Naming Spirituality in Counsellor Education
A Modest Proposal

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Abstract

It is presently unclear to what extent tertiary institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand assist their student counsellors to recognise, engage with, and utilise their clients' spirituality. This article attempts to re-establish a discussion that began 16 years ago in a significant New Zealand-based article which made a number of modest proposals about the education of counsellors in relation to their own and their clients' spirituality. Since then, the accreditation of counsellors and courses, particularly in North America, has prompted a re-examination of the benefits and difficulties of integrating spirituality into counsellor education and counselling practice. This article invites counsellor educators and practitioners to reflect upon how working with a client's spirituality is currently incorporated into counsellor education programmes and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Professional concerns include counsellor competence to work with spiritual and religious issues, and the engagement of spiritual issues in bicultural and multicultural counselling. Considerations for counsellor education include programme content, training requirements, and research, and questions are posed for future discussion.

Keywords: Counsellor education, competence, culture, religion, spirituality

Counselling as a profession in Aotearoa New Zealand is in a state of transformation. Decisions made in the next few years regarding counsellor registration are likely to substantially affect the profession as a whole, not only shaping future counsellor education programmes but also influencing their accreditation. It may be timely, therefore, to take a fresh look at the significance of spirituality in the education and preparation of Aotearoa New Zealand's future counsellors.

Historically secular, the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC), unlike its sister organisation, the New Zealand Christian Counsellors Association, has had little to do with the promotion of spirituality in counselling except where it directly corresponds with the unique national context of bicultural partnership with Māori and Treaty bonds (Te Wiata & Crocket, 2011). However, with the publication in 1994 of Hans Everts and Margaret Agee's ground-breaking article, "Including spirituality in counsellor education: Issues for consideration, with illustrative reference to a New Zealand example," counsellor educators in Aotearoa New Zealand became enjoined in an energetic international debate. What these authors had modestly proposed was a rationale for defining spirituality in counsellor education and how programmes might be structured to incorporate the various aspects of spirituality into counselling.

Subsequently, the number of counselling books and articles in professional journals in the field of popular and humanistic spirituality has increased hugely (Cashwell & Young, 2011; Culbertson, 2009). Internationally, counsellors have been made more aware of the impact of spiritual experiences on their clients' lives, in part, perhaps, by the philosophy and practice of Rogers' (1961) person-centred counselling; the influences of Maslow (1968) and the transpersonal psychology movement (Bray, 2008a; Rowan, 2005); an awareness that clients' spiritual journeys are a major focus of bicultural (Durie, 1994) and multicultural counselling (Sue & Sue, 2008); research into the spiritual factors that influence post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995) in bereavement (Lancaster & Palframan, 2009) and grief work (Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005), and the generally reported positive outcomes for health when spiritual resources are utilised by clients and helping professionals (Fukuyama, Siahpoush, & Sevig, 2005; Gale, Bolzan, & McRae-McMahon, 2007; Hodge, 2011; Levin, 2009; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000).

Much of the impetus toward naming spirituality in counsellor education and practice has its roots in the northern hemisphere. In the same year as Everts and Agee's (1994) publication, a new category, "Religious or Spiritual Problem," was published by the American Psychiatric Association [*DSM-IV*] (1994) that signalled professionals' obligation to assess their competence to deal with distress associated with spiritual experiences and practices. The following year, 1995, the American Counseling Association (ACA) called a Summit on Spirituality. This national meeting formulated nine Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling, which were subsequently adopted by the ACA in 2009. These competencies were designed to help counsellors establish and maintain effective relationships with clients. They assist

counsellors to develop a practice framework that allows them to understand and work effectively with clients' spiritual and religious lives and they provide a guide for developing educational programmes and course designs (Cashwell & Young, 2011).

The competencies address four domains of counselling practice: knowledge of spiritual phenomena; awareness of one's own spiritual perspective; understanding clients' spiritual perspectives, and spiritually related interventions and strategies. Six of the competencies have undergone factor analysis (Robertson & Young, 2011) that empirically supports their use in the training and guidance of counsellors, encourages exploration of spiritual and religious matters in the practice of counselling, and supports their ethical incorporation into counsellor education programmes (Cashwell & Young, 2004, 2011; Cortright, 1997; D'Souza, 2007; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997; Fukuyama et al., 2005; Kelly, 1994; Leseho, 2007).

At home in Aotearoa New Zealand, the 2006 Census revealed that just over two million people—55.6% of the population—are affiliated with a Christian religion (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.). However, a more detailed survey of religion, conducted three years later, concluded that although "a sizeable minority of New Zealanders still describe themselves as religious," low levels of active involvement in regular religious practice supported the view that New Zealand has become a more secular country (Massey University, 2009, p. 3). In spite of religion's decline in popularity, there are many who would claim that "Godzone" is a very spiritual place. For example, in 1999 Morris and Hill (as cited in Bray, 2008a) "estimated the 'spirituality industry' in Aotearoa/New Zealand, excluding the mainstream churches, to be worth over $40 million." They further suggested that a popular "postmodern" spirituality was emerging that invites "questing" as a permanent feature of a new plurality that emphasises the ideal human condition without formally prescribing how it might be achieved (Bray, 2008a, p. 398).

In short, if spirituality in any of its many forms is central to a person's "sense of what it is to be human" (McLeod, 2009, p. 660), then the counselling profession in Aotearoa New Zealand must have a part to play in the perennial debate about the significance of spirituality. It is, therefore, proposed that the inclusion of spirituality in counsellor education will not only lead, as Kelly (1994) has suggested, to a resolution of its place in professional education and practice but will also contribute to the profession's future shape and role in society.

Spirituality and counselling

Defining spirituality

> Without the transcendent and transpersonal we can get sick, violent, and nihilistic, or hopeless and apathetic. We need something "bigger than we are" to be awed by and commit ourselves to in a new naturalistic, empirical, non-churchly sense. (Maslow, 1968, pp. iii–iv)

It is almost obligatory in a work such as this to distinguish between the terms "spirituality" and "religion" (Lines, 2006) and to undertake the challenging task of definition (D'Souza, 2007). Although both incorporate the sacred, "religion" seems to entail belonging to an organisation that shares similar beliefs, values, and moral rules, whereas "spirituality" implies a relationship or consciousness nested in a larger context of meaning (Munro, Manthei, & Small, 1988) that is uniquely experienced yet intuitively shared with someone or something that transcends individualism, the self, and the ego (Levin, 2009; Lines, 2006; McLeod, 2009; Stanard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000; Tse, Lloyd, Petchkovsky, & Manaia, 2005). Spirituality, according to the ACA's Summit on Spirituality, may be further defined as an actualising tendency that directs an individual "towards knowledge, love, meaning, hope, transcendence, connectedness, and compassion…creativity, growth, and the development of a values system" (Miller, 1999, p. 30). What is suggested here is that spirituality encompasses all that is spiritual, transpersonal, and religious. Also implied is that an individual does not have to be religious in order to be spiritual, and vice versa (Rican & Janosova, 2009). These definitions begin to prescribe our possibilities as human beings and offer counsellors and clients profoundly powerful insights into what clients might become as counselling processes unfold.

Counselling and spirituality

According to Kelly (1994), clients want to talk about their spiritual lives and want their counsellors to see them as whole people who have physical, social, emotional, and spiritual resources that inform their wellbeing and provide healing. Correspondingly, as counsellors we are bound to respond to all of our clients' concerns, but how well do our training and experience allow us to work competently and safely with clients' spiritual issues?

There are a number of assumptions concerning the spiritual nature of human beings and spiritual concerns that currently influence counselling practice, making the

inclusion of spirituality in counsellor education compelling. In the former, it is generally agreed that a person's nature is essentially wise, optimistic, and seeks meaning and growth in adversity (Cortright, 1997). In the latter, spirituality can be central to a client's life, a multicultural necessity impossible to avoid, and a genuinely supportive resource (Nelson, 2009). A further assumption is that, in order to be fully effective with clients, counsellors should know themselves and engage in personal work. Similarly, counsellors in training are encouraged to acknowledge and examine the ways in which their beliefs and values position them in terms of their work with clients and self. The advantage of including spiritual issues in counsellor education programmes is that counsellors "become aware of how their beliefs influence the clients' healing processes" (Leseho, 2007, p. 442). Consequently, counsellors who know themselves and value their own spiritual journeys are more aware of how they might influence their clients, and more able to invite them to name these fundamental spiritual concerns safely.

The ACA's nine competencies for training counsellors in this area of work suggest that not only are there skills to be honed but also a body of knowledge to be acquired alongside this developing personal awareness. The following adapts the ACA's competencies and presents them in conjunction with a number of broad spiritual and religious questions that counsellors might be called upon to explore with clients:

1. "I feel so hopeless and worthless. Who am I and what is my life for?" Questions about meaning and existence commonly occur in counselling. In their therapeutic exploration it is useful to understand to what degree religious and spiritual beliefs, values and practices impact upon these questions and influence clients.

2. "I have no one to blame but myself. Is there something wrong with me?" Discussions that touch upon fundamental issues of blame, shame, guilt, and responsibility require a clear understanding of clients' religious and spiritual beliefs and practices in their cultural context.

3. "Why do I feel incomplete and disconnected? Is there more?" Activities that encourage clients to explore religious and spiritual beliefs can provide them with more expansive pictures of themselves in the world, increase awareness and understanding, and support the acceptance of, and relationship with, others.

4. "At this time in my life I should be happy, shouldn't I?" Counsellors can use their knowledge of religious and spiritual belief systems and models of religious and spiritual development across the lifespan to help clients to identify their developmental needs.

5. "Am I so evil that I need to be punished?" Clients may use a variety of religious

and spiritual terms or expressions to describe themselves or their circumstances. Counsellors' acceptance and sensitive curiosity when responding to questions like this open up opportunities for fuller disclosure and help to create an environment where understanding and healing become possible.

6. "How much do you know about Buddhism?" Counsellors should be able to identify honestly the extent of their experience, knowledge and values. When they have reached an impasse with clients, they need to know when it is appropriate to seek support or negotiate a referral and/or contract to cover spiritual and religious subjects through supervision.

7. "Can I explore my spiritual beliefs in counselling?" In practice, counsellors can be called upon to make formal assessments of their clients. Religious and spiritual beliefs may be central to the view that clients have of themselves, the world and their problems. Collaboratively assessing the influence of the spiritual domain in a client's life by discussing the client's history of religious and spiritual participation and experiences; reviewing the client's current practices, rituals, and community involvement; and discussing his or her beliefs, will clarify and assist the therapeutic process and reveal potential sources of support.

8. "How am I supposed to respond when my friends want to apply God-talk to my therapeutic journey?" It is appropriate to respectfully and sensitively explore spiritual themes in counselling within a client's expressed frame of reference.

9. "How does discussing this get us anywhere?" It may only be beneficial to discuss a client's spiritual beliefs in counselling when the client is agreeable and/or if it helps to achieve her therapeutic goal.

Counsellor education already promotes self-awareness, but on its own is it enough to assist counsellors to answer these questions and others like them? One argument (Nelson, 2009) suggests that in order to promote real competence in guiding others, counsellor education programmes should not only assist trainees to become counsellors but also to undertake some form of religious or spiritual practice or discipline.

Integrating spirituality into counselling

Historically, despite these recent developments, spirituality and religion have enjoyed a dysfunctional relationship with counselling and psychotherapy, their estranged secular cousins. As European counselling emerged in the last century, it purposefully distanced itself from established religions and spiritual beliefs, allying itself with

scientific and secular values and constructions of knowledge (Nelson, 2009). This bias toward modern Western rationality and science, Gale (2007) has noted, has strongly influenced the development of the helping professions and "led to a false dichotomy…reflecting a dualistic and hierarchical conception" (p. xx) that privileges rationality and labels the irrational or spiritual as psychopathology. Such ideas, she suggests, must be keenly challenged as failing to meet our "enduring human needs for meaning and connection" (p. xx).

Nonetheless, increasing multicultural practice and the interest in diverse counselling and spiritual practices in the West have enriched the field to a point where counsellors have discovered that in order to effect changes in clients, one needs to be wholly present to their spiritual experiences (McLeod, 2009). Subsequently, spiritually oriented therapies and practices (Richards & Worthington, 2010) have successfully emerged that focus more on the non-expert, personal qualities of therapists and therapeutic relationships as healing (Nelson, 2009), which in turn has popularised counselling as a spiritual lifestyle choice.

McLeod (2009) hypothesises that it is inevitable that counselling theory and practice will "travel in the direction of a more general appreciation of the role of spiritual experience in people's lives" (p. 660) but the form this may take is not clear. He speculates that this will occur as more and more spiritual practices find their way into mainstream counselling, with either the danger that in their metamorphosis they will lose their original potency, or the hope that there will be a "more fundamental *rapprochement* at a theoretical level" (p. 661).

Spirituality at the core of counselling

> *I am compelled to believe that I, like many others, have underestimated the importance of this mystical, spiritual dimension.* (Rogers, 1995, p. 130)

One way of integrating spirituality and counselling is, as Morgen, Morgan, Cashwell, and Miller (2010) suggest, to regard the core skills of counselling as fundamentally spiritual in themselves—that "spiritually-sensitive counseling is not some esoteric realm of study, but may be likened to a dimension of depth in the work we already do" (p. 2). To focus less on technique and more on relationship, counsellors are invited to "rediscover the sacred" in the therapeutic alliance (Hepi & Denton, 2010, p. 21). Rogers' (1961) person-centred approach to counselling exemplifies this approach to spirit-centred practice. For example, his three core counselling conditions of genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding allow a counsellor to

respond to a client's deep needs for attachment with others, universal meaning, and consciousness. Spirituality is at the centre of Rogers' conceptualisation of the empathic relationship between counsellor and client, and he regarded its spiritual characteristics as outcomes of the universe's actualising tendency. He suggested that the act of counselling places counsellors in a liminal position where "we are touching the cutting edge of our ability to transcend ourselves, to create new and more spiritual directions in human evolution" (p. 134). Famously, discussing the essence of his counselling approach, Rogers (1995) described his altered state of consciousness as "full of healing," adding that "my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present" (p. 129). Rogers insisted that there is a universal and formative tendency toward greater order, complexity, and interrelatedness which is a foundation of the person-centred approach. At its core, counselling is a profound partnership between scientific empiricism and spiritual ways of knowing.

Made in Aotearoa New Zealand

Māori spirituality

> *For many Māori, spirituality lies at the heart of Kaupapa Māori.* (Ratima, 2008, p. 2)

It is appropriate here to define spirituality in terms of Māori culture and its unique characteristics and differences (Durie, 2007; Te Wiata & Crocket, 2011). Arguing against universality, Durie (2007) has maintained that while the psychology that underpins counselling owes much to Western science, it can only be applicable to Western cultures. He suggests that if the aim of counselling is to understand an individual's condition as it "relates to relationship building, individuation, growth and development" (p. 2), then this is reflected in the culture within which that person has been raised. Most Māori, he suggests, participate in the culture of Aotearoa New Zealand while maintaining an ongoing engagement specifically with Māori culture and Māori society through their wider whānau/family networks.

The customary Māori worldview recognises wairua/spirituality as a tangible force that permeates life. As "the physical realm is immersed in the spiritual realm," so wairua significantly influences people's relationships with each other and in turn with their environment (Pere, 1997, p. 16). Well-known Māori wellness models, including Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994) and Te Wheke (Pere, 1997), show the important contribution of wairua in balancing social relationships, body, mind, and emotions.

In spite of the mental health system's careful ambivalence or even neglect, spirituality, spiritual experiences, and spiritual practices are still acknowledged by many cultures as important for personal and community health and wellbeing. At a fundamental level, therefore, there might be little to distinguish between, for example, a Pākehā conceptualisation of an all-embracing spirituality that weaves its way through everyday existence, and a Māori understanding of wairua. They are essentially similar concepts, and both can be beneficial, inclusive, interconnected, and holistic, and bring a person into a more intimate relationship with the material and the transcendental worlds.

Tying spirituality to one cultural position or another, rather than creating accord, can also lead to the polarisation of opinion and cause unnecessary division between and within cultures. In debating the issue of spirituality and education, for example, Ratima (2008) warned Māori academics to be consistent about their acknowledgement of Māori ways of being and spiritual beliefs rather than leaving them at the door. Similarly, Mika (2011) reminds educators and practitioners of all cultures to acknowledge and explore the active presence of wairua in counselling Māori. In these instances there is a genuine fear that if spirituality is not named and accepted, it cannot fully participate or be accounted for. Clearly, it would be better to emphasise the diversity of cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand and demonstrate how effective the intentional integration of spirituality into counselling theory and practice can be. To quote Webber (2008), as counsellors we are privileged to "walk the space between," and to develop those skills that allow the naming, sharing, and holding of those things that we most value together as a pluralistic culture.

Everts and Agee's modest proposal

In 1994, Everts and Agee published an article that indicated to the academy how spirituality might be integrated into counsellor education in New Zealand. It was one of only two published articles specifically about counsellor education and spirituality archived by Manthei and Miller (2001), and a current search of this literature reveals little more. If, as Manthei (2001) has suggested, "a professional organisation's journal mirrors the concerns and changes in that organisation" (p. 1), then the handful of articles from NZAC's journal on spirituality to do with adolescent experiences (Bray, 2008b; Burke, 2008) and Judaeo-Christian and kaupapa Māori approaches to counselling and practices (Culbertson, 2009; Drury, 2007; Durie, 2007), though few, may be regarded as somewhat encouraging. There is no doubt that Everts and Agee's (1994) article, read alongside Culbertson's (1998) engaging companion piece about

spirituality and psychotherapy, contributed to the growing international debate about spirituality and counselling and it is worth summarising here.

Everts and Agee (1994) surmised that counsellor education programmes might benefit from investing in course content that more accurately reflects counselling's holistic concerns for clients. They noted the "subjective and controversial" nature of spiritual issues and the conceptual difficulties that this poses for the counselling profession (p. 291). Nonetheless, accepting the importance of acknowledging spirit in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, to prepare counsellors in training to recognise and utilise clients' spirituality, they offered a number of points to guide counsellor education programmes in incorporating spirituality.

First, Everts and Agee (1994) proposed the use of the following criteria when defining spirituality: "accuracy, cultural recognition, empirical verification in terms of people's behaviour and functioning, and its contextualisation in a constructive frame-work" (p. 293). They suggested that a secular counselling definition of spirituality might have something "to do with a person's innermost being and its connection with a universal force or divine presence which gives purpose and meaning to people's lives" (p. 293). They argued that armed with such a definition, beginning counsellors could be assisted in recognising embedded spirituality in client issues and in working with them.

Second, they stressed the importance of training that provides developmental opportunities to enhance self-awareness by exploring personal values, worldviews, and spirituality, and to examine how these are to be played out as a professional. In order to achieve this level of awareness, Everts and Agee challenged educators to be explicit about their own belief systems and the part spirituality plays in them; to model an approach to client functioning that is "a genuine and inclusive acknowledgement of spirituality in their teaching, practice and personal behaviour" (p. 291), and to use naturally occurring opportunities to proactively explore spirituality in every aspect of the counselling programme.

Third, counsellors in training were asked to draw upon a number of theories and approaches that support a client's potential toward psychological development, personal growth, and actualisation. Correspondingly, in terms of programme content, they recommended counselling models, approaches, and strategies that explicitly incorporate spirituality. In the former, they particularly noted the originators of psychosynthesis, logotherapy, and humanistic and Jungian approaches.

Fourth, once established, professional boundaries and cognitive frameworks in

supervision and field placements should support and encourage the disclosure of spirituality as a valid aspect of a client's life.

Fifth, they suggested a professional delineation between the areas where clients seek "secular self-empowerment" and those areas of spirituality that defer to "some higher source of wisdom and guidance," which may require the more appropriate professional expertise of a spiritual director or a tohunga/religious guide. However, they argued that counsellors do have a central role in assisting clients to "reconnect with their own spiritual resources" (p. 299). They also suggested that counsellors in training could benefit their clients by learning how to collaborate respectfully with alternative healers, and knowing how to measure their own competence to participate in such work.

They concluded that spirituality contributes to our overall understanding of counsellor and client functioning and may direct our choices of intervention strategies. Spirituality, they suggested, "should be woven into the fabric of the entire counsellor education programme" (p. 300), affecting how client functioning, counselling theory, skill training, personal development, staff modelling, practicum experiences, research projects, and examination procedures are understood and organised.

Counsellor education and spirituality

Everts and Agee (1994) found that spirituality became explicitly acknowledged by students throughout their counselling programme through staff modelling, supervision, and the orientation and assumptions made about client functioning. Fifteen years later, the University of Auckland's graduate elective "Spirituality and Counselling," a cornerstone of Everts and Agee's original proposition, remains popular with counselling students. However, for intending students, there is little to promote the programme's spiritual integrity on the university's website which, to paraphrase Manthei (2001), should provide a picture of how an organisation wishes to be seen or sees itself.

To begin to understand where spirituality rests in Aotearoa New Zealand's professional counselling organisations and in the community of counsellor educators and practitioners, a look at available websites provides an impression of sorts. On its own website, NZAC currently names 22 counselling training providers offering 24 counselling qualifications from diploma to master's level. A survey (Bray & Malcolm, 2009) of these sites to assess the use of the term "spirituality" in the marketing of counselling programmes provided the following information. New Zealand tertiary websites generally avoid the use of terms such as "spirit," "spiritual," "spirituality," and

"spiritualities" in describing or explaining counsellor training programmes unless they are directly named in a programme or course, as in "Spirituality and Counselling;" as a course outcome which meets the individual's need "to integrate their spiritual vision more in their lives," as in a diploma of psychosynthesis; as a descriptor of special religious character or affiliation such as a course on "Foundations of Christian Faith;" in cultural course content for "Culture and Counselling" and "Multicultural Perspectives;" or in association with Māori disciplines such as "Māori Studies."

In the search of these 22 counsellor education sites, eight gave a nil response to the search terms, seven mentioned counselling and/or chaplaincy services, and 11 responded to the terms from a number of non-counselling courses and papers in disciplines that included Education, Creative Technologies, Fine Arts, Health Science, Māori, Media, Nursing, Sociology, and Anthropology. It is also not surprising that religion and spirituality are given more attention in religiously affiliated institutions than in state institutions, which concurs with Kelly's (1994) survey of 525 American counsellor education programmes. While it is understood that the thumbnail sketch that websites provide is neither a fair nor an adequate picture of the actual work that counselling programmes do, this is nevertheless how they are currently represented to the public.

Integrating spirituality into counselling and education

Any number of reasons may be given why counsellor educators and counsellors might find it difficult to integrate spirituality fully into their professional practices. Even though they are, for example, fundamentally grounded in a culture based upon religious and moral social structures, or may be familiar with existential and humanistic philosophy and practice, they might be influenced by that historic antipathy between religion and psychology that suggests that spirituality is beyond the purview of counselling. For whatever reason, it is likely that clients who bring spiritual, religious, or mystical beliefs and experiences will not always be openly received or understood by their counsellors (McLeod, 2009).

Zinnbauer and Pargament (2000) and Nelson (2009) have outlined four positions that counsellor educators can take toward incorporating spirituality and religion into their programmes. The *rejectionist/reductionist position* reflects an atheistic denial of sacred realities, and defensiveness in their presence and avoidance in their use. The *exclusivist/hierarchical position* is persuaded that there is only one true spiritual path, and all others are to be regarded with suspicion. This position suggests that spirituality

is a separate human quality rather than a holistic human phenomenon. A *constructivist position* recognises the ability of individuals to construct their own meanings and realities, and a *pluralist position*, similarly, endorses the counsellor's unique system of beliefs while being able to sensitively recognise and appreciate the diversity of others' belief systems.

Nelson (2009) added a further approach that regards spirituality and psychology in a respectful and flexible symbiotic relationship of equal value which, when dialogically addressing the problem in one area, assists the other. West (2004) and Lines (2006) have suggested that this position more effectively accommodates the holistic nature of human beings in counselling, and descriptions of their work with clients' spirituality in counselling as "psychospiritual" and "spirit-centred" reflect this dialogical approach. Nelson's (2009) final submission suggests a "uniqueness" model in which spirituality and psychology remain separate, a position that implies that it is "possible to have a good spiritual life in the midst of poor psychological functioning or vice versa" (p. 492). However, the separation of spirituality and psychology in practice also permits counsellors to avoid the use of either one or the other in their work with clients (West, 2004) and creates barriers to understanding (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000). Similarly, counsellors can acknowledge spiritual experience as valid but still exclude it from the therapeutic space on the grounds that they are presently not sufficiently competent to deal with it (Ankrah, 2002).

Linking spiritual and multicultural perspectives

There are clearly established links between spirituality and culture and between culture and counselling that impact upon counselling training (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997; Passalacqua & Cervantes, 2008). As culture defines spirituality (Everts & Agee, 1994), so spirituality, in Aotearoa New Zealand's cultural context, intimately defines a client's way of being in terms of understandings of "wellness" and "wholeness" (Durie, 1994; Maslow, 1968; Pere, 1997).

In their comprehensive work *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice*, Sue and Sue (2008) provide a number of guidelines for counsellors encountering traditional ways of being and healing, including to avoid invalidating a client's core cultural belief system; to become familiar with non-Western forms of healing and their appropriateness to a cultural context; to understand how others experience and live in the world by learning about indigenous beliefs and healing; to avoid the pitfalls of either over- or under-pathologising an indigenous issue; to find ways to use and

partner the services of traditional healers; to accept that spirituality is a legitimate aspect of mental health work, and to recognise that indigenous healing is a community activity. These points have major implications for counsellors training to work with diverse cultural groups for whom indigenous healing is a significant worldview. Furthermore, if the attitudes, skills, and competencies required of counsellors to address multicultural issues are conceptually similar to those used for managing clients' spiritual concerns (Sue & Sue, 2008), it might be agreed that pre-existing counsellor education that integrates multicultural perspectives already provides a fruitful source of easily replicated templates for the development and design of counselling programmes that incorporate spirituality.

Spirituality in counselling courses

A northern hemisphere perspective

Responding to the ACA's nine spiritual competencies, Ingersoll (1997) established a generic counselling and spirituality course at Cleveland State University to bridge the spiritual gap that existed in the training of counsellors. The curriculum described five broad areas that defined spirituality, explored it as an active and passive process, contextualised it in areas of human suffering, examined the healthy and unhealthy aspects of it from a client's perspective, and provided opportunities for reflection and integration. Upon completion, students were expected to be able to present a spiritual autobiography; use skills to clarify clients' spiritual journeys; recognise counter-transference reactions to spirituality; participate in spiritual dialogue in mainstream counselling approaches, and recognise and understand cultural expressions of spirituality.

Ten years later, Leseho (2007) published his graduate course in spirituality in counselling which covered broadly similar areas of content but emphasised the students' self-care and wellness in practical activities that immersed them in unfamiliar spiritual practices, such as attendance at spiritual services, or engagement in daily meditation, prayer, and reflection. Leseho (2007) wrote that "counselling is a spiritual activity, so while a course that focuses on spirituality is ideal, so too is it necessary to include the spiritual in every counseling course taught" (p. 452). However, in America at least, while the numbers of these courses are on the increase, they are still mostly taught as electives (Cashwell & Young, 2004).

In their survey of ACA members, Young, Wiggins-Frame, and Cashwell (2007) asked the respondents to rate the importance of the nine competencies to effectively

address spirituality and religion in counselling. The results demonstrated that a "sizable" proportion of counsellors believed that the integration of spirituality into counselling is important. More significantly, they showed that counsellor education needs to think beyond current self-awareness components and provide training that introduces conceptual models and intervention techniques alongside research that gives counsellors more guidance in managing spiritual issues in their counselling practice.

As a footnote, the British counselling literature reflects similarly broad concerns about programme content (Rowan, 2005) and development (West, 2001), practice (Lines, 2006) and training (McLeod, 2009; West, 2004), and yet its professional body is relatively silent about the issue. However, McLeod (2010) has called for a "reintegration of spirituality into counselling theory and practice" (p. 43) to redress what he conceives as an imbalance caused by counselling's overemphasising the rational over esoteric practice.

Counsellors' roles, ethics and competence

Do we have the skills and knowledge to hold the sacred space (Ankrah, 2002, p. 59)? As counsellors take on the roles that once naturally resided with the village elder or priest (Ankrah, 2002), it is argued that an understanding of spiritual matters and knowledge (Nelson, 2009) is more and more ethically appropriate and therapeutically relevant to the practice of counselling in today's culturally diverse settings (Corey, 2011; Kelly, 1994; Sue & Sue, 2008; Thorne, 1997). It is also increasingly clear that spirituality is a positive factor in individuals' health and wellbeing (Hodge, 2011; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000).

In NZAC's draft *Scope of Practice* (2003), the term "spiritual advisor" appears as a designated counsellor role and areas in which counselling services are provided include "personal growth," "existential crises," and "spiritual crises." However, most codes of ethics require professionals, including counsellors, not to undertake roles or interventions unless they are competently trained to minimise harm to the client (Hodge, 2011). Indeed, ACA's spiritual competencies underscore the importance of training and experience, which suggest that counsellors should understand and appreciate their own spiritual journey before assisting clients with theirs (Robertson & Young, 2011). Unfortunately, there may be many counsellors who have not received training in managing spiritual or religious concerns who, relying on their own convictions to guide their work, are unaware of their own issues and counter-transferential responses that make them less effective with clients (West, 2001).

Reviewing the *GM Resource and Referral Directory* (2011), originally published in 1991 as the *Directory of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, revealed that 20 NZAC counsellors, out of the 93 represented on the database, claim to have some specialist skill in "spirituality" and a further five work with "spiritual crisis" or in "spiritual direction." As an extremely crude sketch of counselling nationally, the author concludes that 26.9% of all counsellors in Aotearoa New Zealand could consider themselves ethically competent to work with some spiritual aspects of their clients' lives. By comparison, over the entire site, listing 311 helping professionals and agencies, only 42 (13.5%) claim some specialism in spirituality. Furthermore, counsellors who specialise in "spirituality" also appear to utilise a number of specific counselling approaches. The most highly favoured appear to be client-centred, followed by CBT, Gestalt, TA, and then transpersonal and psychotherapeutic approaches, sand tray work, RETB, solution-focused, creative, and narrative therapies.

On the face of it, this bodes well for the future of counselling's work with spirituality. However, in her account of the marketing of counselling in New Zealand, Miller (2003) suggested darkly that counsellors do use marketing techniques that "promise clients self-actualisation, fulfilment, spiritual achievements, personal growth and discovery" (p. 81) in order to dispose clients favourably to their product. It is not presently known how many New Zealand counsellors with or without sufficient training actively work with their clients' spiritualities, but this discussion is professionally challenging and raises a number of ethical questions about training and competence, counsellor self-promotion and identity.

Unlike the ACA, NZAC does not presently prescribe a set of spiritual competencies that guide ethically consistent counsellor education and support practice. Presently, as professionals, counsellors are trusted to make their own judgements as to whether a client's spiritual concern, or any issue, falls within the scope of their competence. Consequently, as it stands, counsellors have the freedom to deem themselves competent to carry out spiritual assessments, collect client information, and to undertake research into these areas without formally satisfying NZAC, supervisors, or clients that they are competent to do so.

Clearly, counsellor educators have an important role to play here. If all educators explicitly, comprehensively, and consistently incorporate spirituality into their programmes in ways that acknowledge the spiritual dimension of functioning in therapeutic processes, as Everts and Agee (1994) proposed, this will have implications for future professional development, for the working brief of NZAC, and for the ethical and supervisory guidelines that govern our profession.

The future

This proposal firmly supports the assumption that counsellors' and educators' awareness and knowledge of spirituality may be professionally significant to their clients. It suggests that counselling in Aotearoa New Zealand has reached an evolutionary point where it can no longer ignore international debate about the inclusion and relevance of spiritual issues in counselling. It might begin by considering how client spirituality relates to bicultural and multicultural practice and its centrality to the wellness philosophy that is inherent in our profession. Aligning itself with Everts and Agee (1994), this proposal, therefore, recommends that a "systematic rationale-based implementation" of spirituality in counsellor education be considered "at the earliest opportunity" (p. 300).

Due to its broad scope, this article purposefully raises more questions than it can possibly answer. What follows are a number of key points to encourage discussion and future research in Aotearoa New Zealand:

- What in the core business of counsellor education and practice can be named as spiritual?
- What place does spirituality have in the changing circumstances of our client demographic and of counselling?
- Why is spirituality expressed as an area of specialised practice by some counsellors and not by others?
- Do counsellors feel that they are adequately prepared to discuss spiritual matters with their clients?
- What is the value to counsellor education of existing programmes that include spirituality in their courses, and do they appreciably assist counsellors to hear, understand, and respond to clients with these issues?
- Do counsellor educators feel ill-equipped or reluctant in some way to manage spirituality and religious issues in counselling programmes?
- To what extent do counsellor educators and researchers agree that the training of future counsellors should include an intentional exploration of students' personal and professional spirituality?
- If counsellor education makes room for spirituality to be intentionally incorporated in existing courses, how might its content be integrated and taught, and what templates already exist that will prove useful?
- What recognised, empirically substantiated theories of practice underpin the teaching of spirituality to counsellors, and how might they enhance existing counselling course approaches?

- How may the unique characteristics of Aotearoa New Zealand's spirituality be expressed in and alongside its counsellor education?
- Should NZAC decide to instigate counsellor and course accreditation, what might this look like, and how will it shape the way that counsellors are taught to work ethically and competently with their clients' spiritual concerns?
- Would it be helpful to form a "spirituality and counselling special interest group" to create a forum for counsellors to contribute ideas, to stimulate discussion, to promote spiritually aware approaches to counselling, and to provide opportunities for dialogue across organisations and disciplines?

McLeod (1999) has written that, as is the case with many of our clients, the counsellor's role in society is necessarily "liminal" and "able to enter the unknown" (p. 218). Thus, we have the capacity to engage in transformational conversations that challenge the limited meta-narratives upon which counselling was originally founded and that precluded spiritual experience and denied "what is for many people a primary source of meaning and belonging" (pp. 221–222).

In this pioneering spirit, let us as counsellors and educators address "spirituality" again, and name it and give it a place in the future of counselling in Aotearoa New Zealand. Counsellor educators are powerfully positioned to influence spiritual awareness in the practice of counselling, and to support the recognition of spiritual experiences as factors in the growth and development of individuals and communities.

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