Practicing what we preach: Assessing communication center client and staff perspectives of positive communication conferencing practices

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It can often be difficult, meta-level reflective work in our communication centers to provide guidance on improving others' communication competence through our own understanding of communication knowledge and skill enactment. Few disciplines come with the same kind of scrutiny that we often experience as communication scholars, tutors, and students. We are often called to task as to whether or not we practice what we preach when it comes to effective, ethical communication behaviors.

While knowing and doing are vitally different things when it comes to communication competence, there is value in reflecting on how well our communication center training practices prepare our staff to enact the very behaviors they are often helping others develop. For this reason, our communication center set out to explore how both our staff and clients assessed the positive communicative behaviors we value in conferencing situations. In the following paper, we first overview the relevant literature related to communication center conferencing behaviors. Second, introduce our conferencing training framework, Mirivel's (2014) Positive Communication Model followed by, third, our case context and project methodology. Fourth, we share our findings and, fifth, we explore the implications and usefulness of what we discovered.

Literature Review

In this section, we overview literature related to communication center conferencing behaviors and client perceptions of services. We also introduce the Positive Communication Movement and take a more in depth look at Mirivel's (2014) Positive Communication Model (PCM), which serves as the theoretical frame for our center staff conferencing protocol training and we argue is a useful model for encompassing and promoting effective conferencing behaviors.

Communication Centers

Communication centers offer tutoring for a variety of outcomes such as discussions, presentations, debates and interviews in addition to supporting the basic course (McCall, Harrison, & Murphy, 2017). The success of communication centers to foster learning and inspire repeat client visits is supported clearly in the literature (e.g. Davis, Linvill, & Jacobs, 2017; Jones, Hunt, Simonds, Comadena, & Baldwin, 2004; Kangas Dwyer & Davidson, 2012; LeFebvre, LeFebvre, & Anderson, 2017). For this reason, it is important to understand how communication centers build the behaviors necessary to interact effectively with clients as well as how clients are perceiving the effectiveness of those behaviors.

Conferencing behaviors. Bell and Mladenovic (2015) advocate that tutors, in general, should be prepared to work with clients through a framework of situated learning where tutors experience real teaching situations, reflective practice where tutors are able to build skills through relevant activities, and conceptual expansion where tutors are encouraged to move away

from focusing on themselves and instead embrace student/client-centered learning. Weissbach and Pflueger (2018), in their piece about cross-training writing tutors to work with engineering students, argue for the importance of content-specific training for tutors to better equip them with the knowledge they need to navigate genre-specific writing. Similarly, emphasizing the importance of adaptive content training, Yook, Rao, and Wilde (2012) outline the important role communication centers play in supporting Communication Across the Curriculum initiatives and advocate that tutors develop adaptive strategies to better navigate the discipline-specific communication genres they might encounter. Hobgood (2014) more specifically asserts that communication center tutors "are better prepared to meet a greater variety of requests for assistance if they comprehend the study of rhetoric as a scholarly discipline and the character of rhetoric that spans disciplines and extends beyond the discourse of the academy" (p. 60), and proposes a semester long course for tutors that includes the exploration of the history of the discipline of rhetoric.

While discipline specific training is important, the development of effective tutor conferencing or facilitation behaviors is also necessary. In addition to the policies and procedures of the center, the center must also focus training on the individual interactions between tutors and students in order to instill positive conferencing behaviors. To that end, Troillett and McIntyre (2012) found the following shared best practices for communication center staff training: valuing explicit learning outcomes, employing experiential learning strategies, developing guided process, developing emergency training procedures, closing training assessment loop, and recognizing staff.

While there are shared best practices for staff training across our communication centers, the training content related to conferencing behaviors includes a variety of overlapping perspectives in the literature. Dannels and Houseley Gaffney (2012) offer an ethnographic heuristic for the communication center that shifts the etic (outsider perspective) to the emic (insider perspective) as the tutor becomes an engaged participant "working with not for" (p. 100) the student. From this heuristic, the student is an insider and the speaking assignment serves as a "window" (Dannels & Gaffney, 2012, p. 100) into the living culture of the student's classroom as well as the discipline in which the assignment is situated. To prepare tutors for this type conferencing, Dannels and Houseley Gaffney (2012) advocate that tutors be trained as curious ethnographers through the encouraged use of effective questioning behavior; that they be trained to uncover the emic through finding similarities and differences as revealed in the comparison of their "own perceptions of competent communication" (p. 106) to communication competency in other disciplines; and, that they be trained continuously on discipline-specific assignments they are likely to encounter.

Smithberger (2016) argues that communication center tutors should adopt passionate impartiality as a facilitator behavior, shifting the focus of subject expertise from tutor to client:

> Passionately impartial tutors in the communication center are those individuals who are passionate and knowledgeable about communication theories and the tutoring process itself. Passionately impartial tutors are not required to be experts in the subjects clients may be studying, they do not have a stake in the outcome of a session, and they do not direct clients to make specific

decisions. Instead, the passionately impartial tutor helps guide the client through the learning process by helping clients evaluate the benefits and tradeoffs of the possible approaches available to them. (p. 8)

The focus on passionate impartiality as a tutor framework is offered as a strategy to help with boundary management during consultations. Smithberger (2016) also equates facilitator skills to competent communicator skills, asserting:

Competent communicators are able to develop and achieve goals, effectively collaborate with others, and adapt to changing situations (Bochner & Kelly, 1974), and skills such as active listening, asking clarifying questions, giving feedback within communication exchanges, and self-monitoring verbal and nonverbal behaviors allow individuals to communicate competently (Daniels & Walker, 2001). (pp. 8-9)

Horan (2014) emphasizes that writing tutors should be trained in consultation pedagogy, with a focus on social rapport building and asking questions. Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014) explore how writing tutors use three specific facilitation behaviors with clients: instructional strategies, cognitive scaffolding, and motivational scaffolding. Instructional strategies focus on ways the tutor uses telling, suggesting, and explaining and exemplifying to communicate possible changes a client's work. Cognitive scaffolding focuses on the way in which tutors use pumping questions, specifically both open and closed questions, to help clients think. Finally, motivational scaffolding works to encourage clients to continue their work and engage in collaboration with the tutor.

The functional facilitation behaviors are vital to successful tutor and client interactions. Perhaps even more necessary,

is the way in which relationships are built and maintained within and through those interactions. Jones et al. (2004) argue that tutors "must be trained to not only assist students with any issues dealing with problematic public speaking skills, but also help students cognitively restructure their negative thoughts about public speaking along with helping them to manage their emotional affective responses" (p. 129). Wilde, Cuny, and Vizzier (2006) assert that empathetic listening is a key tool that should be used in communication centers. Specifically, they promote the development of this skill through three major components: 1) focusing--being attentive through nonverbals and word choices, 2) encouraging--motivating client talk through active listening and asking questions, and 3) reflecting--paraphrasing the client and sharing relevant examples. Wilde et al. (2006) also advocate that tutors employ empathetic understanding by taking the perspective of the client.

Building on the importance of relationship in the tutor-client interaction, Ward and Schwartzman (2009) found that both tutors and clients valued emotional intelligence as a useful facilitation behavior as it works to determine how a client is feeling as well as how to adapt to those feelings by sharing relatable experiences that helped to build connection between the tutor and client. Additionally, empathy emerged as a key relationship strategy, specifically in the form of uncertainty reduction, by helping to structure the client's expectations for the consultations. Finally, Ward and Schwartzman (2009) found that both trust and showing caring were key behaviors that reflected on a tutor's perceived credibility. Asking questions and adapting to clients' needs were asserted as specific forms of tutor caring.

Client perceptions of service. Ward and Schwartzman's (2009) work provides perspectives, from both tutors and clients, on effective conferencing behaviors. Jones et al. (2004), focusing on feedback preferences, report that communication center clients prefer having all three types of feedback (verbal, written, and video) available to them for reviewing after their consultations, commenting on how helpful it was to listen to verbal feedback immediately after the speech rehearsal; but then also have the opportunity to take the written and video feedback home to use as a reference for the needed improvements. Importantly, clients indicated that the feedback they received specifically helped to improve their grades on the final speech and in some cases this was an improvement of at least one letter grade. Not one participant mentioned that the feedback they received hindered their final performance in the classroom (Jones et al., 2004).

In a more recent piece, Anderson, Berkshire Hearit, Morgan, and Natt (2015) found that communication center clients reported frustration with interactional restraints related to the consultation structure, such as requiring clients to know the problem they need help with, causing clients to feel underserved and frustrated with their center experience. Anderson et al. (2015) assert a need, based on the client feedback, to provide a consultation structure that helps "students feel less discouraged, frustrated, or limited in their interactions" with center staff (p. 23). In response to that need, Anderson et al. (2015) changed the consultation structure in their respective center:

> To promote the feelings of improved self-confidence that happen when students are empowered through positive learning experiences...Rather than greeting the student by asking what their question is, we have broadened the

greeting to allow the student time to lay out their concerns. (p. 28)

Communication center clients find the help and resources they receive in our centers to be, overall, valuable and useful (Kangas Dwyer & Davidson, 2012). It is clear there are similarities in the helping and facilitation behaviors promoted in our centers--listening, asking questions, greetings, disclosing, encouraging, and motivating are just a few. However, these are important and worth noting as they align clearly with a positive communication framework.

Positive Communication Movement

Interpersonal Communication refers to the body of work that examines personal and social relationships and the important role communication plays in those relationships (Knapp & Daly, 2011). In 2012, the communication field generated the first volume on positive communication, a frame for exploring and improving the personal and social relationships created by interpersonal communication (Knapp & Daly, 2011). The publication, *The Positive Side of Interpersonal Communication,* "began to explore the conceptual boundaries of positive communication in relationships as well as draw conceptual connections with the work of positive psychology" (Socha & Beck, 2015, p.178). Since 2012, the Positive Communication Movement has continued to grow.

Positive Communication, which refers to "any verbal or nonverbal behaviors that function positively in the course of human interaction" (Mirivel, 2014, p. 7), reflect our best behaviors that we would "be proud to model and teach our children" (Socha & Pitts, 2012, p. 324). Positive communication focuses on behaviors that allow us to be transformed in a way that helps improve our overall quality of life.

Positive Communication Model.
Mirivel (2014) focuses specifically on the application of positive communication practices which include "greeting, asking, complimenting, disclosing, encouraging, listening and inspiring" (p. 8). These behaviors encompass the core principles of positive communication, which are

1) Greeting creates contact
2) Asking discovers the unknown
3) Complimenting affects the development of self
4) Disclosing deepens relationships
5) Encouraging gives support
6) Listening transcends human separateness
7) Inspiring influences others (Mirivel, 2014, p. 8)

Descriptive and normative, these behaviors provide an excellent foundation with which to view positive communication practices. These practices are descriptive because they "illustrate communication behaviors that exemplify positive communication as a practice and the important function of these communication behaviors" (Mirivel, 2014, p. 8). These behaviors are normative because Mirivel (2014) asserts that these communication behaviors should be practiced in everyday interactions. Consequently, the seven positive communication behaviors work well to frame communication center client/staff interactions. We explain what this looks like in the case context section of the methodology.

For this case specifically, we felt that using our center's "best practices" for conducting client conferences could provide insight for how other centers could adopt positive communication practices as well as provide us insight as to how well our practice of positive communication behaviors is building rapport with clients. While it is important that those working

with clients understand basic "best practices" for tutoring and guiding clients with their assignments, we believe that without relationship building it is difficult to cultivate an effective conferencing process that provides transformational learning for clients. For this reason, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are positive communication behaviors present in communication center client/staff interactions?
RQ2: To what extent are center staff self-perceptions of positive communication conferencing behaviors aligning with client perceptions of staff behaviors?
RQ3: How do positive communication behaviors affect feelings of connection, feelings of comfort, and inspiration between clients and staff?

Methods

A case study approach was used for the purpose of this project. Yin (1984), defines case study research "as an empirical inquiry [that] investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 35). A case study approach is appropriate for this project because we are investigating the conferencing perceptions of both clients and staff in our center both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Communication Center Context
Located on a southern metropolitan campus, our center has been in operation since 1973, where we first served clients with a tape recorder in a cubicle. Our center has since evolved into a campus location with onsite rehearsal spaces and our services are offered in the traditional face-to-face

conferencing format as well as in both asynchronous (submit and respond via email) and synchronous (video call) online formats.

The center is overseen by a tenured faculty member who serves as Director and is staffed by both graduate and undergraduate students. Graduate Assistants serve as Assistant Directors and are responsible for training and managing the center staff. Undergraduates as well as graduate students must apply and successfully interview in order to be offered a staff position. Staff positions include 1) semester internships, where undergraduate and graduate students are able to register for and earn course credit, 2) work study, or 3) volunteer. Each semester the center staffs five to seven undergraduate/graduate staff members. The center has roughly 1500 center visits a semester and averages 20 workshops on and off campus. Recently, the center has adopted our department's mission, which is to foster the co-creation of better social worlds through positive communication.

In order to meet the mission, all staff are required to participate in an eight-hour training the Friday before the semester begins. We use the positive communication behaviors to operationalize what it means to communicate professionally and ethically in our center. While we expect our center staff to practice the PCM in all of their interactions, we focus much of our training day on how these behaviors translate into our work with clients. To do this, we take time to craft and practice greeting statements to welcome visitors to our center as well as a first step to conferencing with a client. We also fishbowl client conference role-plays, where staff members will rotate through the roles of a client, staff member, and observer. As a staff we first watch a student presentation, and then they enact a conference taking turns representing the client from the video.

In addition to initially greeting our clients, our conferencing behaviors are grounded firmly in the PCM. We pair asking and listening together and emphasize that these positive communication behaviors are the foundation of our conferencing interactions with clients. We ask clients where they feel they are struggling, or in the case of rehearsal, how they felt it went. We use paraphrasing to ensure we are understanding, to the best our ability, the ways in which clients would like to direct the time with us or the ways in which they are able to self-assess their own work in terms of expectations. During the conference, we advocate for the use of feedback that compliments the client's work in honest and affirming ways before co-creating, through the use of questions, areas to be improved. When discussing ways to strengthen client work, we discuss the importance of disclosing, appropriately, to create a sense of connection through shared experiences and offer concrete "how to" suggestions that clients can try in their work revisions, all the while being mindful of framing our interaction in an encouraging and, hopefully, inspiring way. All of these positive communication behaviors are reflected on our Client Conference Evaluation form (see Appendix A), modified from Magee and Reynold's (2015) "Peer consultant evaluation."

In addition to the eight-hour training, staff are required to read *Communicating advice: Peer tutoring and communication practice*, complete and pass quizzes that assess understanding of all of the major assignments for the basic communication course, and attend a weekly staff training meeting. Additionally, staff meet with the Assistant Directors of the center to evaluate their practice of positive communication

professionalism with clients and other center staff.

Participants and Data Collection

After receiving approval from our Institutional Review Board, two different surveys were administered electronically. One survey was sent via email to 32 staff who worked in the center the past two years and 14 responded (44% response rate). The other survey was also sent via email to 290 clients that visited the center during the past year and participated in at least one tutor-client conference. Client participants were also recruited via our center's Facebook page (514 followers). Forty-six clients completed the survey (16% response rate based on the 290 clients directly emailed).

In the client survey, participants were asked to rate their center experience with the six PCM behaviors on a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 equaled strongly disagree and 7 equaled strongly agree (see Appendix B; questions 1-6). Clients were then asked to rate their overall experience with the center in three more seven-point Likert scale questions (see Appendix B; questions 7-9). Additionally, clients were given three open-ended questions at the end of the survey to give us a deeper understanding of their center experience (see Appendix B; questions 10-13).

The staff survey followed a similar format. Staff were asked using a seven-point Likert scale to rate their own ability to practice the six PCM behaviors (see Appendix C, questions 1-6). They were then given similar questions where they rated their overall experiences working with clients in a seven-point Likert scale (see Appendix C, question 7-9). Finally, staff were given three open-ended questions at the end of the survey to allow us to have a more holistic understanding of their experiences (see Appendix C, questions 10-13).

Data Analysis

Only the quantitative section of the surveys (see Appendices B & C; questions 1-9) were used for this project. Using SPSS, six Independent Sample T-Tests were used to compare the means of our two samples (Cronk, 2012), for all quantitative questions (see Appendices B & C; questions 1-9). A Pearson's Correlations Coefficient was used to determine the strength of the linear relationship between our Independent Variable, which are the communication behaviors (see Appendices B & C; questions 1-6) and our Dependant Variables, which are the outcomes of said communication behaviors (see Appendix B & C; questions 7-9) (Cronk, 2012).

Findings

Our project first sought to understand to what extent positive communication behaviors were present in our communication center client/staff interactions as well as to what extent center staff self-perceptions of positive communication conferencing behaviors align with client perceptions of staff behaviors. Overall, all positive communication behaviors are present in interactions and client and staff perceptions seem to be closely aligned.

The responses of both groups were very positive, with means ranging from 6.3 to 6.8 on all the questions (see Table 1). On four of the six items, the staff rated themselves slightly higher than the clients did, although none of the differences were statistically significant as noted below.

Table 1: Client and Staff Comparison

Positive Communication Behavior	Classification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Greeting	Client	46	6.61	.856	.126
	Staff	14	6.79	.426	.114
Disclosing	Client	45	6.36	1.090	.163
	Staff	14	6.50	.650	.174
Listening	Client	46	6.57	.834	.123
	Staff	14	6.29	.994	.266
Asking	Client	44	6.48	.952	.144
	Staff	14	6.36	.633	.169
Complementing	Client	45	6.36	1.282	.191
	Staff	14	6.43	.756	.202
Encouraging	Client	45	6.29	1.236	.184
	Staff	14	6.43	.646	.173

The independent sample t-tests showed no significant difference between the client and staff perspectives on any of the items. Specifically, on the use of greetings with clients, the 46 clients rated their greetings on average as a 6.6, while the staff rated their giving of greetings on average as a 6.8, $t (58) = -74$, $p =.46$. On the use of disclosing with clients, the 46 clients rated disclosure of staff on average as a 6.4, while the staff rated their own disclosure on average as a 6.5, $t (57) = -47$, $p = .46$.

On the use of listening with clients, the 46 clients rated listening of staff on average as a 6.6, while the staff rated their listening on average as a 6.3, $t (58) = -47$, $p =.35$. On the use of asking questions, the 46 clients rated staff's use of asking questions to help them with their work as a 6.5, while the staff rated their own use of questions as 6.4, $t (56) = .44$, $p =.66$. On the use of complimenting, the 46 clients rated staff's use of complimenting as a 6.4, while the staff rated their own use of questions as 6.4 as well, $t (57) = -.20$, $p =.84$. On the use of encouraging, the 46 clients rated staff's use of encouraging as a 6.3, while the staff rated their own use of questions as 6.4, $t (57) = -.40$, $p =.68$.

To better understand how positive communication behaviors affect feelings of connection, feelings of comfort, and inspiration between clients and staff, the six positive communication behaviors were combined into one overall variable to see if there were correlations between them and the outcome variables of connection, comfort, and inspiration. All outcome variables were positively correlated with the overall positive communication behavior ratings at the .01 level (see Table 2). Specifically, positive communication was positively related with the connection felt between clients and staff, $r =.82$, $p < .001$. Positive communication was also positively related with the comfort felt when working with CSC staff members, $r =.68$, $p < .001$. Lastly, positive communication was positively related to feeling inspired to complete assignments, $r = .69$, $p <.001$.

Table 2: Connection, Comfort and Inspiration Correlations to PCM

		Connection	Comfort	Inspiration	Positive Communication
Connection	Pearson Correlation	1	.739**	.545**	.817**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	59	59	59	58
Comfort	Pearson Correlation	.739**	1	.501**	.685**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	59	59	59	58
Inspiration	Pearson Correlation	.545**	.501**	1	.690**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	59	59	59	58
Positive_Communication	Pearson Correlation	.817**	.685**	.690**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	58	58	58	58

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Overall, both clients and staff highly rated the use and experience of PCM behaviors, respectively. While communication center staff rated themselves slightly higher on some PCM behaviors than clients observed, the differences were not statistically significant. Additionally, communication center clients perceived staff positive communication behaviors as being positively correlated with a sense of connection, comfort, and inspiration.

Discussion

The current study supports the presence of Mirivel's (2014) Positive Communication Model behaviors in our communication center conferencing

interactions. Additionally, the study indicates that the perception of positive communication behavior amongst clients and staff within this case are closely aligned. Finally, we find that these behaviors are positively associated with feelings of connection, comfort, and inspiration amongst clients and staff. We find these results incredibly affirming and feel our efforts to train our center staff using the Positive Communication Model are successful--we are practicing what we preach when it comes to positive communication.

It is clear that communication centers are doing the important work to train their tutors to engage in meaningful ways with clients (Troillett & McIntyre, 2012). While there are some important differences to how our respective centers choose to focus the content of those trainings, there are also several similarities in the behaviors we find necessary for creating the kind of learning experience we would like for our clients. Our center's use of Mirivel's (2014) Positive Communication Model as a framework for identifying and training conferencing behaviors is a clear, effective strategy for building the specific communication competencies (Smithberger, 2016; Yook et al., 2012) that lead to meaningful relationship building (Dannels & Houseley Gaffney, 2012; Ward & Schwartzman, 2009; Wilde et al., 2006), and, consequently, a motivational learning experience (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014) in a client/tutor interaction.

For communication centers interested in what training grounded in Positive Communication Model behaviors could look like, we offer a brief overview of our center's staff training related to the PCM. First, we conduct a brief, interactive lecture where the underlying principles and behaviors of the PCM are introduced. Staff are invited to explain how the use of the

PCM in our center supports our mission, to foster the co-creation of better social worlds through positive communication. The remaining of the training related to PCM involves various activities. Because greetings are often a client's first impression of our center, we emphasize the importance of creating and practicing this behavior. Staff are given time to craft a welcome greeting for their time at the front desk. We then have staff members role-play taking turns welcoming clients to the center and checking them in and being the client. We then debrief by asking questions about how it felt to be greeted, what they liked about each others' greetings, and how we can use greetings in our interactions outside of the center.

We use conferencing fish bowls to build the positive communication behaviors of listening, asking questions, disclosing, encouraging, and complimenting. Staff first practice listening by taking notes on an example client speech. We then transition into smaller groups of four or so where staff continue role-playing client and staff conferences, with two staff members observing the role-play interaction. During the role play, staff continue the use of active listening to help guide the use of open-ended questions to invite clients to collaborate in and take ownership of the learning during the conference. Our center emphasizes the general sandwich feedback frame for initial work with clients--this frame first invites us to compliment, authentically, work that is done well, then identify one or two areas that could be strengthened with co-created action plans for revising the work, and concluding with a re-emphasis on complimenting what is done well. When appropriate, during this feedback, staff use their own stories (disclosure) to offer encouragement, compassion, and/or guidance.

Observers of the role-play use our Client Conference Evaluation form (see Appendix A) to take notes on the enacted communication behaviors. We then debrief the fish bowl by making connections between the evaluation form and PCM behaviors as well as the role they play in creating an invitational and inspirational learning space in our center. We also invite staff members to share which PCM behaviors they feel confident about and which they struggle with and why. We continue this conversation about positive communication behaviors throughout the semester with our staff at weekly meetings and monthly one-on-one staff professionalism meetings. Based on the effectiveness of our PCM training, as evidenced by our findings, we would recommend other centers incorporate a similar role-playing training approach tied to PCM behaviors to help build the understanding and practice of positive communication behaviors in tutor-client interactions.

Our findings suggest that center staff have a lasting impact on the clients they serve, however few or far between those interactions might be. If a client is struggling with a presentation or course, the communication behaviors of the center staff member she works with could help make or break the consultation experience if the staff member is not mindful of the relationship level of the interaction: "consultants not only need to know how to communicate effectively, but they also need to know how their personal behaviors influence the relationships established within consultations" (Ward & Schwartzman, 2009, p. 371). A well-trained, positive communicating tutor has the skills to transform an initially high anxiety, uncertain experience (Jones et al., 2004; Ward & Schwartzman, 2009) into an encouraging, supportive, and co-created learning

opportunity (Dannels & Houseley Gaffney, 2012; Ward & Schwartzman, 2009; Wilde et al., 2006). The client is then able to leave the consultation feeling a new sense of confidence as she makes her way in the academic and professional world; and, importantly, is more likely to return for additional help (Kangas Dwyer & Davidson, 2012).

Not only are our clients benefitting from intentional training of our center staff on positive communication conferencing behaviors, it is heartening for us to discover that our staff are also accurately self-assessing, as confirmed by clients' perceptions, their own positive communication behaviors. Given the affirming results of our findings, we will continue to be intentional in training our future center staff on the communicative behaviors that make up Mirivel's (2014) Positive Communication Model. We also recommend that other communication centers consider using the Positive Communication Model as a concrete framework for training staff conferencing behaviors.

Conclusion

This study reinforces the notion that our communication matters and makes an impact on the clients we serve. While intentional or not, when clients come into the center to seek help, that interaction will influence their perceptions of what effect communication is; which, in turn, can affect them professionally and academically. We, as centers, have an ethical obligation to practice what we preach as communication leaders by enacting communication behaviors that work to create transformative experiences with our clients. The Mirivel's (2014) Positive Communication Model provides us with a clear, comprehensive training framework for building inspirational

relationships with our clients, as well as each other as a staff, through greetings, listening, asking questions, paraphrasing, complementing, encouraging, and disclosing.

Our center strives every day to enact our mission, which is to "Foster the co-creation of better social worlds through positive communication." We invite our fellow communication centers to share in our mission as they too practice what they preach through the co-creation of positive interactions with their clients. Working with clients can be a stressful ordeal at times; using the Positive Communication Model behaviors can help our communication center staff feel more prepared and self-assured in the efficacy of their communication skills, can empower them to focus on relationship building as they work with clients, and can, through their positive communication, inspire clients to want to do their best work.

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Appendix A

Consultant: _____   Observer: _____

Client Conference Evaluation

E = Excellent   **G =** Good   **F =** Fair   **N=** Needs Work

Initial Interaction	E	G	F	N
Greeting—promptly addresses client with friendly greeting and introduction				
Engagement—questions are asked to get client comfortable with talking				
Inquiry—questions are asked that are specific to assignment				
Agenda Setting—goal(s) are set for the appointment				
Effective Listening	E	G	F	N
Attention—undivided attention is given to client				
Encouragement—verbal and nonverbal support offered (smiling, nodding, eye contact, saying "Go on," "yes," etc.)				
Silence—strategically uses silence in order to encourage client to elaborate				
Note Taking—notes are taken when necessary to help facilitate appointment				
Feedback	E	G	F	N
Self-reflection—begins by asking clients how they think they did, allowing them to make suggestions first				
Evaluation—distinguishes between higher and lower order concerns				
Critique—uses sandwich method to present strengths and weaknesses of work				
Prioritize/Focus—advice is focused on what client can accomplish				
Critical Thinking	E	G	F	N
Understanding—makes sure the client fully understands the objective of the task. Ex: Could you elaborate further? Could you be more specific?				
Relevance—asks questions about the relation of client's work to the goal of the assignment. Ex: How does this meet the assignment criteria?				
Breadth/Depth—leads client to approach work in different ways. Ex: What factors play into this assignment? How might we look at this differently?				
Logic—leads client to question the validity of work in relation to assignment. Ex: In what ways does the work meet assignment expectations?				
End Remarks	E	G	F	N
Review Agenda—discusses what was and still needs to be accomplished				
Positive Finish—consultant ends appointment on a positive note				
Motivation—client is motivated to continue working on assignment and/or making additional appointments				
Consultant-Client Connection	E	G	F	N
Personable—consultant is open and friendly throughout appointment				
Trustworthy—consultant provides accurate information and reliable advice				
Credibility—consultant speaks and gives advice with confidence and sincerity				
Collaboration—client and consultant work together toward completing goals				
Overall Effectiveness	E	G	F	N
Time Management—appointment time is efficiently and appropriately used				
Organization—appointment follows clear direction from beginning to end; does not jump between different topics and problems				
Professionalism—consultant maintains professionalism during appointment				
Goals Met—goal(s) set at beginning are accomplished				

Overall Strengths: **Area to strengthen**:

Appendix B

Think back to your interactions with Communication Skill Center staff and respond to the following questions:

I was consistently **greeted** by the CSC staff members with whom I worked.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

The CSC staff members with whom I worked **shared** their own relevant experiences related to the type of work I was doing.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

The CSC staff members with whom I worked **listened** carefully to my concerns about my work.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

The CSC staff members with whom I worked **asked** me questions to help me develop my work.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

The CSC staff members with whom I worked **complimented** me by pointing out the strengths of my work.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

The CSC staff members with whom I worked **encouraged** me by pointing out the areas I could strengthen in my work and giving me suggestions for how to make those improvements.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

I felt connected to the CSC staff members after working with them.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

Overall, I felt comfortable working with CSC staff members.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

Overall, I felt my interactions with CSC staff members **inspired** me to improve my work.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

What did you like about your interactions with CSC staff members? Why?

What improvements do you feel could be made regarding how CSC staff members interact with clients? Why?

Appendix C

Think back to your interactions with Communication Skill Center clients and respond to the following questions:

I made sure to consistently **greet** CSC clients with whom I worked.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

I **shared** my own relevant experiences related to the type of work CSC clients were doing.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

I **listened** carefully to my CSC clients' concerns about their work.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

I **asked** my CSC clients questions to help them develop their work.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

I **complimented** my CSC clients by pointing out the strengths of their work.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

I **encouraged** my CSC clients by pointing out the areas of their work that could be strengthened and giving suggestions for how to make those improvements.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

I felt connected to my CSC clients after working with them.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

Overall, I felt my interactions with CSC clients **inspired** them to improve their work.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

Overall, I felt comfortable working with CSC clients.

1 = strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree

Which specific communication behaviors do you feel enhanced your interactions with clients? Why?

What was difficult about interacting with clients? Why?