



Teaching Approaches for Cultivating Hope for Novice Counsellors' in Training: Using Hope Collages and E-Visual Postcards to Process Difficult Moments

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Abstract

An underused component of counselling is the cultivation of hope by novice counsellors with diverse marginalized clients (Warner & Baggs, 2023). Maintaining a hopeful attitude is an important catalyst for strengthening the working alliance between client and counsellor (Rogers, 1957). In this paper, reflection of incorporating hope collages (Jevne, 2005; Weiser, 1988) alongside E-Visual Postcards (Fels, 2015) of difficult moments with a client is used to support novice counsellors in nurturing hope. The intent of the teaching exercises is to help students become more attuned to their own feelings of hope and impact on the working alliance when encountering obstacles with diverse marginalized clients.

Keywords: Therapist Hope, Hope Theory, Diversity, Positive factors in Psychotherapy, Arts-based Supervision

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Introduction

The teaching exercises incorporating the use of the Hope Collage (Jevne, 1991; Jevne, 2005; Weiser, 1988) as well as the visual E-postcards (Fels, 2015) are both conceptualized based on the tenets of Hope Theory (Snyder, 2000; Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 1997). This theory emphasizes the subjective stance, takes a cognitive perspective, and views people as agentic. Hope Theory (2002) is comprised of two main components: (a) agency cognitions, or the belief that one can reach desired goals, and (b) pathways cognitions, or the perceived capacity to flexibly generate workable routes toward those goals. The theory views agency and self-efficacy appraisals as particularly important for activating hopeful motivation and sustaining movement towards achieving goals, including working with marginalized communities (Lent, 2016; Singh et al., 2010).

Relevant Research and Literature Support

Hope emerges in various life contexts, in situations of both adversity and success, and points to the value of attending to people's environments and personal interpretations to understand their experiences (Frankl, 1984). Once a person taps into hope as a resource, people start to take small steps towards a desired future self. By creating more transformative plans with the client that represent actual future commitments helps to inspire hope (Lyles, 2018). Generating hopeful strategies to address client's circumstances and finding ways to nurture hope is important. The counsellor's personal appraisal of hope in their work also influences potential action, goals, and response to life challenges taken when working alongside clients (Snyder, 2000). Individuals who can hope, despite past challenges and unknown outcomes, often engage in creative thinking that allows them to see beyond boundaries (Lynch, 1965; Snyder, 2000; Snyder, 2002; Yohani, 2008). Social justice also emphasizes empowerment of marginalized groups by recognizing how the presenting problem is framed by the sociocultural contexts that influence the client (Arthur, 2018; Mollen & Ridley, 2021). To create social change requires finding new pathways of hope alongside clients to address societal barriers (Blackstock, 2021; Cole, 2009; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). Unpacking self-efficacy beliefs of counsellors working with marginalized groups using the interventions of a hope collage as well as an E-Virtual postcard of a difficult moment helps address an important gap for novice counsellors (Ratts, Singh, Nasser-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016; Swartz, Limberg, & Gold, 2018).

Rationale or Knowledge Gap

During the early stages of the pandemic, Ritchie, Rogers, & Ford (2021) investigated school psychologists mental wellbeing, self-efficacy, and work satisfaction. At the time, job loss rates in North America were 7.2% for workers with a bachelor's degree or higher between March

and April 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2020b) creating a shortage and job insecurity amongst counsellors. Additionally, counsellors perceived themselves as less secure in their role and invested more time on developing their competencies in new ways. They also reported a significant decrease in wellbeing which also mirrors the report from Statistics Canada (2020a) that over half of Canadians mental health had also decreased during the pandemic. It has been suggested that hope is the integral feature in client healing and wellbeing (Frank & Frank, 1991; Hanna, 2002; Menninger, 1959; Yalom, 2009) as well as practitioner experience and intervention (Jevne, 2005; Snyder, 2002). While the importance of hope in counselling practice has received support from practitioners and researchers for many years, understanding how to make hope visible in one's practice is still in its early stages (Sandage, Crabtree, and Schweer, 2014). The use of the teaching exercises is a way to explore means for fostering hope that can expand the novice counsellor's repertoire for enhancing hope for themselves as well as for the diverse clients they serve at their practicum site.

How the Teaching Innovation/Instructional Strategy Addresses the Need/Knowledge Gap

Counselling students engaged in school or community-based practice settings are asked to reflect on their knowledge, practice, and experience to illuminate commonalities and new understandings of hope-based approaches to support work with diverse clients. By compiling and sharing new ideas with each other within the classroom setting it serves as a form of resource knowledge and sharing that contributes to enhancing their wellbeing and commitment to working with marginalized clients. As there are minimal practical hope-based resources in the field for mental health providers who are committed to underserved clients to draw from these teaching exercises represent a starting point and help to provide insights, highlight areas of commonality and differences of experiences, and much needed peer support for the training needs of novice graduate counsellors in the field (Cohen et al., 2021; Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006; Muran & Barber, 2010; Rogers, 1957; Yalom, 2009).

The teaching exercises generated hope-based dialogue exploring realistic ways to reframe experiences and to engage in practices (Paré, & Sutherland, 2016). As a result, students would also reflect on safe and effective use of self in their work with clients. They would take account for self-care practices as a primary factor of sustaining hope in one's work that renewed their commitment to working with marginalized clients. Bringing together a diverse group of novice counsellors and perspectives, this also embraced inviting practices of inclusion, equity, diversity of each student-learner in a manner that was strengths-based and allowed for the individuality and developmental needs of the student to be respected.

Description of Teaching Innovation/Instructional Strategy

Prior to integrating the hope-based collage and E-visual postcards within the semester, I asked students to consider how they would consider creating a safe and welcoming environment

with each other (Geller & Porges, 2014). I would explain the importance of using their counselling skills (open ended questions, paraphrasing, and empathy) as ways to respond to each other's sharing. Early in the semester there would also be a discussion for them to consider what their current self-care practices were as it would help in having strategies of confirmed value to pull from when dealing with the difficult emotions that emerge when discussing the challenges of working with marginalized clients. The self-care strategies are introduced early in the academic term to help the students stay grounded within the classroom environment while discussing areas related to their hope collage and Visual E- Postcard of difficult moments. This use of the hope collage and E-visual postcards can be completed in a manner that would require two class periods of at least 1.5 hours per session held at the beginning or near the end of an academic term.

Hope Collages: Broadening Understanding of how Hope Influences Practice

Prior to students meeting in class, students are invited to create and digitally photograph hope collages, which involves clipping images and adding any other found objects they wish to a poster board. Students are asked to create a collage that includes many elements that reflect hope to them as it pertains to their work with marginalized clients at their practicum site. Collages do not require artistic skills by the participant; the materials are familiar, inexpensive, and readily available; and the method is suitable for using in both an online and in person environment. Students generally need to be reassured that artistic talent is not necessary and that the value of the exercise exists more in the process of creative self-expression than in the perceived quality of the product (Masiarczyk, 2023). The use of collage is well established in counselling settings (Williams, 2020) and seen as a helpful route to exploring hope (Jevne, 1991; Moore, 2005; Turner, 2005). Often images included in the collage symbolize stories or experiences of hope and these can be explored in conversation (Larsen, Edey, & Lemay, 2007). Within small group peer discussion format, students are invited to share and comment on individual pictures, the layout of their collage, and the process of creating their collage. Through the process of sharing stories of practice, they discover more about their experience of hope. Students are asked to find images connected to the following topic areas when working with marginalized diverse clients: challenges in maintaining hope, threats to hope, new hopes found, and hopes that are sought after in their practice. The collage experience can be processed with students focusing on what they have learned about their desired goal in the various topic areas. A few questions upon which students in class might reflect include: What does hope mean to me? How do I hold hope when I work with clients? What is it about these images that inspire hope in my work? How do I see change in my work with clients happening, and what resources are needed? What is my role in promoting change? What areas do I need to develop more to be able to hold hope for the people I am helping? The hope collage is an excellent tool that taps into hope while helping students understand what they want or need in their personal and professional lives (Bates, McCann, Kaye & Taylor, 2017).

E-Visual Postcard of Difficult Moment with a Marginalized Client to Deepen Understanding of how Hope Influences Practice

For the next class, students are asked to create an E-visual postcard of a key moment of difficulty experienced while working with marginalized clients that took place during their practicum. The E-visual postcard incorporates an image, a postcard length narrative of what they learned and why the moment matters to them in their personal and professional life. I have also asked students to integrate a quote of significance (from either a song lyric, poem, nugget gleaned from supervision, or class required reading based on *The Gift of Therapy* (Yalom, 2009)) that resonates with the student (Fels, 2015). Prior to creating their E-visual postcard, all students in the class would have also completed reading *The Gift of Therapy* (Yalom, 2009) to have a deeper understanding of the skills and process pieces that influence the working relationship with their clients. These E-visual postcards are discussed among students and within a small peer group discussion format for unpacking their meanings and wonderings of the key moment with a client and consist of the following questions: What did you have in mind when you created your E-postcard? Can you tell me why this is of importance to you? What two hard realities have you encountered when working with your client? They would then be encouraged to place their E-visual postcard alongside their hope collage to look for patterns as well as possible new insights around what may threaten their hope(s) and how to nurture and sustain hope in their work with marginalized clients. Questions that they would reflect on with their peers would be the following: Looking at your hope collage and E-postcard side by side, has your understanding of the difficulty you identified shifted or changed? What new hopes can you envision in your future work with your client? What might those changes look like in your work? What might be blocking your ability to envision a way forward with the client? What do you think needs to change to make hope more salient in your work with your client?

Application of the Topic to Counsellor Education

Novice counsellors have the challenging task of holding onto hope even when their clients from marginalized communities may be contending with profound feelings of loss and grief. Therefore, when students counsel diverse marginalized clients, they are often also “grief workers” (Hashempour & Anand, 2023; Luterman, 2020; Yohani, 2008). Typical losses experienced by marginalized clients involve relationships, environments/environmental loss, skills, routines, social/societal loss, and self-esteem (Hanna, 2002; Hashempour & Anand, 2023). Students can benefit from psychoeducation that their client’s grief emotional reactions are appropriate given their life circumstances (Williams, 2020). Instructors can educate students that embracing the client’s painful feelings is the first step in healing and can help reveal the various resources of strength a client has to draw from (Felder & Robbins, 2020). This exercise permits students to have an open discussion amongst each other as to the difficulties encountered with learning to bear witness to the client’s pain and loss while also remaining a container of hope for diverse clients (Dickson, Jepsen & Barbee, 2008).

The purpose of the use of the hope collage in combination with the E-visual postcard is to investigate the experiences, challenges, and difficulties novice counsellors have implementing a multicultural and diversity-based framework in their work (Ratts et al., 2016). Additionally, exploring how they create, implement, and sustain hope across working with diverse marginalized clients is a central line of inquiry (Ridley, Console, Sahu, Yin, & Mollen, 2021). Students start to reflect on their options, plans, interventions, perception of progress in their work with diverse clients and communities. They are also encouraged to openly examine change and continuity of hope and self-efficacy beliefs towards their work with marginalized clients within supervision and view it as an ongoing aspect of future self-reflection (Hocoy, 2007).

Ethical Considerations for Responding to Learning Diversity, Classroom Diversity, and Fostering Inclusive Learning Environments

The teaching exercises serve as jumping-off points for further reflection on their multicultural competencies, strengths, ability to strike a balance in their work, and what it means to establish their professional identity. Through processing their applied work at practicum sites, they became more attuned to their self-efficacy beliefs and the self-responsibility needed to address their levels of hope and personal wellness (Callender & Lenz, 2018). They may start to define their peer group as a form of community engagement to strengthen and nurture their awareness of their inner strength and resilience. Students also start to become more aware of the diverse realities and challenges of working in the field. The artwork embedded within each teaching intervention allows the student to be more transparent about their needs and consider how to bring more balance in their work with diverse clients they serve (Bennett-Levy, 2019). Incorporating creative approaches requires careful planning of the instructor as the students in the class need to have a high level of comfort with each other to gently challenge and explore emotional reactions to each other using active listening skills. Use of art-based teaching in counselling classes can be emotionally affecting as use of images may tap into personal aspects of a student's life experiences that differ in emotional valence than when considering more traditional modalities of teaching novice counsellors. Therefore, instructors can use teachable moments that may emerge in processing the collage and E-visual postcards with students to educate students regarding the ethical codes on boundary management. Instructors can help students learn to differentiate between their personal concerns stirred by their work and being able to hone in on clinical concerns/meanings and relevant aspects that have direct bearing on their professional sphere of work with clients.

Reflexivity and Intrapersonal Awareness of the Instructor about Potential Impacts on the Classroom

Hope is often the counterbalancing force to feelings of fragility and vulnerability in ones work with clients. When sharing the hope collage, students can articulate their experiences of contending with both hopefulness as well as different degrees of discouragement that they may be feeling in their work with clients. Therefore, it is very important for instructors to reflect and vali-

date students' initial sense of hopelessness and pain because difficult emotions often need to be fully explored before hope can be found, seen, and felt (Larsen & Stege 2012; Seligman et al. 2015). The hope collage and E-Visual Postcard allows students to have a space to express these thoughts and feelings with each other. In so doing students begin to realize that if their peers can hear, feel and experience the disclosure of the range of their feelings, then they also have the courage to face these emotions with their clients when they emerge. In this realization lies the potential for the emergence of hope and the lived experience of vulnerability as being a strength in one's practice (Bryant, 2006; Hirschi, 2014). It also sensitizes the student with recognizing issues of loss and grief that underly underserved populations. Topics of loss and grief can often be a hot button for both the counsellor and client. Often, novice counsellors bump into their own grief reactions to their client stories which needs to be processed in a safe environment (Geller & Porges, 2014). After exploring the hope collage as well as the visual E-postcards, counselling students often start to disclose topics they are avoiding discussing with clients that they feel may intensify the feelings of loss that a client has (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006). However, over time students learn from each other the importance of being able to stay with the difficult emotions with each other and subsequently can listen more deeply without active avoidance of topics with clients. As an instructor, being comfortable with educating students about loss and grief processes is an important step as these aspects become more apparent when students explore what aspects may be threatening their sense of hope in working with clients. As an instructor, creating space for loss and grief awareness helps students understand how to help clients cope with grief and loss in their own personal stories (Cutcliffe, 2004).

Suggested Complementary Resources for Supporting Implementation of Hope Collages and E-Visual Postcards

Particularly noticeable is the paucity of empirically derived theories regarding the principles of inspiring and instilling hope working alongside marginalized client groups (Masiarczyk, 2023; Neville, 2020). For this reason, the recommendations of implementation of resources to complement the use of the hope collage revolve around students reading material to deepen their understanding of hope by reading significant chapters within the following material: Snyder (2000) Handbook of hope theory, measures and applications. To complement the E-Visual postcards, for considering active listening skills and identifying various difficulties encountered within counselling, all students are also required to read and reflect on the book The Gift of Therapy (Yalom, 2009) which identifies the instillation of hope as the first of 11 critical factors for effective counselling. Additionally, instructors can assign students to read various counselling vignettes exploring the instillation of hope with clients within the book Creatures of the day and other tales of Psychotherapy (Yalom, 2015) that explores creating new vistas of hope and possibility when confronted with life limitations.

Evaluation of Effectiveness of Teaching Innovation/Instructional Strategy

The course is of a pass/fail nature which allows for students to safely reveal their vulnerabilities and enables the instructor to provide individual support as needed. The exercises are best taught from a humanistic and growth perspective which encourages self-reflection. Through sharing, students start to realize that understanding their work with diverse clients lies on a continuum of growth and development (Najdowski, Gharapetian, & Jewett, 2021). It also provides students the opportunity to learn from each other while sharing at their own pace and depth. The instructor helps students pull out areas of strength as well as areas of growth that they could lean into when working with vulnerable populations contributing to feeling more hopeful in their work (Peterson 2006; Seligman, 2002). An area that can be explored through the dialogue to assess student learning in the exploration of the hope collage as well as the E-Visual postcard would be to see if the student is able to formulate/conceptualize the difficulties that they may be encountering with a client. Areas for assessment would be to listen for the degree of feelings associated with the experience, as well as the impact of bearing witness to the client's losses. At the heart of assessment, the instructor is sensitive to listening for how the student stories their hope by also listening for the underlying processes of how the student counsellor is also able to manage the loss witnessed and restore their hope in their work (Cutcliffe, 2004). Through sharing of experiences students can slowly start to identify their own thought patterns, beliefs about themselves, others, and the world we live in and learn the power of reframing perspectives as needed/desired (Patrick, 2020).

Implications

Creative methods can allow for students to deconstruct their difficulties and find new openings (meanings) and realign with their values (Ali & Lee, 2019). This becomes important for student counsellors as the stories that they tell themselves influence their self-efficacy beliefs and their own personal theory of counselling (Wong-Wylie, 2006). These two arts-based approaches can help students build a bridge between their own personal self-exploration (present and past experiences) as well as the new meanings generated of their professional journey that the student is embarking as they encounter more realities of the counselling profession (La Cour & Schnell, 2020).

The use of these teaching approaches can help students self-identify personal strengths that may be underutilized. Additionally, from an existential perspective, students also start to explore the meanings and values that underpin their work which serve as anchors for building and sustaining their hope (La Cour & Schnell, 2020). Having supportive peers to unpack experiences with is also fundamental for seeing themselves as "fellow travelers" and not alone in their journey (Yalom, 2009). Through class discussion they learn to compassionately support each other to find heartfelt solutions to difficulties encountered within ones work with underserved populations who endure systematic oppression in which the client lives.

Unanswered Questions and/or Limitations

Finding the appropriate balance between explicit and implicit instruction when facilitating the two exercises is an area that remains unanswered as it requires the instructor to incorporate developmental considerations of their students. It is important to highlight that students acquire learning about intersections between hope and working with marginalized clients not just through explicit teaching, but rather through helping students to tap into their own experiences. It requires the instructor to nurture the autonomy and self-direction of students to discover through sharing of practicum experiences “where hope lives” for them in the situations that they find themselves in when working with marginalized clients.

Feelings of despair, sadness, and hopelessness can surface for students who work with marginalized clients who face systematic racism based on a magnification of economic hardship, migratory crises, as well as an increase in hate crimes during COVID-19 pandemic (Maynard-Pemba, 2021). Instructors can also encourage students to reflect on the current sociopolitical moment and impact on the wellbeing of their clients, whether they are providing space for clients to discuss their potential feelings of helplessness, and exploring what sources of hope clients are accessing (Day-Vines, Booker, Steen, & Arnold, 2018; French et al, 2023). For many clients from marginalized communities, they experience social impediments that make achieving their individual goals impossible to achieve by individual effort alone (Truscott & Crook, 2021). For these reasons, an area that emerges with students through class discussion touches on their self-efficacy beliefs and understanding of integrating advocacy and social interventions (integrating public education to help shift societal attitudes) to inform their practice (French et al., 2023).

It is also important to acknowledge potential barriers for use of these teaching exercises. The exercises are emotionally rich and time intensive (require additional time for students to complete readings and assignments prior to class as well as building in enough in-class time to process). Additionally, prior to engaging in the teaching exercises, it would be important to imagine where all the students may potentially be on a hope continuum in their work with clients. A caution is that the instructor needs to confidently know that there are a few students in class that can deliver hope-based messages. If most students are struggling in their practicum, more psychoeducation around loss and grief as well as hope for diverse clients would be warranted in replacement of the exercises.

Future Directions for Practice and Research

Hope has been identified in counselling as one of the key strengths and therapeutic factors that counsellors and clients possess as it facilitates the utilization of pre-existing resources and encourages optimism in their work together (Bartholomew, 2023; Brown & Lent, 2016; Yalom, 2009). Additional research is needed to add to our knowledge how best to increase levels of hope for novice counsellors and to enhance their understanding of how counsellors hope for clients serves as an important therapeutic factor (Bartholomew et al., 2019). Use of hope collages and E-

Mani

visual postcards represent creative and accessible exercises that can serve as a meaningful entry point for novice counsellors to deepen their understanding of how hope informs their practice. By identifying how their hope fluctuates when working with marginalized clients novice counsellors benefit from having a forum to hear diverse viewpoints from their peers and discover new ways to shape and sustain their practice.

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