# Facilitating an Empathic "Way of Being": From Experiencing to Conveying

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## Abstract

Despite knowledge of empathy's important role in the counseling relationship, literature regarding nurturing counseling students' empathic abilities is limited. In particular, literature lacks focus on enhancing one's ability to convey empathy. In the following we discuss ideas about fostering empathic abilities and the importance of further research on enhancing empathy conveyance.

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## Facilitating an Empathic "Way of Being": From Experiencing to Conveying

Empathy is one of the defining qualities in a counseling relationship and is an essential part of person-centered approaches to counseling. Not only must counselors listen deeply to clients and *experience* empathy, they must also be able to *convey* empathy. Carl Rogers (1957) highlighted the difference between profoundly understanding a client (experiencing empathy) and conveying empathy, when he stated, "The therapist experiences an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavors to communicate this experience to the client" (p. 96). Counselor education programs are therefore presented with the challenge of training future counselors to both experience and convey empathy. Abundant literature exists which focuses on enhancing counseling students' experiential empathy (e.g., Bodenhorn & Starkey, 2005; Gibson, 2007; Ohrt, Foster, Hutchinson, & Ieva, 2009). Though experiencing empathy is an essential aspect of one's role as a counselor, there is little in the literature addressing how to help counselor trainees improve their ability to convey empathy. Experiencing *and* conveying empathy during time with clients are equally important aspects of person-centered counseling. The following examines literature from counselor education, and other helping fields, that explores efforts to enhance students' experienced empathy. Primarily we provide an argument for the need to explore more fully how to help students authentically convey their meaningful understandings to clients.

### Conceptualizing Empathy

Though empathy is an ambiguous concept and not easily defined, several characteristics describe the essence of this construct. Empathy involves the ability to identify emotions and meaning that accompany the experiences of another individual, and the capacity to imagine what it would be like to have lived in another's shoes. This ability to comprehend another's experience is possible despite how similar or dissimilar his or her life is from one's own. Empathy also involves conveying the understanding of another's experience back to that individual. For example, clients living with depression, anxiety,

or feelings of hopelessness can experience being empathically heard when a counselor imagines the client's lived experience and is able to share her or his understandings of the client's emotions and meaning in life to the client.

Although many theorists have discussed empathy, Carl Rogers was one of the first theorists to incorporate the construct into the building blocks of his theory. Rogers has been one of the most influential leaders in the helping professions specifically for his emphasis on the therapeutic relationship. In his person centered approach, Rogers (1957) developed and identified six aspects deemed "necessary and sufficient" (p. 95) for positive therapeutic change in the counseling relationship. Empathy, in particular the ability of therapists to convey empathy and clients to then perceive empathic understanding from their therapists, is one of Roger's (1957) identified "necessary and sufficient" characteristics. Rogers (1957) described empathy as intensely and sincerely understanding a client's circumstances and individual world as if the listener was personally experiencing it. He added that conveying empathy moves beyond the ability to summarize and reflect clients' statements and feelings; it also makes it evident to the client that the listener understands the client's world.

Conveying this understanding of the client's world provides validation of clients' experiences. Myers (2000) shared that when therapists are able to convey empathy, clients experience not just being listened to, but being genuinely heard and understood. This is a unique gift that therapists have to offer their clients, particularly in today's world of terse, often technology-driven, communication. Additionally, Clark (2010b) noted that empathy enhances the entire therapeutic process; "With an enhancement of empathic understanding, clients generally increase their level of therapy satisfaction, likelihood of compliance, and involvement with the treatment process" (p. 348). In other words, a client's experience of being empathically heard can lead to a more beneficial humanistic counseling experience which can encourage clients to continue counseling until goals are achieved.

Research on therapeutic relationships supports Clark's (2010b) notions about the essentialness of empathy. Norcross (2011) reported on meta-analyses that investigated empirically based therapies and concluded that the therapeutic relationship greatly influences

therapeutic outcomes, and empathy is a central component of this relationship. Norcross noted, "the most practical implication [of his analyses] is to convey empathy to all clients in all forms of psychotherapy" (p. 119). He emphasized that this is not one correct way to convey empathy, because different clients receive empathy differently. Therefore, clinicians must be flexible and able to convey empathy in various ways (e.g., cognitively, affectively), depending on what best serves the client.

Although theories of psychotherapy may differ in their utilization of the construct, the presence of empathy can be noted in most counseling theories (Bodenhorn & Starkey, 2005; Feller & Cottone, 2003; Frankel, Rachlin, & Yip-Bannicq, 2012). Feller and Cottone (2003) conducted a review of the literature and observed the concept of empathy as an integral part of the therapeutic relationship in theories ranging from psychoanalysis to Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy. Similarly, Bodenhorn and Starkey (2005) noted that, "Across theoretical orientations, empathy is recognized as necessary for the development of any counseling relationship" (p. 18). No matter what the theoretical framework, empathy can be utilized in the beginning stages of the counseling relationship as well as throughout the therapy process to create and maintain a positive relationship, and to work toward achieving mutually established goals. Rogers (1975) emphasized this when he described how empathy could be used throughout the counseling relationship rather than distinguishing between separate empathic moments.

There have been some differences in the conceptualization of empathy including viewing this construct as a characteristic, method of communication, relationship trait, and way of showing compassion (Bodenhorn & Starkey, 2005). Throughout much of the empathy-related literature, however, one commonality has been the consideration of two constructs described as cognitive empathy and emotional (affective) empathy (Bodenhorn & Starkey, 2005; Duan & Hill, 1996; Feller & Cottone, 2003; Ohrt et al., 2009). "Cognitive empathy refers to one's ability to take another's perspective intellectually, while emotional empathy describes one's emotional response or 'gut' feeling to another's emotion" (Ohrt et al., 2009, p. 321). These two areas account for the ability to have a level of understanding of another's experience, including the individual's

thought processes and emotional experiences (Bodenhorn & Starkey, 2005).

When reflecting on the counselor's empathic role in the therapeutic relationship, empathic listening involves the two previously mentioned constructs of empathy (cognitive and affective), and the ability of the counselor to communicate this empathic understanding to the client (Bodenhorn & Starkey, 2005; Chi-Ying Chung & Bemak, 2002). The ability of a counselor verbally and nonverbally sharing his or her experiential empathy can be fostered in the process of educating counselors. Therefore, when educating and training future counselors, it is helpful to remember the importance of conveying empathy and the responsibility educators hold to encourage a counselor's capacity for conveying this empathy.

## Empathy and Basic Skills

There has been discussion about the relationship between the basic counseling skills taught in most procedural counseling courses and a counselor's capacity to convey empathy (Miller, 1989). Though basic skills (reflection of meaning, reflection of feeling, summarization, nonverbal attending skills, etc.) help to facilitate the therapeutic relationship, and aspects such as congruence and unconditional positive regard, they are not equivalent to conveying empathy (Clark, 2010b; Miller, 1989; Myers, 2000;). Learning and utilizing the mechanics of counseling does not translate into communicating empathy. Confusion between basic skills and conveying empathy may be particularly strong when teaching and learning reflection skills; as Clark asserted, "reflection has been incorrectly equated with empathy" (2010b, p. 353). Rogers, like Clark, was particularly adamant when he discussed how trainees were at times being taught to mechanically reflect rather than to convey a rich understanding of the client's life:

Reflection of feelings has not been infrequently taught as a technique, and sometimes a very wooden technique at that. On the basis of written client expressions, the learner is expected to concoct a correct reflection of feeling or even worse, to select the correct response from a multiple-choice list. Such training has very little to do with an effective therapeutic relationship. So I have become more and more allergic to the use of the term. I am *not* trying to reflect feelings.

I am trying to determine whether my understanding of the client's inner world is correct whether I am seeing it as he or she is experiencing it at this moment. Each response of mine contains the unspoken question, "Is this the way it is in you? Am I catching just the color and texture and flavor of the personal meaning you are experiencing right now? If not, I wish to bring my perception in line with yours." (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, pp. 127-128)

Reflecting on Rogers' words encourages us to think about ways we are training future counselors to be empathic with clients. As Rogers noted, when training counselors, teaching basic skills cannot be equated with teaching students empathic abilities (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989). One difference between use of basic skills and building empathy lies in who is responsible for both. Regarding basic skills, with input and reaction from others, trainees can practice and learn many of these skills. The counselor (not the client) is then responsible for bringing these skills to the counseling session. Empathy, on the other hand, is created within the counseling relationship (Myers, 2000); both counselor and client participate in this creation. That is, in order for empathy to be effective, not only must the counselor effectively convey empathy, the client must experience a sense of being heard and understood by the counselor. With such complexities, it is challenging to articulate what exactly we as counselors can do to help facilitate empathy in the therapeutic relationship.

In the face of these complexities, and considering the ambiguous nature of empathy, counselor educators are faced with the challenge of helping students to both experience and convey empathy in ways that are helpful to clients. When teaching basic counseling skills, counselor educators may be tempted to include empathy in the "list" of techniques to be learned. This is problematic because, as discussed above, empathy cannot be reduced to a concrete technique. Empathy, rather, falls into what Rogers (1980) described as "a way of being" (p. xviii). Rogers' notion of an empathic presence with clients reflects the core values of humanistic counseling. Miller (1989) shared Rogers' concerns (noted by Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989) when he worried that counselor educators become overly consumed with teaching counseling skills and techniques. In this process, the ability to understand a client and provide an empathic ear may be lost. Counselor educators undertake the task of teaching students to find a

balance between use of attending skills and basic techniques, with the often forgotten ideas of authentically listening, understanding, and conveying empathy to the client (Miller, 1989). Counselor educators may benefit from learning how other helping professions assist students with enhancing their empathic abilities.

## Empathy in Other Helping Fields

Reviewing literature from other helping fields can provide counselor educators with ideas for helping students both experience and communicate empathy. For example, the concept of teaching empathy has been reviewed in the literature in relation to youth (Hollingsworth, Didelot, & Smith, 2003), medical students (Shapiro, Morrison, & Boker, 2004), and social work students (Gerdes, Jackson, Segal, & Mullins, 2011) though the literature is minimal in relation to counseling students.

Training to promote empathy has not been limited to higher education. Hollingsworth et al. (2003) discussed using the REACH Beyond Tolerance program to teach aspects of empathy to school-aged students. The proposal for this program came after teachers and students reported an increased amount of racism and bullying in their schools. The program integrated aspects of "responsibility, empathy, attitude, cultural knowledge, and assertions of beliefs" (p. 141) into classroom curriculum (Hollingsworth et al., 2003). Specific to empathy, the program included reading personal narratives and role-playing people who have experienced unfair treatment. Additionally, multiculturally diverse speakers talked with students about their experiences with prejudice, and students watched movies or television shows related to racism or others' experiences with inequality. The authors proposed the incorporation of these activities for use in a classroom setting and ways such activities could assist with eliciting empathy from students. Further research would be beneficial to examine outcomes of REACH Beyond Tolerance and other related programs.

Shapiro et al. (2004) had similar concerns to those of counselor educators when attempting to enhance empathic abilities of medical students. The authors conducted a study, which involved an experimental group of medical students in a short course that included reading brief poems and narratives about patients and their experiences

in medical settings.  The authors used a pretest, posttest format with the Empathy Construct Rating Scale, Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale (BEES; Mehrabian, Young, & Sato, 1988), and questions related to reflections on the course to gain an understanding of the course's effectiveness.  Posttest results on the BEES were statistically significant for changes in the understanding of empathy in comparison with the control group, which did not attend the brief course.  Additionally, Shapiro et al. (2004) reported, "Student understanding of the patient's perspective became more detailed and complex post-intervention" (p. 79).

Gerdes et al. (2011) applied empathy to yet another helping field, social work.  The authors stated, "We propose that a targeted and structured explication of empathy is an extremely useful, if not essential, foundation for all social work theory and practice" (p. 109).  The authors also noted that although the incorporation of empathy in social work is important, it has been somewhat overlooked in the literature.  A new method for thinking about empathy was proposed in relation to the field of social work which includes one's gut reaction to another, the conscious thinking used to make sense of another's experience, and the response to the client that follows this "cognitive process" (p. 117).  This social work conceptualization of empathy incorporates both the experiential and conveyance aspects of empathy discussed earlier.  Gerdes et al. also discussed specific ideas for teaching the conveyance of empathy in social work education which are similar to ideas discussed by Hollingsworth et al. (2003), including use of role play and imaginative exercises.  Additionally, Gerdes et al. suggested the use of mindfulness exercises and artistic mediums (e.g., reading literature, viewing movies, and writing) as methods for enhancing empathic skills.  The three articles mentioned above provide descriptions of ways in which other fields have attempted to enhance empathy.  Although these instances were in fields different from counselor education, ideas and concepts (e.g., listening to others' narratives, role play, reading the experiences of another, journaling) proposed could be modified for incorporation in a counselor education setting.  Additionally, despite the differences in groups mentioned (youth, medical students, and social work students), all viewed empathy as having an integral role in their work with people.  The construct, empathy, was also referenced similarly by all of the various groups mentioned.  Specifically, empathy was described as being able

to identify emotions experienced by others and imagine what it would be like to have that same lived experience.

## Teaching Empathy in Counselor Education

As students move forward in their counseling program, it is important for counselor educators to consider various ways of encouraging students to develop an empathic way of being with their clients, while also considering students' developmental levels. Authors of supervision models (e.g., Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010) suggest that students who are seeing their first clients often have high anxiety and therefore depend on their supervisors to tell them the "right" way to work with clients. Such students may overly rely on mechanical use of the basic counseling skills, giving them a false sense of comfort if they believe that counseling and empathy equate to precisely demonstrating skills. Henderson, Cawyer, and Watkins (1999) interviewed students and their supervisors during practicum to gain a better understanding of practicum experiences. The authors reported supervisors' thoughts and reflections including the following:

> You have people who are technically excellent, but they aren't really helping people. And the process is very difficult to teach. It's kind of like poetry or music; you can teach people the notes, but can you teach them to make the whole thing into a melody? (Henderson et al., 1999, p. 64)

Student development can play a large role in trainees' ability to create a "melody" out of the counseling process. As students progress in their development, the capacity to convey empathy should improve as they become more confident and comfortable in their counseling role. Counselor educators may consider a variety of methods for enhancing students' empathic skills, methods that are chosen in part because they are relevant for the developmental stage that students are experiencing. When reflecting on this "melody" that can result from the counseling process, it is important to remember that learning about the various aspects of counseling does not translate to being an empathic and competent counselor. Just as when creating music, there are many other factors that can influence this process such as students'

developmental stages, personal life experiences, beliefs about counseling, and worldview.

Lyons and Hazler (2002) focused on counseling students' development when they studied the interplay between students' length of time in a counseling program, cognitive development, and empathy development. They stated, "A better understanding of the effects of cognitive development level among counseling students at different stages in their training could shed new light on the best way to foster the development of empathy and other basic skills in counseling students" (p. 121). Through their research efforts, the authors found differences between first and second year counseling students in empathic abilities. Second year students demonstrated higher levels of both skill-based (cognitive) and trait-based (affective) empathy. Lyons and Hazler's findings mirrored findings in an earlier study (Lovell, 1999) in which results indicated that overall, the further counseling students are in their developmental process, the more they are able to experience and display empathy to others. These studies suggest that empathy can, to some extent, be trained and strengthened over time (Lovell, 1999). Such training would have its foundation in basic counseling skills, but would go beyond these skills to enhance students' ability to profoundly understand their clients' world and communicate the essence of this understanding to their clients.

When thinking about enhancing students' empathic abilities, it is important to remember that experiencing empathy is the base upon which the ability to convey empathy is built (Bodenhorn & Starkey, 2005). Therefore, it is important to review literature that discusses how counselor educators have attempted to enhance counselor trainees' experienced empathy in order to work towards conveyance. Similar to educators in the various other fields mentioned above (i.e., social work, education, and medicine), counselor educators facilitate many learning experiences to assist in training counseling students to more fully experience empathy. Some of these experiences have included viewing film and listening to music (Ohrt et al., 2009), participating in group case conceptualization (Gibson, 2007), portraying characters, and participating in activities which encourage examining situations from various points of view (Bodenhorn & Starkey, 2005).

Ohrt et al. (2009) decided to combine two commonly used techniques of empathy training, viewing film and listening to music,

by having counselor trainees view music videos. These authors argued that "empathy may be as much an art as a science" (p. 323) and the use of artistic mediums may assist in a greater comprehension of others. They showed music videos and facilitated a process of reviewing the lyrics, watching the video, reflecting, and processing the experience, in an attempt to enhance empathy in counselors in training. "Specific to counselor empathy training, music videos provide a short film with characters students can relate to, lyrics to identify with the character's story, and music that can potentially elicit emotional responses" (Ohrt et al., 2009, p. 326). The authors noted the importance of giving students experiences in which they are required to see situations from another's point of view. Additionally, the idea of taking on another's role rather than simply playfully imagining another's experience is emphasized by encouraging students to fully immerse themselves in a character's story. Immersing oneself in another's experience is what adds to the ability to truly imagine what it would be like to have lived their lives. Ohrt et al., like others, focused on experienced empathy and included processing feelings students experienced while watching the music video.

In addition to music videos, different realms of literature have been used to help students learn to listen empathically. Gibson (2007) described how use of literature can provide counseling students with lengthened opportunities to comprehend characters' situations and the practice of empathic listening. Books, poetry, and other forms of literature can act as extended case studies with more "life-like" qualities. This can help students begin to experience empathy. Gibson argued, "Experiencing and processing the emotions evoked by reading material aids beginning-level counselors in acquiring the less technical or skill-specific aspects of empathic understanding" (p. 198). Her students were challenged to explore empathy by noticing emotions elicited when reading fictional work; such emotional awareness can be used as a learning tool before beginning to actively listen to clients. Gibson had students read the famous work of J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, in a school counseling supervision course. Students were encouraged to participate in discussions and answer questions surrounding characters' emotions and their own (students') personal emotions elicited while reading. Gibson reported positive feedback (e.g., discussions about universality of presenting issues, viewing situations from multiple perspectives, opportunities for

strength-based conceptualization) from students and documented empathic development she noticed in students through observation during the semester.

Bodenhorn and Starkey's (2005) use of theater exercises was similar to Ohrt et al.'s use of music videos (2009) and Gibson's use of fiction (2007) in that these mediums were all used to enhance students' experiences of empathy. Bodenhorn and Starkey proposed a comparison between developing empathy and assisting actors with character portrayal. Their use of theater exercises in a counseling techniques course was inspired by their belief that it is not possible to teach empathy; "However the development of empathy can be reinforced and refined through imagination and creativity" (Bodenhorn & Starkey, 2005, p. 19). The authors asserted that the main factors to consider when developing empathy include the ability to portray different roles and the capacity to experience another's perspective. Therefore, the theater exercises involved portraying different roles and attending to body language and facial expressions. Additionally, these theater exercises provided multiple opportunities for feedback from classmates and instructors. The authors gathered quantitative data through pretest and posttest methods using the Davis Empathy Scale (Davis, 1980) and the Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1988). They also collected qualitative information by encouraging students to reflect on their experiences through personal and written submissions. This qualitative data highlighted themes in student testimonials such as, "empathy, trust, risk-taking, and the importance of nonverbal language" though the researchers could not establish statistical significance from the quantitative data they gathered (Gibson, 2005, p. 25).

The above-mentioned activities provide counselor educators with creative options for enhancing counselor trainees' ability to experience empathy and methods for incorporating person-centered approaches into teaching practices. Such experiences of empathy, and understandings of others, are foundational to counselor trainees' ability to communicate empathy to their clients. A next step for counselor educators is to move from a focus on experiencing empathy toward conveying empathy. The ability to convey empathy can be nurtured in a counselor's educational process; therefore it is important for counselor educators to include methods for enhancing empathy conveyance in the classroom.

## Classroom Application and Ideas for Further Discussion

As described above, various strategies have been used to facilitate counselor trainees' ability to experience empathy. Though experiencing empathy in relation to clients is essential, it is equally important to communicate this experienced empathy back to the client. Experiencing empathy does not validate clients' lives or help them explore their thoughts, feelings, and so forth unless they are aware we have this empathic understanding. Yet, there appears to be a void in the literature addressing initiatives counselor educators have taken to facilitate counselor trainees' ability to convey empathy.

Therefore, further thought, conversation, conceptual literature, and research studies addressing the experience *and* conveyance of empathy in therapeutic relationships are needed. For example, it would be helpful to have more discussion about and examples of possible exercises and teaching techniques which counselor educators have found helpful in assisting students with conveying empathy. Cochran and Cochran (2006) discussed such methods for helping students to understand empathy as a construct and enhancing students' empathy conveyance. Specifically, the authors suggested pairing students together and having each partner deeply listening to the other without responding, focusing on trying to experience the emotion each other is experiencing. They noted that not having to focus on reflecting a feeling, or summarizing what is being said, helps students to solely focus on trying to experience the emotions being described by their classmate. The next aspect of this activity integrated conveying empathy to the classmate. While conveying empathy, focus is placed on nonverbal and verbal communication including word choice, expressions, mannerisms, and tone. Cochran and Cochran suggested that it can be helpful to use groups of three instead of two when working on conveying empathy. The third individual can act as an observer and discuss the verbal and nonverbal communication noticed during the exercise. Skovholt and Trotter-Mathisen (2012) also noted the importance of focusing on empathy with attachment in counselors' training process. They stated that learning "… attending, intense listening, emotional sensitivity, and nonverbal understanding" are important to this process (p. 156). Visualization can also be helpful when learning about ways to express empathy to clients. Shovholt and Trotter-Mathisen recommended that students create

metaphors to help themselves visualize being fully surrounded by another's experience. One example of a metaphor provided was the ocean; when in the ocean one is completely surrounded by water just as a counselor should be surrounded by clients' experiences and emotions when conveying empathy.

One class experience we have found helpful during the first class meeting of a basic skills course is to encourage students to reflect on a time in their lives when they experienced receiving empathy from another person. We ask students to remember both the conversation during which this occurred, and to consider why they felt heard and understood by the listener. What did the listener say or do that conveyed he or she understood a slice of the student's world? Students are then asked to share with the class why they felt heard, that is, what the listener said or did that conveyed empathy (students are asked not to share the topic of conversation, as that may be too personal to reveal). When we have facilitated this class experience in basic skills courses, the vast majority of students commented that the listener communicated understanding of the students' dilemma by sharing their (the listeners') understanding of the problem, by being quiet through much of the conversation, and by not offering advice. By facilitating this experience early in the semester, we have been able to refer to it throughout the semester, especially at times when students struggle with use of silence, temptation to offer advice, and accurate conveyance of empathy.

In addition to specific teaching techniques, counselor educators might more generally consider how they model empathy to their students. Eriksen and McAuliffe (2011) discussed "practicing what we preach" by suggesting that instructors of basic counseling skills courses exemplify the skills they expect of their students as they work with clients, such as "the core conditions of empathy, respect, and unconditional positive regard" (p. 93). They noted that instructors might use a parallel process; just as we expect counselor trainees to convey empathy to their clients, we can model empathy in our exchanges with students. Counselor educators could discuss how they model empathy to their students and the challenges of doing so (e.g., displaying empathy while also being in an evaluative role.

It may also be helpful to consider how counselor educators use courses beyond a basic skills course to help students continue to learn about experiencing and communicating empathy, so that use of

empathy is fostered throughout students' programs. Further conversation about counselor educators' perceptions of empathy and the presence of empathy-focused discussion in various counseling courses could help other educators consider ways to encourage empathy (experience and conveyance) as a way of being with clients. These discussions could include consideration of counselor trainee development; empathy training may be quite different in a beginning skills course (when such training would be somewhat simple) versus an internship course (when we would expect a more nuanced understanding of empathy). Venues for such conversations among counselor educators could include listservs, conference presentations, and counseling literature. Future research might build on Lyons and Hazler's (2002) study of students' time spent in a counseling program and the associated empathy development.

It is crucial to think about diversity of clients (and counselor trainees) when considering how to infuse empathy training throughout the curriculum. Constantine (2001) noted the importance of multicultural competence in counselors and the role empathy plays in this competence when saying, "The degree to which counselors can appropriately empathize with the concerns of culturally diverse clients may ultimately determine their ability to respond to these clients in a culturally sensitive manner" (p. 359). Chi-Ying Chung and Bemak (2002) noted a lack in the literature regarding the examination of empathy in multicultural counseling. They proposed that in order for counselors "to effectively communicate empathy across cultures, it is also critical to ensure that the client understands the counselor's attitudes and values about the role of culture in counseling" (p. 157). One may relate this to the concept of being transparent with clients. With all of these considerations about diversity in mind, future writers and researchers must be mindful of how constructs, such as empathy, relate to and play into working with individuals of various backgrounds and cultures.

When working with all clients, including those from different cultures, it is important to think about methods for encouraging client feedback about the counseling experience. Feedback can be a particularly helpful aspect of facilitating empathic communication to explore whether the client is experiencing the counselor as genuinely conveying empathy. Chi-Ying Chung and Bemak (2002) referred to Roger's work when stating, "empathy is considered to be

communicated only if the client perceives and believes the therapist to be empathic" (p. 154). One way to practice solicitation of client feedback is through role-taking exercises (e.g., character portrayal). Role-taking allows counselor trainees to practice conveying empathy verbally and nonverbally, and provides time for individuals portraying clients to share their experience with the student portraying the counselor. During this process (both in role taking and actual counseling sessions), inquiring about the clients' points of view aids in decreasing power differentials and communicates the value we place on their experience.

Future research could explore these client responses to students' attempts to convey empathy. Qualitative research methods may be particularly helpful in this endeavor, due to the complexity and ambiguity of empathy. While scales have been developed to measure empathy (e.g. BEES) it is important to pair qualitative methods with quantitative measures when examining the construct. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods would provide a well-rounded understanding of counselors' abilities to convey empathy and clients' understandings of the empathy which is communicated. Client sessions could be observed and analyzed to discover how counselor trainees attempt to convey empathy to their clients. Then clients could be interviewed about their experience in counseling, particularly how they experienced the counselor trainee as an understanding, empathic listener, and if this communicated empathy was helpful to them (the clients). Such research could be done to explore clients' experiences with counselor trainees who had completed various types of empathy training.

Future research could also explore counselor trainees' ability to convey empathy to clients with a variety of concerns. For instance, a trainee may find it difficult to convey empathy to a client whose presenting problem is not an issue that has yet touched the counselor trainee's own life (e.g., grief due to death of a loved one; a parent's distress over their teen's addiction). This may be particularly challenging for beginning counselor trainees, who tend to focus more on themselves than others as they are learning basic counseling skills. Stoltenberg, McNeill, and Delworth (1998) noted that such "level 1" trainees are anxious and have an "internal frame of reference …. [that] reflects a cognitive focus" (p. 40). Therefore, to develop empathy skills for a wide range of client concerns, trainees must progress from

a largely self-focus to a stronger other-focus, and gain comfort and skill with working with emotions (not just cognitions). Research could compare various means to help these beginning counselor trainees experience empathy, such as those previously mentioned (e.g., character portrayal; literature and music that communicate stories of possible client concerns), and the trainees' resulting ability to communicate empathy.

With our knowledge and awareness of the importance of empathy in the therapeutic relationship comes responsibility. As counselors, we are responsible for using all of our capabilities to create an empathic relationship with clients. As counselor educators we are responsible for preparing future counselors to create an empathic counseling relationship. While experiencing empathy has been a focus of some research and conceptual literature, it is important going forward that we expand the examination of empathy to include educational experiences which help counseling students learn and practice the conveyance of empathy. A review of the literature suggests we may place too high a priority in master's level counseling programs on interventions and mechanical skills, particularly if this is done at the expense of highlighting the need for profound conveyance of empathy in the counseling relationship (Miller, 1989; Rogers, 1980). The importance of fostering an empathic relationship, and specifically the ability of counseling students to communicate empathy, can be intertwined throughout the entirety of a counseling student's coursework and not limited to discussions in basic skills courses. Such emphasis will help students learn that empathic expression is not simply a skill to be pulled out at particular points of time, but rather it is a way of being with clients and all others in their lives.

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