him to help others and, as he put it, "trained" him to be emotionally sensitive: "I had to be aware of my dad's every mood and his every move. I learned to read people from learning to read my dad." Heather learned to be observant of others' nonverbal behaviour as a young immigrant from Central America: "I just watched everyone. After a while I could kind of tell what was happening, even though I could not understand English very well for quite a while."

Other participants served as informal helpers. As a youngster, Kate learned an ethic of service from her missionary parents and then supported other students in boarding school. Heather supported other ESL children, volunteered at her church, and engaged in service activities at school. Kelly discovered a talent for helping others working in the financial services industry.

STANDING UP FOR "THE UNDERDOG"

Several participants connected experiences of marginalization with their choice to become counsellors. Heather spoke passionately about her connection with "the

underdog": "I am aware of the barriers that some people are up against. I know I can't help everyone, but I can make sure there are as few barriers [to counselling] as possible." Ken experienced a racially polarized environment in his high school and a disadvantaged upbringing, which inspired him to help Aboriginal youth. Liz affiliated with gay and lesbian youth because of her own feelings of cultural dislocation.

PERSONAL PREDISPOSITION

Others connected personal characteristics and temperament to their decision to enter the field. Citing the results of a popular personality test, Linda stated that she is sensitive by nature, "knows pain," and was therefore drawn to counselling. Carla stated that she was "meant to do this," recalling how, even as a child, she enjoyed talking with others, and helping them with their problems. Sue laughingly cited her "pretty good motherly instincts," which she used as a teacher, and later as a school counsellor, to support her students.

"I COULD DO SO MUCH MORE"

Most participants had established satisfying careers, but despite great demand and expense, they undertook graduate studies to increase their effectiveness, contribution, and satisfaction. Before Ken entered graduate studies, he "had a pretty good idea of how to help people, but I thought I could do so much more." While Sue was established as an educator and school counsellor, she wanted to be more purposeful, as opposed to "operating on instinct and gut." Heather was dissatisfied by her role as a family support worker, and sought to broaden her experience to see "the big picture."

Opening Chapters

Participants started their programs with a great deal of excitement and expectancy. Linda described her acceptance to graduate school as "a dream come true." Participants were burdened by the amount of content they had to learn and their high aspirations for competence, ethical conduct, and self-awareness. Some had difficulty integrating it all.

A HIGH CALLING

Participants saw their entry to counsellor education as the culmination of a preparatory journey. They had worked hard to enter programs, with a sense of purpose. Carla stated, "I was so excited. After all the time it took to get there, I was ready to throw myself into [it]." Linda referred to her entry into counsellor education in almost spiritual terms: "I don't want to be dramatic, but I ended up here for a reason. I think it was my destiny." However, some questioned if they could live up to the calling to which they aspired.

MANAGING NEW LEARNING

Participants found the new content and skills both enlightening and overwhelming. Sue recalled that, when she did a role-play in a counselling skills course,

"I just froze—I didn't know what to do or what to say. It scared me half to death because I thought, 'If I do that with a client, I'll really mess someone up.'" Several participants reported being overwhelmed by the volume of work. Kate recalled, "Everything in the program just felt rushed. I knew it needed to be that packed; there's so much we need to know. My hopes and my fears were amplified by the information overload."

SELF-DOUBT AND DISSONANCE

Upon realizing the skills and content they were required to master, some doubted whether they were fit for the counselling profession. Anxiety, self-doubt, frustration, embarrassment, and confusion are common and, at times, debilitating. A few weeks into the program, Ken recalled, "I wasn't sure I had what it takes. I kept thinking, 'What if I back out now? What if it doesn't get better next semester?'"

While feelings of anxiety and self-doubt were almost universal, participants' debilitation was typically short-lived. They adapted to their self-perceived deficits by increasing their efforts to read, consult, and practice skills. Sue stated, "I just decided that I could not let myself get paralyzed. I just had to do my best, spend the time doing the reading and practicing, and either I'd be good at it or I wouldn't." Some found the dissonance and distress helpful. Linda stated, "Before we get better, maybe we have to just get overwhelmed and fight our way through it."

PEERS: COMPETITION AND COLLABORATION

Most participants also utilized the support of peers to deal with their dissonance, although some were initially wary. Ken stated,

> I was insecure about getting in there with a bunch of young kids because they were right out of their [undergraduate] degrees. I thought, "I'm this old guy, and it's been a long time since I was in school, and I'm not sure I belong here."

Carla stated, "I was told that in other years, people would do things like take an article that everyone needed out of the [reserve section of the library] to mess the others up." However, initial wariness gave way to a strong reliance on the peer group for support, affirmation, and connection. Linda stated, "I couldn't have done it without the other girls in my class. We still get together … and now we are getting each other through the [Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology]."

Participants used the peer group to normalize their experiences. Heather stated: "I was drowning in work, didn't know if I should be really be here…. But the others were in same boat. We all … supported each other. So it didn't seem so bad."

DISJUNCTURE OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

While overwhelmed with work, some questioned the relevance of what they were learning. Liz stated that all of the knowledge that she had gained during her initial year of course work "gave me this huge suitcase full of stuff [but] I didn't know … how to put it into place. I was not able to incorporate it into myself.

The link was severed between theory and practice, and I didn't feel the profs were bridging the gap."

THEORETICAL CONFUSION

Most participants were exposed to a variety of theoretical approaches, instructors, or mentors, and had a difficult time arriving at a theoretical framework. Ken "followed the way the wind blew" before finding a personally congruent theoretical approach. Kelly was overwhelmed by the information she had to incorporate to write her personal theory of counselling: "It was a big leap. I was memorizing things, integrating…. I kept thinking 'Where will I start?'" Sue recalled exposure to different, seemingly contradictory theories "really threw me off," and took refuge in imitating mentors.

Denouement: Practicum

Denouement (Denouement, n.d.) is "the outcome or result of a complex situation or sequence of events, an aftermath or resolution that usually occurs near the final stages of the plot." Practicum serves a similar purpose in counsellor education, calling upon students to integrate a complex set of skills and knowledge.

ANTICIPATION

Participants entered the practicum with high hopes. Most selected their practica carefully, and many had to compete for a placement. Carla stated, "I was so excited that I got into [name of organization] for my practicum…. [The selection] process I had to go through really crystallized it." Sue anticipated that practicum would be "the culmination of everything that we had been learning."

Participants had high hopes for their placements and for themselves. Carla wrote in her practicum journal:

As a counselling professional, I want to be: accepting, non-judgmental, courageous, a good listener and observer, withholding of assumptions, honest and genuine, calm, centred, grounded, true to myself, collaborative, creative, empathic, understanding, and sensitive…. it seems like a lot to ask of myself.

Liz had "confidence in my humanity," but wondered if it would be "trained out of me" in practicum.

"I'M IN OVER MY HEAD": SELF-DOUBT REVISITED

Along with high hopes, participants experienced apprehension about their performance and questioned their competence. Some were overwhelmed by clients in difficult straits. For example, Linda, who worked in a family service agency serving many involuntary clients, recalled:

Oh my God, the first week this woman came in … and Children's Services was threatening to take away her kids if she moved back in with her husband. She wasn't ready to leave him, and here she's in a shelter and she hasn't slept and

she can't think straight, and she's crying in my office, and I am supposed to set goals with her like they tell us to do in [our interviewing skills course]? As if!

Some participants doubted their fitness for the field. Kate typifies this: "When I got into my practicum, I was over my head totally. I thought I had made a big mistake. I had no idea what to do … and I couldn't separate myself from these major problems that clients had." Finally, participants wanted to live up to their aspirations, and expressed the fear that they would fail. Linda recalled, "I just didn't want to let myself or others down. I took becoming a counsellor so seriously."

PEERS: "IN THE SAME BOAT"

Questioning one's suitability for the profession was typically short-lived. Participants soon responded to difficult demands, mobilizing supports. They reported a great deal of cohesion with peers from their own programs and with student colleagues from other institutions. Carla stated,

For the first few weeks, when I was really feeling overwhelmed, I just couldn't wait to get to class every week to talk about what was going on. It was just that I knew that other people were in the same boat with me. It was comforting.

THE INFLUENCE OF CLIENTS

Each participant cited significant and memorable experiences with clients as sources of learning. Participants were touched by the resilience, strength, determination, and motivation of clients. Linda recalled a woman who had stood up to the influence of sexual abuse, domestic violence, depression, and self-harming behaviours: "All I did was listen. It was just the right time for her. At every session I was almost in tears. It didn't feel like I was doing any interventions with her. I was just a spectator."

Most participants found challenging client situations stressful, but ultimately worked their way through them, deriving valuable learning from those experiences. Heather recalled a challenging case in which the family of an adolescent was verbally abusive in session. She was afraid that they would come to blows. "I had absolutely no map in my head to follow—at least not consciously." She was able to "get my head around the fact that I needed to step back and just diffuse the situation … I discovered I had abilities that I didn't know I had until the clients pulled it out of me…. Who knew?" Seeing the strengths of clients, and responding to client situations for which they did not feel prepared, highlighted previously unknown competence.

DILEMMAS OF PRACTICE

Participants encountered practical dilemmas that typically emerged from disruptions in the counsellor-client relationship. Concerns that seasoned counsellors might find common were disconcerting to counsellors in training. Kate queried what to do when she felt that she was working harder than the client: "I was trying really hard to draw her out, going online to find resources for her, and she

would sit there [in session] like a bump on a log." Heather encountered a client whom she disliked "for no reason. I couldn't come up with a concrete reason why. It wasn't anything he did…. I just got triggered somehow." Kelly found the behaviour of a client objectionable: "This woman had left her kids in Ontario with her ex-husband to come out here with her boyfriend. They were just … 5 and 7 [years old] I think…. I honestly … thought she was just plain selfish." Ken had a similar reaction to a parent who had knowingly used illicit drugs during her pregnancy. Recognizing their own biases, they found practical, as opposed to theory-driven, solutions to these dilemmas.

Other participants found it difficult to balance the client's need to simply be heard with their own need to be goal-oriented. Kate was unsure of how to respond to a client's tearful expressions of sadness and frustration: "I was not sure whether to let her cry or move on with the goals we had set up. [Supervisor] gave me some ideas about how to move her along without stepping all over her feelings." Kate's experience echoed that of many participants, as they learned practical ways to balance goal directedness with empathy.

THEORY COMES ALIVE

In practicum, students have the opportunity to experiment with various theoretical orientations and interventions. To develop their own theoretical framework, students emulate mentors, try out different approaches, and evaluate their personal congruence with a model. Carla wanted to see how the personal theory of counselling that she had developed "would hold up in practice." Liz adopted Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT; Johnson et al., 2005) as her model of choice during her practicum: "It fit for me; it was so consistent with how I am as a person." She used EFT as a vessel for learning generic counselling skills, intervention, and case conceptualization. She was "floored" by the effects of EFT interventions. Near the end of her practicum, she saw herself as reasonably well versed in this approach.

Many participants, however, were not so clear about their theoretical orientation. Heather stated, "When you are actually seeing clients and doing therapy, that's when you find out what your *real* theoretical orientation is. You don't really know a theory until you are actually doing it."

DIVERSITY IN PRACTICE

Each participant had had coursework in cultural diversity and social justice, many had significant human service work experience, and some had had personal experiences of marginalization. In practicum, they began to operationalize these ideas, but the link between concept and practice was not always clear. Heather, an immigrant to Canada, stated:

> I guess the models we learned … were okay, but I honestly relied on my own experience more than any theory…. I worked with this family from Laos…. I could understand how they felt … [what] they were going through…. I don't think the diversity course alone made me culturally competent. I think it is more attitude and experience.

Carla's first practicum client was Bosnian: "[A]ll the things I learned in my multicultural counselling course flooded back, which just only got me more confused and overwhelmed." She worked this through by "realizing I was asking a lot of myself to not be confused and nervous."

Needing to respond to clients in the moment, most participants distilled cultural competence to an attitudinal posture that encompassed an awareness of the differences experienced by individual clients, curiosity and respect, and the willingness to learn about the cultural group.

THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR AND SUPERVISION

All participants desired safety and security in their supervisory relationships, which by and large occurred. Some participants give their supervisors the primary credit for their development. Sue stated, "This might sound over the top, but [supervisor] was my saviour. In a way, I idolized her. She was always there for me, and always knew how to handle what I brought up." When the supervisory relationship provided an atmosphere of security, acceptance, and trust, participants were empowered to receive feedback and take risks. They could discuss poor sessions or difficult clients without fearing humiliation or inappropriate criticism. Supportive supervision inspired confidence. Ken stated, "[Supervisor] seemed to channel his confidence to me. After individual supervision, I would go out of there just pumped up."

Effective supervisors use an assortment of relational stances. Some participants experienced the supervisor as emotionally close. Kate stated, "I knew I was being evaluated, but…. I just felt she was more of a friend." Kelly was uncertain about her supervisor's "touchy-feely" persona, but her excellence as a counsellor and supportiveness trumped Kelly's unease. Carla, on the other hand, found her supervisor "very conscious of boundaries. She never really discussed her personal life at all, and I'm not talking about her family or love life. I just mean what she did on the weekend. I think that was part of her ethics." However, Carla noticed a shift at the wrap-up luncheon for practicum students: "Then she was totally different. I think she felt that she could let down after we were all done." Most participants experienced their supervisors as respectful and supportive.

On the other hand, 2 participants experienced difficulty with supervisors. After showing a videotape of a difficult session in group supervision, Kate felt personally criticized, hurt, and angry. She reacted by withdrawing from taking risks in supervision and, for a time, in her practicum. Liz found her supervisor unavailable, but took action to obtain the necessary support and consultation from other agency staff and peers.

Some participants complained that the supervision they received was too positive. Sue suggested, "while the positive feedback was wonderful … I would have liked it if my supervisor had been more directive with me—told me when some of the things I was doing was not very effective."

"DOING" ETHICS

The practicum provided a vessel for participants to apply ethical principles they had been taught earlier. Like learning to apply counselling theory and principles

of diversity, participants learned ethical behaviour by doing. Although many of them lauded the instruction they had received in ethics courses, they were challenged by the pressure of taking action with actual clients. The most striking example came from Carla, who wrestled with her obligation to report abuse to child protection authorities when a young adult client reported that her mother was striking her siblings:

> It was weird. I knew that there was such a responsibility on me and calling children's services could be a huge thing in this family's life. In our course, the vignettes didn't really have real-life consequence. [Ethics instructor] saying that there could be (forming quotation marks with her fingers) "several defensible courses of action" is not much help when you're talking about the future of a family.

With her supervisor, Carla implemented an ethical decision-making process (Canadian Psychological Association, 2000) to devise a course of action. However, finding an appropriate course of action "was not the issue. The issue was living with the decision we had made." Carla revisited this issue in supervision several times. Reflecting on this struggle, she stated:

> I guess this is something that we have to deal with in this line of work…. [Supervisor] modelled how to make a decision, and then helped me stick with it. I had to realize that I could not save everyone, that maintaining good boundaries meant sticking with a course of action and living with the consequences…. It was hard dealing with the feelings.

However, most participants cited examples requiring practical day-to-day solutions. Heather became conscious of the need to speak softly in the reception area to protect the privacy of clients. Kelly was aware of boundaries when she learned that the daughter of a client attended the same school as her son. Practicum provided challenges for day-to-day ethical decision-making in clinical practice.

"TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORNS"

During practicum, many participants reached a point of crisis. After their enthusiastic entry, a sense of being overwhelmed, and many challenges to their thinking, many participants reached a point of resolve and renewed activity. Sue felt

> swept along by everything that was happening and I just had to stop it all. I was getting no clients one week and then I was totally overloaded the next week. Half the time I didn't feel like I knew what I was doing. I just had to slow it down and take charge of the whole thing.

Ken reported feeling much more in charge of his efforts in the practicum: "When I just took the bull by the horns I felt so much better. Everything came together and I just ended up enjoying myself more." This set the stage for a sense of empowerment that consolidated after he had completed his degree.

Closely associated with taking charge of oneself is a renewed focus on self-care. Self-care was not seen as a process separate from counselling practice, but as integrally related to it. Several participants recalled the stress of balancing the new endeavour of counselling clients with family obligations, recreational and social activities, and coursework. Early in her practicum, Sue went through a personal crisis:

> I felt sorry for myself for a while. I worried about the effect of my emotional state on my clients. And finally, I had to realize that I had to take some steps to ensure that I was okay for my clients. Then I realized that I had to develop some habits for a career in order to really serve clients the way I hope to.

"IT'S COMING TOGETHER"

By the end of the practicum, most participants experienced convergence of the diverse learning experiences during their training: a *cycle of development*. Participants began their placements with distress or dissonance, often triggered by a client situation for which they felt unprepared. As they worked through difficulties, navigated ethical dilemmas, and adopted a personally consistent theoretical approach, they exercised personal agency to take charge of their development. Ken, noting that he had been encouraged to "be himself," suggested, "It's kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy; as I relaxed, I got more confident." As confidence increased, participants were willing to take on new approaches, new interventions, and new client populations. Seeing clients in crisis boosted participants' confidence. Kate stated, "Seeing people who were hurting and who were on the edge was hard, but good. I had to think on my feet and say something that was going to help without running to my supervisor." Many participants reported feeling empowered by "thinking on their feet" when clients presented unexpected situations.

Participants also reported a greater ability to reflect on their own perceptions, reactions, and process as they were interacting with clients. Difficulties, reframed as opportunities to learn, stimulated reflection. They developed the ability to step back and take a meta position to the problem, resulting in enhanced problem-solving.

Final Chapter: A New Professional

I met the participants when they had completed, or nearly completed, their degree requirements. They were confident and realistic about their new skills and opportunities that counsellor education had provided. They identified what had been helpful in their graduate programs and what they wished had been different.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

The participants in this study experienced a deep sense of satisfaction with their skill acquisition. They learned how to execute specific strategies, work with specific populations, and time interventions to respond flexibly to client needs. Heather noted, "I gained the ability to see the 'big picture' the way I wanted to. It

all makes sense looking back." Kelly stated, "I know I have a lot to learn, but now I have the basics … of how to help people, and that's what I wanted all along."

PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

Participants felt worthy to take their places as new members of the counselling profession. They experienced enhanced status, and a sense of belonging and recognition. Heather, who had previously served child protection families, stated, "It made me feel great to be recognized as a clinician by the [child protection] workers. They consulted me about clients and case planning." Sue became conscious of a shift in professional identity when others started treating her differently: "The teachers and specialists were putting me in a different position; I was now 'the expert'…. I was no longer 'just a teacher' anymore."

Participants experienced a new sense of autonomy. Although most were practicing under supervision to obtain professional licensure, they had gained the confidence of their supervisors to operate semi-independently. Kelly opined:

I'm still working under supervision, but I know [supervisor] has confidence in me and is just keeping track of what I'm doing rather than telling me what to do…. And that just increases my confidence; I think, "Hey I know what I'm doing."

Accordingly, reflective practice and self-supervision becomes possible. Participants recognized the need for ongoing consultation, could identify their "stuck points," and self-monitor their performance.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

As a result of counsellor education, participants experienced changes to their attitudes, emotional make-up, interpersonal behaviour, and family relationships. They described themselves as more "attuned," "compassionate," "grounded," and "sensitive." Kate stated, "I know I am just a more complete human being. Coming alongside people when they are suffering has really changed me. I'm more compassionate *and* I have better boundaries." Linda stated that counsellor education "can't not change you immensely…. I am a more accepting person and have greater self-awareness." Ken reported a greater ability to contextualize his relationship with his abusive father.

Many participants experience gratitude as a result of counsellor education. Linda, recalling her work with a survivor of sexual assault and family abuse, told me, "Suddenly my personal struggles seemed so minute compared to her pain." Kelly stated, "I've had my struggles before, but when it comes right down to it, we are privileged with education and income, and just plain good luck." Gratitude was sometimes connected to a new or renewed commitment to social justice. Ken reflected,

I became a teacher and then a counsellor because of the disadvantages that I had as an Indian…. The school system and counselling don't do much to change these things. I don't know how, but I want to do something that makes an impact on a larger scale.

Heather, whose immigrant origins shaped her as a counsellor, has sought opportunities to advocate for social justice through her church.

<center>DISCUSSION</center>

Looking Back: Relationship with Extant Literature

Reflecting on the extant accounts of counsellor development reviewed earlier, the participants in this study described early experiences of helping others that might have been predicted by Holland (1996) and Super (1994) as well as social learning theorists (Krumboltz & Henderson, 2002; Lent & Brown, 2002). The participants exercised personal agency in developing their careers (Savickas, 2005). They reported more cognitive and emotional fluency (Skovholt & Jennings, 2004, 2005). They reported sequential development over the course of their practica (Stoltenberg, 2005), but see their development as extending beyond their graduate school and prelicensing years. Models of psychotherapy do not seem to figure into their development.

Looking Ahead: Directions for Future Inquiry

Madison (1988) suggests that one criterion for the evaluation of interpretive research is the extent to which it suggests new questions. This study stimulated several avenues that could inform future research.

The "Middle" Stages

The counsellor development literature has focused on two groups: those in training (Alexander-Allbrittson, Hanks, & Freeburg, 2007; Auxier, Hughes, & Kline, 2003; Cruikshanks, 2007; Farrell, 2007; Glover, Patel, & Ngazimbi, 2007; Jones et al., 2007; Sawatzky, Jevne, & Clark, 1994; Stoltenberg, 2005; Woodside, Cole, Oberman, & Carruth, 2007), and seasoned practitioners looking back on their professional lives (Fontes, Piercy, Thomas, & Sprenkle, 1998; Goldfried, 2001; Protinsky & Coward, 2001; Skovholt & Jennings, 2004, 2005). Only a few studies have studied counsellors across their professional lives (Orlinsky & Rønnestad, 2005; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1995). This is likely because students, who are readily available in educational institutions, and seasoned practitioners, who are inclined to be reflective, would be more likely to participate. Research that describes counsellors in the early-career postlicensure stage and the mid-career stage of their professional lives could directly benefit the profession and society at large, given that the supply of mental health practitioners is lagging behind demand, despite more access to graduate education (Watkins, Dobson, & Berube, 2006). Understanding "middle stage" practitioners may increase retention and relieve supply problems.

Personal Transformation

Counsellors in training cite personal transformation as an outcome of counsellor education. Personal transformation is not simply a beneficial side effect of

counsellor education, but a nearly universal outcome. Research on how personal transformation occurs among counsellors at all stages of the career life span may prove useful.

Optimal Conditions for Retention, Synthesis, and Application of Content

The participants raise questions about the pedagogical practices that facilitate the learning of new content, and understand its relevance. Online counsellor education (Ekong, 2006; Jerry, Collins, & Demish, 2003) drives the question of the relative merits of online and face-to-face instruction. Aside from this, what types of learning activities facilitate retention, synthesis, and application? Specific curricular provisions designed to stimulate the incorporation of theory, ethical reasoning, respect for diversity, and self-care should be field-tested.

Characteristics of Effective Practicum Sites

Although the supervision literature has described characteristics of helpful and unhelpful supervision, the characteristics of effective practicum sites have not been well described. This study suggests that effective sites have established infrastructures for managing client referrals, a culture of learning, and a respect for clinical supervision as a professional activity. This should be investigated further.

Limitations of the Study

The evaluation of a piece of research relies on the reader's epistemological stance. Madill, Jordan, and Shirley (2000) suggest that readers start by discerning the epistemological stance of the researcher, and evaluate the research accordingly. This study takes a contextualist position that posits multiple interpretations of data, the mutual influence of the researcher and participants, and the intersubjective development of understanding.

My work as a counsellor educator and supervisor predated this study. I came to this research with particular pre-understandings, which affected how I approached the participants' accounts. My interest in this topic renders me anything but objective and neutral, which may be seen as a limitation. Combined with the fact that the pool of participants in this study was small, nonrandom, self-selected, and composed of "successful" products of counsellor education, it may be found wanting by those who equate representativeness and generalizability with utility. This article provides but one coherent account of counsellor development.

CONCLUSION

This article has described a hermeneutic account of how students narrate their development as they proceed through graduate counsellor education. Organized temporally, this story of counsellor development was divided into four phases: Foreshadowings, Opening Chapters, Denouement, and Final Chapter (Conclusions). The participants highlighted their personal agency in overcoming obstacles and challenges. Finally, I recommended that future research and/or counsellor

education practice focus on the middle stages of counsellors' careers, personal transformation as an outcome of counsellor education, pedagogical practices for supporting the rapid acquisition of content, and the characteristics of effective practicum sites.

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Appendix A
Interview Schedule

Interview 1

1. Summarize application materials (CV, statement of intent, and philosophy of counselling/position papers).
2. What has transpired since your application to the program?
   a. course work
   b. practicum/internship
   c. research
   d. progress/status in program
   e. personal transitions (if open to discussing)
3. Describe your sense of your own competence. How competent do you "feel?" In what ways do you feel competent? What do you see as the gaps in your competence?
4. How has your graduate coursework contributed to your competence?
5. Tell me about any important turning points in your coursework. How did these contribute to your sense of competence?
6. How has your sense of yourself as a professional developed since you entered graduate studies? How did your coursework contribute to this?
7. How has your sense of yourself in general developed since you entered graduate studies? How did your coursework contribute to this?
8. How clear or coherent do you feel in your work as a counsellor? (This could include clarity about your role, professional identity, theoretical orientation, etc.) How did your coursework contribute to this?
9. Thinking back to how you conceptualize your present competence, how has your practicum experience contributed to your competence?
10. Tell me about any important turning points in your practicum. How did these contribute to your sense of competence?
11. How has your sense of yourself as a professional developed since you entered graduate studies? How did your practicum contribute to this?
12. How has your sense of yourself in general developed since you entered graduate studies? How did your practicum contribute to this?

13. Going back to your sense of coherence/clarity as a counsellor, how did your practicum contribute to this?
14. Is there anything else you would like to mention at this time?

Interview 2

15. Summarize content from Interview 1.
16. Returning to your sense of competence, how does your experience as a researcher contribute to your sense of competence as a counsellor?
17. Tell me about any important turning points in your research experience. How did these contribute to your sense of competence as a counsellor?
18. How has your experience as a researcher contributed to your sense of yourself as a professional?
19. How has your experience as a researcher contributed to your sense of yourself in general?
20. How has your experience as a researcher contributed to your sense of coherence as a counsellor?
21. Is there anything else that I should have asked you about, which you see as contributing to your development as a counsellor?
22. What do you think is the single most important factor contributing to your sense of coherence or clarity as a counsellor? Explain.
23. What is the next most important factor contributing to your sense of coherence or clarity as counsellor? Explain.
24. What do you think is the single most important factor contributing to your competence as a counsellor? Explain.
25. What is the next most important factor contributing to your competence as a counsellor? Explain.
26. From our conversations, it is clear that there are a number of factors that, in combination, assist counsellors in training to move from a beginning stage to a level of basic competence. How do you see these factors combining and working together?

About the Author

Jeff Chang is an assistant professor of counselling psychology at the Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology at Athabasca University. His scholarly interests are social constructionist approaches to therapy, family therapy, school-based interventions, and clinical supervision.

Address correspondence to Jeff Chang, Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology, c/o 1940 - 37 Street SW, Calgary, AB, Canada, T3E 3A3; e-mail jeffc@athabascau.ca