

EITN Issue 17 Book Reviews

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Introduction to Counselling Skills: Text and Activities. Third Edition

R. Nelson-Jones

London: Sage (2008), pp. 320, Pbk., £22.99 ISBN 9781847873392

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The third edition of this popular textbook outlines Nelson-Jones' 'Relating – Understanding – Changing' model of the counselling process. It is designed not just for trainee counsellors but also for those wanting to use *counselling skills* more effectively in other professional or voluntary helping roles and, as such, it will be of interest to teachers undertaking counselling skills training, those with an involvement in pastoral support or guidance, and also to counselling skills trainers. It includes two new chapters (on relaxation interventions and managing crises) and an updated reference list.

Nelson-Jones draws on both the humanistic and cognitive-behavioural approaches to counselling, creating his own integration of key elements from these very different traditions. He offers an accessible and authoritative 'take' on a wide-ranging mix of counselling concepts and skills (and their theoretical backgrounds), and his model provides an organising, clearly structured framework from which to approach the process of problem solving and change. He also calls it 'the skilled client' model, emphasising, particularly in the Changing stage, the value of teaching the client new skills for communicating and taking action and new 'mind-skills' for improving thinking (drawing strongly on cognitive therapy). This differentiates it from another well-known text, Gerard Egan's *The Skilled Helper* (2006), which offers an alternative approach to problem-management, also using an integrative model. The counselling skills student or trainer may be best advised to preview both models before deciding which is the best individual 'fit' for their purpose. John McLeod's *Counselling Skill* (2007), with its rather different emphasis on how the helper can create a safe and usable space for the natural human activity of sharing and working through a problem 'story', may also be of interest here.

Nelson-Jones' book certainly provides impressively comprehensive and systematic coverage of the many areas that counsellors/helpers need to consider, from advice on how to offer challenge and self-disclosure, to the links between physical reactions and emotional states, to ethics. It could also be a useful reference book for more experienced counsellors/helpers who might be looking for guidance on how to approach interventions that may not have been part of their basic training e.g. how to teach a client visualisation or help him work on selecting goals and strategies. And for the beginner, it is clearly structured and signposted throughout, with a statement of learning outcomes at the beginning of each chapter, illustrative case examples and well designed practice activities that the reader could carry out alone or that could be used as group exercises.

I was also impressed, as a person-centred counsellor/trainer, with Nelson-Jones' recurrent reminders of the value of the relationship and of the counsellor/helper's humanity: "*Sometimes the urge to teach and instruct can override respect for clients' potentials to lead their own lives and make the decisions that work best for them*" (p. 154) and "*to a large degree, clients change because of 'non-specific relationship factors'*" (p.191). That said, the integrative nature of this model means that students of more purely relationship-based approaches (e.g. psychodynamic, person-centred) may find the methods advocated problematic in terms of their predominantly cognitive/behavioural and problem-focused emphasis, their highly structured/directed nature and the particular helper-client power dynamic that this may involve. For some readers the very detailed breakdown of different tasks and skills to be used at different stages may feel confusingly complicated (though Nelson-Jones does flag up ways of using the model in a simpler form, depending on the user's needs). The book aims for a user-friendly style to make it accessible to a wide range of readers but will appeal particularly to those who are looking for clear structure and guidance and a tightly systematic approach.

References

- Egan G (2006) *The Skilled Helper: A Problem-Management and Opportunity Development Approach to Helping*. London: Thompson Learning/Wadsworth
- McLeod J. (2007) *Counselling Skill*. Maidenhead: Open University Press