

**Notebook on Ethics, Legal Issues, and Standards for Counsellors**  
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**Reflections on Ethics Education in Counsellor Education Programs**

I recently prepared and conducted a day long seminar entitled, *Pedagogical Perspectives on the Teaching of Ethics Courses*. So, in this Notebook, I have decided to share a few reflections on this important aspect of counsellor education.

- A commitment to ethics education is foundational to any graduate program in counselling.
- Ethics education rather than being just an obligatory programmatic add-on can be both intellectually and personally challenging and satisfying, and, to my surprise, it can serve a truly integrative function within counsellor preparation since it can touch every aspect of counselling practice.
- One of the primary goals of ethics education in counsellor education is help students develop the ego strength to take ethical action, as well as, to tolerate the ambiguity inherent in most ethically laden circumstances.
- Young professionals are more likely to develop an ethically responsible approach to counselling practice in an environment where counsellor educators value and model ethical behaviour and are open about their ethical challenges and their tolerance for ambiguity so typically associated with such challenges.
- Ethics education is not only about teaching a body of knowledge, it is also concerned with decision-making, problem solving, and critical thinking.
- Counsellors educators who teach ethics course have available a variety of conceptual models of the process of ethical decision making, including, those that see it as: a cognitive, problem-solving process, a moral reasoning process, a process that is multi-dimensional requiring the integration of a number of psychological processes.
- Although our Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice are necessary and helpful, they cannot anticipate the appropriate response to every ethical challenge. Therefore, it is essential that ethics education prepare students to recognize ethical dilemmas and to think through the most appropriate course of action. Fortunately, we have available a number of models of ethical decision-making to assist with this process. (Capuzzi and Gross, 1999, Cottone and Tarvydas, 1998, Kitchener, 1986, Rest, 1984, Schulz, 2000)
- Ethics course should contain both didactic and experiential components. An experiential curriculum is essential to the development of ethical decision making capability. In fact, Handelsman (1986) views it as a skill that can and should be developed. Gawthrop and Uhlemann (1992) found that just a 3-hour experiential workshop had significant positive effect on a group of undergraduate students' ethical decision making when dealing with role play scenarios.
- Historically our approach to ethics education has been to see it as occurring across the counsellor education curriculum, what is sometimes called an infused approach that takes advantage of teachable opportunities, particularly those that occur during supervised practice components. Although this infused approach continues to be essential it may not be sufficient for a number of reasons: there is now a significant body of knowledge to be learned, higher consumer expectations for counsellor ethical sophistication, time constraints during supervision, and maybe a limited range of ethical issues are present during practica and other supervised experiences.

- As most members know, our CCA Accreditation Standards require a stand alone course in counsellor education programs, however, our Certification requirements do not. I know that our Certification Committee is currently wrestling with their review of this aspect of our certification standards. The CCA Board has taken the position that should a change occur requiring an ethics course for certification there would have to be a lengthily transitional period that would allow the continued certifying of graduates from programs with only the infused approach to ethics education until the necessary adjustments are made.
- Ethics education curriculum should include the following: CCA Code of Ethics, CCA Standards of Practice and Casebook. All counsellors should have some familiarity with such statutory laws as, child protection, privacy and freedom of information, youth justice act, mental health act, divorce and matrimonial act, as well as selected examples from case law. All CCA counsellors should be familiar with the CCA Ethical Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures.
- Ethics education in counselling is a rich environment for the generation of a great deal of research activity for both faculty and students. For example, we need to have a fuller understanding of the ethical challenges confronting our members in a variety of work places, schools, private practice, counsellor education. Tracey Nigro (2001) has set a fine scholarly example with her master's thesis dealing with the attitude towards and experiences with duality by our CCA members in British Columbia. There is a need for basic research to shine more light on the nature of ethical decision making and the psychological processes involved.
- It is only through the development of appropriate ethics education with a shared curriculum and instructional goals can we honour our social commitment to self regulation and public protection.

Note: the references for this Notebook are available on request.