Part I

The Transtheoretical Model of Change

An Integrative Model to Guide Reflection

School counselors understand that theory is the foundation for effective practice. However, theory, while intellectually interesting, remains just that—"interesting"—until it is translated into practice. To be successful in practice, a school counselor needs to use theory as an operative framework to guide the processes of gathering student information, discerning what is important from what is not, and knowing what needs to be done to move the student from the "what is" to the "what is desired."

The current book presents an integrated model of counseling with principles, constructs, concepts, and techniques that cut across, or transcend, the traditional boundaries of school counseling theories. The model presented within this text provides both the rationale and the structure for the school counselor to be truly eclectic in the selection of techniques and interventions. Chapter 2 provides an overview to this transtheoretical model of change (TTM) (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2002). While describing the fundamental concepts and constructs of TTM, the focus of the chapter and those that follow is on demonstrating the value of this model as a guide to the school counselor's reflective practice. One specific value of TTM is that it affords the school counselor the opportunity to be "eclectic" in intervention strategies and techniques within the context of an empirically supported, integrated, and coherent model of change.

However, prior to presenting the transtheoretical model of change, the reader is introduced to fundamentals of reflective practice (Chapter 1) and the role and value of theory in guiding that practice.

1 The School Counselor as Reflective Practitioner

"I don't care. I really don't. School is a drag and I don't care if I ever go to college."

—Lindsey, seventeen years old[1]

School counselors reading the above quote will be neither surprised nor shocked by the apparent apathy and lack of academic motivations suggested by Lindsey's comment. The challenge for the school counselor working with Lindsey is to find ways to identify the issues underlying the comment, and process data to help direct the creation of strategies for facilitating this student's academic achievement.

While trained to be good listeners, school counselors understand that listening is but the vehicle to understanding, and that understanding is the base from which we formulate our helping strategies. The effective school counselor is one who not only knows how to invite student disclosure, but is able to *reflect* on those disclosures in ways that guide his or her own decisions at any one moment within the counseling dynamic. It is this process of reflection that serves as the focus of the current chapter.

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT DISCLOSURES

Lindsey's declaration of "noninterest" is actually an invitation to the counselor to engage in a process of reflection in an attempt to understand this student's disclosures. This reflective process is one of discernment. It

is a process through which the school counselor discerns what is important from what is not, understands the "what is" as contrasted to what is "hoped for," and develops connections to guide the student to this desired outcome.

For example, the counselor sitting with Lindsey may look for the clues, the signals, and the information that would help discern the degree of disenfranchisement the student is experiencing. Is this merely a reaction to a bad day or series of days, or does her statement give evidence of a damaged sense of self-efficacy? Perhaps the student is responding to some upheaval at home or a fear of failure or fear of success. Being able to answer these and other such questions is essential if the school counselor is to effectively intervene with this student.

The effective school counselor certainly listens to a student's story, but does so with a discerning ear in search of meaning. The counselor reflects on the data presented as well as the data needed, and it is this reflection that guides the planning and decision making that the counselor employs within and between sessions.

COUNSELOR REFLECTIONS GUIDING PRACTICE DECISIONS

The counselor's ability to reflect on his or her counseling has been identified as an essential component to effective practice (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). This reflection provides the counselor the means to make sense of all the data presented by a student and to connect those data with a counselor response and intervention, both at the macrolevel of case conceptualization and treatment planning and at the microlevel of moment-to-moment interaction that occurs within a session.

Reflection at the Macrolevel: Case Conceptualization

It is clear that not all student information is of equal value or importance to the process and outcome of the counseling. The effective school counselor reflects on the student's disclosures and formulates these data into a coherent, yet tentative, conceptualization of what is, what is desired, and how to move from "A" to "B."

For example, consider the situation of a student who is failing all his classes and presents as unmotivated. Perhaps the school counselor has worked with numerous students who present as "nonmotivated" and, as a result, have failing grades. While the problem is labeled with the same term, "nonmotivated," the cause for this lack of motivation is idiosyncratic to that student and thus the intervention employed must similarly be

shaped in response to the uniqueness of that individual. The effective school counselor reflects upon the data at his or her disposal to shape the best intervention possible for any one student at any one time. This process of reflection effectively links the student's presenting problem to an intervention plan.

The following is a condensed view of just such a reflective case-conceptualization process. The client in this case is a fourteen-year-old Latino student, Raul, whose health education teacher wrote in the referral:

> *I am concerned about Raul. He is a recent transfer and I think I'm seeing some unusual behaviors. Raul stays in the shower following class for an excessive amount of time. He is the last to exit the locker room and has been late to his next class a couple of times. When I spoke with him about this, he became upset and told me he has to be sure to really wash so that he doesn't catch anything. I am concerned about him and would like you to see him.*

Reading and reflecting on this referral, Mrs. Jacobs, the school counselor, began to hypothesize that Raul may be exhibiting some obsessive compulsive tendencies and felt that if that were the case, she would want to know if he was in treatment or in need of a referral. Entering her session with this hypothesis, Mrs. Jacobs invited Raul to share his concerns about "catching things" and asked for detailed descriptions of his washing behavior. While she recognized she was not trained to diagnose such a condition, her thirteen years of experience, along with her training as a licensed professional counselor, has helped her to recognize certain characteristics associated with obsessions and compulsions. She used questions, clarifications, and confrontation to test her hypothesis, gathering details that would provide evidence of the characteristics of obsessions and compulsions.

As she reflected on this first encounter with Raul, she was mindful of the fact that this apparently bright, articulate youth was able to discuss his shower behavior and tardiness with a sense of calm and confidence. When challenged upon his concern about catching something, he appeared a bit coy and reframed the statement to suggest, "I just don't want to go to class all sweaty." Raul's style of response as well as the specific nature of his responses made Mrs. Jacobs question her initial hypothesis. Raul gave evidence of functioning without excessive concern or anxiety in his others classes, at lunch, or even at home where he apparently enjoyed playing with his two dogs, and expressed no concerns about "catching something."

As Raul described why he took so long in the post-gym shower, Mrs. Jacobs began to feel that his behavior was less evidence of an obsessive concern or compulsion and more of a strategy to delay exiting the shower while the other boys remained in the locker room. This observation led Mrs. Jacobs to wonder if the issue was one of some anxiety around his sexual development, extreme modesty, or perhaps his desire to simply avoid the teasing often targeted to new students. Armed with these reflections "on" her session, Mrs. Jacobs consulted with Mr. Abbot, the referring gym teacher, and together they decided that it seemed that Raul's behavior was a strategy used to avoid peer teasing and locker room "play." However, since this was merely their best guess of what was happening, Mrs. Jacobs and Mr. Abbot decided to test this hypothesis that the behavior was in response to peer teasing. It was decided that Mr. Abbot would remain in the locker room during the entire period while the students were dressing, following the gym class. The expectation was that his presence would reduce the possibility of teasing and thus expedite Raul's exit from the shower and locker room.

This planning and reflection practice is not a static, one-time process—rather, it refers to the thinking that takes place following a session or an encounter that allows the counselor to review what he or she did, what was anticipated would happen, and what in fact happened. From the initial meeting through the ending of any one "contract," the effective school counselor must gather and analyze case information, formulate new hypotheses, and develop and implement intervention decisions (Tillett, 1996). Thus, in the case of Raul, Mrs. Jacobs would certainly follow-up to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. Assuming that the intervention was successful, she may still decide to sit with Raul in order to review his social skills and his ability to respond to peer teasing with strategies other than avoidance.

Reflection at the Microlevel: Reflection "in" Process

While it is essential to use student data to develop case conceptualization and intervention plans, school counselors know that counseling is a dynamic process and cannot be staged in nice linear steps. School counselors appreciate that while they may be prepared with a well-thought plan and a well-stocked "intervention toolbox," these cannot simply be applied in a one-size-fits-all manner. The subtleties of each relationship, the unique characteristics of both participants—counselor and student—and the context of time and place, all contribute to the need for counselors to fine-tune and adjust these plans and strategies, often during the moments of interaction.

Counseling as a reflective process is one in which the counselor is simultaneously involved in design and implementation of action, "[. . .] while at the same time remaining detached enough to observe and feel the action that is occurring, and to respond" (Tremmel, 1993, p. 436). Consider the simple example of offering a tissue to a tearful student. What is the intent of such a gesture? While such a gesture appears perhaps caring and helpful, might it signal that tears are not allowed? Could offering the tissue highlight and thus sensitize a student who feels somewhat embarrassed by the tears? Are these the purpose of the activity?

The reflective counselor knows what he or she expected to achieve by this gesture and will rapidly process the student's reactions, contrasting it to what was expected, and adjusts accordingly. Therefore, the counselor who provides the tissue as invitation to share feelings may note the student's dismissal of that invitation and in turn simply state, "Ginny, you seem upset. Would you like to tell me what's going on?" Or, perhaps the counselor offers the tissues as a simple physical comfort, but notes that the client becomes embarrassed by the recognition of the apparent upset. Under these conditions, the counselor may simply lower the box and place it on the table, redirecting the student with the comment, "Ginny, I'm glad you are here. Have a seat (pointing to a chair) and make yourself comfortable."

These are not actions that can be prescribed or even anticipated. These are actions that illustrate the school counselor's ability to rapidly process the data being presented, contrast these data to what was "hoped for" or "expected," and then respond in ways that move the student to the desired outcome. This is the essence of reflective practice, a practice facilitated through the use of a counseling theory or operative model.

COUNSELING THEORY ESSENTIAL TO REFLECTION AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Most of us can follow directions to assemble a toy or build a simple structure. Opening the package we usually look for the directions for quick and easy assembly. The instruction sheets often identify all the parts included, the tools required, and even the steps to take (pictures help!). Even simple "problems" like putting a puzzle together, while not providing step-by-step instructions, make it easier by providing a picture of the finished product on the box top. Knowing the parts and having a concept of how they go together certainly makes assembly that much easier.

While many who work in a problem-solving capacity are presented with problems that are structured with linear steps leading to solutions,

this is not true in the world of the school counselor. We in the counseling field are presented with situations that often have no clear beginning, ending, nor certainly predictable and linear steps toward resolution.

The upset students standing in our doorways come neither with easily identified parts nor clear step-by-step instructions. Our attending and questioning skills allow us to quickly open our "student package." However—unlike most projects that have clearly marked parts—our student provides many pieces, many items, and many points of contact that come flowing out into our session, all without the benefit of a parts list or assembly instruction. Which parts are important and which are redundant or unnecessary? Where does one start? What comes next? How do we put "a" to "b"? These are questions typically answered in the instructions provided by manufacturers but are clearly absent when the "project" is helping a student navigate his or her life crisis.

Reflecting on what the student has shared and how he or she shares it—all in the context of the complexity of the human experience, and within a specific time and place of the encounter—requires some guide, some format, or some structure, or else it will be simply overwhelming. If only one had the picture on the box or the detailed instructions of where to start and how to proceed!

While there is no one picture nor set of detailed instructions to guide us with our counseling, the utilization of a counseling theory as an organizational framework will help the counselor organize the data, make conceptual connections, find themes, and provide purposeful linkages to goal and interventions. So, prior to making any meaningful reflections and procedural decisions, the effective school counselor needs a framework—a schema— to serve as a rough template to help make sense of the data being gathered. Without such an orienting framework or theory, we truly can become "directionless creatures bombarded with literally hundreds of impressions and pieces of information in a single session" (Procaska & Norcross, 1994, p. 3). As introduced earlier, one effective model to guide the school counselor's reflective practice is the transtheoretical model of change (TTM).

THE TRANSTHEORETICAL MODEL OF CHANGE: A VALUABLE ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK GUIDING ECLECTIC PRACTICE

Transtheoretical model of change is not a new theory of counseling, but rather an empirically derived, multistage, sequential model of change. A unique value of TTM is that it provides school counselors the

ability to not only know "what" to do to assist their students, but also "when" to do it.

TTM provides a model of change that will allow the school counselor to identify where a student may be on a continuum of change as well as the strategies to employ to facilitate continued movement along that continuum. TTM serves as a guide for the school counselor to know which of the many interventions available will be most efficacious at any one point in this change process.

Prior to presenting and illustrating the specific strategies and intervention techniques employed by school counselors with this eclectic, TTM-orienting framework (Part II), we will present the fundamental philosophy and core principles underlying this model (Chapter 2).

SUMMARY

Understanding Student Disclosures

- Listening to student disclosure and attempting to make meaning of those disclosures requires a school counselor to employ a model, a guide, or an orienting framework that places these disclosures into some meaningful context.

Counselor Reflections Guiding Practice

- The counselor's ability to reflect on his or her counseling has been identified as an essential component to effective practice.
- Reflection provides the counselor the means to make sense of all the data presented by a student and to connect those data with a counselor response and interventions.

Counseling Theory Essential to Reflection and Effective Practice

- Counselors work with ill-structured problems; that is, the problems addressed by counselors lack linear steps leading to solutions.
- A counselor's theory, model, or orienting framework provides the "structure" needed to begin to understand the large amount of information gathered in counseling and use that understanding to formulate effective intervention plans.

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