

THEORY AND PRACTICE

# The Multilevel Conception of Intentionality: implications for counselor training

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**ABSTRACT** *Counseling training programs have failed to differentiate between and among behavioral, cognitive, and unconscious dimensions. This omission has resulted in confusion and competition in many counseling curricula in that valuable programs are competing for space rather than being integrated systematically. This article proposes a multilevel model of intentionality which integrates the several aspects of the counselor-client relationship. In turn, this integration of behavioral, cognitive, and unconscious dimensions will have important applications in counselor daily practice.*

## Introduction

Counseling process research for the past 20 years has been focused on the understanding of behavioral processes, such as the effects of verbal and nonverbal skills (e.g. Hill & Gormally, 1977), skills across the counseling process (Hill, Carter & O'Farrell, 1983) and across theoretical orientations (Lee & Uhlemann, 1984).

However, following the cognitive revolution (e.g. Mahoney, 1977) several researchers have attempted to clarify the covert mechanisms of the counseling process. This cognitive movement is illustrated by the research on counselor's conceptual strategies (e.g. Strohmer & Chiodo, 1984), attitudes and beliefs (e.g. Stone & Kelly, 1983), perceptions (e.g. Elliott, Barker, Caskey & Pistrang, 1982) and intentions (e.g. Hill & O'Grady, 1985).

While the cognitive movement is still growing, other areas of psychology are already experiencing what some authors have chosen to call the cognitive uncon-

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scious revolution (Van Den Bergh & Eelen, 1984). Increasingly, the advocates of the cognitive movement are focusing on the role of the unconscious process (e.g. Ivey, 1986; Mahoney, 1985; Meichenbaum & Gilmore, 1984). In the counseling process research, the influence of this movement is virtually non-existent. An exception is the small group of studies on countertransference processes (e.g. Peabody & Gelso, 1982).

Behavioral, cognitive and unconscious dimensions are thus considered important components in the understanding of the counseling process. However, despite promising new developments, an integrated model that includes unconscious processes is still absent. Recently, three models were introduced, representing an important step for this integration (Martin, 1984, 1987; Gelso & Carter, 1985, and Goncalves, 1986).

This article will discuss the main assumptions of these models with special emphasis on Goncalves' Multilevel Intentionality Model and its implication for the training of counselors.

### **The Multilevel Intentionality Model**

Rooted in Brand's (1984) model for intentional action, Martin (1984, 1987) proposes a cognitive mediational paradigm of the counseling process. Martin's model rests on two basic assumptions. First, and contrary to most of the research on behavioral dimensions, counselor behavior is not seen as directly affecting client behavior. Instead, counselor actions are processed by the client's internal cognitive structures. These cognitions, rather than the counselor behaviors, represent the best predictors of client actions.

Secondly, Martin challenges the traditional univocal influencing model, in which only the counselor is viewed as an influencing agent. Instead, the impact of the client on the cognitive processes of the counselor is also discussed. Additionally, counselor and client perceptions of each other's behavior are seen as determined by a complex interaction between external and internal information. Internal information consists of the material stored on declarative and procedural memories. Martin (personal communication, 11 September 1985) even though not referring directly in his model to unconscious processes, admits that "not all cognitive processes are conscious or subject to conscious recall". The acknowledgment that different memory processes differ in terms of level of awareness was recently pointed out by Tulving (1985a, 1985b).

Gelso & Carter (1985) have recently completed an important review on the relationship mechanisms in counseling and psychotherapy. Recognising the need for a new conceptualisation of the relationship factors in counseling, Gelso & Carter proposed a model emphasising the contribution of three inter-related components: working alliance, unreal relationship, and real relationship. The concept of working alliance is concerned with the cognitive and rational side of the relationship. The unreal relationship refers to the unconscious dimensions of the counseling process, such as transference and countertransference mechanisms.

Finally, the real relationship refers to the behavioral dimension, that is, what the counselor and client are actually doing. In sum, Gelso & Carter conclude that these three levels are simultaneously present in the counselor-client relationship, and that all of them should be addressed in any inquiry into the counseling process.

Finally, Goncalves (1986) presents a model where the construct of intentionality is used to conceptualise the process of knowledge transformation in counseling. This model shares the basic ideas of the cognitive-constructivist movement that could be summarised as follows: (1) participants in the counseling situation are seen as epistemic subjects active in the construction of their own knowledge; (2) the counseling relationship is seen as one of knowledge construction where both participants are simultaneously subject and object in this process; (3) the process of knowledge transformation is seen as dialectic in nature (*cf.* Guidano & Liotti, 1985; Ivey, 1986; Joyce-Moniz, 1985; Mahoney, *in press*).

Within the philosophical tradition, intentionality has been used in an attempt to describe and understand the relationship between knower and known. In other words, it reflects an attempt to conceptualise the way by which we relate to the external world (Brentano, 1874/1973). In this sense, intentionality appears, as was stressed by Sullivan (1968) and May (1969) as synonymous with epistemology, with the additional advantage of referring to the process of knowledge construction rather than to the product. The search for the understanding of the relationship between knower and known can be seen as the central theme of counseling process research.

Reviewing the research on the counseling process, Goncalves (1986) comes to the conclusion that the process of knowledge construction in counseling operates at three different levels: behavioral, cognitive, and unconscious. Thus, the most central assumption of the Multilevel Intentionality Model states that intentionality of the counselor as well as that of the client (*i.e.* his/her relationship with the world) results from an interaction between behavioral, cognitive, and unconscious dimensions. Then, three levels of intentionality exist in the therapeutic interaction: (1) the dimension of overt appearances and concrete behavioral; (2) the dimension of thought processes and ideas; and (3) the hidden dimension of unconscious processes. Therefore, behavioral intentionality is defined by the network of verbal and nonverbal behaviors occurring between counselor and client.

The second dimension, cognitive intentionality, is characterised by the internal experiences of the counselor and client, including perceptions, attitudes, conceptualisations, formulation of hypotheses, and establishment of intentions. Finally, unconscious intentionality refers to the group of psychological processes of which, though we are unaware of them, influence our thoughts and actions as clients and counselors.

In sum, Goncalves' Multilevel Intentionality Model suggests that the absence of conclusive data regarding the counseling process is in part due to the fact that we have been ignoring the complex interaction between the different intentionality levels. We have confused our discussions and research by 'mixing' the levels without awareness of critical distinctions. Therefore our models for counselor training, practice, and research should, in future, take all these different dimensions into consideration.

The remainder of this article will explore some of the implications of the Multilevel Intentionality Model for the training of counselors.

### **Implications for Training**

Counselor training programs need to consider all three levels of training. Microcounseling (Ivey, 1971; Ivey & Authier, 1978) is an example of a behavioral training program. We have seen the expansion of cognitive interests in training (e.g. Baker *et al.*, 1984). It seems clear that cognitive and thinking dimensions can expand our awareness of the helping process. Finally, there is need to consider the unconscious dimensions (e.g. Freud, 1910/1958) as further expansion of counselor awareness.

A dialectic approach to praxis (the integration of theory and practice into a complete gestalt) has been proposed by Ivey (1986) and Ivey & Goncalves (1988). Dialectics presupposes complexity, the importance of person-environment interaction, and integrations alternative treatment styles into a creative synthesis. Following is a presentation of examples from the three levels of intentionality with suggestions for reconsideration of alternative frames in the helping process.

#### *Behavioral Intentionality*

Microcounseling, in its early stages, primarily focused on identifying specific behaviors and skills of the counseling process. Programs which emphasise basic skills make the counseling and therapy process concrete, observable, and appear to be useful in training beginning counselors, particularly through clarification of what happens in the interview.

It is not necessary to go into detail of the description of contents and methodologies of the behavioral training. Decades of research have shown the efficacy of the social-learning approach combining instructions, modeling, practice and feedback (*cf.* Ford, 1979) in the training of a large spectrum of skills (*cf.* Ivey, 1983).

Stone (1982) has pointed out that "to reduce human relations training programs to skills only is to neglect personal beliefs and attitudes" (p. 450). Research has shown that, for the effective development of beginning counseling skills a conceptual framework is necessary (Goncalves, 1985; Baker *et al.* 1984; Stone & Kelly, 1983).

The five-stage structure of the interview (Ivey, 1983; Ivey & Matthews, 1984) represents an illustration of how cognitive organisation can facilitate learning of skills. Through practicing the 'well-formed interview', the trainee can learn how to conceptualise interview structure and plan accordingly.

It seems increasingly clear that behavioral and cognitive intentionality must work together for full trainee learning.

#### *Cognitive Intentionality*

As stated above, the trainer's attention should also be directed toward the coun-

selor's cognitive processes. There are three main points to consider: The first consists on helping counselors to think systematically about their clients (Hirsch & Stone, 1983); second, cognitive training should help in the translation of conceptualisations into intentions; finally, 'irrational' beliefs and attitudes of the beginning counselor should be identified and confronted. Next, we will refer to each one of these aspects.

Despite some conflicting results there is evidence that counselors tend to form their conceptualisations very early in the interview based on small amounts of data. Additionally, they use questioning strategies that tend to confirm their early conceptualisations so conceptualisations remain quite stable throughout the process (e.g. Friedlander & Stockman, 1983; Holloway & Wolleat, 1980). Thus, a more adequate introduction to strategies for client conceptualisation and hypotheses generation appears as an obvious objective of counselor training.

Several methods for teaching conceptualisation strategies are currently being tested. For example, Kurpius, Benjamin & Morran (1985) tested the effects of three different strategies (i.e. self-instructions, clinical hypotheses knowledge, and self-instruction plus clinical hypotheses knowledge) on trainees internal dialogue and quality of clinical hypotheses. They found that the self-instruction strategy was most effective in the improvement of trainees' conceptualisation ability.

Blocher *et al.* (1985) are in a process of developing a questionnaire (i.e. Counselor Perception Questionnaire) intended to measure trainee cognitive development by the level of integration and differentiation of his/her hypotheses. Although still in an exploratory stage this instrument could represent an important tool for counselors' cognitive training.

A second emphasis of the cognitive training should be on the translation of conceptualisations into intentions for immediate actions and long term objectives. Hill and colleagues research with the List of Intentions, supports the conclusion that: (1) intentions are vital factors in the mediation between of conceptualisations and responses; and (2) there is a correlation between intentions and verbal responses (e.g. Hill & O'Grady, 1985). Therefore, the list of intentions introduced by Clara Hill could be useful in helping counselors in the formulation of objectives after their conceptualisations and before their verbal responses.

Still within the cognitive framework, a third dimension of the training should be focused on the identification and confrontation of trainees irrational beliefs and attitudes regarding the counseling process (*cf.* Schmidt, 1979). According to Schmidt (1979) a major focus of training and supervision should be on the beliefs supervisees bring to therapy. Emotions frequently experienced by beginning counselors may result from self-statements such as "*The client should do what I say*"; "*The client should be more appreciative of me*"; "*How awful I am to feel bored by this person*". The trainer should pay attention to these unstated beliefs, helping the student in their identification and confrontation.

Ivey, Ivey & Simek-Downing (1987) have recently proposed a cognitive-behavioral integration in counseling and therapy training. Trainees are first equipped with the basic skills of counseling and psychotherapy such as microskills, the five-stage decisional structure of the interview, assessment techniques, and

individual and cultural empathy. This is followed by introduction to major theories of counseling and psychotherapy. But the description of theory is not just cognitive. Specific directions (behavioral intentionality) for actually conducting and engaging in 13 different theoretical approaches are made. Praxis demands that we now integrate cognitive theory into practice. The holistic conceptions of the multilevel model of intentionality demand a more complete and complex approach than the 'either behavior or cognitive' mode of thinking. Both appear necessary for complete development of our trainees' intentionality.

Thus, a more comprehensive view of cognitive intentionality leads us to: (1) conceptualise our strategies more fully; (2) formulate our intentions specifically; and (3) challenge 'irrational' beliefs and attitudes. But all of these ideas or cognitions need to be integrated in praxis through combination with behavioral frameworks of training. Yet, even this model remains incomplete. Let us now turn to unconscious dimensions of training and practice.

### *Unconscious Intentionality*

The unconscious has tended to be a forbidden area of counselor training since the time of Parsons and the Minnesota group. Following our trait and factor beginnings in Boston and the midwest, we joined the 'Rogerian revolution'. This was followed by behavioral skills training and an exploration of behavioral psychology. More recently, we have been extending our thinking into cognitions. It now seems possible that we are about to recycle to early beginnings with the examination of the unconscious. But this is a return with a new understanding, an awareness that behavior and cognitive intentionality must be integrated with the unconscious.

Ivey and Kagan initiated a dialogue between behavioral and unconscious in training workshops in the late 1970's. The workshop model balanced training in basic skills of microcounseling which were then superimposed with instruction in *Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR)*. It was found that participants seem to learn more about both IPR and microcounseling in this joint effort, but missing the time were important cognitions which would form the rationale for the joining.

An unconscious thought, of course, is a cognition, but it is a cognition of which we are presently unaware. A primary goal of training, often neglected in our current programs is that of helping trainees focus attention on their unconscious and emotional processes. This process of making the unconscious conscious and conceptualised through the multilevel model of intentionality can result in a multilevel framework of cognitive understanding and behavioral action for the trainee and the counselor education program.

The Affect Simulation Vignettes developed by Kagan (1975a, 1975b) are probably one of the best instruments currently available for conducting training at this level. These vignettes were produced by Norman Kagan to "help students overcome their resistances to the often intense intimate communication that the use of interpersonal skills can encourage" (Kagan, 1984, p. 231).

The Affect Simulation Vignettes is a film series consisting of 70 short strips. In each vignette the actor speaks directly to the trainee. Students are encouraged, in

Kagan's model, to put themselves in the position of the helper, and to share their reactions toward the simulated client.

In order to help trainees deal with their reactions and unconscious processes several strategies can be used. For example, Martin (1985) has recently developed a graphing technique to analyse the associative network memory structure of clients. Martin asks his subjects to free associate on certain key words. Each of these associations is then written on a separate gummed label. Next subjects are instructed to organise the labels in a board, mirroring the way they relate in their minds. Although still new, we have found this strategy very useful in exploring and analysing trainees reactions to Kagan's vignettes.

Unconscious and cognitive dimensions in behavioral training can also be explored. For example, in viewing microcounseling skill practice sessions, trainees can first examine skill acquisition (behavioral intentionality). Then in a second discussion, they can examine their inner cognitions, intentions and plans, and 'irrational' beliefs and fears. Thirdly, through the inquiry process of IPR, it is possible to discover and examine unconscious processes underlying both behavior and cognition.

The process above may be reversed of course. It has been found helpful to start advanced trainees with IPR practice sessions, uncover cognitive and unconscious dimensions, and then move them to behavioral intentionality through further skills training. Although skills training is often associated with beginning therapists and counselors, the uncovering of unconscious processes in experienced therapists leads to the need to practice skills in a new context of conscious, cognitive understanding.

Thus, it is suggested that unconscious processes, those beyond our present awareness, must become increasingly important in our counseling training programs. Yet, what has been presented here is not a return to Freud, but rather a return to the unconscious with a behavioral and cognitive awareness of our own processes. The multilevel intentionality model suggest that counseling training and practice are indeed holistic. To train and educate, we must separate out key components, but it is now important that we help those whom we would serve understand and experience the dialectic interaction and inter-relationship among the many complex dimensions of the counseling process.

## **Conclusion**

This article has discussed some of the major underlying assumptions of the Multilevel Conception of Intentionality recently presented by Goncalves (1986) as a useful paradigm for conceptualising the behavioral, cognitive, and unconscious dimensions of the counseling process. Based on this model, several suggestions were proposed for counseling training. Three dimensions were addressed as central to any training program:

- (1) behavioral intentionality—to promote the acquisition of counseling skills and specific therapeutic techniques.
- (2) cognitive intentionality—to provide awareness and development of

cognitions about the client (i.e. conceptualisations, hypotheses generation, establishment of intentions) and disputation of irrational beliefs;

(3) unconscious intentionality—to make trainees aware of the personal, unconscious, emotional, and countertransference processes in the counseling relationship.

As previously mentioned, Gelso & Carter (1985) refer to the necessity of taking into consideration the real and unreal aspects of the counseling relationship. This article carries the distinction a step further presenting a new conceptual framework connecting the behavioral, the cognitive, and the unconscious dimensions of the counseling process constructively to bridge the gap between philosophies of realism, idealism, and surrealism.

Counseling is a unified activity. Behavioral approaches to training have helped us understand and identify what counseling is and how it works. But, the cognitive approaches increasingly demonstrate that mediational processes are important as well. Further, as we understand cognitions more fully, we begin to appreciate the importance of the unconscious. But with each expanding recognition, what has been done before needs not be lost. Rather, we would suggest that a holistic counselor education program is necessary. This would incorporate aspects of behavioral, cognitive, and unconscious models of training thus permitting a gradual unfolding awareness of the wholeness of relationships which are fundamental to counseling and therapy.

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