

Promoting Cognitive Complexity in Counselor Education: Constructivist and Phenomenological Practices

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The authors examine how the cognitive complexity domains of differentiation and integration are uniquely cultivated by constructivist and phenomenological teaching practices, respectively. Implications are explored in terms of reflective practices and proposed phenomenological activities that support concept deconstruction and empathy development as a means to grow integrative complexity.

Keywords: pedagogy, constructivism, phenomenology, cognitive development, training methods

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The focus on developmental perspectives in counseling and counselor education has led researchers to design various pedagogical and supervisory practices that enhance cognitive development (Glosoff, Durham, & Whittaker, 2012; Owen & Lindley, 2010; Tangen, 2017; Welfare & Borders, 2010). In particular, the notion of *cognitive complexity* as “the ability to absorb, integrate, and make use of multiple perspectives” (Granello, 2010, p. 92) has been closely examined in recent decades as a means to promote counselor development (Castillo, 2018; Little, Packman, Smaby, & Maddux, 2005; Owen & Lindley, 2010). Cognitive complexity is associated with increases in self-awareness, autonomy, empathy, confidence, and tolerance for ambiguity as well as decreases in self-focus and prejudice (Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002; Granello, 2010; Ridley, Mollen, & Kelly, 2011). A counselor’s level of cognitive complexity appears to represent a reliable

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gauge of skill development (Castillo, 2018; Duys & Hedstrom, 2000) as well as clinical and supervisory effectiveness (Skovholt & Jennings, 2017).

In the counseling literature, cognitive complexity is often conceptualized using Perry's (1970) dualistic, multiplistic, and relativistic cognitive development categories (Granello, 2010). The transition from dualistic thinking (i.e., belief in absolute knowledge) to multiplistic thinking (i.e., embracing uncertainty) is, arguably, an established training priority of constructivist methods that are designed to build tolerance for ambiguity (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Wilkinson & Hanna, 2016). The shift from multiplistic thinking to relativistic thinking (i.e., knowledge as contextual), on the other hand, is regarded as a developmental transition that requires over 10 years of professional experience (Granello, 2010; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992). Although it likely does take years for counselors to "develop deeper, more meaningful mental representations of their clients' presenting concerns" (Jennings, Goh, Skovholt, Hanson, & Banerjee-Stevens, 2003, p. 64), it may be possible to develop training methods that help students attain a capacity for relativistic thinking earlier in professional development. If expertise results from how counselors process domain-specific experiences over time (Eells, 1999; Jennings et al., 2003), then counselors can surely benefit from learning what it means to "perceive comprehensive meaningful patterns in domain relevant information" (Hill, Spiegel, Hoffman, Kivlighan, & Gelso, 2017, p. 18).

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how phenomenological teaching methods may be particularly well suited to foster relativistic thinking (Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019) and to review three new pedagogical activities designed to accomplish this task. To begin, we explore how the cognitive complexity subdomains of differentiation and integration relate to constructivist and phenomenological pedagogies, respectively. Next, we promote integrative complexity by exploring in detail three phenomenological teaching practices: a *call-and-response* activity to promote concept deconstruction, a prepracticum activity for empathy development, and a new conceptual approach to reflective practices in counseling. Ours is a humanistic endeavor insofar as phenomenological methods stimulate "conditions which encourage self-initiated, significant, experiential, 'gut-level' learning" (Rogers, 1969, p. 105) from the epistemological stance that students may be better served by contextual (Granello, 2000) and experiential (Bongaardt, Froyen, & Tangvald-Pedersen, 2013) methods than by "expert-driven, transmission models of learning" (Tangney, 2014, p. 266).

DIFFERENTIATION AND INTEGRATION AS FORMS OF COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY

Understanding how phenomenological training methods can promote relativistic thinking requires a detailed grasp of cognitive complexity. From a process-oriented perspective, cognitive complexity signifies the

degree of intricacy within *mental models*, or cognitive representations of the world that serve to organize facts and to identify relationships among facts (Johnson-Laird, 2010). Counselors use mental models to develop case conceptualizations from client descriptions of lived experience “based on the [inferred] meaning of the description and on their knowledge” (Johnson-Laird, 2010, p. 18244). The purported accuracy of a mental model depends on how well it corresponds to what is probabilistically true as a structural possibility in the world (Conway, Conway, Gornick, & Houck, 2014). Differentiation and integration are distinct, yet interdependent, aspects of cognitive complexity (Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992). The two modes of mental model development are complementary; however, differentiation represents the expansion of mental models to accommodate new data, whereas integration denotes the contraction of mental models to identify latent patterns within a surplus of differentiated data (Gentner & Stevens, 2014; Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019).

To expand mental models, counselors must not only aggregate information or data, but also have a corresponding ability to recognize and make distinctions among multiple dimensions within a given data set (Conway et al., 2014; Kovárová & Filip, 2015). Differentiated models are clearly observed within standard case conceptualizations that organize a multitude of client data points into discrete categories or dimensions according to a domain-specific organizational framework. A basic example would be the use of biopsychosocial intake assessments that gather client data across multiple categories to inform treatment planning (Hinkle & Dean, 2017). A more complex example would be the use of a theory to organize client data into a coherent conceptual model. In either case, the counselor seeks to develop a robust mental model by aggregating and organizing data into discrete conceptual categories so as to determine a course of clinical action.

To contract mental models, however, the counselor must have the ability to identify common features or themes within differentiated mental models. As a cognitive process, integration is orthogonal to differentiation insofar as “integrating different things is conceptually more complex than simply identifying different things” (Conway et al., 2014, p. 606). Thus, orthogonal-relational and field articulation models of complexity suggest that integration is essentially an advanced organization of differentiated constructs into well-articulated conceptual hierarchies (Kovárová & Filip, 2015). In counseling terms, integration occurs whenever practitioners identify meaningful connections across conceptual categories or dimensions in a case conceptualization. In this respect, integrated complexity denotes a process of transforming highly differentiated data into a conceptual gestalt, or whole, that is greater than the sum of its parts—that is, an inferential reasoning process that connects discrete constructs into a well-articulated conceptual hierarchy (Conway et al., 2014).

Consequently, the question is, what does it mean to develop well-articulated, as opposed to poorly articulated, mental models? According

to Wilkinson and Dewell (2019), well-articulated mental models “reflect foundational elements of experience rather than abstract renderings of experience,” whereas poorly articulated models are “abstract placeholders . . . without any practical relevance beyond their conceptual relationship to other abstractions” (p. 320). In other words, varying degrees of articulation signify the relative depth of understanding attributed to constructs and concepts that inform mental model development. Although integrative cognitive processes are at work every time conceptual parallels are identified within differentiated data, the relative complexity of integration depends upon the degree to which the underlying constructs are well or poorly articulated. Degrees of articulation are thus a way of gauging how complex a “system for understanding” (Welfare & Borders, 2010, p. 162) is for differentiated data. It is easy enough to determine that a client is compulsive, has unfinished business, or suffers anxious attachment. It is not so easy to grasp, in a way that can be well articulated, precisely what such abstract terms signify.

This distinction may actually be at the root of studies on “mastery” in counseling that suggest that “at the heart of successful practitioner development is an awareness of the complexity often present in the therapeutic endeavor” (Jennings et al., 2003, p. 69). Building the knowledge base for such complexity awareness surely takes years of professional exposure, as demonstrated by studies showing that relativistic thinking is typically acquired only after 10 or more years of experience in the field (Granello, 2010). However, the groundwork for cognitive development beyond multiplicitic thinking can surely be established in counselor training. Efforts to do so may ensure that the cognitive skills needed to cultivate integrative complexity are introduced earlier in the professional development process. Although cognitive complexity may be broadly viewed as “the ability to absorb, integrate, and make use of multiple perspectives” (Granello, 2010, p. 92), it seems pedagogically useful to examine how differentiated and integrative cognitive processing skills can be uniquely cultivated using constructivist and phenomenological teaching methods.

MENTAL MODEL DEVELOPMENT VIA CONSTRUCTIVIST AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL PEDAGOGIES

Insofar as differentiation involves the expansion of mental models by aggregating and organizing data into discrete, domain-specific dimensions or categories (Conway et al., 2014), it is important for counselors to advance beyond dualistic thinking in order to effectively build highly differentiated mental models that signify complexity for this domain. Model expansion may occur by means of exposure to multiplicity, which suggests that “changes in self-awareness are spurred by increasing the realm of conceived possibility . . . to include a more diverse array of viable possibilities” (Wilkinson & Hanna, 2016, p. 14). Constructivist teaching methods provide exposure to

multiplicity via instructional activities to increase open-mindedness (Bell, Limberg, Jacobson, & Super, 2014; Deaver & Shiflett, 2011; Mullen, Luke, & Drewes, 2007; Ziff & Beamish, 2004), tolerance for ambiguity (Bohecker, Vereen, Wells, & Wathen, 2016; Levitt & Jacques, 2005; Luft & Roughley, 2016; Pompeo & Levitt, 2014), multicultural sensitivity (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Brubaker, Puig, Reese, & Young, 2010; Shaw, Bayne, & Lorelle, 2012; Sommer et al., 2009), and self-awareness (Conlon, 2015; Duffy, Saltis, Thompson, & Kassirer, 2017; Gladding, 2008; Jones & Granello, 2008; Lawrence & Coaston, 2017).

The use of creative and reflective classroom tasks to “emphasize multiple perspectives, embrace differences, and encourage plurality” (Shaw et al., 2012, p. 272) is a pillar of constructivist teaching (Kinsella, 2006; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012; Yilmaz, 2008) as well as counselor development (Gladding, 2008; Griffith & Frieden, 2000). Such constructivist methods destabilize the coherence of dualistic mental models by introducing new ideas, perspectives, and contextual frames of reference that allow for the assimilation of previously omitted concepts into more complex mental models (Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019). Multiplistic thinking thus grows as simple or naive mental models expand, or acquire differentiated complexity, to include a broader array of interrelated factors. Creative and reflective constructivist teaching practices are a particularly effective way to expose students to new perspectives that can expand simple mental models into more robustly differentiated models that better inform professional development.

Integrative complexity, on the other hand, does not appear to be a natural consequence of such constructivist methods since the differentiated expansion of mental models is orthogonal to the integrative contraction of mental models. To be clear, counselors apply integration whenever they connect differentiated evidence to formulate clinical judgments and make decisions from limited data about client experiences (Hanna, Bemak, & Giordano, 1996). Integration is, indeed, simply an aspect of those abductive reasoning processes used to determine the best possible explanation from limited evidence (Walton, 2014). However, developing *complex* integrative capacities requires learning how to build well-articulated mental models that accurately reflect a given phenomenon under investigation (Kozhevnikov, 2007). In other words, if the best possible explanation for the clinical evidence merely invokes a reference to abstract concepts without any experiential grasp of what those concepts actually mean in practice, the explanation is of little practical use.

It has thus been suggested that phenomenological methods can uniquely build integrative complexity by means of *exposure to specificity*, or the “process of examining the experiential phenomena referenced by abstract interpretations” (Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019, p. 321). By means of phenomenological training methods that enable exposure to specificity, students can be taught how to examine and refine their understanding of psychological constructs in a way that supports the developmental transition from multiplistic to

relativistic thinking. Phenomenological inquiry denotes examining how phenomena are immediately experienced in conscious awareness, which requires a shift from the interpretation of mental constructions to the more direct examination of apperception (Husserl, 1913/2012; Zahavi, 2008). The process is descriptive and deconstructive, teaching students how to identify and question preconceptions, engage in rigorous deconstructive analysis, and provide detailed descriptions of psychological phenomena (Bongaardt et al., 2013; van Manen, 1996). Such phenomenological practices can teach students how to transform poorly articulated, naive abstractions into well-articulated, experientially grounded concepts that reveal the complex interconnections among psychological processes (Wilkinson & Hanna, 2016).

The constructivist practice of exposure to multiplicity destabilizes the coherence of rigid mental models to ensure that a wider range of relevant observations can be aggregated into an expansive conceptualization, whereas the phenomenological practice of exposure to specificity is used to refine conceptualizations by revealing how presuppositions and abstractions prevent an effective contraction of differentiated evidence into well-articulated mental models. The genuine complementarity between the constructivist and phenomenological positions supports their integrated pedagogical use in training. Both positions stem from a merging of cognitivist and progressivist learning-theory premises (Rasmussen, 1998) and centralize subjective experience by encouraging responsibility, autonomy, and self-directed learning (Yilmaz, 2008). Yet the phenomenological approach to pedagogy is uniquely suited to the task of growing integrative complexity because the phenomenological method directly attends to those experiential concomitants to which interpretive abstractions only symbolically refer (Bongaardt, 2013; Hanna et al., 1996; Hanna, Wilkinson, & Givens, 2017; van Manen, 1996).

PHENOMENOLOGICAL TEACHING PRACTICES TO ENHANCE INTEGRATIVE COMPLEXITY

Phenomenology can play a substantial role in developing well-articulated mental models by providing a method to guide the deconstruction of abstract psychological concepts. Insofar as consciousness is always a consciousness of something (Husserl, 1913/2012), phenomenology examines that “something” as it is immediately given in conscious experience. Put another way, phenomenology studies experience as it is experienced from a first-person stance—that is, not as mere subjectivity but as the direct observation of phenomenal consciousness as it is given to itself (Zahavi, 2008). The philosopher Jean-Luc Marion thus “warned against constructivist approaches to phenomenology where meaning is [pre-]determined, constructed, or attributed to a phenomenon or event by the subject” (van Manen, 2017, p. 775). Whereas constructivist approaches emphasize an interpretation of

concepts based on personal and socially constructed meaning (Wilkinson & Hanna, 2016), the phenomenological approach emphasizes *givenness*, or how phenomena reveal themselves within lived experience (Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 1913/2012; Marion, 2002; van Manen, 2017).

Based on the guiding precepts of Janicaud's (2000) minimalist phenomenology, the proposed purpose of phenomenological methods in counselor training would be to advance "an attitude of neutrality that has eliminated doxic prejudices, allowing the description of certain kinds of phenomena, and seeking in them characteristic invariances" (p. 92). In effect, it may be possible to teach students how to leverage curiosity and critical thinking as a means to scrutinize abstract psychological concepts. The expansive interpretations of phenomenology in academic philosophy are herein eschewed in favor of a far more restricted notion: The phenomenological method can be used to build integrative complexity by revealing the difference between abstract concepts and the lived experience to which such concepts refer, or essentially, to "let that which shows itself be seen from itself" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 58).

Phenomenological inquiry in the social sciences is primarily conducted using a form of the phenomenological method (Husserl, 1913/2012) called the phenomenological-psychological reduction (Giorgi, 2009). This method begins with the epoché, which involves identifying and setting aside speculative explanations, interpretations, and preconceptions in order to arrive at the pure or direct observation of a phenomenon, as it is given in prereflective consciousness (Zahavi, 2008). Epoché is a suspension of judgment that enhances curiosity about the difference between lived experience and abstract or symbolic references to lived experience (van Manen, 1996). As one moment within the phenomenological reduction, the epoché bypasses the *natural attitude*, which consists of common associations, presuppositions, and reflexive interpretations that individuals accept without question about themselves, others, and the world (van Manen, 1996). Moving beyond the natural attitude requires an ability to refrain from making such naive assumptions (i.e., epoché, or abstention) so as to identify and set aside particular explanations, interpretations, or theoretical speculations as they arise (i.e., bracketing, or suspension). Although additional methodological steps, such as the eidetic and transcendental reductions, may have great value in terms of social science research (see Hanna et al., 2017; van Manen, 2017), such advanced procedures are irrelevant to this training-oriented approach.

When the natural attitude is bracketed, lived experiences are revealed in such a way that the experiential ground of abstract ideas become identifiable (Husserl, 1913/2012; Marion, 2002). The resulting shift in awareness is referred to as the *phenomenological reduction*, denoting how an abstraction can be effectively reduced to its primary experiential qualities (Zahavi, 2008). By means of this method, it is possible to transform differentiated but poorly articulated mental models into better integrated and well-

articulated mental models (Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019). The epoché is thus an essential feature of the practices we propose, taking the form of a systematic uncertainty concerning the meaning of abstract concepts. Each exercise is designed to elicit thoughtful, affect-imbued, and direct experiential contact with a phenomenon under review. We propose that differentiated mental models attain greater articulation via the phenomenological process and can subsequently be recontextualized using constructivist approaches that support the meaningful internalization of newly deconstructed concepts.

Call-and-Response Assignment

One format devised to introduce learners to phenomenological reduction as a method is a “call-and-response” writing assignment (Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019). The exercise involves posing questions about the meaning of certain concepts, answering those questions, identifying presuppositions within the answers, and then developing new questions to clarify the ongoing interpretation. The semistructured exercise involves three progressive stages: deconstruction, contextualization, and application. The deconstruction stage guides students’ thoughts beyond naive assumptions so as to ground abstractions within lived experience. The contextualization stage reengages the constructivist emphasis on personal narratives, and the application stage provides an opportunity to apply the newly deconstructed concept in a clinical scenario (see Table 1).

Deconstruction stage. In the deconstruction stage of the call-and-response assignment, learners pose a broad “what” question about the concept under scrutiny and then answer that question. For example, after calling “What is a condition of worth?” a student might respond, “Believing my self-worth depends on meeting certain conditions.” This response includes other abstract terms (i.e., “self-worth” and “conditions”), the meaning of which must be directly addressed in follow-up questions. For example, calling “What are conditions?” may lead to the response, “Any expectations for who I should be or what I must do to gain the approval of others.” Within that response, there are other abstract terms that demand clarification, such as “expectations” and “approval.” As the iterative process unfolds, the learner maintains a call-and-response path of inquiry that systematically deconstructs those abstractions that serve to limit experiential contact with the actual phenomenon under investigation.

Contextualization stage. Next, learners personalize findings from the deconstructive stage by first stating the finding from a first-person perspective. For example, the learner may state, “How I feel about myself often depends on whether or not other people think that I’m a good, OK, likable person.” Then the learner addresses pros and cons of this stance. A pro might be that the statement indicates a receptivity to the thoughts and feelings of others, whereas a con might be that expectations held by others should not determine self-worth. Next, the learner undertakes a contextual narrative by reflecting on a personal

TABLE 1
Abbreviated Sample Call-and-Response Exercise for Students

Conditions of Worth
Step I: Deconstruction Stage • What is a condition of worth? Believing my self-worth depends upon meeting conditions. • What is self-worth? How I feel about myself. Whether I'm a good, OK, likable person. • What are conditions? Any expectations for who I am or what I must do to gain approval. • What are expectations? How we think someone should be or act, or how something should happen. Expectations involve imagining how someone "ought to be" or what they "ought to do." • And if you don't meet those expectations? Then I meet with disapproval, and that hurts. • And what is approval? When someone lets you know that you're good and OK and likeable. • So what does "condition of worth" indicate? How one feels about oneself depends upon how others imagine one ought to be, since one wants to be seen as a good, OK, likable person. Step II: Contextualization Stage • Can you state it in the first-person? How I feel about myself often depends on whether or not other people think (or tell/show me) that I'm a good, OK, likable person. • Pros? Well, maybe it indicates that I'm open and receptive to others. • Cons? Just because others imagine I should be a certain way doesn't mean I should be. It's their expectations, in their own imaginations. I have my own life to live. • How do you experience these "expectations"? As a pressure, a sort of second-guessing. I feel uncertain, small, deficient, misguided. It feels deeply empty and superficial, or aimless. • Does this bring up any memories or ideas that indicate areas where your self-worth depends on this approval from others? [<i>Student writes contextualized personal narrative of two or more paragraphs.</i>] • The phenomenon of conditions of worth can be described as? Being so stuck in a pattern of acting a certain way to gain the love and approval of others that you live in perpetual fear of judgment, lose touch with yourself, and undermine your own well-being. Step III: Application Stage <i>Vignette:</i> A client (your age/gender) presents with concerns about their ability to communicate. They are fearful of being judged negatively. They have good insight and motivation to change. <i>Client:</i> I don't understand why I care so much about what everyone else thinks about me. I'm always trying to make everyone else happy. I just can't seem to find my voice. <i>Counselor:</i> You mentioned earlier that you're frustrated about "giving in" to others. You want to be more assertive, but you continue to avoid speaking up and you're not sure why. <i>Client:</i> That's right. I don't know . . . I guess how I feel about myself depends a lot of the time on how others seem to feel about me. I try to make sure others like me by being overly agreeable. <i>Counselor:</i> You feel a pressure to make sure that people think well of you. [<i>Exercise continues on to its conclusion</i>]

experience that further contextualizes their first-person statement about the concept of conditions of worth. The question may be, “What memories, ideas, or feelings arise when you say, ‘How I feel about myself depends on whether or not other people say that I’m good, OK, and likable’?” In response, a learner might explore a memory of conflict with a family member that helps the learner identify a sense of conditional worth through personal narrative.

Within the contextual narrative, it is important to continue the call-and-response format to identify thoughts, feelings, sensations, or imaginings that accompany the narrative. As Bateson (1979) noted, "Without context, words and actions have no meaning at all" (p. 15). This portion of the exercise is designed to clarify how an abstract concept is actively experienced. In the current example, a learner explores their own experiential contact with conditions of worth. This process results in an indelible felt-sense impression that restructures the learner's grasp of the concept such that it signifies a meaningful way of being rather than a disembodied idea. To complete this stage, the learner briefly describes the phenomenon in their own words using a sentence stem, "The phenomenon of conditions of worth can be described as . . .," with the primary intention being to clearly and directly identify how the phenomenon is experienced by the learner.

Application stage. In the final stage, the learner develops a case vignette outlining a hypothetical client's struggle with the phenomenon under consideration. The learner creates a fictional call-and-response transcription that begins with the client stating, in a creatively rephrased way, what the learner previously identified in the sentence stem portion of the contextualization exercise. For example, at the conclusion of the contextual narrative, a learner may describe conditional self-worth as how "my felt-sense of being a whole person depends on how others see me." Translated for the transcription, the client might say, "I don't understand why I care so much about what others think. I'm just always trying to make others happy." The learner evolves the transcription using a combination of reflecting skills and thoughtful questions derived from their prior exploration of the "conditions of worth" phenomenon.

Prepracticum Empathy Skills Training

Because the conceptual nature of empathy is elusive, researchers have explored many unique ways in which to expand the counseling profession's understanding of this central feature of counseling practice (Clark, 2010; Neukrug, Bayne, Dean-Nganga, & Pusateri, 2013). From a cognitive complexity stance, empathy training may require the clear differentiation of specific empathy-related concepts and an integrative articulation of empathy. Coplan (2011) set forth a narrow conceptualization of empathy as "a process through which an observer simulates another's situated psychological states, while maintaining clear self-other differentiation" (p. 58) that can be used to develop an integrative phenomenological training method. Emotional contagion and perspective taking are standard distinctions in the counseling literature (Clark & Simpson, 2013). Emotional contagion is considered a preanalytical experience "triggered by direct sensory engagement with another person expressing an emotion" (Coplan, 2011, p. 46). Perspective taking is defined as a higher order, simulative capacity to take the psychological viewpoint of another person.

Yet perspective taking can be further divided into self- and other-oriented forms (Coplan, 2011). *Self-oriented perspective taking* denotes passively imagining oneself in a client's situation, thereby holding an egocentric position that blurs the line between counselor and client. It is activated by the question "Can you imagine how hearing that would make you feel?" thus leading the counselor to imagine themselves in that situation. *Other-oriented perspective taking* involves actively imagining a client within their own lived situation, through their own eyes or ears, in a manner such that the counselor vicariously experiences the lifeworld of the client. This is a more difficult task because maintaining a clear self-other distinction requires considerable capacity for self-regulation and self-awareness, yet it is also "much less likely to cause aversive arousal and personal distress than self-oriented perspective taking" (Coplan, 2011, p. 60).

Method overview. We propose using a phenomenological method to train students to distinguish types of empathy, which first requires bracketing preconceived notions of empathy. Rather than teaching students about distinct types of empathy, we use this approach to facilitate direct experiential engagement without offering any preliminary definitions or abstract explanations. Students are placed in triads in which one student serves as facilitator and two serve as empathizers. Groups engage in three rounds of experiential tasks to facilitate a deeper awareness of emotional contagion, self-oriented perspective taking, and other-oriented perspective taking. Group discussions are held at the end of each round to review group members' questions, insights, and challenges.

Emotional contagion stage. Each facilitator shares a unique personal story that captures a major feeling, such as loss, frustration, or hopelessness. As the facilitator shares their story, the empathizers are tasked not with tracking the content but with identifying the felt-sense or embodied experience of emotional contagion that arises as each story unfolds. It is critical to note that the empathizers must try to bracket errant thoughts, imaginings, or memories that arise during the exercise. Focus remains steadfast on how the experience of emotional contagion is initially experienced, how it changes or morphs as thoughts or memories arise, and what it is like to bring the felt-sense experience back to the forefront of awareness during the exercise. At the conclusion of each story, group members describe their experiences using somatic or affective language and try to identify distractions or barriers that interfered with their experiences.

Self-oriented perspective taking. Each facilitator retells their story while the empathizers imagine what it would be like to experience the facilitator's story of loss, frustration, and hope in their own life experience, as if it happened to them. The facilitator should use prompts, such as "Imagine how you would feel if that happened to you," to help the empathizers engage in the self-oriented process. The empathizers are asked to describe how they imagine the situation through their own eyes and to identify thoughts, memories, or imaginings that arise during the facilitator's storytelling.

After each story, group members discuss how this self-focused process serves to either facilitate or prevent a sense of reciprocal understanding, as well as whether any sense of distress or anxiety occurred in the process (Coplan, 2011).

Other-oriented perspective taking. Each facilitator revisits their story by prompting, "I want you to now try to imagine how I felt, in my own body and through my own eyes and ears, during this experience." The empathizers are asked to bracket any personal memories or self-relevant thoughts that arise, focusing intently on trying to sense how the facilitator may have experienced the event. At this point, empathizers are asked to use reflections of feeling and meaning to communicate any direct perceptions arising from empathic attunement. Each facilitator must closely attend to their own felt-sense experience to determine the accuracy of each reflection, communicate whether it is accurate, and provide additional clarification as needed. At the end of each story, group members discuss their experiential observations of the other-oriented empathy process compared with the self-oriented and emotional contagion processes. Group members are given the three definitions of empathy after completing the full exercise, actively discuss the definitions as a group, and then write individual reflection papers about their experiences.

Pure and Impure Reflective Practices

As noted by Nelson and Neufeldt (1998), "Educating reflective practitioners involves providing the space to reflect, the permission and encouragement to reflect, [and] the knowledge of how to inform one's reflective process" (p. 82). The first two premises have been extensively discussed in the literature (see Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). However, if knowledge about reflective practice is equally vital to development, then identifying what constitutes such a practice is also an important task. Within phenomenology, there is a critical difference between *impure* and *pure reflection*. Impure reflection is grounded in presuppositions, denoting "a type of knowledge" that "interprets the reflected in an objectifying manner" (Zahavi, 2008, p. 87) on the basis of predetermined categories. Alternatively, pure reflection "articulates the phenomena, without contaminating them with interpretive overlays" (p. 88) in a manner that reveals essential features of the phenomena in prereflective experience.

Notably, the distinctions between impure and pure reflection respectively align with the premise that differentiation is an aggregation process whereas integration is a thematization process (Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019). In other words, some forms of reflection promote differentiation and others promote integration, indicating that expertise at high levels of cognitive complexity may represent the refined application of integrative reflection. Because many counselor educators encourage students to regularly engage in "the essential method of continuous professional reflection" (Skovholt

& Rønnestad, 1992, p. 509), it could be helpful to provide students with guidance on different reflective methods. Reflection has been described “as idiosyncratic in that different people experience it in unique ways and have their own styles of doing so” (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012, p. 85); however, the distinction between differentiated (i.e., impure) and integrative (i.e., pure) reflection may serve as grounds for making reflective practice less idiosyncratic and, consequently, teachable.

Differentiation-based reflective practices support multiplistic thinking by supporting “awareness of feelings, thoughts, reactions, and personal values in the context of the counseling relationship” (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014, p. 82). Such constructivist practices guide counselors to expand mental models to include previously unconsidered ideas, options, or biases. Integration-based reflective practices require a different skill set, stressing the refinement of mental models via phenomenological inquiry. In practice, integrative reflection is enhanced by learning how to question basic presuppositions and deconstruct clinical concepts (Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019). Whereas differentiated reflection expands mental models to increase breadth of knowledge or to enhance the application of knowledge, integrative reflection refines the articulation of mental models through a process of examining common themes and questioning conceptual assumptions (Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019). Delineating between these unique forms of reflection could help both students and practitioners engage more intentionally in the art of reflective practice.

CONCLUSION

In combination, constructivist and phenomenological instructional practices can support cognitive development such that multiplistic and relativistic thinking become attainable earlier in the counselor training process. Constructivist teaching supports multiplistic thinking by helping students assimilate new views into existing mental models that are complex (i.e., differentiated) and contextualized in terms of personal narratives. Phenomenological teaching aids the transition from multiplistic to relativistic thinking by helping students deconstruct abstract concepts and build well-articulated mental models grounded in experiential awareness (Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019). This is a salient goal for humanists because the contextualized, nonreductive interpersonal approach to counseling that stems from relativistic thinking may be a prerequisite for effective humanistic practice (Dewell & Foose, 2017; Hansen, 2017). If humanists indeed seek to help clients attain “greater levels of experiencing” (Eells, 1999, p. 315), then integrative complexity may be an essential ingredient in terms of facilitating client contact within lived experience.

It may be possible to hasten the trajectory of cognitive development among students and practitioners alike by fostering multiplistic thinking via a constructivist approach and then providing guidance on how to engage

in relativistic thinking via a phenomenological approach. New research applying phenomenological teaching methods, such as those outlined herein, is first needed to validate the efficacy of this proposal. Additionally, further research as to how differentiation and integration uniquely evolve through counselor training is needed to root pedagogical practices in appropriate developmental frameworks. For instance, empirical studies might be conducted using the Counselor Cognitions Questionnaire (Welfare & Borders, 2010) with some minor procedural modifications that reflect a process-oriented distinction between differentiation and integration as forms of cognitive complexity (see Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019).

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