

Editorial

While the articles in this issue of the Journal address notably diverse topics, they also divide neatly into three areas of general interest to counsellors in Aotearoa New Zealand. Two report the results of qualitative research projects that were approached in different ways, yet yield results that raise sensitivities to the ways in which we relate to and affect our clients. Two articles address the ways in which school counsellors are meeting the needs of young people whose emotional wellbeing is challenged and who are navigating their way through the social and academic pressures of the senior years in high school. The final two articles are written from the perspectives of tertiary educators who turn a critical eye on themselves, as well as their students, though each focuses on a different area of specialisation.

In an important but disturbing research report, Vivienne Elizabeth, Julia Tolmie, and Nicola Gavey reveal evidence of gender bias in the treatment of women by some Family Court counsellors in New Zealand. These researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 women who had participated in court-mandated conciliation processes to address issues of child care and contact arrangements; for 18 women these processes were facilitated by Family Court counsellors. The results of their research show a distinct gender bias on the part of both male and female counsellors within the Family Court system, particularly in the case of the male counsellors. Mediations that were intended to resolve parental disputes between divorcing couples often led to re-victimisation of the wives and mothers involved in the process. The study is shocking and difficult to read, and demands that not only Family Court counsellors but indeed all readers question the gendering of our own practices when working with couples.

The second article addresses a more soothing topic, while at the same time modelling a somewhat different style of qualitative research. Tim Mapel and Jillian Simpson explored the effects of offering mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) to help clients deal with a range of concerns from physical health to emotional wellbeing. Mindfulness-based therapies are relatively new in New Zealand, and as yet little published research has tested their effectiveness among New Zealanders. MBSR is a form of complementary medicine that addresses both physical and emotional issues,

often simultaneously, and originated with the theories of Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. Mapel and Simpson provide informative examples of how MBSR has helped their clients gain a new sense of holistic health.

The next article expands upon research by Barbara Bulkeley, published in a previous issue, in exploring the strategies used by school counsellors in working with depressed adolescents, and their professional development needs in this area of their practice. While she found that the counsellors were already using a range of approaches and skills, the author describes and evaluates a one-day workshop that was designed to address their expressed need for a specialist workshop on contextually appropriate counselling approaches. This included a set of strategies, referred to as “The Famous Five,” for working effectively with young adults who are struggling emotionally.

Continuing the theme of working with adolescents, Judith Kelleher, Roger Foggitt, and Jason Hansen then offer a vivid description of a successful programme they devised “on the ground” as school counsellors to address the emotional, relational and developmental challenges affecting the senior boys at Matamata College. This article presents a charming example of participatory action research, and offers a model programme for use in any number of schools that take seriously their responsibility to usher young men into a post-secondary-school life of shared responsibility.

Philip Culbertson, a co-editor of this journal, then surveys his experience in teaching a philosophy course entitled “Perspectives on Death and Dying” at his local educational institution, the College of the Desert, in Palm Desert, California. Following a brief review of literature on the teaching of Death Studies courses at tertiary level, Philip gauges the impact of the course on his students by surveying the topics they chose to write about for their major essay of the semester. He reflects on the essays he found particularly moving as part of the students’ processing of their emotional engagement with events that smacked of “dying,” both literally and figuratively. Finally, he turns his gaze on his own feelings of loss and grief as each semester comes to a close. This article highlights the potential of academic courses to serve as catalysts for students’ personal learning, growth and even healing, when they are offered opportunities to engage with personally meaningful topics. It also invites readers who are involved in education to consider their position regarding the use of themselves and their own experiences in their teaching, and may open up new possibilities for practice and research.

In the final article, Niccy Fraser and Jan Wilson extend the examination of reflective practice by investigating students’ evaluative perspectives on their own learning.

Challenges experienced by the students included managing preconceptions, changing counselling models, matching student learning with tutor teaching styles, and translating the model of cognitive therapy cross-culturally. Benefits for the students that emerged from surmounting these hurdles included valuing self-development through self-practice, a deeper empathy for clients, and a growing perception of themselves as competent to apply cognitive therapy. Further articles addressing counsellor education in Aotearoa New Zealand can be found in a Special Issue of the Journal that focuses on this topic, published online in December 2011.

Philip Culbertson and Margaret Agee