

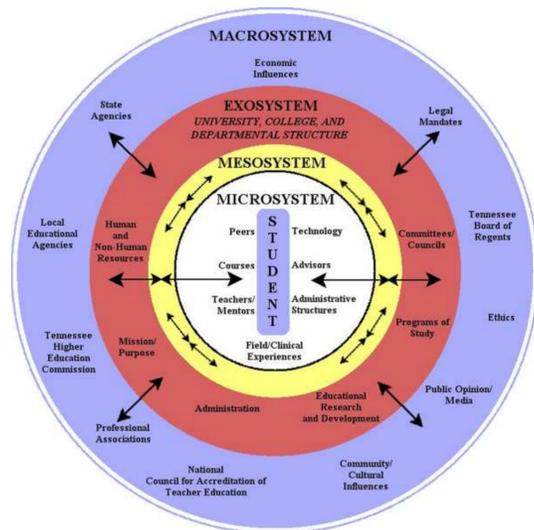


Internal Family Systems Therapy as a Framework for Academic Advising

Background

Internal Family Systems Therapy applies the tenets of Family Systems Theories, and Person-Centered Theory in a combined approach. Family Systems Theories: pragmatically identifying and addressing positive and negative patterns of behavior in groups or families. Person-Centered Theory: individuals gain better understanding of self and sources of his/her actions, thoughts, and emotions. Therefore, IFS allows the counselor an opportunity to learn a new lens to view student development and equips him/her with the tools and skills to teach to students in order to pace them forward to be successful in their current situations but also, in college and in their careers.

Fig. 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Retrieved 30 Sept. 2014. Lecture Notes: Urie Bronfenbrenner. Retrieved from: http://www3.uakron.edu/schulze/610/lec_bronf.htm

Abstract

IFS is a combination of Systems and Person-Centered therapy where the main goal is for individuals to tap into their authentic selves. Students are constantly bombarded by the messages and expectations from the different systems (groups/families) they are in. Students are also at a stage in development where they are breaking free, making big decisions on future plans, and being challenged academically. When students enter Foundation Year, they are not just bringing themselves; they are bringing along with them their families, neighborhoods, current worries and past traumas. They are "multi-systemed" and multi-faceted, and they would benefit from having concrete examples and actions steps to deal with maintaining order and making decisions when having to weight expectations and voices from the many systems that make up who they are.

Goal

IFS Training will supply tools and a lens so that FY is a positive holding environment where students are able to be in touch with their true selves, goals, and role in the many systems they take part in. FY will provide the following interventions and supports:

Academic and Career Development-

Career counseling: helping students make the connection between interdependence and attachment/secure self-concept with career choices: "In addition to exploring how clients' relational and work worlds intersect, it is also helpful for clients to describe important relationships with others. Through this process, both counselor and client gain a better understanding of how the client connects with others and how these connections are interdependent with the individual's work world" (Schultheiss, 2003, 305).
The College Experience Class- tailoring curriculum to promote reflection on internal locus of control in decision-making on the group level.
Helping students parse out personal goals vs. goals set by others.
Aiding students in identifying careers that intersect with their interests and skills.

Socio-Emotional Development/Counseling-

Individual counseling- encouraging students to identify and refine their leadership qualities that reside in them already: such as compassion, perspective and confidence.
Crisis counseling- calling on past info sessions with students to help them to cope with emergency circumstances and find positive coping skills and action plans to carry them through their difficult time.
Human Development- providing safe space for students to understand themselves, their goals and abilities, and how systems outside of their authentic self may be having an impact on their thoughts, actions and emotions. According to Kegan (1983), "There is never just an 'individual'; the *person* is more than an individual. There person is an "individual and an "embeddual". There is never just a you; and at this very moment your own buoyancy or lack of it, your own sense of wholeness or lack of it, is in large part a function of how your own current embeddedness culture is holding you (116); IFS will allow students to become more self-aware of their decision-making while at FY and beyond.

Relevancy Across Disciplines

Although the focus group for this training are Foundation Year students, the same ideas can be applied across curricula and schools. Each brings a separate set of systems to the table. As Academic Advisors, having a working knowledge of these systems can be helpful as each part that makes up each individual is at play when taking classes, code-switching between classes and home, and making academic decisions that are intertwined with personal decisions.

This framework may work especially for individuals who are:

- First generation college-going students
- Individuals who have a gap between high school and college
- Individuals who are part-time college students who are balancing multiple worlds at one time
- Students with complicated living situations

Details

The training session will begin in October 2014. Six 3-day weekends (sessions) over the course of 10 months total. 18 training days (108 program hours).

Next Steps:

- Revamping the College Experience curriculum so that it connects IFS terms and ideology with current main concepts (Cognitive Behavior Therapy, locus of control, Myers Briggs personality traits and career development).
- Creating a new intake sheet that evaluates systems at play, stressors, goals, etc.
- Teaching FY faculty applicable concepts to better understand selves and better pace our students forward.
- Level 2 Training for IFS (Depending on Level 1 Training).

Outcomes

Expected outcomes:

- Empower students with language to understand themselves and their decisions
- Open dialogue between advisor and student in regards to cognitions, automatic thoughts and resulting behaviors with the hope that this will lead to a newfound awareness and change in problematic behaviors
- Offer professors new lens to review their instructional methods and interventions for individual students
- Creating new intake sheets that get at the heart of wrap-around support systems and meeting students where they are at

Acknowledgements

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Research/References

Kegan, R. (1982). *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Schultheiss, D. E. P. (2003). A Relational Approach to Career Counseling: Theoretical Integration and Practical Application. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 81, 3, 301-10.