MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Primer for Academic Advisors and Student Affairs Professionals

Benjamin M. Ogles, David S. Wood,
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By

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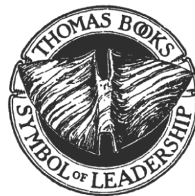

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER • LTD.
Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
2600 South First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62704

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ISBN 978-0-398-09362-4 (paper)
ISBN 978-0-398-09363-1 (ebook)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2021004204 (print)
2021004205 (ebook)

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Printed in the United States of America
MM-C-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ogles, Benjamin M., 1961- author. | Wood, David Samuel, 1973- author. | Weidner, Rebecca O., author. | Brown, Samuel D., author.
Title: Motivational interviewing in higher education : a primer for academic advisors and student affairs professionals / by Benjamin M. Ogles, David S. Wood, Rebecca O. Weidner, Samuel D. Brown.
Description: Springfield, Illinois : Charles C Thomas, Publisher, Ltd., [2021] | Includes bibliographical references and indexes.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021004204 (print) | LCCN 2021004205 (ebook) | ISBN 9780398093624 (paperback) | ISBN 9780398093631 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Counseling in higher education. | Motivational interviewing.
Classification: LCC LB2343 .046 2021 (print) | LCC LB2343 (ebook) | DDC 371.4--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021004204
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021004205

PREFACE

In 2015, the training committee for the advising community at Brigham Young University approached me (BMO) about doing a workshop for their annual in-service retreat. As a clinical psychologist serving as dean of the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences, they felt I was invested in their work and could provide a valuable perspective. However, they did not assign a specific topic for me to address in my training. Having recently participated in a motivational interviewing (MI) continuing education course and given my long-time interest in Carl Rogers's client-centered approach to psychotherapy (Rogers, 1959), along with many years of teaching basic counseling skills to graduate students in clinical psychology, I decided to do a brief introduction to–"a taste of"–MI during our 90-minute session. I thought that the spirit of MI (the fundamental principles of partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evocation), along with the reflective listening skills of MI, could be a useful addition to the tool kit for these important staff members who interact with thousands of students.[1] As with all MI training, our brief workshop was interactive and provided the advisors and student affairs professionals the opportunity to experience the spirit of MI and practice basic reflective listening skills—the OARS (open-ended questioning, affirming, reflecting, and summarizing). I hoped that the professionals who found the approach to be appealing would seek out additional training opportunities from among the various options available through books, online resources, and workshops.

In preparation for that workshop, I searched online for any references to MI and academic advising. Not surprisingly, I found several examples of presentations (typically from the annual National Academic Advising Association [NACADA] conference), workshops, brief articles, and chapters among the offerings (e.g., Pettay, 2009). It was clear that MI had already

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1. Please note that the advising community at BYU combines professionals working in a variety of academic advising and student affairs offices when conducting training and retreats. Staff working in college academic advising offices, athletic academic support offices, career counseling, international student services, multicultural student services, women's services, first year experience support services, student conduct office, etc. are all included because of their various roles supporting, helping, advising, and assisting students.

found an open and willing audience among the broader academic advising community. However, I did not find any book-length works that attempted to frame MI in the context of higher education and specifically for academic advisors or other student affairs professionals.

Two years later, the training committee from our university-wide advising committee approached me a second time to see if I would be willing to conduct another MI training that built upon the original training. I was surprised and pleased to know that there was enough interest in the approach that they were willing to pursue additional training. In between the two sessions, I had been teaching basic MI skills and philosophy to the undergraduate students in my Introduction to Clinical Psychology course each fall. I felt that this introduction to reflective listening and the associated MI spirit and philosophy was great preparation for the students, many of whom were on the path to clinically oriented graduate programs in social work, marriage and family therapy, counseling, psychology, or psychiatry. As a result, I was expanding my skill set and deepening my knowledge of MI to be prepared for that training and instruction. In addition, I had become better acquainted with Dr. David Wood, a new faculty member in the School of Social Work at Brigham Young University. Dr. Wood is a uniquely qualified clinician who is trained as a licensed psychologist and as a social worker. He also had training from Bill Miller and Teresa Moyers at Flag is Up Farm through his military experience in the Army National Guard. Dr. Wood has taught a graduate level course focusing on MI for social work students and military chaplain candidates since 2013. In fall 2017, he participated in the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers Training New Trainers (MINT TNT) workshop to further develop his MI training skills. (I also participated in the MINT TNT workshop as part of the fall 2019 cohort.) Because I knew that Dr. Wood had these unique skills, I agreed to do a second session on MI only if the training committee would let me do the training collaboratively with Dr. Wood. They, and he, agreed and we conducted a second session that reviewed the basic ideas of MI for newly hired advisors and student affairs professionals, as well as providing additional content for those who had participated in the previous training. (Although I helped develop the materials and outline, Dr. Wood conducted the on-site training on his own because I fell sick that week.) After the second training, we suggested that if there was enough interest, we would be willing to host a monthly, hour-long meeting where advisors and student affairs professionals could continue building their MI skills – to establish an MI Learning Community. To our satisfaction, there was significant interest in the approach, largely because the advisors and student affairs professionals could easily see the utility of developing MI skills for their work with students and their interactions with others.

Since that second workshop, we have been conducting monthly training sessions, with only rare interruptions, that are focused on a variety of MI skills with a growing and changing group of staff members who work with students on our campus in a variety of positions, including advising, career counseling, student conduct, multicultural and international student services, women's services, academic assistance for athletes, etc. As word about the trainings traveled around campus, the student conduct office and the Dean of Students' training committee asked us to do specific introductory trainings with a wide range of co-curricular departments. Those from among the introductory trainings that are interested then join our MI learning community monthly meetings. In these meetings, we do frequent reviews to orient newly hired staff who join our group, and we provide them with readings that introduce them to the key concepts and skills. Our monthly training involves review of basic principles and techniques, live and videotaped modeling of MI skills, and "real playing" (a variation of role playing where one person discusses a real but innocuous issue they would like to change) to help participants develop their reflective listening and evoking skills. We use a variety of available resources both written and digital, and we have developed exercises or modified exercises created by others (e.g., Rosengren, 2009) to fit the unique situations faced by professionals serving students in higher education. We also started a folder of resources in the cloud that could be accessed by any of the regular participants who wished to continue developing their skills. What was missing was a short manual or book that provided an initial introduction to MI through gathering many of our resources together in one place. We thought this would be especially helpful for our growing group of interested participants.

As a result, we set to work developing this brief primer on MI for academic advisors and student affairs professionals. Because Dr. Wood and I are faculty members and not regular participants in this daily work with students, we included Rebecca Weidner, an academic advisor in the College of Fine Arts and Communication, and Sam Brown, Director of International Student and Scholar Services, and both long-time, regular participants in our learning community, as collaborators to incorporate history, theory, and practice for advising and student affairs into our work. This book represents much of what we have learned over several years of training academic advisors and student affairs professionals. We are hopeful that others will find this primer a helpful introduction to the MI philosophy and skills that are useful for professionals working with students in higher education. There are many resources (including books, workshops, blogs, articles, demonstrations on the Internet, and DVDs) to supplement this book for those who wish to continue their journey into intermediate and advanced skills. We describe some of those resources in Chapter 7.

Our intent is not to provide an extensive introduction to the expansive research literature about MI or to provide clinical training that would be more typical for licensed social service and mental health workers. Although some of our participants have clinical degrees leading to licensure, typically in counseling or social work, the majority do not have clinical degrees. As a result, we hope to introduce the spirit and skills of the MI conversational style that can be productively used by individuals who have no academic background, formal training, or licensure in counseling but who do have extensive practical experience working with students, combined with very good interpersonal skills. The academic advisors and student affairs professionals we work with are in many ways the perfect audience for MI because they have no preconceptions based in other psychotherapy modalities or theories, yet they are helpers by nature, have strong interpersonal skills, and care deeply about students. The MI spirit also fits well with several models of advising or student affairs practice in higher education (see Chapter 3) and is useful for engaging students around focused issues in brief periods of time, which is a typical context for most higher education advising and student affairs settings and consistent with other applications of MI (see, for example, Clifford and Curtis's 2016 book on MI in nutrition and fitness).

The dozens of staff who have been participating in our working group report that the skills are useful to them in their work with many students and often in their work interacting with other employees or in personal and family interactions. MI is not needed in all appointments or interactions with students, though the spirit of MI as described in Chapter 2 and the reflective listening skills described in Chapter 4 are useful in any interpersonal interaction. We provide guidance about the types of situations that are best suited for MI in Chapters 2 and 5. We hope that this book will make the MI approach available to a much wider audience of academic advisors and student affairs professionals, and we anticipate that our description of the approach coupled with practical exercises will provide a solid start to any MI journey.

Because the university-wide advising community at our institution is so broad, we use a variety of terms in this book to refer to the individuals working in higher education with students, such as, advisors, student affairs professionals, professionals, staff, helpers, MI helpers. At times we use examples from subsets of those working in specific settings (e.g., academic advising), but in general the approach discussed here is useful to student affairs professionals and academic advisors working in a variety of higher education positions. When reading more specific examples, we hope you will abstract the ideas and principles to the settings that are relevant for your individual work with students.

We begin in Chapter 1 by providing a description and a brief history of MI, noting some of its connections to counseling and social psychology. We

also introduce academic advising and other student affairs work in higher education and explore the potential overlap or intersection between these relatively new and emerging movements. Lastly, we look at what has been learned about developing skills in MI and make some recommendations about how this book may be useful in that endeavor. In Chapter 2, we explore in more detail the spirit of MI—the key relational components that the professional using MI is attuned to. This interpersonal attitude can be summarized within four key principles: partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evocation. Chapter 3 presents an overview of some contemporary models of academic advising and student affairs practice. Importantly, MI is conveniently flexible in that it can be paired with other models for working with students (such as those presented in the chapter). We describe briefly how the MI spirit and skills can be integrated with other approaches.

In Chapter 4, we cover the basic MI skill set, which is referred to by the shorthand OARS. For those looking to focus primarily on developing MI skills, we suggest starting with Chapters 2 and 4 and then moving on to Chapters 5, 6, and 7. In Chapter 5, we discuss the four processes in MI conversations about change: engaging, focusing, evoking, and planning. While these processes can occur in a straightforward sequence, it is not unusual for them to ebb and flow and overlap as the professional focuses on different aspects of the student's needs. In meetings with students, different processes may be more appropriate for certain kinds of appointments. For example, a student needing to decide about a major or internship may have little need for enhanced motivation to change, so the meeting will focus more on the student's values and how to make the decision. For a student clearly needing to change a specific behavior, say by increasing studying or decreasing partying, a more typical pattern seen in clinical settings may apply to the meeting, which may involve all four processes.

In Chapter 6, we further elaborate on the evoking stage and provide an expanded discussion concerning "change talk" and "sustain talk." *Change talk* refers to student statements that express a desire, need, or readiness to change, while *sustain talk* refers to student statements that indicate maintenance of the status quo or a reluctance to change. In addition to providing more in-depth definitions of these concepts and examples of student statements, we present strategies for increasing or evoking change talk and softening sustain talk. In Chapter 7, intermediate to advanced MI skills are addressed to prepare the highly motivated staff member for higher-level training that can be obtained through workshops, observation, and coaching. Chapter 8 puts everything together in two case examples. Chapter 9 provides some additional exercises that can be used to practice and develop MI basic and intermediate skills. Lastly, we provide some brief concluding remarks in Chapter 10.

We hope that the contents of this book adequately communicate our fondness for and energy around the spirit and skills of MI. We view MI as a highly useful model for conversations about change that has many applications, including academic advising and student affairs practice in higher education. We have benefitted from our ongoing reading, workshops, and practice and hope that this book will be a resource to academic advisors and student affairs professionals as they incorporate MI skills into their work with students.

B.M.O.
D.S.W.
R.O.W.
S.D.B.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful for the many academic advisors and student affairs professionals who have participated in our Motivational Interviewing Learning Community. Together we are learning to resist the "righting reflex" and to collaborate with students in a way that helps them to identify and pursue their goals and dreams. We also appreciate Aubrey Jooyeon Jun and Sarah Worthington-Cox who gave permission for us to use their "real play" in the case examples. Amber Esplin from the BYU Faculty Editing Service provided comments on an early draft of the manuscript that were very helpful. More generally, we are grateful for the many hours of work that have helped create the foundation for and distribution of Motivational Interviewing across a wide range of human services. The generosity and spirit of the MI founders, Bill Miller and Stephen Rollick, along with the community of MI researchers, trainers, and practitioners, particularly those involved in the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers (MINT), is truly remarkable and serves as a model for us to follow in our work with college students. Thanks, and appreciation to all!

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MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

We value what we discover more than we value what we are told.

—Bruce & Marie Hafen, Faith Is Not Blind

"Motivational Interviewing is a collaborative conversation style for strengthening a person's own motivation and commitment to change" (Miller & Rollnick, 2013, p. 12). First developed in the early 1980s as a treatment approach for individuals with problem drinking (Miller, 1983), MI has now been studied in a variety of settings with many different populations. For example, MI is used to assist people receiving care or wishing to improve their functioning in health care (Dart, 2010; Rollnick, Miller, & Butler, 2008), nutrition (Clifford & Curtis, 2016), corrections (Stinson & Clark, 2017), education (Herman, Reinke, & Frey, 2013; Reinke, Herman, & Sprick, 2011), social services (Hohman, 2011), sports (Rollnick, Fader, Breckon, & Moyer, 2019), and mental health settings (Arkowitz, Miller, & Rollnick, 2015), among others.

Interestingly and importantly, MI has not been limited to use in therapeutic settings with licensed mental health care providers (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and licensed counselors). Although MI was originally developed as a therapeutic intervention for problem drinking and was to be delivered by licensed mental health care providers, MI skills have been successfully expanded for use in many settings by social service and health care providers, such as probation officers, dieticians, nurses, teachers, coaches, dentists, and others. The MI spirit and skills fit nicely with many services in which helpers interact with people who wish to, but may be ambivalent about, change. In addition, the listening skills developed in MI are useful for many other types of conversations where there is no specific change target.

Significantly, MI has also been the subject of many scientific studies. Since its development, hundreds of controlled studies have been conducted using variations of MI in many different settings (Hettema, Steele, & Miller, 2005; Lenz, Rosenbaum, & Sheperis, 2016; Lundahl, Kunz, Brownell, Tollefson, & Burke, 2010; Miller & Moyers, 2017; Miller & Rollnick, 2013; Pace, Dembe, Soma et al., 2017). Although every application of MI has not been thoroughly studied, in part because the applications are continuously expanding, the general findings of published studies indicate that MI is a useful intervention that can help clients dealing with a variety of issues, such as problem drinking, nutrition and fitness, health behaviors, and athletic performance. Individuals receiving MI to address various problems across many different settings are more likely than counterparts not receiving MI to talk about change, seriously consider taking steps to change, develop plans to change, and ultimately make changes in their behavior (Miller & Moyers, 2017; Romano & Peters, 2014).

Background for MI

MI was originally developed by William Miller through his personal experiences both treating problem drinkers and studying effective treatments for problem drinking (Miller & Rose, 2009). More specifically, he described the development of MI as evolving while he was on a sabbatical to Norway right after he completed a study of behavior therapy for problem drinkers. In the study, the therapists were trained in both specific technical skills[2] and the client-centered skill of accurate empathy (Rogers, 1959). Accurate empathy is the ability to hear and understand the client's perspective and communicate that back to the client. Later, when the researchers examined the treatment outcomes, they discovered that therapist empathy for the client was a strong predictor of client drinking 6 months, 12 months, and 24 months later. As he discussed these findings, interacted with his Norwegian colleagues, and demonstrated his therapy technique, Dr. Miller gradually developed a conceptual model and some clinical guidelines that provided the foundation for MI in an article published in 1983 (Miller, 1983).

2. Behavioral self-control training: goal setting, self-monitoring, managing consumption, rewarding goal attainment, functionally analyzing drinking situations, and learning alternate coping skills.

A main feature of this conceptual model involved differentially responding to client speech in a way that strengthened the client's own expressions for change (what later came to be known as *change talk*) and empathized with expressions that argued against change (what later came to be known as *sustain talk*). In this way, the conceptual model built on the findings regarding empathy in the study. The original 1983 paper about MI was then elaborated through collaboration with Stephen Rollnick, and the first book-length description of the approach was published in 1991. The third, and most recent, edition of that book, *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change,* or what is known by some MI practitioners as MI3, was published in 2013 (Miller & Rollnick, 2013).

A unique feature of MI is its focus on both the quality of the relationship between the helper and the client (or the advisor/student affairs professional and the student in this context) and the technical elements of intervention (technical skills). The relationship elements of MI were grounded in the client-centered theory of Carl Rogers (1959). Rogers was a prominent clinical psychologist who developed a theory of intervention that has been especially influential in the field of counseling psychology. His theory proposed that the necessary and sufficient interpersonal conditions for change in a counseling relationship include unconditional positive regard, accurate empathy, and therapist genuineness. According to Rogers (1992), *unconditional positive regard* is an attitude of acceptance of the client as they are, not as we might wish them to be. *Accurate empathy* refers to the ability of the helper to see and understand the world from the point of view of the client. *Genuineness* or *congruence* is the ability of the helper to be real, open, and authentic in the relationship with the client. Miller and Rose (2009) suggested that the combination of these conditions created a "supportive atmosphere" that "seemed an ideal, non-threatening context within which to explore clients' ambivalence and elicit their own reasons for change" (p. 528).

Although the typical interaction between an advisor or student affairs professional is not per se a therapeutic relationship, the relationship is certainly analogous to a counseling relationship and definitely can benefit from the attitude and person of the advisor, especially when they are able to create these conditions in the relationship with the student. As will be described in Chapter 2, the spirit of MI incorporates the main ideas of Rogers's necessary conditions, though

described in different terms using alternative labels: partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evoking. In addition, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, many of the current models of advising and student affairs work benefit from deep connections to the counseling literature, including roots in Rogers's theory of change (see, for example, Burke, Sauerheber, Hughey, & Laves, 2017). As a result, MI is not the only counseling model that has subsequently been applied to academic advising and that has roots in the writing of Carl Rogers.

The technical aspects or skills of MI are somewhat different from Rogers's client-centered approach. While Rogers advocated for a nondirective, or "following," approach, Miller's focus on selectively encouraging or eliciting client change talk and responding with empathy to client sustain talk is more of a "guiding" approach. In MI, the interviewer intentionally and strategically uses "questions, reflections, affirmations, and summaries to strengthen the client's own motivations for change" (Miller & Moyers, 2017, p. 758). Still, both Rogers's and Miller's approaches to change conversations contrast starkly with the confrontational approaches that were often used at that time (when MI was developed) for problem drinking. Much more is said about the basic and more advanced technical aspects of MI in the coming chapters.

In short, the MI approach evolved out of practical clinical experiences combined with research findings that emphasized the strategic importance of **both** creating an interpersonal atmosphere or relationship that is conducive to exploring change and incorporating technical communication skills that help to elicit motivation for change. As has already been demonstrated, this basic formula has many readily available applications and has influenced change-oriented conversations across a wide variety of settings and disciplines.

Connections Within Psychology

As Miller and colleagues began to elaborate the method and theory associated with MI more fully, they looked for links to other areas of psychology to help explain the conceptual approach. One important connection involved a link to social psychology, in which researchers had investigated the significant role that self-talk plays in changing attitudes and behavior. People tend to be more persuaded by their own rather than others' arguments for change (Bem, 1967). As a result, the MI focus on helping to elicit or evoke the client's own