

# PREFACE

**I**t would be difficult to marshal the staying power to complete a text like this one without the conviction that one had something new to say. This book has been a long time coming—many years in gestation and a few in the birthing phase, too. It’s precisely because I believed I had something urgently worth sharing that I was able to keep at the project despite many other duties, obligations, and distractions. But I’d like to be clear that I don’t see this book as a compilation of my ideas; the something new that I have taken great pleasure in articulating derives from the work of countless theorists and practitioners I have had the privilege of encountering over the past two decades.

I won’t fill this early preview of what lies ahead with a detailed account of what those novel ideas and practices are—there is plenty of space ahead for that—but let me provide you with a brief glimpse. The idea for the book sprung from my noticing that none of the counseling skills textbooks I was acquainted with through my role as a counselor educator paid sufficient tribute to the dazzling array of innovative approaches to counseling and therapy I was familiar with through my role as a counseling practitioner keeping up with contemporary work in the field. I noticed the textbooks were still informed by a highly individualistic view of people, whereas so many forward-looking practitioners had moved well beyond that perspective.

As you will see in the pages ahead, that single shift to a view of person-in-context sets off a domino effect of other important shifts that distinguish this book in many ways from traditional counseling texts. For starters, counseling is unveiled as a cultural practice, and clients are seen as cultural beings. That move away from individualism precipitates a lessening of the focus on individual pathology because it opens up a view of people’s taking on the diverse contextual challenges of their lives in a variety of resourceful ways. Counseling comes to be seen less as an exercise in correcting dysfunction or promoting personal growth

and more as a cross-cultural collaboration capitalizing on people's unique knowledges and competencies.

The book is divided into sections that roughly parallel phases of the work, with the first section devoted to preparation for practice. Chapter 1 provides a tour of some of the key new ideas I referred to above; it may be worth returning to from time to time as the issues highlighted there become foregrounded through the practices outlined in later chapters. This first chapter introduces one of two counselors, Maria, whose therapeutic conversations will be featured in transcript form throughout the text. Maria is represented in each of the ongoing scenarios—as both a counselor to Jorge and a client of Daniel. She is included in both roles as a reminder that like clients, counselors face ongoing challenges themselves that hover in the background of the work they do.

The second section of the book is devoted to constructing a foundation of collaboration. Chapter 3, on receiving and listening, emphasizes the critical importance of skills that are less overt but fundamental to creating a safe and receptive context for sharing. The fourth chapter examines the role of the therapeutic relationship, which has been repeatedly shown to play a crucial role in effective helping.

Section 3 of the book takes on the task of mapping the client's experience, reminding readers to be mindful of cultural diversity and to approach each new client with an attitude of open-minded curiosity. Achieving shared understanding is a subtle art that includes both receptive and expressive skills. The section is divided by these, starting with skills for reading experience, followed by skills for conveying that reading back to clients to coordinate meaning making.

The fourth section of the book focuses on assessment. This is where some of the more striking divergences from some other texts appear. Whereas assessment typically emphasizes a scoping out of personal deficit, these chapters provide ideas for separating persons from the challenges they face, a practice that diminishes the focus on pathology and opens space for more optimistic and productive conversations. Chapter 7, about defining problems and preferences, reminds readers that assessment should never lose sight of what people are striving for because clients' hopes and aspirations are the compass for the work. The following two chapters expand on assessment practices that situate challenges in context and keep a view of client competencies alongside an account of what is troubling them.

The book's final section, about promoting change, moves into the more proactive task of joining persons in making shifts in the ways they act, think, feel, and make meaning of their lives. The section begins with the topic of collaborative influence, an orientation to practice that facilitates change while keeping the client at the center of the process. The chapters to follow in this section offer a diverse range of practices for joining clients in making changes in particular areas. The chapters portray possibilities for creatively linking practices associated with dominant contemporary models of counseling and

psychotherapy. Chapter 14, “Working With Stories,” is particularly integrative because it demonstrates opportunities for bringing together gains made in the various domains of living, making meaning of changes, and reflecting on what they say about clients’ values, skills, and identity. The book’s final chapter, “Endings and Beginnings,” emphasizes that the termination of work with a counselor is the beginning of a new era of living for clients—cause for both thoughtful reflection as well as acknowledgment and celebration.

As the book unfolds, you will notice some other features worthy of mention. The chapters include boxes designated as “Student Voices”—passages written by graduate students in the thick of their counselor training. These will give readers cause for reflection as they witness accounts of counselors’ experience both resonant with, and different from, their own. The chapters are also interspersed with further opportunities for contemplation: watch for the gray boxes that invite reflection on personal experiences tied to the material at hand. The text is also broken up at times with boxes focusing in on particular elements and presented in the form of vignettes, in-depth explanations of key concepts, tables and charts, and so on. Each chapter closes with a pair of other features: sets of questions for discussion, and activities for bringing an experiential element to the learning.

Writing this book has been a rewarding experience for me, consolidating my respect for the infinite diversity and resourcefulness of the people I encounter as a practitioner. I hope it serves to invigorate your own practice.