Teaching in Counselor Education: Engaging Students in Learning

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A Product of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision
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This book is dedicated to all our teachers, colleagues, and students who have taught us about the practices of teaching in counselor education. We, like many of you, have been profoundly influenced by teachers and, as a result, teaching has gained a special place in our lives as counselor educators. It is our hope that this book will serve as a means for helping some to initially consider perspectives on teaching while helping others to continue thoughtful reflection on teaching.

Part of our stories as counselor educators includes an investment in “life-long learning” with regard to counseling and counselor education. For us, writing and editing this book has created an additional place in time to think about the practice of teaching along with considering future possibilities for our teaching. This, in turn, will hopefully open further opportunities for students to become engaged in learning. For this continued reflection on teaching, we are indeed indebted to authors in this text for their time and talent in conveying perspectives on various aspects of teaching.

Of course, one of the ways the counseling profession can show commitment to the practice of teaching is by subjecting it to scholarly inquiry and discussion. It is our hope that a number of high quality manuscripts and professional presentations around teaching will continue to be valued. Ideally, these scholarly products will be generative in character so that the study of teaching in counselor education might be a “life-long learning” process for all of us and for future generations of counselor educators.

Because we are invested in practices of teaching in counselor education, we invite readers to share with us their thoughts on teaching. These thoughts might pertain to any number of teaching practices in counselor education as well as processes for evaluating one’s practice. In part, it is through conversations with
colleagues and students that our understandings of teaching will continue to develop. The opportunity to serve as a teacher is a special privilege that can result in great professional pleasure, and requires continuous curiosity, dedication, and an ability to connect with others. We wish for all those who decide to step into this role, a professionally fulfilling life as a teacher.

Best wishes,

John, Don, Jane, and Jason

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Often through our years together as counselor educators we have sat as colleagues at Kent State and at times with more distant colleagues, pondering teachers, teaching, and student engagement in learning. Those conversations might have gone like this, “I (Don) remember Dr. Richard Fisch once saying, ‘So the question is, did Columbus discover America or did he create it?’” The question stuck and Don was puzzled by that catchy turn of a phrase. A few years later two of us sat interviewing Dr. Ken Gergen and he said in effect, “We create reality by the language we choose to describe it.” Again, at the time the idea was novel to us, novel enough to stick in our minds and yet too novel, at the moment, to incorporate into a coherent story that would broaden our lives and guide our thinking. But along the way Don pondered comments by Drs. Fisch and Gergen and he began to think about Mr. Warren Moon, and the Art History course he took in 1963; you know, the one we all took where we memorized paintings and artists. At the time Don was so busy with the memorization that the instructor’s point of the course did not sink in, or maybe it did. At least the pictures were there and perhaps so were Mr. Moon’s lectures, which held meaning waiting to be released as suggested by comments from Drs. Fisch and Gergen. Art has suggested different realities at different times to different people based on the context in which it was inspired and based on conversations among those who view it. Yet there has to be enough commonness among the perspectives of some viewers for the art to gain traction and hold significance over time. Both the artist and the viewers share their perspectives, resulting in a landscape of created realities.

Well, of course what has been described is one perspective and others might have had similar experiences and come to different perspectives or no perspective depending on their own experiences and understandings. Obviously, Don has been drawn to the narrativist-constructionist perspectives, at least for now. But,
behind this narrative of constructed realities, there were three teachers mentioned, and many more recalled, who by lecture, discussion, demonstration, media, activity, and feedback provided the context for learning.

One in our group (John) has on many occasions lauded the teaching efforts of instructors he had in graduate school. For example, one faculty member had an uncommon ability to move students to a more thoughtful place, as an opportunity was opened for thinking during quiet moments of listening and note taking and reflecting on presentations. This individual moved students to additional thought and interest in the presentation and was a masterful lecturer. Another seemed to always be available to students who wanted to talk about counseling theories. With a genuine interest in the subject, even out-of-class discussions easily turned into role plays in the professor’s office. There were few things more exciting than taking the role of the counselor as the faculty member role played the part of the client. And yet another faculty member had an ability to facilitate a seminar in such a way that the students felt compelled to be prepared in order to offer an informed contribution. This individual was able to combine a welcoming manner with a clear expectation that students should be prepared. In each of these cases, there was an affirming style on the part of the faculty member. Stephenson (2001) seemed to be writing to the importance of an affirming style when he noted that “extraordinary teachers” have an “exceptional ability to connect with students” (p. xxxi).

Don remembers a rather quiet and demure professor, who gave excellent feedback on written work. This individual circled subject-verb agreement issues, noted formatting issues by number according to the most recent edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (currently the 2010 edition), so that they had to be looked up, while also providing grades for both content and writing style, and this professor allowed students additional opportunities to improve on their work. He remembers being so embarrassed by his errors, and the time it had required this professor to correct his paper, that he vowed to take the mechanics of writing much more seriously. The faculty member’s use of feedback as a teaching mechanism certainly impacted the time Don takes and the nature of feedback he gives students today. These thoughts seem similar to comments made by Stephenson (2001) when he wrote, “One of the biggest misconceptions about highly rated teachers is that they are easy. Far from it — extraordinary teachers are demanding instructors who teach rigorous courses” (p. xxxii). In turn, Bain (2004) asked, “Why do some teachers expect more and get students to produce it . . . while others fail miserably with what they regard as ‘higher’ standards?” (p. 71). After considering data from his own research as well as literature on “stereotypes” (pp. 72-76), Bain, in part, noted exemplary teachers took all their students seriously, and treated each one with respect . . . [and] they could convince their students through . . . sincerity . . . [that the
suggestions they offered were] based on the high standards of the best . . . scholarly . . . thinking, and [a belief by the professor that the] student had the capacity to benefit from the advice. (pp. 76-77)

Jane spoke of the time faculty members took with her on Saturday mornings to work with her on her dissertation. It was time given at least monthly, sometimes weekly, for over a year. That time together included general discussions of literature related to “reflective” practices and to her experiences in implementing those practices, as well as the research she was conducting on the use of “reflecting teams” stimulated by the work of Tom Andersen (1991). It included critiques of writing and thinking, and Jane mentioned, “We were discovering how to work together and growing together in our understandings of the theory and practice of using ‘reflection’ as a way of learning, maybe even as a way of life.” Stephenson (2001) wrote, “Extraordinary teachers have a passion for four things—learning, their fields, their students, and teaching. In other words, they believe deeply in their work, the people they serve, and their mission” (p. xxii). It has been our experience that these beliefs are often evident in time and commitment given to students during their studies.

Jason has fondly recalled relationships he developed with faculty members and how each of these relationships was unique. He was caught by the notion that faculty members who inspired him also challenged him to think for himself, and encouraged Jason to be comfortable with the unknown. During the oral portion of his doctoral comprehensive examinations, Jason remembers feeling confident and yet nervous in front of the five members of his committee. One committee member asked a question that Jason interpreted as abstract and unclear and he politely noted, “I am not sure if I am following your question, can you tell me more?” The response was, “No, I want you to wrestle with my question.” In that moment Jason remembers feeling frustrated by the comment; however, he posed a few responses that he thought addressed the question. The individual replied with a smile and said something to the effect of, “Good response, not what I was looking for, but your thinking is sound.” Allowing Jason to think through the question and sift through the ambiguity was the faculty member’s goal. Jason mentions having carried this experience with him and having remembered the individual’s intent during his own teaching. Struggling with meaning can cultivate even richer understandings. Herbert Tucker (2003), a professor of poetry, suggested that having students wrestle with ambiguity can lead to broader and clearer understandings. In counseling, our clients can at times experience a lack of clarity around their difficulties. It is up to us as counselors to help them work through their ambiguity and gain helpful perspectives. Being clear with students is important in many situations; however, working with ambiguity can lead to useful understandings and it also mirrors efforts found in the counselor-client relationship. A great amount of learning can come from working with the unknown.
In a final example of the effect a teacher might have on a student, Don recalls sitting in the Jolly Roger Doughnut Shop in Lancaster, Ohio, late at night with two faculty members discussing the effort to get legislation passed that would license counselors in Ohio. They had dropped him off in Lancaster to teach a class for one of them while they went on to Columbus to speak with legislators and legislative committees about what counselors had to offer the citizens. On the way back from their duties, Don was picked up in Lancaster and he recalls how “we all sat, talked, and enjoyed the doughnuts.” He remembers how the two faculty members were invested in the legislative effort both as a way of serving citizens and as a way of establishing the counseling profession. They had been at work on the issue for several years but were especially hopeful that progress was being made. They spoke specifically and respectfully of legislators and the kind of information that was needed to help individuals see the merit of licensure. Don recalls being struck by the confidence they had in him to teach, by their commitment to counselors, citizens, and the legislative effort, and by the respect they had for those who served the public as legislators. He still looks back on that time as making a difference in the emergence of the counseling profession and in the eventual realization that “in many ways, their work made it possible for me to have a 35 year career in counselor education. It was a lesson in vision, strategy, and commitment that I will never forget.” These comments remind us of Bain’s (2004) remarks that, “Highly effective teachers tend to reflect a strong trust in students. They usually believe that students want to learn, and they assume, until proven otherwise, that they can” (p. 18). Each of the above memories also brings to mind comments from The Art of Teaching by Parini (2005),

Nobody who has taught for very long has not experienced the strange allure and intimacy of the teacher-student relationship. . . . It moves beyond what psychologists refer to as transference. There is true love in the passing on of knowledge, and this involves understanding: the teacher must really know the student, on some deep level, for teaching of the most intense kind to happen. The student must have real love for the teacher. We have all experienced this, from first grade through graduate school, and beyond. I have loved my best teachers. (p. 124)

For us these teaching-mentoring moments came as gifts; gifts we did not receive and open at the time and gifts given by teachers who assumed they were just doing their jobs; trying to help society to be more inclusive, more skillfully caring, and to move our knowledge base in ways that were more responsive to human and environmental needs. But now in our careers, we understand their involvements with us to have been gifts. They were teaching us not only about the content of counselor education but also about the caring lifestyle of being a counselor educator. They had accepted a sacred responsibility, that is an essential trust (see Kittredge, 1999, p. 42), to care deeply about the well-being of the world in which
they lived and as teachers they had accepted the challenge of engaging others in the caring and learning process. Through their involvements they passed that trust onto us. We hope we are good stewards of the gifts we have been given. As you read the chapters in this book we trust you will be touched by the generosity and caring of these author-teachers who themselves seem to see teaching as a sacred trust; an opportunity to live generous lives.

FOCUS OF THE BOOK

The idea for this book grew then from discussions we had about teaching and from our own experiences as teachers. Some of us were inclined, as learners, to have an appreciation for the spoken word via lectures, some liked class discussions, others appreciated applied work in field settings, and some thought they grew from classroom activities and processing. Instructor and student feedback encouraged rethinking and improvement in our teaching. Each of us thought that exposure to the critical issues of the time, as formal students and later in life, helped us realize that social justice, inclusion, and environmental concern, that is, values, were always critical components of the teaching-learning process.

With time, we each gained further clarity around the complexities of the teaching-learning process. Although we might each prefer some teaching modalities, for example, lecturing, there were often different aspects of the modality that held the appeal. For one it might be the turn of phrases and for someone else it might be connections the instructor made between concepts and life as experienced by the student. The appeal was often a part of a larger context or narrative on teaching and learning that we perceived as having its origins in earlier life experiences, and in our histories as educators, which were expressed in involvements with students, colleagues, and professional issues, as well as our professional dreams and commitments for the future.

We decided to delve further into the practices of teaching by contacting colleagues who we thought held a particular aspect of teaching close to their heart and who we thought had special insights and knowledge about the use of that particular component of teaching. We asked these counselor educators to address four facets of working with a specified teaching modality or issue. Authors first discussed a rationale for their particular modality and reviewed literature related to the modality. For example, they might have noted why they thought the use of the seminar was a valuable learning activity and reviewed literature about the use of the seminar format. Secondly, they noted practices of implementing the teaching modality that they found useful. Either integrated into this discussion or in a separate section they described experiences or examples they had in using the modality. Finally, they offered their thoughts on evaluating the effectiveness of the
particular approach that was the topic of their discussion. These discussions of the engagement of students in meaningful learning, using specific modalities or issues, comprise chapters 2–12 of the text and are further described below. Chapter 1 has an intentionally different structure and discusses literature illustrating assumptions and beliefs about teaching and how beliefs about teaching are associated with practices by means of a teaching philosophy statement, whereas the closing chapter, 13, reviews ideas from the authors and addresses the need to be a reflective teacher.

TEACHING MODALITIES AND ISSUES

In Chapter 2, *Creating a Syllabus and Course Anticipation: Early Engagement of Students*, Jane Cox addresses three functions that syllabi might serve: communication, organization, and agreement (Eberly, Newton, & Wiggins, 2001). A syllabus communicates not only the goals and objectives for a course but also the instructor’s preferred tone for the course. Organization is about conveying the flow of the course and developing teaching strategies to accompany the flow. Agreement notes the more specific expectations for assignments, class participation expectations, and grading criteria. Jane also shares thought on a pre-course teaching practice designed to encourage students to become engaged in the process of learning. Finally, evaluation of syllabi both by colleagues and students is addressed.

Mark Savickas (*Preparing and Presenting Lectures That Exemplify the Ideals of Counselor Education*, Chapter 3) addresses the historical context of lecturing in education. His chapter models how a scholar might think about the lecturing process. Mark notes that counselor educators who lecture have an advantage of bringing their counseling skills to the process. He provides ideas about purposes that lectures might serve, as well as ideas about lecture preparation and delivery. We would have a particular appreciation for an underlying theme of Mark’s lecture preparation; that is, engaging students with the larger world in which they live via art, music, prose, media, daily events, and active learning.

In Chapter 4, *Making Use of the Seminar*, JoLynn Carney and Richard Hazler tackle the teaching methodology of the seminar as a means of engaging students in learning. They note that a value of the seminar is in connecting knowledge to experience. With the presupposition of students possessing knowledge, they focus on what are sometimes termed “higher order” thinking skills including: analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). The authors note that an attribute of the seminar is the stimulation of a diversity of ideas. Our own experience is that in leading seminars one must often wade through a wilderness of ideas to arrive at the promised land of
well-formulated thought. JoLynn and Richard guide the reader through instructional practices, useful to seminars, that offer roads to the promised land.

Mark Young and Gulnora Hundley (Connecting Experiential Education and Reflection in the Counselor Education Classroom, Chapter 5) posit that experiential learning is a preferred approach to use with adult learners. The mode connects experience with new learning often through the medium of reflective practices. With an emphasis on the importance of critical reflection, the authors discuss four types of experiential exercises: experiments, simulations, case study and critical incident analysis, and problem-based learning that they think have particular utility to counselor educators. Finally, they discuss some of the pitfalls of the evaluation of students who are involved in experiential learning and offer suggestions for avoiding these problems.

Chapter 6, Using Out-of-Class Learning Activities, explores, from both an instructor’s and students’ perspective, the practices and value of using what has been historically thought of as homework to increase students’ engagement and learning. Jason McGlothlin, Diana VanWinkle, and Kelsey George suggest that for out-of-class assignments to have the greatest impact they must address course objectives and be prescribed in ways so that students can understand the relevance of the assignment to their own professional growth. The authors suggest further criteria to be used in developing out-of-class learning assignments and provide examples of such assignments and methods for evaluating them.

Marty Jencius (Using Technology in Teaching, Chapter 7) provides a brief historic review of the advances made in technology that have pertinence to education over the past 20 years. He then, given a focus on pedagogical purpose, provides criteria (e.g., cost, sustainability, ease of use, etc.) to help the counselor educator decide which technologies are worthy of investment. Specific technological applications for the classroom are also discussed, for example, microblogging, news feeds, virtual worlds, and so forth.

Annette Albrecht and Dennis Jones (Using Distance Learning in Teaching, Chapter 8) provide a glossary of terms used in the distance learning arena. They use these terms to describe some of the “best” practices of distance learning. The practices convey the need for thoughtful organization of distance learning courses. The authors also suggest practices for evaluating the distance learning process and outcomes. Their comments on distance learning are timely in light of the interest shown by counselor education programs in the practice of distance learning.

One might posit that professions are judged by how well they are perceived to serve a public good. In serving that public good, professions must insure their viability by developing professionals capable of providing excellent services to the public and to the profession that supports them. Most of the chapters in this book address the preparation of professionals to deliver services to the public. In Chapter 9, Teaching to Encourage Professional Involvement, Courtland Lee, GoEun
Na, and Roxanna Pebdani explore ideas related to the preparation of individuals to provide service to the profession. Courtland, GoEun, and Roxanna give particular attention in the chapter to instruction that encourages meaningful professional involvement among counselor trainees.

Janine Bernard and Melissa Luke (Reflecting on Student-Teacher Relationships Within Counselor Education, Chapter 10) address teacher-student relationships that encourage student learning. Although they address inappropriate faculty-student relationships, their primary focus is on using relational skills common to counselors and counselor educators to enhance teacher-student relationships focused on learning. Janine and Melissa discuss the use of boundary maintenance, challenging, empathy, modeling, and self-disclosure with students as well as enhancement of student-to-student interactions. They also address topics such as social networking and experience levels of students as considerations in developing relationships focused on learning. Similar to the counselor-client relationship, we have come to believe that the teacher-student relationship is a meaningful component in the student’s educational experience.

Loretta Bradley, Janet Froeschle, Gerald Parr, and Bret Hendricks (Using Solution Focused Evaluation to Engage Students in the Learning Process, Chapter 11) address the issue of how one makes student evaluations a learning process as well as an evaluation process. More specifically they discuss ways of using solution focused evaluation as a source for student engagement in learning. The authors stress the importance of having students involved in their own evaluation and draw from writings on solution focused techniques. Finally, they suggest the use of Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) in assessing the helpfulness of solution focused evaluations in counselor education courses.

In Chapter 12 (Broaching the Subjects of Race, Ethnicity, and Culture as a Tool for Addressing Diversity in Counselor Education Classes), Norma Day-Vines and Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy introduce conceptual frameworks, the Continuum of Broaching Behavior (Day-Vines et al., 2007) and the Multidimensional Model of Broaching Behavior, as tools that counselor educators and counselors-in-training might use in advancing their ability to hold conversations concerning race, ethnicity, and culture. These frameworks are viewed as potential resources for counselor education and for engaging others in a multiculturally sensitive manner.

CONCLUSION

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) notes in its doctoral standards (Section IV.C.2.) students are to receive preparation in “instructional theory and methods relevant to counselor education.” It would appear that teaching about theory and method might be a
rather straightforward endeavor, yet, as noted by Parker Palmer (2007), we find that “writing about teaching” is done with a good deal of “humility” (p. xi). For us, this is because, much like walking on a forest trail, there can be an endless series of noteworthy, absorbing, and inspiring images to investigate, from those that lie right at one’s feet to those that remain further up the trail. With regard to teaching, these images can include an array of narratives about instruction with some focusing on methods used by the instructor and others focusing on the self or selves one chooses for company in the classroom. So while reading this book and considering methods of teaching, we would ask that you also reflect on personal stories about what it means to be a teacher in counselor education, for this will be taken up again later in the Epilogue.

REFERENCES


