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Evocative Engagement with Research

Teaching research to undergraduate counselling students

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Abstract

Teaching research methods to counselling students is an important aspect of developing competent, reflective practitioners who can demonstrate professionalism as well as contribute to the strengthening of the counselling profession. However, counselling practitioners still seem to be reluctant to engage in research. Low motivation, lack of confidence, and high anxiety, as well as confusion about the relevance of research skills when trying to learn counselling skills, have been identified as reasons for this reluctance. It is proposed that these impediments need to be addressed within counsellor education programmes in order to develop a long-term solution to this problem. This article discusses how a course in research methods is intentionally taught in a meaningful and evocative way in order to captivate the imaginations and motivations of counselling students in a Christian college. The results of a survey exploring the questions that counselling students bring to their engagement in research are presented, and recommendations are offered for how research methods can be taught more effectively to counsellors.

Keywords: research methods, teaching, counselling, undergraduate, researcher-practitioner

The importance of research for counsellors

Research has been identified as a "component of all competent counselling practice" (McLeod, 2003, p. 9), and the New Zealand Association of Counsellors encourages members to engage in research in order to inform and develop counselling practice (Crocket, Agee, & Cornforth, 2011). Research helps practitioners to be accountable, develop new ideas, apply counselling in new areas, and gain a wide perspective (McLeod, 2003). Lennie and West (2009) have emphasised the continuing need for

counsellors to engage with research not only on a professional level in terms of developing the evidence base for counselling practice, but also on an individual level with regard to professional development and accreditation. As McLeod (2003) has stated, "research is important for counselling in establishing the legitimacy of the profession" (p. 3). This was especially the case with the emphasis on evidence-based practice, seen as a sign of the "legitimacy" of the counselling profession by those using a medical model of practice. Over recent years a shift has occurred away from evidence-based practice toward practice-based evidence. (Barkham et al., 2001; Chenail, George, Wulff, Scott, & Tomm, 2012; Green & Latchford, 2014). Practice-based evidence involves practitioners examining data from clinical work to enable them to more richly understand their practices and ways in which they might improve their services.

How counsellors view research

Even though counsellors acknowledge the importance of research, many are still reluctant to show an active interest in or engage with it. Evidence suggests that many counsellors do not read research articles and they continue to view research as unrelated to therapeutic practice (Dalzell et al., 2010; Reeves, 2009; Wrate & Forbat, 2008). A decade ago A decade ago Manthei (2004) observed that "according to the professional literature, counsellors around the world do very little research nor do they read or make use of the research that does exist" (p. 70). This was also the case among New Zealand counsellors, and counselling and clinical psychologists. (Manthei & Stanley, 2004)

Reasons for reluctance to engage in research

This lack of engagement with research among counsellors may be due to multiple factors. Counselling students have been found to manifest various difficulties in learning research methods in their training programmes (Holley, Risley-Curtiss, Stott, Jackson, & Nelson, 2007; Wang & Guo, 2011). These challenges include high levels of anxiety, low motivation to participate in classes in research methods, and lack of confidence (Bauman et al., 2002; Kahn, 2001; Papanastasiou, 2005; Reisetter et al., 2004). Wang and Guo (2011) examined counselling students' attitudes toward research methods classes and found low research interest and motivation to be the primary problems. These problems can affect students' future research productivity (Bauman, 2004; Deck, Cecil, & Cobia, 1990) and may account for higher levels of resistance to incorporating research implications into counsellors' own professional practices

(Bauman, 2004; King & Otis, 2004; Wheeler & Elliott, 2008). If this state of affairs continues, it does not bode well for the counselling profession.

Kaplan (2009) attributed the low interest and motivation of counsellors for engaging in meaningful research activities to deficits in counsellor education. A perceived lack of connection between counselling skills and research methods that students may experience in their training is one of the reasons that has been proposed for the lack of engagement in research by practitioners (Dalzell et al., 2010). As Lees (2001) noted, "it is common for counselling trainees to encounter research training that presents research methodologies as distinct from therapeutic practice" (p. 134). Moodley (2001) found that teachers of counselling research methodologies frequently failed to explore imaginative and innovative ways in which practitioners engage in therapeutic practice, leaving students with the impression that research methodologies were disconnected from other components of their counselling training. Wang and Guo (2011) strongly recommended examining research methods courses and teaching, seeing them as "imperative to instilling the importance of research into counselling students" (p. 6).

Teaching research within counsellor education programmes

The proposed solution to this problem is the need for competency-based curricula incorporating effective teaching about and engagement with research during counsellors' professional education (Hamoda, Bauer, DeMaso, Sanders, & Mezzacappa, 2011). In fact, there has been an increased focus in recent years on the teaching of research within counsellor education programmes (Wheeler & Elliott, 2008). As Sanders and Wilkins (2010) have stated:

> Research is an essential component of the counselling and psychotherapy core curriculum…Therapists and all care practitioners not only need to be able to understand and evaluate research literature, but are also increasingly expected to carry out simple practitioner research to monitor their own practice. (p. 5)

Although increasing emphasis is being placed on teaching courses in research methods to counselling students, the way the courses are taught may contribute to the counsellors' lack of engagement in research. Research courses themselves tend to "arouse student angst" (Langer, Lietz, & Furman, 2007, p. 71) with students reporting they found research challenging and anxiety-provoking (Moran, 2011). Low motivation has also been identified as an impediment to engaging with research, but Williams, Hill, Kim, and Campbell (2012) argue that it may be "a disguise for lack of

confidence" (p. 323). These factors are important to consider when educating counsellors about research.

For students who may be anxious about the process of learning research methods, Langer et al. (2007) suggest that instructors engage students "evocatively" in the process of research. This involves engaging them meaningfully, at an emotional level rather than primarily at a cognitive, rational, or factual level. This may be what is needed for counsellors to overcome their anxiety and low confidence about research.

Engaging students evocatively in the process of learning about research is the focus of this article. First, I will describe how the research methods course in the Bachelor of Counselling degree at Laidlaw College was developed, and how it is intentionally taught "evocatively." Second, I will discuss the results of a survey of the questions that students engage with during the course. The questions the students are asking identify not only that they are engaging with the course, but also what captures their imaginations about research and its role in their lives.

The research methods in counselling course

In Aotearoa New Zealand there is an emphasis on the teaching of research courses to counselling students. Of the seven institutions offering Bachelor's degrees in Counselling, five teach at least one compulsory research methods course in the third year (level 7). Laidlaw College is one of these five institutions. The Bachelor of Counselling (BCouns) degree at Laidlaw College is an NZQA (New Zealand Qualifications Authority) level 7 (360 credit) programme designed to equip students with a range of counselling skills; to teach them to critically engage with a range of counselling theories; and to develop their ability to integrate these with a relational theological approach, in order to prepare them for professional practice.

Laidlaw College's Bachelor of Counselling is designed for students who want to integrate Christian faith with a range of sound, well-established counselling theories and practical skills, in order to enter into community, church-based, or private practice. It is intended that by the completion of this programme students will be proficient in the practice of counselling with an emphasis on relationality, and will be equipped to engage in professional counselling practice. They will have engaged practically and critically with a range of counselling approaches (more specifically Person-Centred and Narrative Therapy) and will have demonstrated the ability to integrate their theory and practice within a sound theological framework. They will have satisfactorily demonstrated their ability to practise under supervision, and will have entered the early stages of practice and research (Laidlaw College, 2014a, p. 2).

According to the School of Counselling Academic Handbook, Bachelor of Counselling graduates will be:

- Educated in preparation for provisional membership of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors and the New Zealand Christian Counsellors Association, in a variety of health, social service and educational settings.
- Equipped with an approach to counselling that draws from Person-Centred and Narrative Therapies, and emphasises relationality.
- Proficient at articulating a well-integrated theological anthropology, developed from the study of the sacred Christian Scriptures and traditions, history, culture and the social sciences that understands people as persons-in-relationship, people of dignity who are formed through and for loving relationship.
- Practiced at relationally engaging with people including their emotions, cognitive processes, meaning-making and social positioning; skilled with a range of reflective practices including self, peer and clinical supervision.
- Prepared for postgraduate study and research. (Laidlaw College, 2014a, p. 2)

This final phrase is directly relevant to the research methods course as this is where vital preparation for postgraduate study takes place. Since the Bachelor of Counselling at Laidlaw College is a relatively new degree (launched in 2010), there was flexibility in the design of this course. It is described in the course outline as follows:

> Counselling is a relatively new profession and thoughtful practitioners are equipped to contribute to ongoing conversations about what constitutes best practice. This course involves the planning and preparation of a literature-based research proposal for the purpose of focused and intentional professional development. It also prepares students for postgraduate research by familiarising them with fields of potential research, guided reading strategies, and exposure to a range of relevant research methodologies. (Laidlaw College, 2014a, p. 12)

The learning outcomes are:

1. Evaluate a range of methodologies that are relevant to ongoing research in the field of counselling.
2. Critically engage with a range of literature pertinent to a chosen research topic.
3. Formulate a research plan that will contribute to conversations about what constitutes best practice.
4. Evaluate the current state of research in a chosen research topic, and articulate its history of interpretation. (Laidlaw College, 2014b)

There are three core assessments in the research methods course: an annotated bibliography, a research essay, and an applied research proposal. The students are encouraged to choose an area of interest or passion to focus their reading around for all their assignments. At the end of the course the students present their applied research proposals to their peers as an opportunity to practise oral presentation skills. The intention behind getting the students to present in front of their peers is to prepare them for either postgraduate study (e.g. presenting their ethics proposal to a committee), professional practice (e.g. presenting a case study in a multidisciplinary team setting), or conference presentations. Additionally, these assessments are intended to enable the students to "find their voice" in an area of their passion, as a step towards developing their competency as counsellors/researchers.

Ethical issues in research are covered extensively in the research methods course, including the ethics of data collection (Crocket, Drewery, McKenzie, & Winslade, 2004; Hart & Crawford-Wright, 1999; West, 2002) as well as the challenge of decolonising methodologies (Smith, 1999). Indigenous research models are explored, such as kaupapa Māori methods (Smith, 1999); talanoa research methods used by Samoan, Tongan, and other Pacific Island researchers (Baba, Mahina, Williams, & Nabobo-Baba, 2004), and the work of indigenous researchers such as Dei (2013), Getty (2010) and Wilson (2008). Having lived in Canada and grown up in the Amazon region of Brazil, where the indigenous voice is silenced compared to Māori here in Aotearoa New Zealand, First Nations scholars in Canada, or Native American scholars' voices in the United States, I am passionate about raising my students' awareness of marginalised voices. I see research as a powerful ethical tool to bring the voice of the voiceless to a wider audience. My own passion strongly influences my approach to teaching this research methods course "evocatively."

Teaching research methods evocatively

In the 1990s a clarion call was issued by Lee and Workman (1992) for innovative teaching strategies to be considered in order to enhance the educational goals of teaching research methods to counselling students. The research methods course at Laidlaw College tries to take up this challenge of an innovative approach by teaching research methods evocatively. The course was designed to be delivered not with a primary focus on methodologies and techniques but instead focusing on gaining a grasp of the process and value of research for counsellors' personal and professional development, which has been my own experience. I introduce the class by telling

students the story of the "reluctant researcher," a story of my own journey of becoming a researcher, outlining the pivotal events, my early misconceptions, and resistance (anxiety, self-doubt, and questioning) along this journey.

In the research methods course, students are taught the importance of research for themselves as professional counsellors as well as for their contribution to their profession. Due to the high importance that research plays in competent counsellor practice, it was felt that the research methods course should be made compulsory, in accordance with Wang and Guo's (2011) recommendation, based on their research findings that "an involuntary research requirement has a positive impact on students' attitudes and motivation toward learning research methods and their future research productivity" (p. 6).

As Laidlaw College is a Christian tertiary institution, the majority of the students would classify themselves as Christians. In order to engage evocatively and meaningfully in learning about research methods with Christian students, the course starts by redefining research as a sacred activity (e.g., worship). This inspiration came from a Cree scholar, Shawn Wilson (2008), who describes research as ceremony. Speaking from an indigenous research paradigm, Wilson (2008) sees "research as a sacred activity…a life changing ceremony" (p. 61). The intention of reframing research as a "sacred activity" is to reduce the students' anxiety and lack of confidence, especially if their anxieties are associated with common misconceptions, such as a belief that research inevitably involves statistical analysis of complex variables.

Seeing research as a sacred activity also places it within the realm of daily practice, thus helping Christian students to continue to view research as integral to their ongoing work as counsellors, rather than associated only with a compulsory "specialist" course to complete before graduation. If research can be positioned within the scope of daily practice for counsellors, it is hoped that their perceptions and expectations may shift to see it as a natural part of what counsellors do rather than a specialist activity to add to their already stressful workload.

Redefining research as a sacred activity resonates well with a Māori worldview that perceives the sacred (wairua) as integral to all of life and wellbeing (Durie, 1994, 1999, 2005). This also resonates with a Christian perspective that views our place in God's kingdom as inextricably linked with the passions that God has placed in our hearts. Beuchner (1993), for example, observed that "the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (p. 39). In order to access the students' "deep gladness" or "passion" and facilitate a connection between research and the rest of life, I start the lectures by asking the students some focusing

questions: *Where do you get your passion from? What inspires you? Do you have a vision for your life and work?* These focal questions help the students reflect on their own lives, including their strengths and their struggles, in order to find a topic or area of interest that they would like to focus on while doing the research methods course. As they reflect, they are able to identify an area of interest or passion that they would like to research; this forms the focus for all the assignments they complete during the course.

Thus, Laidlaw research methods students are invited to engage with research at an evocative, emotional level by focusing on their passion before exploring the different research methodologies. The purpose of this is intentionally to arouse their curiosity or "emergent energy"[1] in the hope of counteracting anxiety and low confidence. As Neufeld (2010) has stated, "courage is not the absence of fear, it is fear mixed with love for the treasure." When we talk about what we treasure, we are talking about values. The research methods course not only evocatively engages the students' faith and spiritual values but it also asks the students to reflect on their personal formation story: What was formative in their lives, and how has it led them to treasuring certain things or developing certain values? This is an intentional element in the research methods course as a way of counteracting students' anxiety and raising their confidence in engaging with research.

This focus on personal formation was inspired by Aten's (2012) statement that "all research, to a degree, is autobiographical" (p. 314), which echoes Dallos and Vetere's (2005) observation, "research questions inevitably arise from a personal position" (p. 19). Dalzell et al. (2010) examined an autobiographical approach to getting counselling students engaged in research, suggesting that trainers can learn from narrative practice, which has had an impact across the social sciences (see Riessman, 2008). Narrative practices understand "story" as a "metaphor for how human beings make sense of their lives and their world" (Speedy, 2005, p. 11). Dalzell et al. (2010) observed that skills used by narrative counsellors are readily transferable to researching in ways that embrace bearing witness, collaboration, relatedness, and the co-construction of knowledge. The Bachelor of Counselling degree teaches narrative therapy as one of its counselling modalities, so the students in the research methods course are being taught the importance of listening to clients' narratives. They are asked to reflect on their own narratives, focusing on their personal formation before being exposed to specific research methodologies: *How did you emerge as an academic? How did you emerge as a practitioner? How have you become both? Who stands with you as an academic/researcher? Who stands with you as a practitioner?* The purpose of this is to

enable the students to name the strengths that lie within them, and the strength of the community of support around them, as well as making connections between their narrative therapy training and their identity formation as "researchers." Having the students focus on their personal formation as counsellors and researchers/academics is intended to counteract any lack of confidence, anxiety, or feelings of isolation they may be experiencing on the often bewildering journey of research.

As Sandelowski and Barrosa (2002) have asserted,

> reflexivity is a hallmark of excellent qualitative research and it entails the ability and willingness of researchers to acknowledge and take account of the many ways they themselves influence research findings and thus what comes to be accepted as knowledge…Reflexivity implies the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry; and, in between researcher and participant to the social interaction they share. (p. 222)

A survey of the research methods students

A survey was given out to the students at the end of the 12-week research methods course in order to investigate their impressions of the course and the questions they were grappling with while doing it. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain whether the course evocatively engaged the students' passions and allayed any anxieties or misconceptions around research.

Participants: The research methods course students

Thirty-four female (90%) and four male (10%) second- and third-year students who were enrolled in the research methods course volunteered to participate in the evaluation at the end of the semester-long course. The students' ages ranged from 22 to 58 years (see Table 1).

Table 1: Age of counselling students surveyed

Age of counselling students	N = 38	%
20–30	11	28
31–40	4	10
42–50	15	39
51–60	9	23

Table 2: Ethnicity of the sample

Ethnicity	N	%
European New Zealanders (Pākehā)	26	68.4
Pacific Islanders	4	10.5
Asian immigrants	4	10.5
Māori	3	7.9
International student (Singapore)	1	2.7

The majority (68.4%) of the students were European New Zealanders (Pākehā); 10% were Pacific Islanders (three Cook Islanders; one Fijian); another 10% were Asian immigrants; nearly 8% were Māori, and one was an international student from Singapore (see Table 2).

Procedure

At the end of the research methods course the tutor asked students to fill in a self-report questionnaire containing a mix of closed questions (yes/no) and open-ended questions. Permission to publish the students' responses was sought and they indicated their consent in a yes/no question at the end of the questionnaire. There was a 100% response rate, with all 38 students giving permission to use their responses in this article. A thematic analysis of the students' responses was conducted by the primary researcher and then independently by the research assistant in order to cross-check the accuracy of the categories of the themes of the responses.[2]2 I am indebted to my research assistant, Siobhan Hunt, for her invaluable work with me on this project.

Qualitative research relies heavily on the views of the researcher or interpreter of the data. As Punch (1998) points out, "it is inevitable that the words we use to record data from the field will reflect, to some extent, our own concepts" (p. 61).

Results and discussion

Only the results of the first question from the survey are presented in this article. The results showed that the students were grappling with a number of aspects of self-awareness, including identity, passion, and personal, spiritual, and professional formation. As McLeod (2003) asserts, "the best researchers are those with the best questions, not the best answers" (p. 193). On this basis, the first question of the survey was:

If doing research is about keeping our hearts attuned to new questions that arise and

Table 3: Response to first survey question

What kind of questions arose for you to attune to?	%	(N)
Research as personal, spiritual, and professional integration and formation	32.3%	(11/34)
Becoming interested in the process of research and research per se	32.3%	(11/34)
Questions around personal story (interest areas and personal healing)	32.3%	(11/34)
Did not understand the word "attuned" so no answer	3%	(1/34)

finding ways to strengthen our knowledge, did you find this course helped you attune to new questions? Yes/No. If Yes, can you say what kind of questions arose for you to attune to?

Thirty-four of the 35 (97.1%) respondents who completed this question replied "yes," while only one responded "no." Three main categories of responses to the question by those who replied "yes" were found, and each category was equally represented (32.3%; 11 out of 34). Table 3 shows the three themes that emerged.

Research as personal, spiritual, and professional integration and formation

One-third (32.3%) of the students said that the new questions the course helped them attune to were ones related to their personal, spiritual, and professional integration and formation. Some of their answers related to passion: *Where does my passion for being a counsellor lie? What are my passions and why?* One student elaborated: *Questions arose as my passion ignited around intentions: what is the validity and usefulness of research? How would I apply my questions?* Another student, realising the huge scope of where research could take her, responded: *Trying not to think too broadly, staying focused with my passion.* It seemed that focusing on passion helped to keep her grounded so that she did not get too overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task of research.

Some answers related to sense of self and integrity of practice: *What kind of counsellor/human being do I want to be? How does what I've learned in this counselling course fit together? How can I do research that "fits" for me and my values?* From these questions we can see signs of the development of reflective practitioners.

A few students seemed to shift their view of the relevance of research generally and came to recognise its core value for their continuing professional identity. Here is one response: *Before the course, research was not something I intended to be high on my list as a way to increase my experience. Now I ask myself in what ways I can include this in my experience as a counsellor.* This is a heartening response which alludes to the student

wanting to continue researching beyond their training into their work as a practitioner. One of the intentions of the course was to address the issue of counsellors viewing research as unrelated to therapeutic practice (Dalzell et al., 2010; Reeves, 2009; Wrate & Forbat, 2008).

Some students gave examples of the spiritual and professional integration questions they were grappling with: *How can I integrate faith, counselling, ethics and research? How do I integrate my counselling and my theology? How do I work and research in ways that are consistent with my deepest values and faith?*

Other students said the questions they attuned to were specifically sparked by the redefinition of research as a sacred activity. One student said*: The main question that grabbed me was: "If research was part of your worship, how would that change it?"* Another said: *I attuned to new questions around my own story, passions, gifts, and my part to play in God's kingdom.* It seems that these students took to heart the redefinition that moved them to reflect on how their personal stories connected with their spirituality and how their spirituality could be integrated with research. From these responses we can see the beginning development of reflective practitioners who wanted to bring their spirituality and their personal story together with their professional identity as counsellors/researchers.

Demystifying research: Becoming interested in the process of research and research per se

The second category of responses (32.3%; 11/34) was related to demystifying research by becoming interested in research per se or in the process of research. Some examples of the responses were: *What is research? What are the different methods? Is research really relevant to me in my work? What is the benefit of research in counselling? How can I contribute to counselling research?* These responses may reflect some wrestling with the relevance of research for their professional formation, but it is also heartening to hear one student wondering what they could contribute to the counselling profession. This may be further evidence of a diminishing perceived gap for the student between research and counselling practice—ultimately the long-term solution to the issue of counsellors being reluctant to engage in research.

A few students were more specifically interested in the process of research. One said they learned *not to be afraid to question research work previously done if it has not answered your query or wonderings.* Another was aware of the intricacies of doing research in their chosen area: *The subject I chose is fraught with variables and ethical dilemmas—so the question that continually came to mind was—which track do I go*

down? This shows a deepening of understanding around the complexity of areas under investigation and ethical practice.

Ethical questions emerged for some students. One asked: *How can I do research that respects participants' voices?* Another student expressed this question: *In what ways can my research benefit the participants and the community?* It is interesting to hear the students take these ethical considerations to heart when engaging in research; this is another sign of the emergence of ethically reflective practitioners.

Epistemological and philosophical questions arose out of the research methods course. One student came up with a specific question related to the hegemony of quantitative paradigms in Western academic research: *Is quantitative research still in reality the dominant form of research accepted, particularly in relation to getting funding?* Another was wrestling with epistemological issues: *How do I extend the limitation of post-modern approaches?*

One student became aware of the limitations of assumptions: *Wanting to broaden my scope of understanding…looking wider…not assuming—getting to really know*. Another student expressed curiosity about who would collaborate with her in her newfound interest in research: *How can I quench my thirst to know more? Where do I find it? Who will do it with me?* These questions show the students grappling with the process of research as well as wondering who would support them in their research endeavour, resonating with Narrative Therapy's ideas about communities of support.

Personal interest and healing

The third category of responses involved students listing areas of personal interest that they would like to research. Specific responses covered the following areas: how counsellors can work safely with trauma survivors; experiential avoidance in adolescents with childhood trauma; questions around birth parents and adoptive parents, particularly birth fathers; and the place of spirituality in some therapies. More generic responses were: *The links between a particular problem and other factors affecting it; Raising my awareness of gaps in the research in my area; New ways of seeing things and recognising the need/gaps; What are the origins of the topics I'm interested in? How can I benefit from research?*

Some responses fitted into a particularly personal or deeply private realm. One respondent said: *I can't say the questions, but they gave me the desire to keep researching.* Others gave examples of personal questions they were wrestling with which made them want to explore answers for their own growth and development. One student's

response was around the issue of ethnic identity: *Where does my identity lie? What ethnic identity do I relate to? Do I lean more to one ethnic culture or do I incorporate both ethnic identities?* Another was related to the student's personal story: *More so answering questions on why I was the way I was. I didn't realise how I was, was due to unprocessed layers of trauma.* It seems that the journey of research has led this respondent on a journey of self-discovery and potential healing.

Dei (2013) points out that one aspect of indigenous research is healing. Part of that healing process is the role of empowerment: to raise "questions [as] part of a broader commitment to strengthening people's capacities to undertake their own research" (p. 31). One of the aims of the research methods course was to empower the students in their journey of personal, spiritual, academic, and professional formation, which may involve healing and paradigm shifting. It would seem, from the questions the students were wrestling with, that this aim may have borne fruit in some of the students' experiences.

To summarise these results, the students appeared to engage with research in three key areas: seeing research as part of their personal, spiritual, and professional integration and formation; demystifying research by becoming interested in the process of research and research per se; and more personally, students becoming aware of areas of personal or private interest that may have led to gaining insight for personal growth and healing. Since the course was intentionally taught "evocatively" with an emphasis on engaging the students' passions and connecting with their personal formation stories, it would seem that this emphasis led to their showing signs of starting to develop as ethically minded, reflective practitioners who want to bring their spirituality and their personal story together with their professional identity as counsellors/researchers. The students' responses showed an emphasis on personal development, self-discovery, and their own inner healing. They also showed signs of being interested in contributing to the counselling research base in the future. After the course ended a few students gave me verbal feedback; one student said the course *gave me insight into how research strengthens the counselling process*, and another said *this course helped me to find my "inner researcher."* This was encouraging to hear, as these were the aims of the course.

Recommendations and conclusion

It is important for research to become an integral part of counselling practice so that counsellors remain professionally competent and reflective practitioners who are able

to contribute to evidence-based practice as well as practice-based evidence (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003; Barkham et al., 2001; Chenail et al., 2012; Green & Latchford, 2014) within the counselling profession. Yet there is some reluctance to engage in research as a part of counselling practice (Dalzell et al., 2010; Manthei, 1997, 2004; Reeves, 2009; Wrate & Forbat, 2008). This reluctance to engage in research may not be due to a lack of motivation, but rather due to high levels of anxiety and a lack of confidence regarding research (Langer et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2012). Thus, there is a need for research to be taught more effectively to counsellors-in-training in order to help overcome the students' reluctance to embrace research as an essential part of their professional formation.

This article has explored how a research methods course in an undergraduate counselling programme was taught evocatively in order to engage students' passions and reframe the research process to reduce anxiety as well as increase motivation and confidence. The results of a student survey indicated that engaging with students' passions helped them to see research as part of a process of personal, spiritual and professional formation and integration. By reframing research, the students began to see how investigating their areas of personal interest could lead to self-discovery and healing. The students also showed signs of being curious about how they, as ethically minded, reflective practitioners, could start to contribute to the wider research conversations happening within the counselling profession.

The results of this study suggest some recommendations for teachers of research methods courses who want to encourage their students to develop into researcher-practitioners. As discussed, training programmes for counsellors need to address the key issue of counselling students' lack of confidence and high anxiety levels around engaging in research. In order to do this, teachers may, firstly, facilitate the students' connection with their own passions, interests, and values so that they engage evocatively in the process of research. Secondly, teachers can encourage students to explore their personal stories as a way of highlighting their strengths and motivations as well as capturing their imaginations for research. This can be done by modelling a reflective stance involving telling personal stories to the students as well as encouraging them to reflect on their own formation.

As this was a small, qualitative study investigating the responses of one cohort of counsellors-in-training, it is limited in its scope. It does not address the question of whether taking a research course at undergraduate level is enough to engage counselling students in a lifelong engagement with research. A recommendation for further

research would be to undertake a longitudinal study with this same cohort to see if this "evocative" training in research has indeed managed to increase their engagement in research to generate practice-based evidence in their counselling practice.

Endnotes

1 A term coined by Neufeld (2010) to describe when a child's anxiety is calmed by an attachment figure, thus enabling the child to move to exploratory play. It may be similar to what Hughes (2007) describes as playfulness: "one would not be playful if there was a likelihood of failure" (p. 63).

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