



BEST PRACTICE 1

Title	Case Conferences: Scaffolding Professional Development in Trainee Counsellors
Objectives of the practice	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) To develop conceptualization, diagnostic, therapeutic planning and process skills2) To empower students to handle real-life problems that come with client-work3) To scaffold students' development from trainee to professional4) To develop healthy attitudes towards mental health and client work in the students5) To enhance core values of Professional Competence, Self-direction, Personal Integrity, Empathy, and Cultural sensitivity6) To meet our mission to train psychologists and counsellors with personal integration and professional competence;7) To provide contextually relevant, socially inclusive and affordable mental healthcare support to all in need
The Context	<p>Counselling training is a professional program, the graduates need to be adequately skilled to provide this service. Through practicum, students are exposed to the real world and they also provide counselling services to the general public as part of the syllabus. However, several existing gaps make this task both difficult and challenging:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) The syllabus is more focused on theory than practice2) The skills and techniques training practicals programs only work with hypothetical situations3) Students have never been responsible for another person prior to practicum4) Syllabus does not adequately develop conceptualization and diagnostic skills in students, especially with real-life cases5) Syllabus does not adequately develop skills for planning and carrying out therapy with clients

The Practice

From the first semester itself, our students are exposed to case presentations by their seniors in the third and fourth semester so that they understand how therapies that are being taught as part of their theory papers get applied in practice. When students reach their third semester, they are assigned a supervisor. Each supervisor attends to around 10 students who oversees their performance and conduct during their field practicum across the third and fourth semesters. Each week during these semesters, a case conference is organized which is also scheduled into the timetable. The case conference is organized and is attended by all students across all four semesters and faculty. In the case conference, two students of third or fourth semester present their cases: real clients they are seeing in practicum. This presentation lasts for an hour each. The students present the client's case history, their mental status examination and diagnosis, case conceptualization, and the treatment plan. At the end of each part, audience participation is elicited to help in the conceptualization, diagnosis, and treatment planning. This hones these skills in the students as they are exposed to multiple perspectives and receive feedback on their thoughts and opinions from peers and teachers.

The students who study at Montfort College are at a unique advantage as compared to students enrolled at other HEIs who usually do not have such a practice at the post-graduate level. The practice of case conferences encourages our students to think like professional counsellors, and goes over and above the usual practice of field-work/internships at the Master's level which usually stop at observation and minimal interactions with real-life clients. The journey from being audience members in the first semester to being presenters in the third and fourth semester also allows the students to appreciate their own growth and learning over the two-year programme.

Thus, case conference develops the skills and attitudes for professional counselling not only in the presenting students but in all the students who attend it.

Evidence of Success	<p>Success is evident in many ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Students and alumni have expressed how the feedback received during case conferences has helped build adequate professional skills 2) Employers have mentioned that the students come with good knowledge and ability to practice counselling in work setups and require less training as compared to students from other colleges 3) Alumni and employers have expressed the high ethics and attention to detail that have been developed via this practice. 4) Students and alumni have expressed their ability to deal with a multitude of clients from different cultural backgrounds because this practice allows them to learn from the cases presented by the other students. 5) By providing free supervised counselling to students and general public, the students of Montfort College are helping realize its mission to promote mental health and emotional wellbeing in society.
Problems encountered and Resource required	<p>As the institute grows, it becomes impossible for all students to witness all case presentations. Given the large number of students and the limited amount of time available per semester for this activity, two concurrent case conferences (by two students each) are conducted. The students and faculty are divided across these two conferences which means that a student can only witness half the total number of case conferences. Helping students prepare for the case conferences, and moderating the case conferences themselves takes a significant amount of time and resources on the part of our faculty members. The availability of high-quality faculty members who are equally skilled in teaching and practice is scarce. Most of the supervisors and case conference moderators have been from among the permanent faculty, which has led to some amount of over-working of the faculty. The college is yet to find a solution to this, but the college does not intend to dilute this practice, despite small problems, since the benefits are very important to student development. The resources required are Trained supervisors, dedicated time in the timetable for supervision and case conference, students on practicum (counselling others in the real world)</p>