Helping Students “Find the Words”
Understanding Role Plays to Better Build Clinical Skills

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Images by Kristin Garay

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The actors: Marshall Factora and Nana Ponceleon

Students from the Fall 2018 and Fall 2019 online course: Foundations of Grief Therapy

Columbia School of Social Work, Columbia University Center for Teaching and Learning, The Center for Complicated Grief,

The team at CSSW: Kevin Ram, Christine Holmes, Hong Kyung Anna Suh, Johanna Creswell Báez, Steven Schinke, John McDonald, Starsha Jordan, Irv Garfinkel, Katherine S. Rochmat

The team at Columbia CTL: Abie Sidell, Stephanie Ogden, Jessica Rowe, Srilakshmi S. Nair, Michael Deleon, Celine Zaphiratos, Jon Hanford, Vincent Aliberto, Andre Laboy, Lucy Appert

The team at CCG: Colleen Gribbin Bloom, Bonnie Gorscak
Online campus launched: Fall 2015

First graduates: May 2017

Primary model:
Weekly synchronous classes in Adobe Connect & asynchronous homework in Canvas

Residential & online campuses are integrated:
Residential students can take online courses and vice versa if online students are local

Local field placements, local advisors

Program options:
- two-years full time
- one-year Advanced Standing
- part-time-to-full-time, up to four years

Program concentrations:
- Clinical
- Social Enterprise Administration
- Policy
Overview: Helping Students “Find the Words”

Teaching goal
Helping students learn what to say, moment-to-moment, in psychotherapy.
Teaching Method

Scripted actor-performed videos

Interactive activity
Evolution of the video-based interactive exercise

Version 1: Enhanced student recorded role plays

Version 2: In-class individual “find the words”

Version 3: 4-student panel “find the words” discussion

Version 4: 4-student panel guided analysis and reflection
Version 1: Recorded student role plays enhanced by watching videos
Result
Students still struggled, often feeling awkward

Problem
Role plays require too many decisions
Version 2: In-class activity “Find the Words”
Result
Students still struggled ... uncertain what to say and and feeling “on the spot”
Version 3: In-class 4-student panel “find the words”
Version 3: “the process – part 1

Info

Set the frame

Video paused at a point of therapist response

Students suggest therapist response
Version 3: the process – part 2

Play video therapist response

Instructor-guided Discussion
Result: Students liked this better …
but they were STILL confused
Why were they struggling?

Step 1: Draw some circles
Step 2: Draw the rest of the owl

Maybe this was too big a leap
We were asking them to provide a simple, personalized intervention... without helping them sort through the complexity.
Personalized intervention

Meet the client where they are

Move in direction of therapy goal
Active Listening

Full concentration to fully hear and comprehend meaning

Therapeutic alliance

Client

Verbal and non-verbal communication
Context
Readiness

Therapist

Self-observation
Relevant experience
Therapeutic goals and strategies
Therapy goals and strategies

“If you don't know where you're going, you might not get there.”
Yogi Berra
Intervention possibilities

There’s more than one way
Version 4: In-class 4-student panel using an activity guide
“Find the words” Activity

An activity guide

What the client is saying and why
The therapist’s response
How you might respond

Increased time for discussion and break-out groups using a second case
Now let’s try it!

Version 4: “Find the words” activity

1. Learn some background
2. Watch a video segment
3. Discuss the segment
Background: the therapy frame

Loss of someone close

Acute Grief

changes

Grief Therapy Goal

Adapt to changes

Accept the loss
Restore wellbeing

Integrated Grief
Background: therapist goals and strategies

Goals
• Maintain treatment alliance
• Promote adaptation to loss

Strategies
• Accept grief
• Manage emotional pain
• Think about the future
• Strengthen relationships
• Tell the story of the death
• Live with reminders
• Connect with memories
Introducing Grief Monitoring

Using a scale where 1 = the least intense, and 10 = the most intense grief you can imagine, please record the minimum and the maximum intensity of your grief each day and tell us when these lowest and highest points occurred. Then, at the end of the day, rate the average intensity for that day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>HIGHEST GRIEF</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
<th>LOWEST GRIEF</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
<th>AVERAGE GRIEF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ther</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Had dinner with friends I haven’s seen since I died.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spent time with 4 year old grand niece. She is very cute and funny</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Before I went to bed. Missing so much.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Trying to watch tv (this was a bad day. home alone all day. no one called.)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity Guide

1. Consider Frank’s receptivity to grief monitoring in a larger context: think about Frank’s loss and grief, about his emotional life - his current daily life, his relationships. How might this explain what he is saying to the therapist?

2. A therapist needs to intervene in a goal oriented way. What are Rhonda’s goals in this segment? What is she responding to? What intervention techniques is she using? Is she meeting Frank where he is, and moving him toward a goal?

3. Ask yourself if you would be comfortable working with Frank in a similar way. If not how would you respond to him?
video: introducing grief monitoring
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Everyone

Questions? Comments?