A Model for using Empathy in Counselor Education

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Dimensions of Empathic Therapy

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Teaching student counselors to be empathic and understand the purpose of empathy in the counseling process is both the responsibility and challenge of every counselor education program. Empathy is the heart and the art of counseling. How does one counselor education program face the challenge of teaching empathy? Three counselor educators, Drs. Carol Kaffenberger, Diana Gibb, and Sally Murphy, from George Mason University's Graduate School of Education, describe their perspectives on teaching and using empathy in their counselor education program.

Carol Kaffenberger—First Steps in Using Empathy

Teaching empathy to first semester counseling students can be a painful and difficult task. Unlike writing a lesson plan or learning to use technology, there are few clear guidelines or tried and true methods that assure assimilation of empathic skills as an outcome. Jeffrey Kottler (2000) says that it "is one of the easiest skills to learn and yet is one of the hardest to master" (p. 71). Difficult as it may be, it is also our most important goal.

Empathy 101

For the last 5 years I have had the privilege and responsibility of teaching the *Introduction to Counseling Theories* course at George Mason University.

The goals of this class are twofold. The first goal is to teach the historical and foundational theories of counseling: psychoanalytic, Adlerian, person- centered, existential, and Gestalt. The second goal is to teach basic counseling skills. Because it is one of the first classes student counselors take, typically they have no previous knowledge of the field of counseling or basic helping skills. These beginning students bring with them a desire to help others, yet they have very little awareness of how to accomplish this. Another reality is that for a significant number of our students this is their first graduate level class since

completing college. For some, this means being in a classroom for the first time in years. They are eager to learn, but very unsure of themselves.

Given the purpose of the course and the needs of the students, I have developed a class that requires they learn a significant amount of theoretical information and challenges them to learn and practice skills that are very unfamiliar to them. In order to meet these goals, I believe that the students must be provided with a safe environment in which they can grow and learn.

Within the first 20 minutes of the first class, we begin talking about counseling skills. I ask the students to fill out an index card and write four things about themselves: their proudest accomplishment, what they want to get out of the class, how they have fun, and what is counseling. After they have completed their cards I talk about attending skills: body language, proximity, culturally appropriate eye contact, facial gestures, and minimal encouragers. I randomly put students in triads that will become their working groups for the next 15 weeks. I ask them to share the information on their index card with others in the triad. I ask them to use appropriate attending skills, notice the attending skills that the others in their triad use, and to be prepared to comment about them to the rest of the class. This activity accomplishes two things. First, the students begin to develop the trust they will need in order to practice the unfamiliar skills that will be taught in the weeks to come. Second, they have just learned the first and most basic set of counseling skills that will set the stage for the skills to come. After they have completed this task we come back to a circle and I have each member of the triad introduce another member of the triad, thus demonstrating the importance of listening skills. Students do not realize it, but they have just had their first lesson in empathy. As students hear themselves being introduced to the rest of the class, it is apparent that they like having their stories told, and appreciate the positive words that they hear. The triad relationships that are formed on that first night become the cornerstone of the skill building that will occur over the next fifteen weeks.

This class is a skills class as well as a personal growth opportunity. I tell them from the first day that the skills they will learn will make them more effective employees, students, friends, and family members, as well as prepare them to be counselors. As students learn to use empathy, and learn counseling skills, they must also get in touch with their own affective responses. Personal growth is the outcome.

Another trust building routine I have built into the class structure is a weekly check-in or icebreaker. I choose an activity consistent with the theory that is being taught that night. For example, when I am teaching existential theories I have students respond using a weather word that reflects how they are feeling at that exact moment. I listen closely to hear students who are feeling vulnerable, overwhelmed, strong, or confident as they use terms like "stormy," "chance of showers," " partly cloudy," or "sunny." Students get in touch with their own feelings and I get information about how they are doing and what is going on in their lives that may impact our class. In addition, these check-ins allow me to identify which students I can use for role-plays, students that need to hang back a bit, and students that are feeling enthusiastic and ready to participate. I literally take the "temperature" of our class with this activity.

These strategies, forming triads, and checking in with students, are essential to creating the atmosphere required to be empathic and to teach empathy. As students begin to get in touch with their own responses, practice accurate listening skills and feel accepted, the stage has been set for learning the skills of empathy.

During the third class meeting, I begin formally teaching empathy. We begin with the formula: "You are feeling _____ (key emotion), because _____ (key experience and/or behaviors that are causing the emotion)" (Egan, 1998, p. 84). We practice this as a class, in triads, on tape, and in writing exercises. As rigid as the formula approach is, I emphasize that the purpose of the formula is to assure that they are reflecting both the *feeling* and the *reason* for the feeling. These first few lessons in empathy are painful, as these skills are very unfamiliar. Some students worry about sounding like a parrot. Each student struggles to find the word to reflect the feeling they hear. This is very challenging since they often confuse behavioral vocabulary with affective vocabulary.

At this stage in the process I do a lot of role modeling. Sometimes I play both counselor and client, doing a quick exchange. Other times I ask for a volunteer client. I have students listen for the impact and effect of empathy on the client. We talk about the benefits of empathy and what empathy feels like when experienced.

One of the theories taught in this class is Carl Rogers's person-centered therapy (Corey, 2001). I

usually present this theory during the first few weeks of class when the beginning level skills are taught. I believe the Rogerian therapeutic conditions capture the heart of empathy: unconditional positive regard, congruence, and accurate empathic understanding. Rogers's belief, that simply listening and being fully present with the client, creates the conditions for individual therapeutic change. Sometimes I have the students watch the classic video of Rogers working with a client. Students observe how Rogers helps the client through the use of accurate listening and genuine concern, without giving advice or providing solutions.

So far I have told you how I *teach* empathy. But I believe it is equally important to talk about how I *use* empathy to teach. I have already mentioned how I use exercises in the beginning of each class to check in with students. I strive each semester to create an environment where it is safe to ask questions, and share feelings. I model responses to student check-ins that reflect how they are doing. I listen to their questions to process how the class is going for them and to figure out what is missing. I have them talk about what they need. I pride myself on being available to students, both in and out of class, to explore their reactions to the process of counseling.

One student interaction is a reminder to me of how much I need to use empathy in order to be an effective instructor. Several semesters ago a young woman enrolled in my class as an extended studies student. It is not unusual for our introduction to counseling theories class to have several extended studies students. Typically these students are thinking about pursuing a counseling career, or recognize a need to increase their own helping skills. This young woman was attracted to the class because she wanted to learn about theories. From the beginning it was clear that she was not only uncomfortable with the skills component of the class, but that she was unhappy with how the class was being conducted. She did not want to work in triads and she did not want to learn or practice counseling skills. During class she would draw, put her head down on her desk, and when she did contribute to the class discussion it would be to make a critical comment. She was single-handedly affecting the climate in the class. I decided rather than have her work in a triad I would be her partner. We practiced skills, listened to tapes, and shared feedback. I consciously listened and practiced the empathic skills I was teaching rather than delivering a lecture on classroom behavior. Slowly I began to see this student, not as a disruptive component of my class, but as a unique individual who was bringing her own perspective to the counseling process. Once I stopped being the professor, the expert, and met her person to person, both of

us were able to hear what the other had to say and express our own thoughts and feelings. Slowly over a few weeks our work together in these sessions paid off in improved class participation and willingness to engage in class activities. I do not believe this young woman has pursued a career in counseling but I do believe that she learned some skills that are making her more successful in whatever she is currently doing. I also believe I created the opportunity for this experience through my use of *empathy*.

I have other similar stories. An African-American male counselor, working in the penal system for many years, struggled to learn the skills involved in empathy. Accurately naming feelings and reflecting content were foreign to him in his work setting where he had developed a confrontational and challenging style of counseling. He and I worked hard to understand each other. I needed to hear about his counseling strategies and understand his clientele and counseling purposes; at the same time, he had to trust my goals for him and the feedback I offered. I believe we both grew and benefited from our willingness to be open with one another.

I think my success in teaching the introduction to counseling course has been my ability to provide a safe environment for students, to use empathy with students in order to hear where they are, and what they need in order to learn and practice these new skills. I have tried in my practice to be a role model in the use of empathy.

Using Empathy in Teaching Group Counseling Skills

Another class I teach, in which empathy is critically important, is the course in group counseling. Students typically take this group counseling course midway through their program. The purpose of the group class is to teach the theory and skills of group counseling. Once again students are asked to learn and practice skills that may be unfamiliar to them and in order to do so need to be in a safe environment. Empathy is used to establish such an environment. Empathy is not so much a specific skill taught in group process as it is the clay that allows groups to form.

In the first stage of group development the leader provides the structure that allows group cohesiveness to begin (Gladding, 1999). In the second stage, the transition stage, group norms begin to develop. Norms are the "behaviors and feelings expressed by group members toward each other" (Gladding, 1999, p. 142). Empathy plays a particularly significant role during this stage. If the group is

to develop cohesiveness and move to the working stage, then members need to be able to listen accurately, and respond empathically. Yalom (1995) believes the role of the group leader is to establish an attitude "of concern, acceptance, genuineness, empathy" (p. 106) and that nothing is more important. Therefore, in teaching group counseling the instructor is challenged to demonstrate and role-model group leadership skills as well as teach those skills.

In a way, the class becomes a group as I move in and out of teaching and demonstrating group counseling skills. The class works best when there are ten to twelve students, which allows me to conduct the class as a group. What starts at the beginning of the course as a group led by me, ends up as a group in which students are taking responsibility for maintaining process, as well as task accomplishments.

In addition to the class, students participate in a separate group lab run by a trained group leader. The material and process of the lab is a completely separate experience for the students from the class experience, and the group leaders and I work to keep the lab a confidential and safe experience. Each semester I notice how the group cohesiveness develops as their group lab experience reaps benefits in the class portion of the course.

One semester I was particularly struck by the growing level of empathy shown by class members towards one another. It was evident to me that the group was developing and was at an effective working stage by mid-semester. I saw the class allow expressions of anger, sadness, and frustration, and reframe negatively expressed statements. This class demonstrated an advanced level of empathy when they gave permission for one class member to miss class for 3 weeks due to a personal emergency, and then welcomed her back with open arms. By the end of this particular group counseling class, I felt more like a *parent* than an instructor. Like a *parent*, I was needed to provide information regularly, and encouragement when necessary, but was not a member of the group. I was proud of this class as I watched them conduct their own closure. They predicted the feelings that leaving the group would produce and empathically responded to the tearful expressions of pride in their accomplishments and sadness in having to say goodbye.

Diana Gibb—Practicing Empathic Skills

Few educational programs demand the soul baring, personal examination required by programs preparing helping professionals. We ask them not only to acquire knowledge, but also to demonstrate a sophisticated level of interpersonal skill while dealing with individuals who are often not at their best. While students come to us eager to be transformed into society's helpers, few of them anticipate the challenges they will face. Our empathic understanding of this journey and its difficulties and rewards allows us to be better facilitators of the process.

Using Empathy in an Advanced Counseling Skills Course

Just because students have survived their beginning level course and can lay claim to a considerable number of credit hours does not decrease their need for empathic instruction particularly in George Mason University's *Career and Educational Counseling* course. The format of this course is unique: one-half of the semester is devoted to studying career theories, instruments and strategies, and the second half is comprised of a laboratory with "real" paying clients. As students are counseling their clients, students, teaching assistants, and fellow students are observing them through one-way mirrors. These observers are also listening on headphones and making written comments about the student counselor's performance. Post-counseling processing sessions are led by teaching assistants.

The presence of experienced professionals who serve as teaching assistants is another testimony to the need for empathy at all stages of our careers as counselors. Although the teaching assistants have master's degrees in counseling, and at least 2 years of experience, they often do not necessarily have supervisory experience. This presents an interesting parallel process with students who are concerned about their counseling skills and teaching assistants who are concerned about their supervisory skills. As the instructor, I find that empathizing with the teaching assistants about their concerns around their supervisory skills is an important part of helping them develop those skills and assist the student counselors. Even these experienced counselors need a supportive atmosphere so they can share their concerns about their role. Again, the continuity of empathy among and between all participants in this experience—instructor, teaching assistants, student counselors and clients—is critical to effective counseling and learning.

The Reality of Live Supervision

No experience in a counseling program shakes students to the core like the reality of live supervision. There is nowhere to hide and no way to put a "spin" on what happens. It is the ultimate, in educational terms, of being who you are and dealing with the consequences. To describe this experience as painful is an understatement. To grow and learn from it is a challenge.

The hardest part of their education for counseling students is not learning theoretical material or the intricacies of assessment instruments. It is taking all of that knowledge and putting it into action. It is a humbling experience for students who write exemplary papers and eloquently express ideas to find that they are tongue-tied when faced with a client who is in tears. It is downright embarrassing to find that a tape of a session includes more closed questions than an IRS form.

It's pretty difficult to learn from an experience when you are "stuck" in the discomfort of embarrassment, loss of pride, confusion, and even hopelessness. Mired in the effect of an imperfect performance, students find it difficult to switch to the more cognitive approach of being analytical and identifying what might be a more effective intervention. It can be even more difficult to put themselves in the frame of mind to engage in the next session. Like clients, they are so focused on their own affective experience, that there is no point in trying to move on until it is addressed. Empathy becomes the catalyst that turns a painful affective experience into one of growth. Below are two examples from my personal experience that I believe illustrate this perspective.

Take the case of Martha. Martha was a middle-aged woman who had raised three children and worked full-time to put her husband through graduate school. In addition to the maturity gained through these experiences, Martha had excellent verbal skills and usually received As on her well-researched and organized papers. But when Martha began explaining the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, she found that she didn't know the instrument's scales well enough to make them meaningful to her client. She couldn't answer his questions and found herself flustered and embarrassed in the session. By the time she entered the processing room she was near tears. The following conversation ensued.

Instructor: Martha, you seem pretty upset.

Martha: I am so disappointed. I prepared so much, but I just couldn't answer his questions.

Instructor: It sounds like you're feeling disappointed because you found some of his questions hard to answer.

Martha: Yes. He must think I'm a total idiot.

Instructor: So you're also worried that your client will think less of you because you don't have all the answers.

As our conversation continued, I discovered that what had really flustered Martha in her session was that she felt tremendous pressure to be an authority. Accustomed to being thoroughly competent, she had no idea how to react when she didn't have an answer. As an instructor, I probably could have guessed what had happened and provided a didactic lecture about counselors not needing to have all of the answers. But such an approach would have ignored Martha's feelings and the pain she felt at learning this firsthand. It also would have missed the opportunity to strengthen my bond with Martha, and allow her to explore alternative ways of handling this situation. The next time Martha finds herself in a counseling situation where she doesn't have the answer, I feel confident that she will handle it more effectively, both emotionally and cognitively.

Martha's story helps to illustrate my belief that the use of empathy in counselor training allows our students to engage in helpful self-examination, to learn from painful experiences, and realize that we respect them as learners even when they don't perform perfectly. It helps to keep the priorities straight—that, within the bounds of ethical behavior, the learning is more important than the actual performance. Hopefully, Martha had also learned an important lesson for all counselors: how to use supervision to grow professionally.

Using Empathy Outside the Classroom

The case of another counseling student, James, illustrates an additional way in which empathy contributed to personal and professional growth. James, my advisee, struggled through, but passed, practicum. When he got to his internship placement, he found that the challenges of his placement were overwhelming. James came in to discuss his situation.

James: I am having such a hard time at this site.

Instructor: You seem really worried.

James: I am. I really don't think that I have the skills to do what they expect.

Instructor: Sounds like you're under a lot of pressure to do things that you don't feel ready to do.

It would have been within my role as advisor to begin asking a lot of questions about what James was being asked to do and exactly what he felt he could not do. Instead, I chose to empathize with what it must feel like to be at the end of your program and feel like you couldn't live up to expectations. I was glad that I chose that route, because I think that James felt understood and supported enough to make a wise decision for himself. He decided that the demands of his family at that point were so great that he just couldn't put the necessary time into preparing for the activities of his site. He withdrew from internship that semester, and reenrolled at a later date.

As an instructor, empathy has a lot to do with not deciding that we always know what is best for our students and what their issues are. While I might have guessed accurately in Martha's case, I would have never known about James's family situation if I had not empathized and supported him as he explored the real reasons for his difficulties. It's very easy, as the professor, to make assumptions and decisions about our students' academic needs. I have found it to be more productive to empathize with their feelings of embarrassment, confusion and disappointment, and build a relationship conducive to identifying real issues and exploring options.

Just as we teach our students to use empathy to build relationships with their clients, I believe that we are wise to use it to build relationships with our students. While not a panacea, it is the best tool I have found for creating a climate where students can learn from their mistakes, retain their self-respect, and make good academic and personal choices.

Sally Murphy—Reflective Practice

I have been in education all my life—as a student, a teacher, a school counselor, working on curriculum development, and now as a counselor educator in a university. And because of my many experiences and varied career paths, I know and value the role of the counselor and the incredible impact a counselor makes as a mental health professional. For the past 6 years, I have had the privilege of working in the Graduate School of Education at George Mason University. I am continuously aware of the enormous responsibility I have helping to advise and train student counselors who will one day affect change and impact the lives of people in school communities, in higher education, and in agency and

community settings.

Empathy is evident and modeled in all aspects of my work: advisement, teaching, program development, and daily interactions with staff and faculty within the university. It is a fundamental counseling skill.

Advisement

In my role as advisor, empathy and active listening are probably the two counseling skills I use most. Students come to me to help them plan their program, asking what courses they should take and in what sequence to take them. If it was just a matter of answering everyone in the same way, I could reference a website to direct their plans. But life is still happening, regardless of whether or not someone is in graduate school. My job is to listen and help students weigh certain priorities in their lives in order to make informed decisions about their program.

Graduate school is a rigorous experience; one that takes commitment and focus. Balancing the demanding work of graduate school with weddings, marriages, divorces, births, deaths, and everything in between is no easy feat. I remember one student who came to talk to me about planning her program. Though we met early in the fall, throughout the conversation I noticed a distinct anxiety about the timing of final exams for the spring semester. She finally told me her story. She said she knew she would do well in the classes but had a concern about taking her exams because they were scheduled for the week right before her wedding. The young woman was radiant as she told her story. Although she wanted to finish graduate school, she did not want to wait until after graduation to get married.

The woman in my office that day was a young professional who made a decision to go back to graduate school to get a master's degree in counseling. She had worked with children in a variety of jobs and knew she wanted to continue working with them in a school environment as a professional school counselor. Her commitment to her ultimate goal sounded both sincere and steadfast. But she was trying to do it all without missing a beat! As a counselor and as a woman, I empathized with her situation. Empathy, a basic human relations skill, is the ability to try and feel what the other person is feeling about a specific issue or situation. It is having compassion for the other person. Barbara Lewis (1998) compares it to being on a hilltop and shouting down into the cavern. The echo that comes back is not as loud as your

own voice but is still reflective of what you said and how you said it. My job, that day, was to help the student understand the enormity of what she was trying to do and help her make decisions based on achieving a balance in her life. I needed to use empathy to deepen her understanding of the problems and solutions. "Doing it all" is not the same as "doing it well." We spent a considerable amount of time trying to evaluate the impact certain decisions would have for her short-and long-term goals. When we were finished, she thanked me and said she was grateful that I understood her whole situation, and that I didn't see her just as a student, but rather, someone who had life issues to consider. That's what being an empathic counselor is all about—trying to understand the total person.

Teaching

I teach courses that allow me to work with students at the beginning, middle, and at the end of their counselor education training in the master's program. I not only enjoy seeing the growth each student makes at different stages within the program, but I also want to check the rate and type of growth that is occurring.

I meet many of the students in the school counseling track early in their program when they take *Principles and Practices of School Counseling* at the elementary and secondary school levels. These courses provide a real hands- on experience of what it is really like to be a professional school counselor. In order to help them become aware of the current issues that school counselors deal with on a daily basis, I cover a variety of topical issues, such as special education, special populations, child protective services, ethical and legal issues, youth violence, conflict resolution and peer mediation, character education, and issues of death and loss. Looking at this list, it should be relatively easy for the reader to imagine why I stress the importance of empathy as a basic skill to my students and why it is imperative for me to practice and model it, as well.

For example, when I do the lesson on issues of loss, I am very aware of the emotional feelings that might surface within the class. Although the purpose of the class is for students to understand the many levels of loss that school children experience, another key focus for me, is to be aware of how, or if, my students have done any personal work resolving their own issues of loss. So, as we go through the various activities, I watch for individual reactions to the role-plays, the discussions, and the interactions

among the students. I listen and watch for the ways my students struggle with personal losses. I am not merely providing information on a subject or just answering questions. I am in tuned with my students and consciously aware of the emotional triggers the specific topics may touch.

The next time I teach students is midway through their program when they take *Advanced Theories and Techniques of Counseling.* This class is specifically designed to build on the skills learned in the introductory theories class that Dr. Carol Kaffenberger teaches. We work very hard to make sure our two classes are linked. We both value and understand the importance of a solid foundation; therefore we have consciously developed a seamless transition from her course to mine. They know that in each of our classes, we will include a focus on theory and will provide an intentional period for practicing skills. Students know that the basic triad model will be used in both Dr. Kaffenberger's introduction to theories course and my advanced counseling theories course.

During the skills component of each class, I assign the students a specific role to play: counselor, client, and observer. By the end of the semester, they will have had many opportunities to practice their skills in all three roles. I bring the students to the counseling lab. The environment sets the tone for the serious nature of individual counseling. It is their first experience in a small counseling room and being observed through a one-way mirror by their classmates and the instructor. I understand they are nervous about the experience and empathize with what they are feeling.

It is not surprising that the role of "observer" is frequently more difficult than being the "counselor." One of the responsibilities of the observer is to give feedback to the counselor, noting the persons strengths and areas for growth. Giving constructive feedback to one's peers is not always an easy task. During one recent debriefing session, the "observer" was having difficulty giving feedback. The role-play had been a rather difficult one, and the "counselor" had struggled through much of the session. The "counselor" finally said, "I totally understand why you're having a hard time telling me anything. I was floundering and totally missed key issues that the client was giving me. You don't want to hurt my feelings. It's okay. I've been in your seat and I know what it feels like to have to give negative feedback. I totally understand what you're going through having to tell me all this."

In that instance, the student's prior experience as an observer allowed her to empathize with her

classmate. But one does not always have to experience a situation in order to empathically respond to a client. To empathize with a client is to put yourself in that client's shoes. It does not mean that the counselor needs to have experienced the situation, as well. And when the counselor has experienced a situation similar to what the client is experiencing it still does not mean that the counselor will truly grasp the emotional level the client is experiencing. Many of my students, when engaging in a role-play exercise, respond with, "I understand what you are going through." They label that as "empathy." I stress they should qualify the intervention, " I *think* I understand what you are experiencing. . . . you seem to be. . ."

Sometimes students confuse empathy with "sympathy." They forget that while sympathy helps one to express compassion, it is not a counseling skill; it is not part of an intentional intervention process. Empathizing with a person is different than feeling sorry for that person. That is not to say that we cannot feel compassion for someone, it just means that we do not use sympathy as a counseling tool for intervention.

Clinical Field Experiences

By the time students get to the final phase of their program, they have had many courses in theory and skills training. It is now time to really merge the two and practice in the real world. Although they are still very much under the direct supervision of the on-site supervisors and the university instructors, student counselors soon understand the enormity of their work as they meet with clients on a daily basis. Regardless of their counseling setting (PreK-12 schools, agency and community clinics, or higher education counseling offices), our students must reach into their own skills box and take the appropriate intervention tool needed to help them work with their clients. It is an awesome responsibility, and one that our students take seriously.

For example, up until this point in their training, students in the PreK-12 school counseling track, even if they are teachers, do not fully understand the complex issues that children face on a daily basis. Working on-site and counseling clients on real-life issues is both exhilarating and terrifying. As one of the university supervisors, I make sure my students have plenty of time to process their experiences during our weekly group meetings. I help them talk about the situations they have experienced at their sites. I

listen to accurately assess if what they are recounting is the same perception as what the site supervisors have identified. Part of the processing model is to encourage the students to help each other. There is no need to provide role-play scenarios for this class. These students are dealing with real-life situations and are learning firsthand how important it is to consult with colleagues to effectively work with clients. I am there to listen to their experiences, supervise the feedback they give each other, and empathically respond after they have shared an intense situation.

Students are now dealing with issues, which up until this point have only been textbook discussions. On a weekly basis, I hear them talk about their clients who, for example, have considered suicide, been physical or emotionally abused, or have been put into a rehab center for drug addiction. It is my job to assess the students' skill levels and make a judgment as to their readiness level for graduation.

Though the practicum and internship classes are smaller in number, the intensity and level of student-teacher contact is at its highest level within the entire program. Not only must I know the specifics of their counseling techniques, I need to know how the students are handling the entire experience. Therefore, all practicum and internship students are required to e-mail the instructors, at least once a week, when there are no scheduled classes, due to site visits. The purpose of this requirement is to provide the student and the instructor a vehicle in which to continue the reflective process and dialog. The content of the message is a brief update of the weekly clinical field experience, similar to a journal entry. Their log of hours will reflect "what" they are doing. I want to know "how" they are doing! Again, the importance of empathically listening to my students is a critical focus. It is one of the most important counseling skills I have had to integrate into my personal and professional life.

CONCLUSION

As we reflect on the use of empathy in our program it occurs to us that it may be the cornerstone of the skills we hope to impart to students. While there are many important skills, theories, and ideas taught in our graduate program, none is as central to all we do. What we have learned is that empathy is a two-way street. Students must have empathic experiences in order to be empathic. If they are to *be* empathic with others, they must believe that others have been empathic with them. We hope we are providing the climate that allows this to happen.

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