



## ***Katrina: First Thoughts***

**John Hipple**  
**University of North Texas**

As counselor educators and supervisors, the drama of Katrina provides an opportunity to examine not only what we teach our students, but also gives us a view as to how we are presenting our profession to the public.

The call for counselors and mental health professionals was issued well in advance of the hurricane's landfall. It was assumed that many would experience severe, immediate, and long lasting emotional dissonance as a result of their survival experiences. However, from a cold-hearted perspective, research indicates that approximately 25% of those exposed to trauma will experience emotional difficulty over the long haul. The vast majority will recover and return to normal/typical functioning with no lasting problems.

Of course there is the argument that immediate crisis intervention, often called 'debriefing' will reduce long term difficulty. Here, too, there is some evidence that disputes these types of interventions as being beneficial to all.

As displaced individuals and families moved to safer locations such as large shelters, hotels, and private homes mental health professionals were alerted to be ready to provide counseling and psychotherapy. Yet as we examine the type of services found to be most helpful, it becomes clear that providing for physical safety, food, showers, clothing, ways to contact relatives, permanent housing, employment, food stamps, etc. are in the most demand.

It appears to me that Katrina has taught us that 'compassionate conversations' and 'case management' may be more in demand than "counseling" as we typically define it. To be heard and assisted a very concrete and practical fashion are probably the most critically needed 'helping' services. And above all to know that 'being respected' is an important supportive and strengthening aspect.

The kids and teens that are among the displaced need the same services as the adults. Additionally it is probably more critical to focus on making connections with their other family members. And finding ways to constructively fill time with enjoyable activities is also important. And finally, helping kids get re-attached to a school schedule which will go a long ways in setting the stage for them to find a degree of success and belonging.

From a crisis response/intervention perspective, persons experiencing a great deal of traumatic dissonance need only a small dose of emotional focus and a huge mega dose of practical action to reduce the static in their lives.

From a traditional definition of counseling, I would guess that counselors and mental health workers have more to give in the short term to those who provide volunteer services than to the 'victims' of the disaster. One can give and give and give for only so long. And we even have a term for that — 'compassionate fatigue'. A short stress relieving conversation can go a long way in helping a volunteer catch a breath and get back into the trenches.

As a profession I believe we are walking on a pathway with many potential pitfalls as we either respond to or make the cry of 'Send out the Counselors, they will make it all better'. It appears to me that this trend does not fully acknowledge the strengths that are inherent within people to not only help themselves but also to help others. Fear and anguish are normal and to always rush to the rescue by calling out the counselors could inappropriately compound the fear by implying the situation is really worse that it really is.

As time passes, there will certainly be many individuals who have been touched by Katrina will need counseling and psychotherapy as we know it. And maybe our most important contribution to this tragedy will take place months and months down the road. That is when the long-term 'emotional repair' work will be needed. But until then time does heal and will heal for so many.

As educators and supervisors, maybe the learning from Katrina is not yet over.



## From the President

Richard E. Watts  
Sam Houston State University

The third week of September, 2005, I was a keynote speaker for Turkish Counseling Congress held in Istanbul, Turkey. Istanbul is a beautiful city and the counselors, counselors-in-training, and counselor educators attending the conference were very warm and gracious. At one of the general meetings, there was a panel-led discussion addressing the present and near-future state of counseling in Turkey. Interestingly, they struggle with many of the same issues that we do. Two key topics they mentioned that particularly resonated with me were issues of professional identity and advocacy for the profession. With these topics in mind, I thought it might be useful to share with you an article I wrote for the *CACREP CONNECTION* (the newsletter of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs). Perhaps it may stimulate some dialogue on TACESNET regarding counselor identity and advocacy. If you are not on the TACES listserve, please email me (watts@shsu.edu) and I will be glad to add you to the list. Richard

### Are We in Danger of Losing the Identity That We Never Clearly Defined? <sup>1</sup>

Authors in the counseling literature (*Journal of Counseling and Development* and ACA division journals) have been calling for a unified definition of counseling for at least 20 years; and yet we still have no collective identity. Furthermore, much of counselor identity over the past ten years or so has been market driven—third party reimbursement—rather than defined by the profession or by the profession creating new markets (Gale & Austin, 2003; Hannah & Bemak, 1997; Meyers, Sweeny, & White, 2002; Swickert, 1997).

### *Counselor Identity and Outcome Research*

Although we do not have a unified definition of counselor identity, the counseling literature has historically identified the profession by the following “differentiating” characteristics. Counseling and counselor education focuses on:

- ◆ the primacy of the client-counselor relationship (rather than techniques);
- ◆ normal human growth and development;

- ◆ mental health and client’s strengths and abilities rather than psychopathology and client’s disabilities;
- ◆ prevention/education rather than merely remediation;
- ◆ holism, wellness, multiculturalism, and social justice (Gale & Austin, 2003; Meyers, Sweeny, & White, 2002; Swickert, 1997).

In addition, Gale and Austin (2003) note that even in the clinical area, counseling’s focus on normal human growth and development provides a different and valuable perspective for planning and structuring treatment. Interestingly, the “common factors” outcome research resonates with the differentiating foci mentioned above that the profession of counseling and counselor education has historically stressed. According to this research, counseling and therapy efficacy is not dependent on specific disciplines or theoretical models. Rather, the common factors of successful outcomes include

- ◆ Extratherapeutic (client) factors (accounting for 40% of the variance),
- ◆ Counseling relationship factors (accounting for 30% of the variance),
- ◆ Hope, expectancy, placebo factors (accounting for 15% of the variance), and
- ◆ Model and technique factors (accounting for 15% of the variance) (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999)

Counseling and counselor education has historically emphasized the primary importance of the counseling relationship and stressed the importance of clients’ strengths and abilities in building hope and expectancy of successful counseling experiences. Models and methodologies are considered important but, as the outcome research affirms, have not been the primary focus.

### *Professional Advocacy Needed*

Counselors advocate vigorously for our clients. However, counselors and counselor educators do not advocate with sufficient vigor for our profession.

If we, as counselors and counselor educators, do not start communicating who we are and what we do in a more meaningful, unified manner, and do not begin to more aggressively advocate for our profession, others will be **and are** redefining who they are in terms of who we are and have been historically as a profession. Let me provide a few—of many—recent examples from the literature.

In recent article (Hage, 2003), titled “Reaffirming the **Unique Identity** [emphasis added] of Counseling

*continued page 7*

## Counseling Children in the Aftermath of a Disaster

Gail K. Roaten  
Baylor University

As first responders and frontline helpers, school counselors may be the first mental health professionals that students may have interaction with after re-location. Remember that children and adolescents involved in the recent hurricane have probably exhausted all of their coping strategies to deal with the stressful event, and therefore, are in a state of crisis (psychological disequilibrium). This may be characterized by feelings of anxiety, helplessness, fear, inadequacy, agitation, disorganization, anger, and even shock and denial. School counselors must react quickly to refugee students can help by 1) identifying alternative coping skills, 2) assessing need or degree to which child's functioning is impaired, and, 3) intervening.

School counselors, administrators, and mental health professionals need to work together to develop systemic/systematic strategies to intervene with these survivors. Diminished responsiveness such as "psychic numbing" or "emotional anesthesia" usually begins shortly after the traumatic event. Sometimes reactions may appear immediately, or a delayed reaction might take place weeks or even months later. Additionally, students may be in need of the basics: food, clothing, hygiene products, even sleep. After assessing the student's functioning, decide whether or not you need to make an immediate referral (psychological service, medical attention or medication, etc.). If the student does not need more intensive therapy, then the following treatment protocol, administered by the school counselor, might help.

1. Help the child cope with powerful affect they are experiencing, accept that affect, and discuss causes. You might use basic counseling skills (especially listening), art therapy, play therapy, sand tray, bibliotherapy, etc. in this stage.
2. Acknowledge child's feelings, emotions; help them understand that this is a completely normal response to what they have been through.
3. Develop a plan of coping with the student. You now need to become more directive and action-oriented. At this point, students are probably not capable of making any decisions, so you may need to provide them with direction.

4. Be systemic, structured, and follow a step-by-step plan with the students (victims) you are counseling. Cognitive Behavioral work will be effective at this juncture in dealing with thoughts and emotions about the event, which in turn affect the child's behaviors. Additionally, extend the art therapy, play therapy, sand tray, biblio- therapy sessions already in progress.
5. Set up an internal system of support for these students. This could include (but not exclusive to) mentors, peer advisors, PALS, training teachers to talk to all students in a sensitive and timely manner, etc.
6. Follow-up should be often and consistent immediately after the crisis. Counseling should only be tapered off only when the counselor determines that the student is no longer at risk.
7. The support person(s) and school counselor should continue with periodic "check ups" with these children and adolescents for monitoring; onset of effects in some children may occur several weeks or months later.

*continued page 8*



**TACES at the  
TCA Professional Growth Conference  
November 2-6, 2005**

**TACES will host a members only breakfast on Thursday, Nov. 3 at the TCA 2005 Conference.**

There is no charge for the event, but you **must** pre-register with TCA.

Texas Counseling Association  
316 West Twelfth Street, Suite 402  
Austin, TX 78701  
Phone: 512-472-3403 or  
800-580-8144  
Fax: 512-472-3756  
<http://www.txca.org>

## From the Director

**Kathryn Everest**  
Ft. Worth Independent School Districts

The 2005 Directors' of Guidance Conference kicked off the new school year on August 28-29th. The return to Austin was welcomed by all and was a great success! Suzie Humphreys, former KVIL Radio celebrity, was the keynote speaker. The rave reviews on the conference evaluations indicated the message was timely, appropriate and FUN!

Ms. Humphreys' topic "*I Can Do That*" was motivational and inspiring for the conference attendees as they brace for another new school year filled with trepidations regarding school finance, potential budget cuts, unclear district policies defining the role of school counselors, not to mention the miss use of counselor personnel.

The conference included many well-received breakout sessions. Thanks to all the presenters for sharing valuable information that will help conference participants as they continue to articulate the role of the school counselor and to build capacity in their home school districts. Presenters included those who lead school counseling programs and are "in the know" about high performing comprehensive school counseling programs. These presenters provided much needed information as conference goers learned how to restructure guidance and counseling K-12 programs as defined in Texas Education Code law. Directors learned the importance of encouraging and requiring documentation of school counseling services for accountability purposes.

Other breakout sessions during this annual conference provided Directors of Guidance with up to date information about legislation (or the lack thereof). Thanks to Jenna Watts from TEA and Shannon Noble of TCA for their insightful contributions! Jane Caldwell (Higher Coordinating Board), Victoria Young and George Rislov (Texas Education Agency) presented important information in the areas of curriculum and assessment. Learning opportunities on international transcript interpretation and grade conversions for the growing international populations in Texas public schools were provided.

TACES should be commended for intuitive and insightful leadership in the desire to serve TACES membership. Taking on the responsibility of organizing and hosting this most important conference is no little feat. Thanks to TACES for stepping up to provide this valuable service after TEA was forced to relinquish their role in the event.

Due to the success of this year's event, the TACES leadership is already working on the 2006 Directors' of Guidance Conference. Watch TACESNET and the TACES (<http://taces.utep.edu>) website for upcoming calls for presentation proposals, reviewers, and conference team members!



### Mark Your Calendars

- ▶ 49th Annual TCA Professional Growth Conference  
November 2-5, 2005 - El Paso
- ▶ TACES mid-Winter Conference  
February 17, 2006:  
Doubletree Hotel, Austin

### New Edition of *Handbook of Counseling Supervision*

The revision of ACES's classic *Handbook of Counseling Supervision* has just been released. The handbook was first published in 1987 and has enjoyed wide circulation since then. L. DiAnne Borders and Lori Brown (University of North Carolina at Greensboro) have updated and expanded the handbook, while retaining the hands-on flavor it is well known for. Added are sections on multicultural sensitivity, group supervision, and tools for evaluation. This is a "must" item for novice and experienced supervisors alike; it is very appropriate for field supervision and practitioner workshops. It augments the more academically/research oriented publications with a "how-to" approach. Many vignettes and examples are provided to guide the supervisor.

The revision is *The New Handbook of Counseling Supervision*. It can be purchased through the ACA website at <http://www.counseling.org>. ACES members receive a discounted rate for individual copies. Bookstores are welcome to place their orders.

## Lessons from the Classroom: A Case of the Kind Of's

Derrick A. Paladino\*  
University of North Texas - Dallas

\*Article Contributors: Jared Cobb, Judith Dumont, Rosemary Holt, Sarah Nowinski, Masika Smith (Graduate Students, Counseling Program, University of North Texas)

Throughout graduate school, we learn that building a counseling relationship and understanding our clients are chief functions in our role as a counselor. This is achieved by accurately reflecting feelings and content, being respectful and genuine, offering unconditional positive regard, and acknowledging and validating our clients' feelings and experiences. In addition, connecting with our clients through empathy and advanced empathy fosters a strong working alliance and intentional environment for growth and change. One of the core basic counseling techniques is reflection and we learn that they should be accurate and congruent with our clients' experiences. In addition, we also learn that we should not minimize clients' feelings as this creates a barrier to building a strong working alliance.

Imagine yourself sitting across from a client that is describing an experience filled with anger. We hear it through their description, we hear it in their tone, and we know in our gut, the feeling is anger. However, our immediate response is, "You're feeling kind of angry." Is our reflection congruent with our client's feeling? The quick answer is no. The feeling word "anger" is congruent, but the phrase "kind of" changes its meaning. "You're feeling kind of angry" is altered to "Your feeling irritated, frustrated, or annoyed". The issue here is that the counselor knows the feeling is anger, but does not say "You are feeling angry". The feeling has been minimized.

This raises a significant question in the education of basic counseling skills. "What makes us use minimizers? After all, didn't we kind of use them; I mean use them during our tenure in graduate school? Is it the myth that we will offend our clients if we amplify their feelings? Is it our level of confidence in our ability to accurately reflect feelings? Are these safe phrases? Are we concerned with how our client's view us? Or is it simply that we use these phrases in our everyday life. Some examples of these minimizing phrases are:

Kind of \* Sort of \* A Bit \* A Little \* Somewhat

After a class discussion on this topic, I decided to survey some first semester graduate students in my Basic Counseling Techniques course. Below you will see a summary of their written thoughts and comments on what might cause them or another counselor to use these phrases.

### Maintaining Self-Confidence

Our confidence is built by continuous success. "Fence sitting phrases" (i.e., sort of, kind or), as described by one student, can offer a level of success because we don't "fail" as long as the feeling word is in our reflection. If commitment is made to a feeling word and our reflection is incongruent, the possibility of "losing creditability with ourselves" increases, therefore, jeopardizing our perception of self-competence. Another student suggested that, "we don't want to be incorrect" or have "a lack of insurance... It seems worth the risk of only being "kind of" right than absolutely wrong."

### Protecting the Working Alliance

We learn that developing a strong therapeutic relationship is vital in the overall process of counseling. Carl Rogers (1951) suggested if a counselor can convey empathy, unconditional positive regard, warmth, acceptance, and genuineness, then client progress can be fostered through the counseling relationship. One student suggested that, "the counselor might be fearful of reflecting an emotion/ observation that they feel the client isn't ready to process." They feel that by not "shocking" our clients and conveying less threatening feelings the working alliance will be protected. Another student described that the foundation of this fear can rest on pleasing our clients.

### Protecting Our Clients

This theme also includes pleasing our clients. A student suggested that, a "counselor might fear creating excess conflict in the world of the client." For example, if a client describes a bad day with several contributing circumstances, the counselor may feel that reflecting the anxious or frustrating feeling will produce more anxiety or conflict in the client's world. By downplaying negative feelings, the client will be protected from deeming their situation hopeless. The question here is, "Is this the client's reality?" By saying, "It sounds like you're kind of having a bad day," there is a missed opportunity to reflect accurate acceptance, acknowledgement, and understanding.

*continued page 9*

# TACES MIDWINTER CONFERENCE

**February 17, 2006**  
**Doubletree Hotel, Austin**

The TACES MidWinter Conference will be held on February 17th at the DoubleTree Hotel in Austin. This year we will offer 10 one-hour programs, the annual business meeting, and time for networking. We believe this year's conference will be the best yet and hope that you will plan on joining us! Austin is a great city, why not make it a weekend trip and enjoy the numerous amenities available in Austin.



## Austin

Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau writes that Austin is known for its casual and playful nature. Situated at the center of the Lone Star State, it stands as the gateway to the Texas Hill Country and the Highland Lakes.

Austin is a city where the music never stops, live music plays at more than 100 venues on any given evening. Blues, country, rock and roll, and jazz puts Austin music into a distinctive music genre that's difficult to label. The largest concentration of music venues is found downtown in the Warehouse District and along Sixth Street, a six-block stretch of bars and restaurants. *Austin City Limits* continues to be the best show in town. For ticket information, call the ticket hotline at 512-471-4811.

For additional information visit Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau at <http://www.austintexas.org>



## The Doubletree Hotel

The Doubletree Hotel Austin is a very elegant Spanish Colonial style hotel located at the intersection of IH-35 North and Highway 290 East in central Austin. The hotel is just 5 minutes from downtown and 20 minutes from Austin Bergstrom International Airport.

There are many fine restaurants within walking distance of the hotel and shopping is just a short 3 minute drive away at Highland Mall or Lincoln Village.

The Doubletree Hotel Austin features 350 beautifully appointed guest rooms with coffee makers, irons, ironing boards, work desks, hairdryers, voice mail, 27" televisions and high-speed internet access.

*Registration information will be available on the TACES website soon (<http://taces.utep.edu>)*

### Call for Program Proposals

We have expanded the program to include 10 one hour programs!

Program proposals or poster sessions addressing the interface:

- between counselor educators and school district directors of guidance and counseling, or
- between counselor educators and LPC supervisors will be given preference.

Please complete the proposal form that is located on our TACES website. Due date: November 1, 2005



Psychology: Opting for the ‘Road Less Traveled By’”, the author’s abstract described counseling psychology’s roots as a specialty as

. . . including its *particular* [emphasis added] commitment to prevention, multiculturalism, and social justice. A set of standards or competencies to advance counseling psychologist’s commitments to a prevention-oriented, social justice approach is needed to guide *counseling* [emphasis added] training, practice, and research. In addition, significant barriers to the implementation of a prevention-oriented agenda in counseling psychology will need to be overcome. (p. 555)

In the preface of the *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, the editors (Snyder & Lopez, 2002) describe the Positive Psychology movement as a “new approach” because “psychology and its sister disciplines . . . focus on the weaknesses in humankind” (p. ix). In affirming the positive qualities of humankind, they state that “*no science, including psychology, looks seriously at this positive side of people*” [emphasis in original, p. x]. One may say that these ideas only pertain to psychology in general and not specifically to counseling. However, chapters in the book include significant discussion of areas typically addressed in the counseling literature (as defined earlier): development, prevention, mental health rather than mental illness and moving away from the medical model perspective, focusing on human strengths and resources, to name but a few.

Cowen and Kilmer (2002) offered a critique of Positive Psychology’s lack of attention to precursory literature and I fully expected to find substantive mention of the counseling literature (as defined earlier) contained therein. And I was wrong. A portion of the abstract reads as follows:

The approach’s [Positive Psychology] major current limitations include: (a) a relative insulation from closely related prior work in primary prevention and wellness enhancement; (b) its lack of a cohesive undergirding theoretical framework; and (c) its prime adult, cross-sectional approach which does not sufficiently reflect key life history and developmental pathways and determinants of specific positive outcomes. (p. 449)

Amazingly, there is not one citation of any counseling literature, as defined at the opening of this article. The authors criticize the Positive Psychology literature for its “insulation from closely related prior work” regarding primary

prevention and wellness, and its lack of developmental perspective; yet they fail to mention any of the counseling literature that is *closely related, prior, developmental*, and has a *primary prevention and wellness* perspective.

### Conclusion

The counseling profession does not have a unified identity even though there have been numerous calls for one for at least two decades. In fact, in my relatively brief time as a counselor educator (eleven years), I have frankly seen significant movement toward fragmentation—rather than unification—of counselor identity. I am concerned that we are indeed in danger of losing the identity that we never clearly defined. *If we, as counselors and counselor educators, do not start communicating who we are and what we do in a more meaningful, unified manner, and do not begin to more aggressively advocate for our profession, others will be and are redefining who they are in terms of who we are and have been historically as a profession.*

<sup>1</sup>This article was originally published in the *CACREP CONNECTION* (Spring, 2004) and is used by permission.

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continued page 8

### Children *from page 3*

When dealing with school populations at large, David Walsh, Ph.D. (2001) provides some very timely tips on how school counselors can talk to all of their students (and parents) about national crises:

- ◆ Fear is an intense concern or worry caused by real and/or imagined danger.
- ◆ Fear is a natural and normal reaction to a scary event.
- ◆ Children younger than five years old cannot always tell fantasy from reality. Media depictions of events can be just as scary as being there.
- ◆ Some children will exhibit fear through behavior, not words. Examples might include crying, abnormal fussiness or agitation, lump in throat, diminished appetite, withdrawal, etc.
- ◆ Sensitive children with vivid imaginations are more prone to intense fear reactions.
- ◆ All children, even the very young, have a “sixth sense” that enables them to be aware of an adult’s fear & anxiety.

### Tips to Help Children

- ◆ The best overall strategy is to do two things that simultaneously: acknowledge their fear while reassuring them.
- ◆ Take your cues from the child or adolescent. Don’t assume they are more afraid than they may be. Conversely, don’t assume that they are unaware of what has happened.
- ◆ Take their fears seriously. Don’t try to talk them out of it.
- ◆ Respond calmly. Don’t exaggerate their fears by using extreme language or overreacting.
- ◆ Answer their questions directly but don’t give them more information than they are asking for or that they need.
- ◆ Provide physical reassurance with lots of hugs and touching.
- ◆ Make sure they know that it’s okay to ask questions and talk about the disaster.
- ◆ Manage the media coverage developmentally.

### Tips to Help Students in Middle School

- ◆ Talk to the middle school child and answer questions honestly.
- ◆ Acknowledge any feelings of fear, horror, and anger.

- ◆ Provide comfort and reassurance.
- ◆ Children at this age will be more interested in details. Share what you know but don’t overwhelm them.
- ◆ Some children may act out scary feelings or may become withdrawn. Talk to them and ask them to tell you about their feelings.
- ◆ Use historical examples (911, Challenger Space Shuttle, etc.) to explain that bad things sometimes happen to innocent people, but as people and as a nation, we go on with our lives and resolve bad situations.

### Tips to Help High School Students

- ◆ Adolescents have probably already talked about the disaster with friends. It is important to be honest with them and let them know what is factual. They may be “glued” to the TV, eager for more news and details.
- ◆ It is important for them to talk about what has happened and about their feelings and yours.
- ◆ Acknowledge fear, sadness, and anger.
- ◆ Some teens may also just try to block out the whole thing and refuse to acknowledge that anything “big” has happened (or that they care). This may be a defense mechanism or masks real fears and feelings of being overwhelmed.
- ◆ Some teens may make jokes. Let them know it’s not funny without lecturing them.
- ◆ Some teens may be very interested in discussing issues that this tragedy raises. Be willing to engage them in serious discussions.
- ◆ Be careful to avoid placing blame on a group or targeting a group in relief efforts.
- ◆ Use historical tragedies as a basis for conversation. Talk to teens about how the situation might be resolved in terms of rescue workers, governmental responses, changes in domestic policy, etc.

### President *from page 7*

Snyder, C. R., & Lopez, S. J. (2002). Preface. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. ix-x). New York: Oxford University Press.

Swickert, M. L. (1997). Perceptions regarding the professional identity of counselor education doctoral graduates in private practice: A qualitative study. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 36, 332-340.

## Not Knowing Ourselves

This theme consists of two parts. The first relying on our ability to recognize and relate to our clients' feelings and the second, assessing our awareness of countertransference. One student reported, "A counselor who has not explored his [or her] own feelings or who is not in touch with his [or her] own feelings may have a hard time recognizing and describing a client's feelings." The source of a counselor's language is derived from the ability to share empathy with clients. We do not need to have experienced the identical situation to understand a global feeling (i.e. anger, loss). Understanding core feelings is what is significant. Countertransference is defined as, "...positive or negative wishes that the counselor unconsciously directs or transfers to the client (Gladding, 2006, p.38). This can either be elicited by client projection or the counselor's response as though there is a shared life, history, or fantasy (Corsini & Wedding, 2005) For example, when working with an angered couple, or a client that has experienced a tremendous loss, the counselor may minimize feelings to protect their own reaction.

## Attention in Session

One student described that using minimizing phrases can occur, "when [counselors]...haven't been actively listening." Leaving any attempt to accurately reflect the client's story is near impossible. Minimizing phrases can be used as a "safety guard" preventing an inaccurate assessment from the counselor.

## It's Just My Language

"We may also use these expressions because they have become a normal part of English language slang" or natural "fillers" in our dialogue, as stated by some students. The fact is that these phrases are applied in everyday language, therefore making it difficult to alter. In this case there no negative reason for using minimizing phrases, but the counselor must explore client impact. Another student suggested that these phrases arise when there is a deficiency in the counselor's vocabulary level. "Rather than knowing separate words... [and] varying degrees of a certain feeling...only one general word comes naturally and the phrases are used as qualifiers..." Having a limited feeling vocabulary can alter the intensity and accuracy of any reflection.

## It's a Two-Way Street

Finally, this is a two-way street. Our clients also have the capability of using minimizing phrases. "That makes me kind of angry," may communicate to us that they are having difficulty accepting the full meaning of a feeling. A counselor

can assess this by asking the client, "Are you feeling kind of angry" or reflecting "I'm hearing you say that you're kind of angry, but I have the sense that it is more than that. You are angry." These responses promote self-awareness in our clients as well as set a model of communication for future sessions.

## Final Thoughts

Beginning counseling students weighed in on rationale of the application of minimizing phrases in counselor language. They suggest that minimizing phrases develop from counselor self-awareness and confidence issues, vocabulary level, and client protection. In addition, the potential influence on working alliance and counselor/client relationship was discussed. For these students, this discussion has been the impetus to raising their awareness on what influences their responses in the counselor role. The impact of minimizing phrases will change with every client. Therefore, what is important is that each counselor assesses their own awareness of how these phrases enter their counselor language.

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## From the Editor

Melanie Bullock  
University of Texas - El Paso

*Juncture* strives to be a valuable resource for TACES members. To meet this goal, we need your help! We invite you to submit articles, mini-case studies, literature reviews, announcements, and reports of interest to counselor educators and supervisors. In addition, please let us know what you would like to see in future issues!

The winter issue is scheduled to be published in January. So....



send submissions to  
[mmbullock@utep.edu](mailto:mmbullock@utep.edu)  
by January 13th.

Please include TACES in the subject line.