Listening and Responding: Skills and a Framework for Helping People Change

J. Scott Yaruss, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
Assistant Professor, University of Pittsburgh
Clinical Research Consultant,
Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh
Co-Director, Stuttering Center of Western PA
My “philosophy” of teaching

Do I have a *philosophy*?
My “philosophy” of teaching

Do I have a philosophy?

Yes! I guess I do…
My Teaching Goal

Students will develop the skills they need to help clients achieve their goals in treatment

- Counseling is an integral part of the therapeutic process in communication disorders, regardless of the specific nature of the disorder
- All speech-language pathologists need to develop counseling skills
My Teaching Goal

Students will develop the skills they need to help clients achieve their goals in treatment

- Understand basic theories of counseling
  - Humanistic
  - Person-centered
  - Gestalt
  - Existentialist
  - Behaviorist
  - Rational Emotive
  - Cognitive Restructuring
My Teaching Goal

Students will develop the skills they need to help clients achieve their goals in treatment.

- Understand basic principles of counseling
- Attending
- Listening
- Valuing
- Probing
- Challenging
- Summarizing
My Teaching Goal

* Students will develop the skills they need to help clients achieve their goals in treatment
  - Understand how counseling relates to the scope of practice in communication disorders
    - What is the boundary between speech-language pathology and counseling psychology?
Accomplishing the Goal

- Students will develop the **skills** they need to help clients achieve their goals in treatment

  - Students need time to **PRACTICE** their counseling skills if they are going to be able to use them in clinical settings
  
  - Many students are uncomfortable (at first) talking about the issues that may come up in treatment for communication disorders
Step One:

Learning to talk about “stuff”
- Feelings our clients have
- Challenges our clients face
- Unpleasant things that happen to people
- Situations we wouldn’t want to face ourselves

Clinicians need their counseling skills to help their clients with the issues that the clients couldn’t handle on their own
How my teaching has evolved...

Well, it *still* hasn’t had time yet...

I have moved more and more toward giving students the opportunity to DEVELOP their microskills for counseling rather than just being taught them.
Organizing principles for my class AND my own clinical interactions

Learning Counseling Microskills

Understanding the Importance of Change
Counseling Microskills I

What does it take to be an effective “counselor”?!?

LISTENING
…the ability to…

- Attend to what the client is saying
- Convey through verbal and nonverbal means that you understood the client’s experiences, behaviors, and feelings

How does a student develop good listening skills?!?
Learning to Listen

Some people are born listeners...

...most of us have to develop the skill

Students develop attending and listening skills by practicing with each other

- Role-playing interview scenarios
- Observing each other while listening and providing feedback about their classmates
- Practicing common listening mistakes then attempting to correct them
Counseling Microskills II

What does it take to be an effective “counselor”?!

Responding
...the ability to...
- Let the client know you can understand his perspective
- Provide feedback that helps clients make changes in their lives

How does a student develop good responding skills?!

Practice
Learning to Respond

It is not enough to understand what a client is saying, we also have to let him know that we understand.

- **Empathetic responses** let clients know we have heard and respected their message.
- **Probes** help clients consider their situation more deeply and lead to new insights.
- **Challenges** encourage clients to examine their assumptions and consider new perspectives.
- **Summaries** help clients integrate experiences.
Learning to Respond

It is not enough to understand what a client is saying, we also have to let him know that we understand…

- Students may be uncomfortable, at first, with these types responses, so they need lots of time to practice
Learning to Respond

It is not enough to understand what a client is saying, we also have to let him know that we understand…

- **Students may be uncomfortable, at first, with these types responses, so they need lots of time to practice**

- **We spend a lot of time in role-plays practicing different responses to scenarios and evaluating which response is better**
The Importance of Change

Any counseling interaction should be focused on the goal of treatment...

- ...to help the client *make changes* that move them to their desired outcome
- ...to help the client *solve problems* that stand in the way of these changes

It is not enough to “have a good talk”

- Clinicians must have a plan in mind that will help the clients achieve change
A Blueprint for Change (Egan, 2002)
(The “Skilled Helper” model)

**Stage I: Current Scenario**
- Helping the client tell his or her story
- Identifying “blind spots” in the client's perspective
- Leverage: Determining which issues should be addressed

**Stage II: Preferred Scenario**
- Identifying possibilities for the future
- Setting and agenda for change
- Making a commitment to the process

**Stage III: Action Strategies**
- Identifying possible courses of action
- Determining which action provides the "best fit"
- Formulating a plan for achieving the client's goals

ACTION leading to the desired outcomes
A Blueprint for Change (Egan, 2002)
(The “Skilled Helper” model)

Stage I: Understanding the **current scenario** – *where are you now?*

Stage II: Identifying the **preferred scenario** – *where do you want to go?*

Stage III: Developing **action strategies** – *how are you going to get there?*

Action Arrow: The whole point is to help the client achieve goals in therapy
A Blueprint for Change (Egan, 2002)
(The “Skilled Helper” model)

Using this model, students learn...

- that the point of counseling is to help the client move in a specific direction
- that counseling involves more than just “talking to the client” and “active listening”
- how to identify roadblocks to change that affect the client’s success in therapy

And they can develop the confidence they need to develop an effective partnership with their clients
Summary

Counseling is an integral part of the therapeutic process for all communication disorders.

Students not only need to understand the goals and processes of counseling; they must also *practice* the microskills necessary for helping clients make the changes to achieve their treatment goals.