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Summer 2015 Full Issue

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# The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision

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Edina Renfro-Michel

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# Editorial Note

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We are excited to introduce our first special issue, Summer 2015, with the theme of Creativity. Nolte, Bruce and Becker introduce a research mentoring model for counselor education doctoral students. They provide specific examples and a thorough model description. Fulton and Gonzalez research student feedback in a career counseling course that focuses on experiential learning. Gary and Grady explore ways to utilize television media into group coursework to enhance student learning.

As editor, I thank all of the dedicated reviewers who worked quickly and diligently to produce high quality manuscripts for JCPS. I want to thank, with deep appreciation, Associate Editor Jane Webber for her dedication and hard work as she finishes her tenure with JCPS. I also recognize Editorial Assistant Ellery Parker, and Graduate Assistant Lauren Spinella who spent many hours working with reviewers and authors. Additionally, I thank the NARACES Board for their continued support.

Edina Renfro-Michel, **Editor**



Jane Webber, **Associate Editor**





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# Building a Community of Researchers Using the Research Mentoring Model

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Meaghan C. Nolte, Mary Alice Bruce, Kent W. Becker

The development of a community environment and strong mentoring relationships is integral in helping doctoral students complete their degrees. Of the stages comprising a student's academic career, effective conceptualization and writing of the dissertation proves the most challenging and may result in failure to complete a doctoral degree. The researchers developed and used their Research Mentoring Model (RMM) to help doctoral students identify research topics, move into a researcher identity, and develop a sense community. This hermeneutic phenomenological sought to understand the experience of the five first year doctoral students participants. All were enrolled in a CACREP accredited Counselor Education and Supervision program of a western university. Each student was the Focus Person during participated in a structured, 90-minute mentoring to explore the possible directions of dissertation research. The sessions were attended by faculty and advanced doctoral students who provide feedback and discuss possible research. The five first year students were then interviewed about their experiences with the RMM. The themes that emerged from the individual interviews included: experiencing a sense of community, developing a researcher identity, increasing confidence, self-efficacy and motivation, as well as finding support from peers and faculty. The Article concludes with limitations, reflections and directions for future research.

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*Keywords:* Doctoral students, research, mentoring, researcher identity development

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Earning a doctoral degree is a complex process that involves the crossing of several thresholds leading to successful graduation (Kiley, 2010; McAlpine & Lucas, 2011; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Across disciplines, the doctoral dissertation is historically the final requirement between a doctoral candidate and the completion of a doctoral degree (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross, & Burgin, 2011; Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007). Of the stages that comprise a student's academic career, the dissertation process often prove the most challenging and may result in degree non-completion (Carter, 2011; Gardner, 2010; Kiley & Wisker, 2009). Over half the students who are admitted to doctoral candidacy quit before graduation, with a range from 11% in engineering

to as high as 68% in the humanities (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Klaw, 2009). Completion rates for doctoral students admitted into counselor education programs consistently average about 50% (Lewis, Ascher, Hayes, & Ieva, 2010; Smith, Maroney, Nelson, Abel & Abel, 2006).

Despite the tolerable completion rates in Counselor Education, there remain serious consequences for institutions and their students who do not graduate. Energy, time, and financial resources seem wasted for students who discontinue their academic path. What can be done? Building a community of faculty and doctoral student researchers may minimize the attrition rate, support doctoral students to move into a research identity, and enhance motivation toward graduation (Griffiths, Thompson, & Hryniewicz, 2010). Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the creation of a research community and collateral activities meant to support doctoral students through the dissertation process.

For the current research study, the community of researchers is defined as a group of university faculty, especially dissertation advisors, and doctoral students at various stages in their doctoral work. Community members provide support and feedback, as well as ensure accountability, while maintaining the flexibility to remain useful to the students as they progress through their doctoral studies. Promising practices in building this type of community in higher education involve: (1) collaboration among faculty and students, (2) guided socialization into academic and professional roles, and (3) mentoring (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Gardner, 2010; Gazzola, De Stefano, Audet, & Theriault, 2011; Mays & Smith, 2009). The researchers developed the research mentoring model (RMM) to support these practices in our counselor education graduate program.

Drawing upon the literature (Chang, 2010; Fernando & Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Gardner, 2010; Kiley & Wisker, 2009), the conference presentation of Ross, Rosenau, and Hakes (1999), and our professional experiences, we developed and implemented the model as part of a doctoral seminar course required for all first and second year doctoral students in the department.

Our work was an effort to develop a research community that encouraged doctoral student success, enhanced the development of a professional researcher identity, and reduced doctoral student drain. The purpose of this research is to explore the individual experiences of doctoral students participating in the RMM as an initial inquiry into its effectiveness as a fundamental activity of the research community. Doctoral students were given the individual opportunity for the RMM to explore their research ideas. All faculty and doctoral students in the counselor education program comprised the ongoing research community. Therefore, all members of our community were invited to participate in each RMM session held during our doctoral seminar class. While some of the members of the community were unavailable for every session, the participants necessarily included all students enrolled in doctoral seminar, the instructor of the class, and dissertation advisors. During each RMM session, one of the participants was the RMM facilitator who introduced each step in the model and enforced adherence to the time constraints. In addition to the facilitator, participants included the *focus person*, his or her dissertation advisor, and members of the doctoral student community. The focus person was encouraged to invite additional participants he or she believed might contribute to the discussion about his or her future research (i.e., dissertation committee members).

The RMM is a structured intervention that supports the development of this research community. All faculty members joined the weekly doctoral seminar class meetings thus engaging in discussions about their research interests with the result of supporting the new

doctoral students via an intentional activity of support. However, while as a single event the RMM was not sufficient to sustain a research community, the RMM sessions did seem to provide a first step toward community. The first year doctoral students felt welcomed and included as valued members of the existing research community. After the RMM sessions, the resultant positive energy also evoked various collaborative research teams among faculty and students that included all community members who were willing. In addition, faculty members and students endeavored to maintain the community by inviting newly admitted doctoral students to join the community and providing continued support of the advanced students.

This article begins by placing the RMM in the context of the background literature as a promising activity that may serve as a valuable component in building a vibrant research community. Next, we describe the five steps of the RMM including an additional sixth step, which we added in response to feedback of the research participants. Our methodology, research paradigm, and procedures follow the description of the RMM. We present the results as five themes that emerged during the research; themes are complemented by quotations from the participants. The article concludes with limitations, reflections regarding the process, benefits, and long-term implications, of the current study.

The first author contacted both Ross and Rosenau to obtain permission to use the initial concepts of their 1999 conference presentation and inquire about any additional research they conducted. Rosenau responded indicating that the presenters did no additional work with their model after their conference presentation; she was unaware of the theoretical foundations for the model, and she advised us to proceed with our study (Rosenau, personal communication, February, 21, 2010). Thereupon, the RMM was developed, enhanced, and then implemented in our university department as a primary step in developing a research community.

## **Background**

As reported by the Council of Graduate Schools (2010), specific practices in higher education encourage doctoral student graduation rates. Collaboration within a community provides members of that community with a sense of identity and belonging, which can be empowering (Gazzola et al., 2011). According to Gardner (2010), socialization into the environment of academia is also vital to a doctoral student's success. Finally, formal mentoring by faculty and peers supports doctoral students in determining a sense of direction and building confidence, helping them overcome feelings of isolation and self-doubt (Driscoll, Parkes, Tilley-Lubbs, Brill, & Bannister, 2009). The RMM endeavors to create a collaborative and supportive community to address these practices.

### **Collaboration among Faculty and Students**

Building a collaborative departmental community in higher education engages students with faculty and peers, facilitates a supportive environment, and provides maximum opportunities for scholarly success that lead to graduation (Driscoll et al., 2009; Mullen, Fish, & Hutinger, 2010). Collaboration offers common goals for working together and supporting each other to maximize effectiveness and success (Gardner, 2010; McGrath & Tobia, 2008). The alliance facilitates active engagement among department members, which contributes to empowerment and meaning making in the learning environment (Gazzola et al., 2011; McAlpine & Lucas, 2011). In academic areas such as counselor education, collaboration between faculty and students socializes members (both faculty and students) in their roles as competent professionals who are comfortable and always growing in their identities as researchers (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Gazzola et al., 2011; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). The process of

moving into a counselor educator role requires that students discover their professional roles and begin understanding how to function within the structure of academe.

### **Socialization into Academic and Professional Roles**

Socialization assists individuals in gaining the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary to become competent members of a group or community. According to Mays and Smith (2009), one of the major challenges a doctoral student faces to complete a dissertation successfully is the integration of a new professional identity as a researcher. This identity shift is among the most challenging tasks for many doctoral students (Kiley, 2009). Mays and Smith (2009) offered the metaphor of a phoenix rising out of the ashes to describe the identity shift that occurs during the process of obtaining a doctoral degree. As with many transformations, this new identity is not easy to create. It is not enough to complete required courses that focus on reviewing existing information in the field (Aitchison et al., 2012). Students must cross a threshold to become independent researchers who produce original work, shifting from consumers of information provided to them by their professors, textbooks, and scholarly articles (Fernando & Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Powers & Swick, 2012).

In their conceptual article, Meyer and Land (2005) described a liminal stage before doctoral students achieve independence; in this liminal stage, they begin developing confidence with academic inquiry. During this stage, young researchers often find themselves feeling stuck, confused, and frustrated. The sense of feeling stuck without experiencing support can lead to a decrease in self-efficacy and self-esteem (Myer & Land, 2005). Formal and informal student-faculty research meetings can help reduce feelings of inadequacy and frustration, clarify use of resources, and specify tasks and operationalize ideas for research (Fernando & Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Powers & Swick, 2012). Consistent support and mentoring from faculty members and

other doctoral students can assist students in handling the anxiety of meeting the expectations set out by programmatic and accreditation requirements (Gardner, 2010). The RMM attempts to be an initial step toward supporting students as they develop their researcher identity.

## **Mentoring**

Mentoring promotes successful completion of doctoral work including the dissertation (Black, Suarez, & Medina, 2004). It is a developmental partnership through which knowledge, skills, and perspectives are shared to support personal and professional growth (Black et al., 2004; Buck, Mast, Latta, & Kaftan, 2009; Ku, Lahman, Yeh, & Cheng, 2008). Mentees often seek various types of support from their mentors involving personal accountability, support, friendship, promotion of personal growth, and constructive feedback about student progress (Black et al., 2004).

The mentor-mentee relationship can also foster a sense of independence and confidence in the mentee (Buck et al., 2009). Although both doctoral students and faculty benefit from the relationship, it is important that the nature of the relationship is based on the needs of the students (Mullen et al., 2010). By allowing the students to direct the terms of the relationship, they are able to develop an independent professional identity while seeking support from mentors (Gazzola et al., 2011).

Mentoring relationships among peers provide another essential cornerstone of doctoral student support (Driscoll et al., 2009). Peer mentors offer stability and foster interdependence in the institutional culture of higher education. As part of a department's mentoring program, assigning doctoral students who are further along in the doctoral program as formal mentors to incoming students can enhance levels of trust and respect and can assure meaningful collaborations among mentors and mentees. Although these relationships do not specifically help

students complete their dissertations, they serve to build a research community in a doctoral program that helps students develop their identities as researchers, which has the secondary impact of encouraging dissertation completion. These relationships increase personal connections that often provide specific opportunities for successful mentoring among all members of a department research community. Mentor-mentee relationships can also increase connection and support for the mentors in the final stages of their doctoral work by ensuring continued interaction with their peers and colleagues.

Therefore, we introduce the RMM as a means of bringing together best practices for creating a community of researchers who support doctoral students for completion. The RMM offers students opportunities to discuss research topics and philosophies using a specific structure that facilitates the discussion of dissertation topics in a supportive community. In addition, the community time aids in the development of a researcher identity. Such discussions seem to help students move through the liminal stage (Meyer & Land, 2005) of researcher identity development and manage the inevitable ambiguity associated with the processes of graduate school. Finally, students develop the skills of scholarly discourse necessary to complete the doctoral dissertation and graduate.

### **The Research Mentoring Model**

The research mentoring model, RMM (see Appendix), is a group format that supports students in the process of thinking aloud and reflecting on their research. Five to ten participants in each RMM session is the optimum number, including the individual focus person, the individual's faculty advisor, and other appropriate members of the research community (student peers, faculty in and out of the department). One of the members who is familiar with the RMM process acts as the research mentoring model *facilitator*. The process provides opportunities to



explore ideas, identify possible research questions, and gain feedback about dissertation ideas from session participants. This structured model is a collaborative process for students to discuss their ideas, hopes, and apprehensions about the dissertation process while receiving feedback from peers and faculty mentors. Meanwhile, other students and faculty can begin to understand the interests and needs of their colleagues during the six discrete steps of the model (see Appendix).

During Step One, the Opening Big Picture discussion, The focus person discusses the vision of research and scholarly interests. This process lasts 10 minutes, during which the other participants remain silent and listen to the focus person's ideas. The ten minutes are designated specifically for the focus person, even if used for silent reflection. Silence can be a valuable tool allowing the focus person to solidify ideas and allowing for additional research questions and ideas to arise.

The second step is a 45-90 minute period during which all participants attending the session engage the focus person with questions and muses about research possibilities. The Questioning Period invites a dialogue between focus person and other participants introducing a variety of ideas and various research directions. The participants ask questions, and the focus person can choose to respond (or not). Participants may wonder, "When you are done with your dissertation, and writing an article on the results, what will be the key words?" or, "You are so passionate when discussing play therapy. Where is that passion when talking about your current research ideas and questions?" Questions and the resulting discussion can help the focus person discover previously unaware thoughts and emotions regarding his or her research topic.

The next three steps last 30 minutes, during which the focus person is invited to remain silent. Step three offers participants the opportunity to make observations and reflect for ten

minutes on the focus person's initial big picture discussion and questioning period. These observations include insights, reflections of the meaning, and emotions expressed as well as identify their perceptions of the important content and process aspects of the second step. The focus person listens to these reflections without responding. The purpose of the silence is to encourage the focus person to listen without attempting to justify or react to the feedback. Instead, the focus person can just absorb and contemplate the reflections of others, in keeping with the concepts of a reflecting team (Chang, 2010).

During the fourth step, participants provide appreciation and encouragement for five minutes to the focus person. Again, the focus person remains silent and can feel empowered by the positive energy and multiple perspectives (Chang, 2010). RMM participants can also offer resources and connections to help the focus person move forward into the identified research. Step five lasts 15 minutes while the participants provide feedback and thoughtful ideas in the form of suggestions about the research interest. This respectful feedback often takes the form of "If this were my research..."

The RMM was the impetus of the research and preceded the research interviews of this study. The researchers explored the experiences of the doctoral students in the use of the RMM, seeking to understand how the participants understood and made meaning from their experiences with the RMM sessions.

## **Methods**

### **Research Paradigm**

Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to understand the lived world, and this paradigm guided our data collection and analysis. Heidegger (1929/2010) argued that people cannot be separated from their personal history and context. Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology allows for

close examination of a participant's lived experience (Newman, Cashin, & Waters, 2010). Both participants and researcher experience a phenomenon through a lens that reflects personal culture, history, socialization, and religion, rather than being passive recipients of knowledge, they co-construct knowledge through dialogue with the research participants (Charalambous, Papadopoulos & Beadsmore, 2008). The participants and researchers co-construct the data through discourse. It becomes paramount that the researcher is in constant dialogue with him or herself throughout the research process in an attempt to understand the context of any interpretation. We chose hermeneutic phenomenology because of the active, overlapping roles. Hermeneutic phenomenology provided the researchers opportunities to reflect upon their experiences and biases throughout the research, without the necessity of bracketing themselves out. Our individual experiences with the RMM influenced the research process underscoring the importance of recognizing our expectations and the influence those expectations may have on our interaction with results (Wojnar & Swanson 2007). Because the first author was also a doctoral student participant, the focus of hermeneutic phenomenology to contextualize experience using dialogue and reflection was the most appropriate research methodology

### **Participants**

Participants in the study were five first-year doctoral students, at a western university with high research activity (The Carnegie Foundation, 2005). The research participants ranged in age from 26-30 in their second semester of full time doctoral study. Of the four women and one man, three of the five participants were international students from Southeast Asia; the remaining two students were born and raised in the United States (40%). Each student's specific demographics and research interests are provided.

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The first author of the article who also participated in the study is a single Caucasian

woman who joined the cohort after completing her master's degree in counseling in the southeastern United States. Initially, she expressed dissertation ideas related to adoption, or spirituality and addictions; she was undecided when she began the first step of the RMM session. The authors use pseudonyms for the other participants. Isaac was an international student who brought his family to the United States. He declared an interest in focusing on effectively treating adults with addictions. Samantha, an international student who also brought her family to the U.S., disclosed wide interests ranging from play therapy to gerontology. Cathy, whose family lives in the local area, matriculated with a master's in clinical counseling from a Midwestern university. She was inspired by working with adolescents in residential treatment and wanted to conduct her research with the same population. Kate, an international student who also brought her family to the U. S., had a focus on career counseling to make a difference in helping students when she returned to her country.

As members of the doctoral seminar class, two second year doctoral students participated and facilitated the RMM sessions. Additionally they supported and mentored the first year students formally and informally throughout the academic year. The faculty members, two women and one man who participated in the sessions, were members of the first year students' committees. Two of those faculty members had tenure at the university, and the third was an assistant professor in a tenure track position.

### **Procedure**

All participants were students in doctoral seminar, a required course that occurs in a series of four. All doctoral students were required to complete the series of courses as part of their graduation requirements. The class met once weekly for three hours. Each first and second year doctoral student was required to participate in the RMM during class. The goals of the

RMM were to build an active research community within which the first year students were encouraged to explore dissertation topics while being mentored by advanced students and faculty. The research community aided students in moving through the liminal researcher identity phase into a research identity and developing dissertation research questions.

The authors obtained participant agreement and university Human Subjects Review Board approval for research about the mentoring sessions. We also adhered to the American Counseling Association (ACA) code of ethics regarding research throughout the research process (ACA, 2005). During the RMM sessions, each first year doctoral student (research) participant was the focus person during one session and participated in other sessions as a member of the community providing support to their peers. In addition to the five-first year doctoral students, two-second year doctoral students and three faculty members participated in all of the sessions.

**Research Mentoring Model.** During each session, a faculty member or second year doctoral student acted as the facilitator thus ensuring adherence to the RMM by distributing the model protocol (see Appendix) and monitoring the time. The sessions occurred over the course of three weeks. Each of the mentoring sessions was scheduled for 90 minutes with time allotted for the five discrete steps described above. During the first week there was only one session, the two subsequent weeks the class was split into two groups, and two sessions occurred concurrently.

**Interviews.** All the first year doctoral students consented to participate in 30 minute, semi-structured individual interviews following their Research Mentoring Session. The first researcher conducted all the interviews at least one month following the RMM sessions, which allowed participants time to reflect on their experiences of the sessions prior to the interview.

The authors developed the interview questions to elicit responses that addressed the experience

of the participants in their role as the focus person, although the final prompt requested any other comments about the RMM. According to the developed protocol, the five participants first responded to questions about their ideas about the relative helpfulness of the RMM sessions. We created this protocol based on reflections and ideas from previous students who participated in previous years' dissertation discussion sessions loosely based on the work of Ross et al. (1999). Next, the participant had an opportunity to reflect on the sessions with any other information believed relevant. The second author conducted the first interview with the first author. The first author then scheduled and conducted the interviews with the other four participants. The first author recorded and transcribed all interviews.

**Data Analysis.** The researchers used Hermeneutic Phenomenology to analyze the data. To ensure that the interviewees were understood accurately, the authors provided a copy of individual interview transcripts to each participant. The transcript was accompanied by a request for review of the transcript to check for errors and offer edits. As a result, a few minor changes were made.

After the initial transcript reviews, the first and second authors met and identified the themes that arose from the interview process. First, the two authors checked emergent patterns and salient themes. Next, they examined for alternate explanations. The researchers identified, modified, re-evaluated, and reduced the themes into the final five themes based on the interview transcripts (Merriam, 2009). After the authors identified salient themes, they conducted member checks whereby the four non-author first year doctoral student participants were contacted via email and asked to review the themes identified and ensure that the themes were congruent with their experiences. Each participant also had the opportunity to reflect further on the identified themes. Participants all responded confirming that the themes were congruent with their experience.

**Researchers' Position.** Hermeneutic phenomenology requires transparency of the researcher's position to explain context and mediate some of the potential limitations. All three authors were tied integrally to the research topic, as advisors and research chairs, and as participants in the process, whether faculty or students. It is important to acknowledge these positions and situate each author within the context of the Research Mentoring process, and in relationship to the study (Merriam, 2009). The first author, as stated above, was a participant in the Research Mentoring process. She experienced the process first hand; thus, she was able to understand personally, and theoretically, the content and themes identified during the data analysis. She also met regularly with the second and third authors in order to maintain awareness and address perceived biases about how her experiences with the RMM related to and interacted with the research project. The second author, a full professor in the Counselor Education program, was the dissertation advisor of three of the participants, and was present for three of the five mentoring sessions (she was only able to attend one session during the weeks when two sessions occurred concurrently). The second author met weekly throughout the academic year with her advisees for individual mentoring. Often, readings and possible dissertation ideas were the topic of discussion accompanied by follow-up reflection related to the RMM sessions. The third author was the instructor of the doctoral seminar course and introduced the RMM as part of the course. He was also the dissertation chair of one of the participants, and was present for three of the five mentoring sessions (see above).

**Trustworthiness.** The qualitative nature of the interviews created a need to ensure trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This presented unique challenges because the first author was also a first year doctoral student, thus a participant-observer (Spradley, 1980) in the mentoring sessions and the interviews. The first author was the first participant to be

interviewed, ensuring that the first author reflected and became aware of her experience before conducting the other interviews.

Throughout the study, the first and second authors met to debrief and evaluate their biases, not to remove those biases, but instead to make the implicit biases explicit in the research process. The fact that the first author was also a participant was the repeated object of discussion in order to evaluate the emotions and beliefs that might bias the interview process. By means of ongoing conversations, the authors were able to maintain awareness about their assumptions and thus contextualize the researchers as well as the research topic (Merriam, 2009). The second author also offered reflections and observations about possible biases of the first author to help maintain trustworthiness. This process was especially important during the data analysis phase of the study when the first author worked with the second author evaluating her own interview, as well as the responses of the other interviewees.

## **Results and Discussion**

The intentions of the RMM were threefold: to build a research community, enhance students' researcher identity, and aid the students in developing dissertation research questions (Gardner, 2010). A secondary goal was to increase the experience of tangible support by faculty and peers. In this study, the RMM was a component of a required doctoral seminar course. Five major themes emerged based on the experiences of RMM sessions by the first year doctoral student participants during the semi-structured interviews: structure of the sessions, researcher identity, confidence/self-efficacy, motivation, and support.

### **Structure of the Research Mentoring Model Sessions**

Participants were quite eager to address the structured steps of the model itself. The majority of the participants identified the questioning period as one of the most helpful steps



during the session. The first author indicated, “Hearing my thoughts coming out of somebody else’s mouth was really helpful because it opened my eyes and helped me gain a little more perspective.” While Isaac stated that “just throwing out ideas, ‘hey what do you think about this’ was nice.”

Offering another perspective, Cathy said that the initial step of ten minutes during which she discussed her ideas without interruption was the most powerful part of the model:

I think it was ten minutes to just talk about my ideas, like it just, I knew no one would interrupt me. That I could just play around with my thoughts, and so, kinda’ getting all that out on the table was good because it helped me to continue to process them.

The initial step, according to Cathy, allowed her to express her thoughts and provided her an opportunity to set the stage for the subsequent discussion with faculty members and peers to develop her next strategic steps.

Samantha expressed appreciation for the concepts she identified during the overall session, although she did not walk out with a specific action plan for moving forward with her dissertation work. Instead, during her session, Samantha felt comfortable and safe among colleagues to share cultural implications related to her research investigation.

At the same time, the structure also posed some challenges for the participants. Isaac and Kate both acknowledged that they had high expectations after participating in their RMM sessions. However, they were surprised to finish the session with more questions than answers related to becoming a successful researcher and action steps regarding their dissertations. Kate stated with a bit of disappointment, “maybe I expected I would be able to make a decision immediate[ly] after the process” and then get going on my dissertation ideas, although, I did get “more focus and determination.”

Most participants expressed difficulty in listening, without engaging in a dialogue, during the final three steps of the mentoring session. Both Cathy and the first author specifically identified the requirement to remain quiet during the final steps during the session to be a challenge. Each had questions swirling and ideas they would have liked to bring forward to the group. These reflections along with the underlying tenet of offering respect for collaborative closure are the justifications for adding the sixth step as necessary to the RMM.

### **Emerging Researcher Identity**

Another theme that participants brought forward, socialization into a researcher identity, is another area identified in the literature (Lovitts, 2005; Mays & Smith, 2009) to be crucial for students during their dissertation work. The notion of emerging researcher identity encompasses preparation (prior to the session), actual researcher identity, and the process of becoming, all of which are identified in the literature as occupying the liminal stage (Kiley, 2009). The first author's statement about developing a research identity seems to express clearly the experience of the transition inherent in this liminal stage.

I think I'm beginning to see myself more as a person who wants to identify research questions and figure out how to answer them...I don't know I that I would call myself a researcher, but I think that my research identity is definitely developing...I get excited about it.

This expression of increased comfort as a researcher is echoed by Cathy, the "class research sessions helped my confidence in terms of how to find a literature review...I learned a lot."

All participants told of mentally preparing for their session. All five reported they planned prior to the session to provide a foundation for their confidence with the structure and

expectations of the RMM. This was best expressed by Cathy when she stated: “I had a general...a big idea to funnel down later.” All participants were satisfied that they were able to identify their general, broad topic; Samantha indicated, “I already had the population in mind... so I had the general topic and then I had the population but I didn’t know what to do about that [topic specifically].” This theme came across in each of the participants’ interviews. They had a general idea about their research interest, and the RMM helped “funnel down” their research topic as Cathy stated.

Related to the process of becoming researchers, participants expressed satisfaction that the session helped them feel more comfortable with their roles as emerging researchers. Cathy indicated that the session “encouraged me to think out of the box” indicating an increased comfort in thinking and conducting novel research. Samantha stated that she’s “positive I can get there [to a completed dissertation].” Samantha reported that her sense of herself as a researcher dramatically improved since she began the doctoral program through participation in research classes, through participation in the RMM, and with continued support from faculty members and peers.

### **Confidence and Self-Efficacy**

The theme of confidence and self-efficacy emerged because participants expressed increased confidence not directly related to their researcher identity. The focus of increased confidence was the comfortable shift to overall socialization and understanding of the norms of the graduate school environment (Gardner, 2010; Mullen et al., 2010). All five participants reported an increase in their confidence and self-efficacy at the prospect of completing their dissertation. This increase grew out of three experiences: the actual RMM session, the process

of preparing for the session with most students conducting a brief review of the literature related to their topic of interest, and follow-up conversations with faculty members and peers.

Kate stated: “it [the RMM] helped me choose my topic” and “I recognize my strengths and weaknesses.” Isaac described the increased confidence using the metaphor of “opening windows” that helped him see different aspects of his research interest. Cathy indicated that she planned to use the audio recording of her research mentoring session to “remind myself to work through the...ups and downs of the process.” Each of the participants also used the word “confidence” and described how personal clarity and sense of confidence had increased because of the RMM.

### **Motivation**

The motivational changes associated with the RMM seem to have affected both the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation of the study participants. A number of the participants indicated that they became more extrinsically motivated to learn about their topic prior to the session; while this may have been a desire to be prepared in front of colleagues, participant’s described this as motivation from outside themselves. Kate stated that knowing about the upcoming session “encouraged me to search for information.” Meanwhile, Cathy stated that the session “...gave us a jump start and kicked things off.” This shift in motivation seemed to be directly associated with the knowledge of the upcoming session.

Following the session, participants also reported an increase in their intrinsic motivation to discover more about their topic of interest. Cathy stated that the “research session allowed me to continue that conversation” and motivated her to “continue to read and search things out...I feel more sparked about my topic.” Isaac indicated a similar change in motivation, reporting he has the “energy to move on [in the research process].” Isaac also indicated that he has increased

clarity about his future career, an experience also expressed by Kate who indicated that the session helped her “focus and choose the best topic to suit my need in the future, to suit my interests.”

## **Support**

The theme of support includes general support, the experience of a collaborative community, and the use of external supports. All participants indicated that the mentoring session highlighted the support and trusting community prevalent in the university’s counselor education program. Many of the students also highlighted their experience of support from outside the department and sometimes outside of the university community as they engaged in discussions about their progress as a doctoral student.

The most salient type of support was the encouragement experienced by the participants during and after the session. Students indicated their appreciation of specific verbal acknowledgements from faculty and peers in addition to nonverbal support, such as thoughtful nods, during both the times of victory and struggle as students tried to find the words to express themselves during the session. The participants also emphasized the importance of being heard carefully and feeling understood. Another especially constructive type of support was receiving helpful feedback and the insightful perspective of others. The first author expressed that the session “provided some support and helped me see that it [completing a dissertation] is possible and that...I have the support, not only that I felt it then [during the session] but that it exists within the department...so, if I need it I know that I can get it.” The support provided by peers, faculty mentors, and student mentors was an important part of the mentoring sessions.

The idea of belonging to a supportive community also emerged. Cathy and the first author both expressed a feeling of connection to the community. Cathy stated that it was helpful to realize

We're all struggling with these ideas and where we're headed and what-not, and just realizing the reinforcing fact that we're all in this together. We're all going through the same thing, so it's not just me out on my own trudging along on this dissertation without any sight of anyone else...you can feed off the positive people...to help motivate all of us to work through that.

This seems to express the importance of feeling like a member of the community, focusing on how each member of the community can provide support, motivation and encouragement to all the other members and value everyone's contributions.

Additionally, four of the five participants indicated that one benefit of using external supports is the increased perspective outside of the counseling lens. Isaac stated that he has a continuing dialogue with a colleague in his home country, which helps him maintain a dual perspective, i.e., from his community support at the university he is currently attending and from the community where he will return when he completes his education. Samantha identified a member of the Adult Education faculty, and she offered, "I notice that he provides more articles and additional reading materials...I know he knows that we won't really have time for all of the articles he send[s], but it's good." She also has a standing meeting with this professor during which she takes an opportunity to discuss her research ideas with a person from outside counselor education. Finally, the first author discussed the support she finds from a member of her committee from outside the counselor education department, and her father (a mental health professional) "about what makes sense and what doesn't... the way that I think isn't always linear or logical.... I think most of it is interaction...interaction with literature helps me think more, but then interaction with people helps me think different[ly]." The use of external support seems to help participants feel supported and realize a different perspective about their topic of interest.

## **Limitations**

As related to trustworthiness, each of the authors was integrally connected with the research personally and professionally. Although personal interaction with participants is the strength of qualitative research, it is also a potential limitation. It reduces generalizability and has the potential to bias the research. The authors used constant dialogue in an effort to ensure trustworthiness; however, it is not possible to remove this limitation entirely.

Another limitation is the first author's participation in this research as both participant and researcher. Ethnographic research has long used participant observation (Spradley, 1980); however the current research is not an ethnography. As such, the author's identity as participant and researcher may limit the research and was a careful consideration throughout the entire process.

Another limitation of this study is that three of the five participants were international students from Southeast Asia. This means that the majority of participants in this study were minorities and international students. Often, international students deal with the pressure of acculturating into their academic institutions (Gómez, Urzúa, & Glass, 2014); as second semester students, they had a brief time to acculturate. In addition, all three students were living with their families and had developed a support network with other international students from their home country. Family and social support may have increased comfort with the community where they were living, but the absence of large family support networks still may have impacted their experience. The two semesters of their study also provided an academic support system within their cohort, the cohort from which all the study participants were drawn. In this way, the first author being the interviewer may have helped the international student participants speak candidly about their experiences of the RMM.

## Implications

Finding the most effective practices to support doctoral students toward degree completion and success can benefit students, faculty members, families, and institutions (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010). Acknowledging that doctoral programs may provide an initial sense of good will and respect, participating in research activities together provides a long-term commitment to effective mentoring and a facilitative department community (Butler & Schnellert, 2012; Cassidy et al., 2008). While a variety of literature provides strategies for supporting doctoral students, the authors of this article propose that participating in the RMM sessions accomplishes several goals in an efficient and effective manner. With less expense and time as compared to other strategies for creating collaborative communities (McAlpine & Lucas, 2011), the mentoring sessions can be integrated into existing graduate courses and provide the basis for building an inclusive research community of mutual trust.

Past student participants have expressed appreciation for the chance to experience a careful balance of listening, encouragement, and input from faculty and peers during their participation in the RMM. In the model, all input is equally valued, which furthers meaningful collaboration thus lessening the fear of hierarchical power and control issues (Cassidy et al., 2008; Dricoll et al. 2009). Also, the sessions can result in continuing follow-up conversations and more intensive, connective relationships within the context of a collaborative department community.

In addition, as the RMM sessions are regularly planned and clearly offered as a counselor education program activity, mentoring and socialization in academe can flourish, resulting in the formation of ongoing research teams in which all members are involved as teachers and learners (McAlpine & Lucas, 2011). Faculty members and students collaborate on research teams



regarding conference proposals and presentations as well as writing manuscripts for refereed publication.

At our university, the RMM sets up expectations for successful collaborations. Students are socialized to realize expectations for themselves and faculty members, gain understanding of action steps for success, and begin thinking of themselves as moving from student identities to that of professional colleagues.

According to McAlpine and Lucas (2011), working as a team within the context of an institution enhances cohesive connections and group identity among faculty and students. Confidence and motivation related to active research and scholarship also increase. Another benefit is the sense of allegiance to the institution and possible long-term connections based on shared meaning and understanding.

### **Reflection, Directions for Future Research**

Reflections of past student participants of the RMM reveal additional insights that may allow the model to offer more benefit for students and faculty members. Prior to the RMM meetings, students can prepare by visiting consistently with their major advisor and others to select areas of dissertation interest. Next, by studying the related literature to explore issues and current trends enables the participant to bring forward tentative thoughts and goals.

As part of a department's community activities, integrating the RMM as a required activity demonstrates structured mentoring as a priority with a focus for research and realistic research expectations. Thus, investigating the benefits of multiple sessions to consider ongoing research projects across the entire doctoral program may be helpful related to reinforcing and sustaining student research motivation and identity. Also, examining the interplay between the

RMM and research courses, normally taught by faculty outside the program, may provide intriguing strategies for enhancing doctoral students' research identities.

A long-term qualitative study could be conducted with interviews before and after the Research Mentoring session, and the sessions could be recorded. Students could also be interviewed as they progress through their doctoral coursework and dissertation research. Research of this kind may aid in understanding particular steps of the RMM that is designed to provide support, aid in the development of a researcher identity, share ideas, and help doctoral students gain confidence in their ability to produce original research.

### **Conclusion**

The RMM facilitates students to move past the idea that the doctoral dissertation is an arduous task to be completed before graduation. Rather, students realize the dissertation is an opportunity to begin creating what they really want for their lives and the world. Students begin to embrace the identity of a researcher and realize that a dissertation can be a vital foundation component of a research agenda, which can lead to desired goals on their career trajectory. While the time required for intensive sessions with individual doctoral students requires careful planning and scheduling, the resources are well spent. Aligned with the Council of Graduate School's (2010) suggestions for student success, the RMM offers a professional development opportunity to receive continuing mentoring support from faculty members as well as other students.

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Appendix A  
Research Mentoring Model (RMM)

- I. Opening and big picture discussion .....10 minutes
- Focus person expresses ideas, passions and dreams about a possible research agenda and dissertation direction
  - Participants carefully listen without speaking
  - Focus person identifies needs and wants in order to move forward
  - Everyone honors silence as needed
- II. Question Period.....45-90 minutes
- With a purpose of understanding the Focus person’s ideas and intentions, a lively exchange of questions and discussion among everyone occurs which usually leads to further questions
  - Questions are asked with the purpose of helping the Focus person explore possibilities
  - Focus person has the right to pass rather than answer a question
- III. Observation and Reflection .....10 minutes
- Participants restate what they perceive the focus person said
  - Participants offer their understanding of the focus person’s intention
  - Participants give their impressions of the Focus person’s feelings and behaviors
  - Focus person carefully listens to gain self-awareness
- IV. Acknowledgement and Encouragements .....5 minutes
- Participants affirm the work already done by the Focus person
  - Participants identify specific strengths and resources of the Focus person
  - Focus person carefully listens to absorb affirming recognitions
- V. Feedback and Ideas .....15-30 minutes
- Participants respectfully offer their personal strategy for moving forward, “If this were my research, I would ...”
  - Focus person carefully listens
- VI. Focus Person Reflection (optional) .....5 minutes
- Focus person reflects on feedback from the final three phases of the RMM.
  - Focus person requests clarification of comments.

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# Making Career Counseling Relevant: Enhancing Experiential Learning Using a “Flipped” Course Design

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Cheryl Fulton, Laura Gonzalez

Because work is important to mental health, faculty who teach career development courses need strategies to engage master’s counseling students who may have low motivation for the topic. Findings from this exploratory study suggest that enhanced focus on experiential learning strategies, achieved by using a flipped classroom, may improve students’ attitudes toward career development counseling and generate confidence in performing career counseling tasks ( $N=58$ ). The experiential class activities and assignments, and technology utilized for flipping the course are described. Student feedback regarding changes in their attitudes and values toward career development, and confidence in performing career counseling, is reported along with feedback regarding instructional methods and preferred class activities and assignments. Implications for counselor education are discussed.

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*Keywords:* Career counseling attitudes, career counseling pedagogy, flipped course design, active learning strategies

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Work is central to the lives of Americans and is interrelated with mental health and overall well-being (Bluestein, 2008). Myers and Sweeney (2005) identified work as “an essential element in human experience that can enhance one's capacity to live life fully” (p. 274) in their evidence-based wellness model. Further, clients’ career related concerns and decisions are inseparable from personal concerns, thus, it is vital that *all* counselors are prepared to respond to a full range of client needs (Swanson & Fouad, 2010). It is not surprising, therefore, that The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has identified career development as one of eight common core curricular areas required of all students in an accredited counseling program (CACREP, 2009). Despite the importance of career



development counseling, counselor trainees and practicing counselors approach the topic with low motivation and trainees often feel that it will not be relevant to their future work with clients (Hartung, 2005; Lara, Kline, & Paulson, 2011; Savickas, 2003).

This low interest in the topic of career development counseling may be shared among some faculty. The career development course is, at times, assigned to newer or non-tenure track faculty members, as more senior counselor educators often do not prefer to teach it (Carter, Bowman, Kher, Bowman, & Jones, 1994; Savickas, 2003). In fact, Carter et al. found that among senior faculty, the career development course was rated the least satisfying to teach. Further, career development courses are “high content courses” in which the instructor must teach numerous theories (due to CACREP requirements and preparation for standardized counselor licensing exams). The theories can be challenging to present meaningfully (Osborne, 2009) and can consume considerable class time (Carter et al., 1994). Engaging students in a theory-dense course can be challenging when students and/or faculty do not view career development counseling as professionally relevant. Conversely, in a more recent study of faculty who teach career development, Osborne and Dames (2013) found that 85% of participants ( $n = 77$ ) reported positive feelings toward teaching the course, although instructors recognized it can be a challenge. One participant commented, “I love the challenge of ‘convincing’ the students that career is salient in their work regardless of whether or not they want to be a career counselor” (p. 305). Many instructors in the study found enjoyment in seeing students’ attitudes start to shift from negative to positive over the course of the semester.

As a result, instructors must find creative ways to motivate students to engage with the material such as utilizing experiential learning strategies (Young & Hundley, 2013). Paradoxically, little has been written in counseling journals in the last ten years evaluating

empirical studies of active learning approaches to teaching the career development course (Barrio Minton, Wachter Morris, & Yaites, 2014; Lara et al., 2011). Only four scholarly articles published between 2001 and 2011 in American Counseling Association (ACA) journals were classified as centrally focused on strategies for teaching career development (Barrio Minton et al.). A number of educators have shared practical suggestions for teaching career development, via books, book chapters, and conference presentations (Emmett & McAuliffe, 2011; Minor & Pope, 2005; Oberman & Studer, 2009; Osborn, 2009; Rush, 2009; Toman, 2012), however, scholarship on evidence-based teaching strategies for making career development counseling relevant to students is limited.

Based on the challenges in creating an effective teaching-learning environment for the career development course and limited scholarship on ways to enhance interest in the topic, we describe how experiential learning strategies were used to impact students' values and attitudes toward career development counseling and their confidence in performing career development counseling tasks. In addition, we illustrate how flipped course content delivery (Stone, 2012) was used to expand available class time for experiential learning, with the goal of making career development relevant to students.

### **Attitudes toward Career Counseling Courses**

Scholars have examined counseling students' attitudes toward career development counseling courses (e.g., Heppner, O'Brien, Hinkelman, & Flores, 1996; Lara et al., 2011) particularly as interest in career development counseling has declined over the decades (Heppner et al.). Based on two extant empirical studies, researchers found that students' familiarity with career counseling (Lara et al., 2011), their perceptions of faculty enthusiasm for the topic, and their internalization of the attitudes of their peers adversely impacted their expectations for the

career counseling course (Heppner et al., 1996; Lara et al., 2011). Further, students' attitudes toward career counseling were influenced by their level of engagement with the course, their personal value for career counseling (Lara et al., 2011), and their ability to master and apply career development concepts (Heppner et al., 1996; Lara et al., 2011). However, participants in the Lara et al. (2011) study relayed that at the conclusion of the course, they still felt less than fully competent to conduct career counseling and thus, in need of further training. In the words of one participant, "Understanding theory isn't the biggest thing, but applying it" (p. 437). Although limited, these studies point to the importance of shifting negative student attitudes by engaging students, and providing opportunities for direct practice of career development counseling skills, with instructor feedback, to build confidence.

Osborn and Dames (2013) documented attitudes toward teaching career development counseling in a quantitative descriptive study from the instructor point of view ( $N = 91$ ). Most faculty were motivated by the opportunity to convince the students that counseling clients with career issues would be salient in their future work, but some did not enjoy the continual struggle to change students' attitudes year after year. One participant in the study summarized the dilemma this way:

Counselors-in-training have the least interest in career counseling and its theories, yet out in the active practice the information and skills are greatly needed; therefore, the challenge is to engage them in an area that they are not interested in and yet will have proportionally the greatest need (Osborne & Dames, 2013, p. 305).

In sum, empirical support for low interest in career development among students and faculty, coupled with the lack of recent publications regarding career development pedagogy (Barrio Minton et al., 2014) point to the need for career development instructors to have teaching

strategies to diminish student resistance and increase motivation and sense of relevance. Based on studies of both counselor trainees and faculty, researchers made four key recommendations for career development counseling instructors: (1) increase the relevance of career as a topic for the students, (2) give greater attention to, and instruction for, the practical application of career counseling; (3) link career-based concepts to other aspects of the counseling curriculum (e.g., basic skills, multicultural competency, assessment); and (4) understand the importance of faculty attitudes toward career development counseling in generating enthusiasm and relevance among students enrolled in the course.

### **Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning strategies are based on a structured cycle of doing/experiencing and then reflecting to generate meaning and improve implementation (Gerstein, 2011). Researchers have documented the use of experiential learning strategies in counselor education primarily in multicultural classes (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Tromski & Doston, 2003), but also in courses working with groups (Pistole & Filer, 1991; Young & Hundley, 2013) or couples and families (Lim, 2008; Shurts et al., 2006). Although the types of experiences being generated were different in each case, the importance of structured reflection after the active learning phase was a common theme among these studies. Counselor educators have utilized video case studies, self-awareness exercises, metaphors or guided imagery, psychodrama or role play, and interactive media/technology. Experiential activities have been associated with better student outcomes in terms of motivation, comprehension, application of theory, performance of skills, and critical thinking (as summarized in Osborn & Dames, 2013).

Further, in a survey of 84 associate and full counseling professors, Carter et al. (1994) found that courses that have a balance of didactic and experiential learning are greatly preferred

(84%) over purely didactic (10%) or purely experiential (6%) courses. The authors recommended that when teaching courses that are theory dense and traditionally didactic, instructors revise the curriculum to create time for experiential learning. Thus, utilizing a pedagogical approach that prioritizes active learning and application is a logical strategy for a challenging course like career development. Given the theory/content demands of the career development course, however, finding the class time to implement experiential activities, including those that enhance skill building as recommended by Lara and colleagues (2011), can be a challenge. Flipped course designs (Stone, 2012) are growing in popularity as a means for moving content delivery outside of class time and increasing the opportunity for a more interactive and engaging class experience.

### **Flipped Course Model**

A course is defined as “flipped” when lectures are moved outside of class and homework (i.e., practical application with feedback) is moved into the classroom (Findlay-Thompson & Mombourquette, 2014). Technology is utilized to deliver brief pre-recorded lectures covering the most essential points to students outside of class time (Gerstein, 2011; Milman, 2012). The delivery of lectures as video homework is only part of the flipped strategy; students must also respond to the lectures in some way such as posting their reactions to the content online and/or bringing questions about the content to class (Tucker, 2012). Thus, students have absorbed some of the basic content and have started to identify where they have more nuanced questions before class. Stone (2012) emphasized that by using a flipped class model, instructors are able to preserve content delivery while prioritizing application, inquiry, and active learning during class time. This model places greater emphasis on the relationships and interactions that can happen in

a classroom community, and is often described as more engaging and active in terms of both student and instructor roles (Stone).

Although a flipped classroom can be difficult to adopt among instructors who are comfortable with a traditional lecture format (Findlay-Thompson & Mombourquette, 2014), it seems a reasonable choice for counseling faculty versed in leading experiential activities (Moran & Milsom, 2015; Young & Hundley, 2013). Based on a review of the flipped course design literature, there is anecdotal evidence that this model can positively influence students' learning experiences and academic outcomes. However, empirical evidence is limited and largely focused on undergraduate courses. Studies that help elucidate the utility of a flipped classroom as a means for increasing experiential learning and enhancing student's attitude toward course content are needed. In particular, given the low interest in career counseling among counseling students, a study of experiential learning, using a flipped class model in the career counseling course is warranted.

Therefore, we implemented experiential learning strategies in the career development counseling course at two universities after creating a flipped course design. We utilized a pre/post course assessment to understand whether students' attitudes and values for career development counseling were changed by the class experience. Additional post-course evaluation items were used to describe students' level of confidence in applying course material to counseling practice and to identify the particular course activities that were perceived as most helpful. The goal of the current preliminary research study was to evaluate the impact of a highly experiential model of career counseling instruction on students' values and attitudes toward, and confidence in, performing career counseling. We hypothesized that students would endorse a more positive value for and attitudes toward career development counseling after completing the

experientially-focused curriculum, and would endorse having confidence to perform career counseling.

## Methods

### Participants

Master's counseling students from two CACREP-accredited programs in two states (southeastern and western) participated in the study. Participants were recruited from two career development counseling courses, one taught by each author. All 58 students from the two classes consented to participate for a 100% response rate. Participants at University A ( $n = 25$ ) were a non-cohort, therefore, they were in various stages of completion of the program, however, all but one student was at least in their second semester. Participants at University B ( $n = 33$ ) were in the second year of a cohort-based program, and thus were starting their internships in a variety of settings concurrent with taking the career course. Based on the total sample ( $N = 58$ ), 84.5% were female ( $n = 49$ ), and 15.5% were male ( $n = 9$ ), with an average age of 28.2 ( $SD = 6.8$ ). The majority of participants ( $n = 21$ , 36.2%) were in the couples and family track, followed by clinical mental health or community counseling ( $n = 18$ , 31.0%), and school counseling 19.0% ( $n = 11$ , 19.0%). The remaining participants were in college counseling/student development or dual tracked ( $n = 8$ , 13.8%). The majority of participants identified as Caucasian ( $n = 41$ , 70.7%), while others described themselves as African-American ( $n = 9$ , 15.5%), Biracial ( $n = 4$ , 6.9%), Asian American ( $n = 3$ , 5.2%), and Other ( $n = 1$ , 1.7%).

The instructors were both Caucasian females who were early career faculty members but had experience in counseling and education prior to completing their PhDs. Instructor A worked ten years as a counselor in a variety of settings including two university counseling centers in which she provided career counseling. She taught a number of graduate courses including an

undergraduate Career Planning course and two semesters of the graduate Career Development/Counseling Course. Instructor B had worked for nine years as an academic advisor/career counselor for undeclared students in a university setting and had taught the Career Development/Counseling course four times before the course under study.

### **Procedures**

The first day of class, we (the authors/instructors) relayed that a research assistant would be describing a study to the students, which was voluntary and anonymous (students selected a research ID number). Participants were informed that the survey was assessing instructional strategies used in the course and the impact on their perceptions of the meaning or usefulness of career counseling as a topic of study. We left the room while the assistant read the verbal consent form to the students and administered and collected the survey. Thus, the pre-test occurred prior to any classroom instruction. The post-test was collected in a similar manner on the last day of class. Because both campus IRB's had approved the study as exempt, no identifying information was collected concurrent with the surveys to allow students to participate with complete anonymity, as some questions rated both the class experience and the instructor. Demographic information was solicited after the class ended via anonymous electronic survey to preserve confidentiality of student feedback. According to ACA ethical codes, students who participate in research with their instructors should not experience any impact on their academic standing (code G.2.b), which is why we took several steps to separate our teaching role from the researcher role (ACA, 2014).

### **Classroom Structure**

We, the authors/instructors, had previously co-taught the career course and collaborated on the design prior to the semester in which we implemented the experiential learning model.



Thus, we formatted our classes similarly, using the same text, parallel assignments, similar in-class activities, and similar uses of the technology for flipping content. Differences between the two classes included different instructors, different university and departmental contexts, and different timing in the students' programs of study. These differences are delineated in greater detail in the below description of the courses. Following we will briefly describe how we utilized a flipped class design to support out-of-class content delivery increasing available class time for more engaging, interactive, and practical learning experience.

CACREP prescribed content, including numerous career theories, models, and resources, was largely delivered outside of class with the use of technology. Instructors utilized similar technology for flipping the course (e.g., for recording PPT narration), however, it varied slightly based upon cost, availability, and technical support at their respective campuses. Instructor A used audio narrated PowerPoint presentations via Camtasia (<http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.html>) which students received online a week before each class. A rotating subset of students was responsible for posting written responses and questions related to the presentation online each week. These postings, which included student developed discussion questions, were then discussed in small groups during class. Similarly, instructor B delivered lecture content to students a week in advance via video recorded presentations using VoiceThread ([voicethread.com](http://voicethread.com)), and a subset of students was responsible for adding video or audio comments on the lecture slides each week. The student comments were similarly processed in class. Online response postings and short written or interactive quizzes were utilized (in both classes) to ensure students were reviewing the lectures and completing assigned reading. Both instructors solicited informal feedback from the students to ensure that access to, and use of, technology did not become a barrier for participation; there were no identified concerns about

technology adoption from the student point of view. Further, we deemed adopting varied technology for the course as acceptable given that counseling programs continuously update their technology and these can be leveraged to accommodate different learning styles and encourage active engagement with course content (Osborn & Dames, 2013).

As a result of this content delivery method, a substantial portion of class time (approximately 75-80%, as opposed to less than 50% in our previous non-flipped offerings) was available for participating in activities and working with fellow students in career counseling role plays or experiential learning. Activities included viewing counselor-client video examples, discussing case studies, engaging in diversity awareness activities, implementing structured career interviews, exploring online career resources, and processing activities in large and small groups. An effort was made to bring in “real world” career related content that was meaningful to the students into the classroom. Instructor A employed *News You Can Use*, whereby a rotating subset of students brought current career news and events to class and initiated a class discussion of the information. Instructor B utilized a class Twitter account with designated volunteers who were willing to identify and share current career news. The instructor would open the Twitter account during class to allow all students to view and discuss the posts.

Students were required to complete formal career assessments, such as the Life Values Inventory (LVI; Crace & Brown, 2008) and the Strong Interest Inventory (SII; Strong, Donnay, Morris, Schaubhut, & Thompson, 2004). In-class time was also used for completing and discussing a number of informal assessments such as a values card sort or checklist, career timeline, career genogram, a Myers Briggs Type Indicator proxy, and a Wheel of Life (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998), a visual depiction of their level of satisfaction in areas such as social, career, financial, spiritual, and physical well-being. There was a formal

practicum in classroom B whereby students worked for four hours total with volunteer clients to interpret some of the informal career assessments they had learned in class. Although Classroom A did not have a formal practicum, equivalent time was spent peer counseling with instructor observation and feedback.

Finally, in addition to reading, audio/video lectures, quizzes, activities, and practical application, the course included outside assignments. These assignments were (a) researching and writing up a concise summary of a chosen theory, which was then compiled for all class members as a standardized exam study guide; (b) developing and presenting a career program for a specific population; and (c) completing a career portfolio. Students in both classes had “portfolio partners” with whom they shared the contents of their portfolio and completed a counseling assessment and plan. The portfolio included items such as: a written summary of an informational interview, a resume, a career autobiography, a stepwise career plan, a career timeline, a career genogram, career assessments and reflections, a journal entry on decision making style, a reflection on role models/career influences, and a summary of the Career Construction Interview (Savickas & Hartung, 2012). Thus, several of the portfolio items had been generated and discussed in class, but were further reflected upon by each portfolio pair during peer counseling. A sample class assignment can be found in the Appendix, and interested readers may also explore classroom activities found in Minor and Pope (2005) and Toman (2012).

## **Measures**

The purpose of this preliminary study was to assess student response to a teaching strategy, not to develop and validate a new measure. Thus, we drew from existing measures and qualitative research to create survey questions aligned with our research questions. Specifically,

values and attitudes were assessed with ten items and students' confidence in performing career counseling and related tasks was assessed with four items. Students were to rate all survey items using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

**Attitudes toward Career Counseling.** We used five pre-test/post-test items to measure students' attitudes toward career counseling. Two items, drawn from Lara and colleagues (2011), addressed students' attitude toward career counseling (e.g., "*I am excited to learn about career counseling*") and three items, adapted from the Attitudes toward Career Counseling Scale (ACCS; Rochlen, Mohr & Hargrove, 1999) addressed career attitudes as stigma toward career counseling (e.g., "*Talking to a counselor about career issues is less pressing or important than talking about personal issues*").

**Value for Career Counseling.** Five pre-test/post test items were used to measure value for career counseling; two items were adapted from the ACCS scale (e.g., "*Career counseling is a valuable resource for people making a career choice or career change*") and three items were from the findings of Lara et al. (2011) to reflect students' value for career counseling (e.g., "*I believe that career/work, paid or unpaid, is an important aspect of all clients' lives and their wellness*").

**Career Counseling Confidence.** An additional four items were created to assess students' sense of confidence in performing career counseling and related tasks (e.g., career assessments) drawing directly from themes identified in the grounded theory study conducted by Lara et al. (2011). These were post-test only items such as: "*I gained confidence in my ability to perform career counseling related tasks and activities*" and "*If my clients were having career related issues, I would not hesitate to address them.*"

**Quality of Learning Experience.** To obtain information on which instructional factors students perceived as most positive and influential to their learning experience, students were given a list of nine factors (e.g., class exercises, assignments, classmate interactions) and asked to rank them from 1 (most positive influence) to 9 (least positive influence). These nine factors were chosen because they are related to the content and skills that instructors deemed as most central to the course. Additionally, students were asked to identify the most influential class activities and assignments in an open-ended item.

## Results

Based on preliminary *t*-test analyses of the two groups of participants, there was not a statistically significant difference in their responses to the 10 pre-test items, so the groups were combined for all analyses. A single post-test item response was missing for one participant, therefore, the sample item mean rating for the respective class was used to replace the missing data. Further, four students from Class B incorrectly completed a question asking them to rank factors in the course, so they were omitted from that analysis.

We hypothesized that students would express greater value for and positive attitudes toward career counseling as a result of participating in the course. Means, standard deviations, and mean differences between pre/post-test ratings for 10 items of career values and attitudes were calculated (Table 1). The sample mean for 9 of the 10 items shifted in the expected direction from pre- to post-test. One item, *excitement to learn about career counseling*, decreased; however, the change was negligible (.07). Items with the greatest pre/post-test change were related to willingness to seek career counseling and improvement in overall attitude toward career counseling. Paired *t*-tests comparing items pre-post were conducted for all items in the questionnaire. A more conservative alpha level ( $p < .005$ ) was established using a Bonferroni

correction (Howell, 2007) to control for Type 1 error ( $.05/10 = .005$ ) related to conducting multiple tests. Eight of the ten items yielded a significant difference in mean ratings from pre-test to post-test (Table 1).

Mean item ratings for the four post-test items evaluating students' career counseling confidence were calculated and all items were rated higher than average, using three as the average. Based on frequency ratings, all students responded favorably, rating the four confidence items (e.g., confidence with career counseling tasks) as 4 or 5 out of 5. Means and standard deviations for each item were as follows: *I feel more comfortable with using career assessments learned in class* ( $M=4.2, SD=.59$ ), *I gained confidence in my ability to perform career counseling related tasks and activities* ( $M=4.2, SD=.59$ ), *If my clients were having career related issues, I would not hesitate to address them* ( $M=4.5, SD=.65$ ), and *Direct practice/application of class material via practicum (if applicable) or role plays increased my confidence in offering career related counseling* ( $M=4.0, SD=.66$ ).

Table 1

*Pre-test/Post-test Means, SD, and Mean Difference in Career Values and Attitudes*

Item	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Difference*	<i>t</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
<b>VALUES</b>						
If I had a career related dilemma, I would seek career counseling	3.12	1.17	3.98	.85	.86	6.15**
The counseling relationship is as essential to career counseling as it is to personal counseling	3.96	.90	4.57	.62	.61	5.34**
I can see how career and personal counseling are interrelated	4.10	.74	4.67	.47	.57	6.39**
Career counseling is a valuable resource for people making a career choice or career change	4.12	.65	4.57	.57	.45	4.68**
I believe that career/work, paid or unpaid, is an important aspect of all clients' lives and their wellness	4.48	.57	4.55	.60	.07	.73
<b>ATTITUDES</b>						
I have a positive attitude toward career counseling	3.69	.75	4.38	.75	.69	6.09**
I can see how a career counseling course is relevant to my program track	4.12	.84	4.66	.51	.54	5.09**
Talking to a counselor about career issues is less pressing or important than talking about personal issues	2.69	1.08	2.16	.85	-.53	4.33**
Having to see a counselor to talk about career related concerns is a sign of indecisiveness	2.00	1.00	1.64	.77	-.36	2.90**
I am excited to learn about career counseling	3.76	.90	3.69	.92	-.07	.53

Note: \*Items ordered by descending mean difference for each variable. \*\* $p < .004$

Additionally, to better understand what aspects of the course most influenced students' experience in the class, students were asked to rank nine factors in terms of how much they contributed to the quality of their learning experience (Table 2). We hypothesized that students would place greater value on experiential and interactive components of the course. Among the nine factors, students ranked class exercises as most contributing to the quality of their class experience followed by personal reflection, skills practice, and classmate interaction.

Table 2

*Ranking of Course Factors Influencing Quality of Class Experience*

Ranking	Item	Mean Ranking*
1	Class experiences/exercises	7.07
2	Personal career reflection/development opportunities	6.20
3	Skills practice (e.g., peer counseling and practicum)	5.81
4	Classmate interactions	5.37
5	Assessments	5.15
6	Personality/teaching style of instructor	4.78
7	Technological resources (e.g., Camtasia Relay, Blackboard, VoiceThread, Twitter)	4.00
8	Content (e.g., textbook, articles, PowerPoint presentations)	3.93
9	Assignments (e.g., career portfolio, quizzes, papers)	2.69

Notes: \*Higher means associated with higher ranking

Finally, participants were asked to write in their preferred course assignment and their top three preferred class exercises in an open-ended item. We did not make a hypothesis about specific preferred exercises as this was exploratory. A subset of the sample did not rank course assignments or exercises highly, and subsequently did not take the time to write in examples.



Among students who did identify their favorite course assignment ( $n = 36$ ), 61.1% identified the career portfolio and 13.9% identified the program development/evaluation project as the most meaningful assignments. Among students who identified some of their favorite class exercises ( $n = 55$ ), informal values assessments such as values card sorts were most frequently cited ( $n = 24$ ), followed by the *Wheel of Life* exercise ( $n = 18$ ), class discussion ( $n = 14$ ), and career role plays ( $n = 14$ ). In terms of differentiated exercises across courses, Course A students noted *News You Can Use* ( $n = 9$  of 25) among the most impactful experiences while Course B students noted their formal practicum experience among the most impactful ( $n = 7$  of 33).

### **Discussion**

The aim of the current study was to assess changes in master's students' value and attitudes for, and their overall confidence in, career development counseling after completing a 15-week career counseling course in which a flipped course model was used to shift content delivery outside of class and create more in-class time for experiential learning strategies. Additionally, we sought to determine what course components were perceived by students to be most influential to their learning and which class activities and assignments were most preferred.

First, we hypothesized that students would endorse greater value for, and a more positive attitude toward, career development counseling after completing the experientially-focused curriculum. As expected, there was a change in mean ratings in the expected direction for items related to participants' value for, and positive attitude toward career counseling, with one exception. Students' level of excitement for learning about career did not notably change over time and was higher than expected prior to the class, limiting the potential for the course to impact their attitude toward career counseling. Although we found preliminary support for our hypothesis, controlled studies comparing a class using experiential learning strategies within a

flipped course structure with a traditionally structured course without a focus on experiential learning strategies would be needed to draw conclusions regarding the impact of experiential learning on students' attitudes and values.

There are few empirical studies of career development counseling instruction and limited research on experiential learning via flipped content delivery by which to compare results of the current study. Our findings, however, are congruent with Osborn and Dames' (2013) qualitative study of career counseling instructors. The faculty in their survey identified the need to raise the relevance of career development counseling for their students by promoting active learning environments and connecting career development to other aspects of the counseling curriculum. Although we cannot infer a causal relationship between student's improved values and attitudes toward career development counseling and our focus on greater experiential learning strategies within the flipped course design, we have extended their study by providing preliminary evidence that a more experiential and interactive approach to the career development course, facilitated by using a flipped content delivery, may positively impact students' career values and attitudes for the topic.

Second, we hypothesized that students would endorse higher than average scores on items related to their confidence to engage in career counseling at the end of the course (e.g., "*I gained confidence in my ability to perform career counseling related tasks and activities*"). As expected, students reported mean values for post-test items related to confidence with career counseling tasks that were higher than average (i.e., 3 on the scale). We developed the course with attention to Lara and colleagues' (2011) recommendation to give greater attention to practical application of career counseling and Osborne and Dames' (2013) findings that instructors should increase the relevance of career for students first and incorporate experiential

learning strategies. Although we cannot draw conclusions regarding the cause of students' high endorsement of career counseling confidence, it appears that students did complete the course with confidence in performing career counseling. Similarly, in the post-test, students endorsed that they were more likely to perceive career and personal counseling as interrelated. This aligns with the conclusion made by Lara et al. (2011) that career attitudes will shift over the career course if students determine that career counseling has relevance in their personal and professional lives.

Third, as this study was exploratory, we did not hypothesize which course activities would be most influential to learning. However, because flipped content delivery is purported to increase time for application, active learning, and class interactions (Stone, 2012), we did hypothesize that the experiential and interactive components would be rated as most influential to student learning. Students reported that class experiences/exercises, personal career reflection, skills practice, and classmate interactions were most important to their learning experience. Finding that the experiential and interactive aspects of the course were perceived by students as most important to learning may offer direction to instructors regarding how to structure the career class time. This finding is consistent with the informal feedback offered by students in response to the flipped classroom model described by Moran and Milsom (2015); students rated experiential activities in class, working collaboratively with classmates, and working on class assignments while receiving instructor feedback as contributing "very much" to the facilitation of their learning the material. Additionally, in the current study personal career reflection was ranked second most influential to their learning, lending support to the idea that instructors should make the relevance of career for students a primary goal (Osborne & Dames, 2013).

Although assignments were ranked lowest on the factors that contributed to the overall course experience, the career portfolio assignment was identified by more than half of the students as the most preferred assignment. The portfolio combined personal career development, classmate interaction, and practical application of a number of career development related tasks and activities (e.g., resume, informational interview, career genogram), which were factors students identified as important in the current study. Portions of the career portfolio assignment were completed as activities within class, so preference for the portfolio assignment may also suggest preference for the experiential and interactive components of class. In addition, the portfolio allowed students to practice holistic career assessment with a peer as a client, so it may also have fulfilled their desire for skills practice. This finding is congruent with findings in a previous study in which researchers (Lara et al., 2011) found that students' attitudes toward career counseling were influenced by their personal value for career counseling and how well the course prepared them to perform career counseling tasks.

Even though the technology used for the flipped lectures was not among the highest ranked factors influencing class experience, we maintain that the purpose of the technology was to support greater use of class time for personalizing and exploring theories and topics in a more experiential way. In this regard, it was important that the most valued part of the learning experience was not the novelty of the technology, but rather increased time for activities and interactions which the technology afforded us. Our intention was to prioritize active classroom interactions and help generate deeper meaning in the learning community by functioning more as the "guide on the side, not the sage on the stage" (King, 1993). We interpret student feedback that they valued opportunities for skills practice, personal reflection, and classmate interaction, to mean that those experiences contributed to the overall quality of the learning experience and

influenced their values and attitudes toward career development counseling. It is noteworthy, that based on informal feedback, students relayed that they did not find the technology difficult or burdensome.

Further, students in the current study reported that class exercises, skills practice, and peer interaction were among the most important factors in their overall class experience. Based on the instructor perspective, these were the interactive components that were intentionally made the focus of class time after flipping the lecture, and had been difficult to incorporate previously due to the time pressure to cover theories and content. The in-class activities that were identified by the students as the most beneficial were informal values assessments, the Wheel of Life exercise, role plays, and class discussions.

Although we did not evaluate the impact of the technology directly, using flipped content delivery was essential to our ability to increase experiential learning strategies in the career course. Using technological tools may increase time for interactions between faculty and students, create better student motivation/ engagement with the material in class, and generate more positive attitudes about learning (Stone, 2012).

The course had the greatest impact on students' likelihood to seek career counseling for their own career related dilemma, however, other pre/post items with the greatest change in mean rating were those that reflected an overall improved attitude toward career development counseling, connection between career counseling and personal counseling, and association of career with other parts of the students' curriculum (e.g., importance of the therapeutic alliance). These results lend support for the recommendations offered by Lara et al. (2011) and Osborne and Dames (2013) that it is important for instructors to connect career concepts to other aspects

of the counseling curriculum and convey an enthusiastic and positive attitude toward career counseling.

Findings from the current study need to be considered within the limitations of the study design and sample. First, there were no previously developed and validated measures of career counseling trainee attitudes and values appropriate for the goals of our study. We took a first step toward learning about students' attitudes and experiences. However, future researchers could improve upon this study by creating and testing a measure of students' values and attitudes toward career development courses and career counseling activities. Second, all instruments were self-report and susceptible to social desirability. Third, participants were mostly Caucasian females, recruited from only two career courses within CACREP-accredited programs. It is unknown how results might generalize to other students or programs. Fourth, because we utilized a pre-test, post-test design with no control group, it is unclear whether results were based on using experiential learning strategies or other factors. Lastly, because the course was delivered over 15 weeks, it is unclear whether confounding variables (e.g., personal career experiences) may have also impacted students' attitudes and values toward career counseling courses.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

Despite the limitations of the current study, the findings include several important implications for teaching career development counseling. First, it may be important to assess students' opinions of career counseling early in the semester and throughout the course so the instructor can acknowledge, explore, and address these views as part of class discussions. Addressing any extant negative feelings directly may help the instructor to adjust experiential learning activities to align with student needs (e.g., diminishing concerns about lack of relevance of career counseling in clinical settings by incorporating role plays directly addressing mental

health issues due to unemployment or impact on members of the family system). Second, the use of experiential learning strategies may be important to improving students' attitude and value for the career course, however, controlled studies are needed to support this. Further, activities that encouraged personal reflection related to career (e.g., work-life balance, career decision making, role of personal values, interests, or skills in career satisfaction) were appreciated among students in the current sample which may be useful feedback for instructors who aim to create the career counseling course in a way that will most interest students. In addition, engaging students in learning "real world" career information (e.g., *News You Can Use* activity) may be a useful tool to stimulate interest in career development, particularly if discussed with the intent to examine their implications for the mental health and wellness of clients (e.g., emotional impact of workplace discrimination), to help students relate career and personal issues in counseling.

Third, it is important that flipped content delivery is part of an overall instructional strategy that focuses on experiential learning (Tucker, 2012). For the courses in the current study, technology was a useful tool for delivering content outside of the classroom to free up in-class time for experiential activities. The flipped classroom blog-o-sphere laments that many faculty members are trained to transmit information via lecture, and thus feel at a loss when given an opportunity to direct "extra class time" to a different purpose (Gerstein, 2011). Although many counselor educators are inherent facilitators, successfully using this in-class time requires planning, attention, and constant monitoring for needed modifications. In counselor education at the master's level, there are many ways to create intentional, practical, and active learning experiences (Young & Hundley, 2013), only some of which have been described in the current study. Instructors could consider a service learning component, for example, which

allows for student skills practice, potential benefit to the community, and deeper understanding of the connections between personal and career related issues for clients.

Finally, skills practice was ranked high as a positive influence on students' class experience, thus, a practicum (or peer career counseling) may be a vital component to the course. Depending on how the career counseling course is scheduled relative to the basic helping skills portion of the curriculum, instructors may need to provide students with varying degrees of structure and guidance regarding counseling skills. Practice that allows students to consider career related issues of clients in their intended settings (e.g., cases drawn from schools, universities, clinics, private practices) may also help to increase sense of relevance of career issues to future work. Practical experience gives students the opportunity to view clients' career concerns more holistically, assessing their mental health, support systems, and career concerns simultaneously (Minor & Pope, 2005). Further, applying career theories or experiential activities to their peers or themselves allows students to build empathy for the emotional component of career issues and to see relevance in their own lives. Practical and experiential application of the material supports students to feel confident in and gain value for career counseling (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Young & Hundley, 2013).

Findings from the current study offered preliminary evidence that increasing time for experiential learning strategies by flipping content delivery, may contribute to enhancing students value for, and attitude toward, the career development counseling course. Further, developing a measure to assess values and attitudes toward career counseling among counselor trainees would support further research in this area. Future researchers could also explore whether a formal practicum increases students career counseling self-efficacy and satisfaction with the career development counseling course. Because counselors must be able to address



career concerns among clients, and they often approach the career development course with low interest, researching teaching strategies that improve students' attitudes toward the topic of career development is important to their overall development as counselors as well as to providing quality services to clients.

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## Appendix

### 90 Second Commercial – “Tell Me about Yourself”

This activity is designed to help students learn an essential interviewing skill, how to respond to the interviewer request “tell me about yourself”. Discussion is facilitated by asking students if they have ever been given this prompt and how they have responded. Short video clips about the question (found on youtube.com) are also shown (e.g., explaining the purpose of the interview prompt and the focus of an appropriate answer, or humorous examples of interviewees responding poorly to this question) to introduce the topic and promote discussion.

Students are then given a description of a counseling job posting and a corresponding answer to the question “tell me about yourself”. After addressing questions, students are instructed to work on a draft of their “commercial” for use in a class activity the following week. The next week students work in pairs reading their commercial out loud and receiving feedback from their peer. Following this activity, the instructor fields a few examples for the whole class and provides feedback so that students gain a better understanding of a quality response. The commercial is later submitted, along with a specific job posting, as part of a career portfolio assignment so that each student receives instructor feedback on their commercial.

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# Integrating Television Media into Group Counseling Course Work

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We explore the feasibility of supplementing traditional group work pedagogic tools with watching group-themed reality and scripted television programs in order to convey group dynamics and concepts. Students view television programs through a group leader's lens and analyze the group dynamics. Advantages and limitations of this resource are reviewed and implications for counselor educators are discussed.

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*Keywords:* Group counseling, counselor preparation, television viewing

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Group work is a core therapeutic skill expected of graduates of counselor education programs. Professors are tasked with designing courses that both develop clinical skills and understanding of group theories (Furr & Barrett, 2000). Counselor educators are often challenged how best to teach these requisite skills to graduate students. The students, in turn, are challenged to meet a minimal level of competence in group work by the end of the course.

The academic challenges experienced by the counselor educator and students might be further exacerbated by generational differences in teaching methods and learning styles (McGlynn, 2005). According to the Pew Research Center (2010), a growing number of Millennial graduate students (i.e., born between 1980 and 2000) who enroll in counselor education programs are typically adept in using electronic devices, as well as in operating on demand and online services for academic and recreational purposes. Effective counselor educators strive continually to teach Millennial students by updating their pedagogic tools in

order to meet students' current needs, interests, learning styles, and preferences for academic engagement (McGlynn, 2005; Pew Research Center, 2010). According to Svinicki and McKeachie (2011), "Appreciating the unique needs and characteristics of your students sets an educational environment that will better enhance learning by each student" (p. 151). Similarly,, Granello and Wheaton (2004) asked counselor educators, "What is the best way to deliver instruction to students so that they may learn to be effective counselors?" (p. 276). We ponder this question as it applies to watching television programs to teach group work.

While teaching group work, the first author instructed students to watch selected television programs as a midterm project. The responses were positive, with students reporting that viewings made group work concepts "come alive." A review of the literature on teaching group work by watching television programs failed to identify any evidence-based studies. However, Shostrom (1968) reported that the history of watching group work on television dates back to the 1960s in which *Therapy* (1966-1967) featured 21 group work sessions conducted by various therapists on commercial television.

*Therapy* (1966-1967) aired in prime time in Los Angeles and Shostrom (1968) facilitated ten consecutive sessions. He reported that the positive feedback and reports from the televised group members and home viewers were consistent with his enthusiastic reaction although responses from other mental health professionals were mixed. For instance, Hurvitz (1968) critiqued some episodes and raised concerns about ethical issues and facilitator inauthenticity. Shostrom concluded:

Perhaps therapy in the flesh will never be able to compete favorably with *The Fugitive* for the general viewing public, but we may be on the brink of a new era of 'open therapy' which will be of benefit to observers and participants alike. (p. 209)

When the literature review was unsuccessful in identifying relevant studies, we broadened it to encompass watching commercial movies to teach group work. Only one reference was identified (i.e., Tyler & Reynolds, 1998). Tyler and Reynolds (1998) assert:

feature films, as an adjunct to other methods of classroom instruction, are seen as sound pedagogy.... [F]ilm is seen as a tool to provide shared social experience, to promote social interaction, ... to create meaningful effective experiences in the classroom, [and] as a tool to encourage discussion and exploration. (pp. 18-19).

Watching commercial movies to teach counseling skills other than group work is not novel. Feature films, such as the classic *12 Angry Men*, are popular with contemporary students, and have served as teaching tools (Armstrong & Berg, 2005). Counselor educators have increasingly incorporated commercial movies to teach a wide variety of counseling theories and concepts, including identity (Pierce & Wooloff, 2012), couples counseling (Shepherd & Brew, 2005), multicultural counseling, psychopathology (Hatcher, 2005; Wedding, Boyd, & Niemiec, 2010), ethics (Doherty, 2013; Doherty, 2010; Toman & Rak, 2000), positive psychology and resilience (Niemiec & Wedding, 2013), family counseling (Higgins & Dermer, 2001; Hudock & Warden, 2001), and counseling theory (Koch & Dollarhide, 2000). According to Wedding et al. (2010), nearly 1,000 movies are appropriate for educational purposes to illustrate psychopathology and the counseling process.

Watching movies usually encourages classroom discussions, which have been demonstrated to be superior to lectures for knowledge retention, comprehension of key course concepts, and higher learning processing (McLeod et al., 2008; Tyler & Reynolds, 1998). One criticism of using commercial movies for academic purposes is the large investment of time, usually between 90 and 120 minutes, needed for viewing (Holbrook, 2009). Films may be



viewed outside of class so that class time is unaffected. However, the time investment must be considered when considering out-of-class workloads. Might watching 30- or 60-minute television programs encompass most of the advantages of watching commercial movies for demonstrating group dynamics without the large investment of time? This academic option appears to be under-investigated, based on the results of the original literature review.

We explore the feasibility of how counselor educators might use selected reality and scripted, group-themed television programs, heretofore called programs, to teach group work. That is, counselor educators instruct students to watch group-themed television programs using focused viewing through a group leader's lens to guide their observations and comprehension (Holbrook, 2009), rather than passively view them through a general audience lens for recreation or entertainment. Holbrook (2009) calls this pedagogic activity "mindful learning" and believes it should be an active experience. He asserts, "Mindful learning is more effective than mindless learning and movies represent a mindful approach to learning, particularly when viewing is done with a purpose" (p. 491).

### **Advantages**

Baruh (2010) describes the act of watching programs as non-pathological voyeurism that enables the spectator to observe people on-screen in their natural environment. Spectators are transmitted into a human event, enabling them to witness the complexities of human interactions from inside the relationship of dyads, families, and groups while exerting no influence on the outcome of relationships (Goldfarb, 2002; Orchowski, Spickard, & McNamara, 2006; Peters, 2007; Taub & Forney, 2004; Wedding et al., 2010).

When students watch a social microcosm in a movie, human interactions and group dynamics can convey visually-specific group work concepts such as cohesion, conflict,

membership influences, confrontation, alliances, and stages of group development, among others that could be difficult for some students to grasp from reading textbooks or through traditional pedagogical tools (Holbrook, 2009; Stuckey & Kring, 2007). Television watching also enables replaying of specific scenes to analyze human interactions repeatedly. Finally, the use of programs for academic purposes avoids some of the educational limitations of traditional pedagogic tools.

Watching group-themed programs is recommended, particularly programs airing from 2000 to present. More recent programs may be more familiar and appealing to millennial students. Programs that use physical sequestration of multiple individuals are advised. Such environments can replicate the group counselor's initial task, which is to help create a physical entity – a cohesive group (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Scripted programs (e.g., *Lost*, 2004-2010) or reality programs (e.g., *Survivor*, 2000-present), which create sequestered social microcosms, can provide a shared foundation for students to identify significant group dynamics as well as normalize and simplify complex group interactions (Furr & Barret, 2000; Wedding et al., 2010).

Television characters are often similar to the typical and diverse clients who comprise groups and begin to appreciate the complex multicultural context of group work (McLeod et al.; Schwitzer, Boyce, Cody, Holman, & Stein (2005)). Some reality programs depict characters and contestants to which students are likely to relate (e.g., *Big Brother*, 2000-present) or a scripted ensemble of actors portraying a group of people (e.g., *Under the Dome*, 2013-present). The behaviors and interactions of people, who generally have no formal training in group dynamics, could depict relationships among clients in group work. This similarity enables students to use programs to expand their awareness about the range of people's personal belief systems, socioeconomic influences, cultural effects, and worldviews that might differ from their own

when they eventually work with clients. It may also enhance their multicultural awareness in group work (McLeod et al., 2008; Schwitzer et al., 2005).

Students should be encouraged to use focused viewing and reflect on how they, as future group leaders, might work effectively with a specific character or diverse clientele in groups; interact with group members who espouse different worldviews; use confrontation skills effectively within a multicultural group without alienating some; and facilitate the group process and promote behavior change for all group members.

### **Limitations and Considerations**

The production of television programs creates a potential conflict between the needs of academia for authenticity and reality and the roles of cast members/actors, directors, writers, and production teams for entertainment value. The presence of cameras can alter how people behave. For nearly ninety years, the Hawthorne Effect has described behavioral changes in subject who are aware of their participation in experiments (Jones, 1992). Production teams edit several hours, days, or months worth of taping into neatly wrapped 30- or 60-minute episodes that do not necessarily reflect accurate depictions of human interactions, but entertaining ones (Kosovski & Smith, 2011). In scripted programs, the director's and writers' purpose is to seek a "reality effect" (Leone, Peek, & Bissell, 2006) for the story line, instead of capturing true reality. The reality effect is often skewed toward what attracts viewers and boost Nielsen ratings (Nielsen Media Research, 2000), rather than focus on authenticity in relationships. Commercial interests limit some of their pertinence for counselor educators' needs, and they seldom reflect concern for client exploitation (Hurvitz, 1968). Consequently, some benefits of students analyzing group dynamics from watching programs are diminished.

The degree of authenticity captured on programs might be a challenge without the counselor educator's preview of sample episodes. In spite of this limitation, counselor educators can successfully incorporate reality programs into the curriculum in order to visually acquaint students with group dynamics when (1) television clips or programs are previewed; (2) focused viewing is the foundation for class projects, discussions, and deliberations; (3) students are informed of potential limitations (e.g. ethical implications of televising therapy sessions, as with the various Dr. Drew franchises); and (4) discussion questions are assigned (see Appendix), which provides a template of questions to promote focused viewing.

Some reality programs use actual clients, such as *LA Shrinks* (2013-present). This program follows three therapists in independent practices located across the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Counselor educators are advised to preview sample episodes to ensure that the profession's ethical and professional standards are upheld and that Federal laws to protect clients are followed. Shows can also be used as examples of what not to do or to generate thoughtful discussions around group ethics and legal issues as long as the issues are not egregious. This attention ensures that learning objectives are met and that counselor educators are not complicit in exploiting clients, goals noted by Chessler (2013) in an entertainment review of *LA Shrinks* (2013-present).

According to Baruh (2009), although actual clients on reality programs willingly sign informed consent forms to televise their counseling process, in their vulnerable states of mental illness or active substance abuse, they may not fully comprehend the implications and consequences of waiving their rights to confidentiality or understand the pressures of being televised for viewers' entertainment (Hurvitz, 1968). Moreover, counselors or clients may

distort their accurate or authentic portrayal of self or of group interactions in front of cameras (Hurvitz, 1968; Shostrom, 1968).

Media characterizations of clinical challenges, interactions, and interventions are often erroneously and purposely portrayed for entertainment purposes (Kauffman, 2010). Some programs portray group leaders and counselors as being professionally incompetent (e.g., *Go On*, 2012-2013), engaging in sexual relations with clients (e.g., *Anger Management*, 2012-present), and engaging in unethical behaviors (Taub & Forney, 2004; Wahl, Hanrahan, Karl, & Lasher, 2007; Wedding et al., 2010). These representations are considered “unbalanced” counselor portrayals (Robinson, 2003; Wedding et al., 2010), and may leave the general audience viewer or novice counseling students with the impression that unethical or incompetent behaviors are relatively common practices in counseling.

While unbalanced portrayals of group leaders, counselors, and the counseling process may be inaccurate, they can be useful as topics for class discussion if the goal is to teach students what not to do. For example, students might discuss how unprofessional group leaders must behave, clinically and ethically, in order to be redeemed as competent and balanced. However, we prefer programs that convey what *to do* in group work and portray balanced and realistic human qualities (e.g., *Rehab with Dr. Drew*, 2008-2012).

When compiling a list of appropriate programs, counselor educators are advised to preview them for language, content, behaviors, sexual activity, ethnic comments, cursing, violence, and clothing. Counselor educators are advised to warn students of potential exposure to behaviors “different” from and beyond their individual comfort zone. A diverse class of students might elicit a wide range of reactions when they are watching required programs (Furr & Barret, 2000). Some students may be offended by program content, distracted from the program’s

educational value, or feel detached from peers. If a student raises an objection, counselor educators are advised to prepare an alternative academic activity. If a student has disclosed a hearing or visual impairment with documented accommodations according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009), the viewing assignment can be completed outside of class.

Holbrook (2009) identifies a frequent criticism of watching programs as the large investment in time required to view them. This same criticism was raised about watching commercial movies for academic purposes; however most television programs require 30 or 60 minutes. Holbrook further advises counselor educators to remain abreast of current copyright laws when using programs in academic courses. The current American copyright law, Digital Millennium Copyright Act Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2000), permits the use of television programs and commercial movies without consent for academic purposes. Moreover, counselor educators who teach abroad must become familiar with and follow the copyright laws of the host country (Holbrook, 2009).

### **Implementation**

Watching programs for educational purposes may be enhanced if students are given specific questions or tasks (see Appendix) to encourage reflection, analysis, and synthesis prior to a viewing and to guide their responses afterward (Tyler & Reynolds, 1998), substantiating their responses with examples observed in the program(s). Responses can be discussed in small or large groups, or be written and submitted.

The following are examples of how counselor educators can use programs and focused viewing in the academic setting for classroom activities, homework assignments, and projects.

In each instance, students are assigned to view a program from a short list furnished by the counselor educator. Questions in the appendix can facilitate these learning experiences:

1. Homework. Students analyze the program's characters using assigned questions from Table 1. Students gather in small discussion groups based on the program they selected and analyze sub-grouping, power, and impact of member self-disclosures, for instance.
2. Classroom activities. Students engage in a role-play exercise that has been stimulated by a television clip shown in class (Taub & Forney, 2004). For example, two students assume the persona of characters from the program and interact with other students to demonstrate maintenance and task roles, leadership skills, or therapeutic factors, for instance that might be appropriate for facilitating group dynamics effectively with the personas.
3. Project. Students view a few episodes of one program and submit written responses to questions from Table 1.

Technology's continuous advances have increased accessibility of programs and reruns (Doherty, 2010, 2013; Wahl et al., 2007). Many programs are accessible by (1) viewing on user-friendly web sites (e.g., <http://www.hulu.com/plus><http://www.imdb.com/>); (2) subscribing to streaming services (e.g., Aereo), streaming on demand services (e.g., Roku), or offered by most cable and satellite companies; (3) enrolling in a DVD mail service (e.g., Netflix); (4) purchasing a DVD series set (e.g., *Lost*, 2004-2010); (5) downloading a smartphone app (e.g., <https://goo.gl/lgNoZn>) or a live streaming app for mobile devices to access a broadcast channel (e.g., <http://abc.go.com/watchabc-overview>); (6) borrowing DVDs from public or university libraries; and (7) watching broadcast channels. These services provide students and counselor educators with multiple viewing options.

In addition to group work, counselor educators can incorporate programs successfully into other counseling courses. For instance, programs might be used successfully in courses that teach couples counseling (e.g., *Couples Therapy*, 2012-present), life coaching (e.g., *Iyanla: Fix My Life*, 2012-present), substance abuse counseling (e.g., *Rehab with Dr. Drew*, 2008-2012), counseling women (e.g., *Starting Over*, 2003-2006), multicultural counseling and human relations and basic counseling and interviewing skills (e.g., *In Treatment*, 2008-2010), and individual counseling (e.g., *The Sopranos*, 1999-2007). Table 1 summarizes some group-themed reality and scripted (i.e. manufactured) programs that portray typical group dynamics experienced in various settings and social microcosms for group counseling courses. Some examples fit under multiple categories.



Table 1  
**Examples of Group-Themed Television Programs**

Type of Group	Television Program	Reality/Scripted Program	Educational Value
Homogeneous	The Biggest Loser (2004-present)	Reality program	Demonstrates the group dynamics of contestants working in teams and as individuals, with the goal of shedding pounds and winning prizes.
Heterogeneous	Under the Dome (2013-present)	Scripted program	Chronicles sequestered group members' interpersonal conflicts, shifting alliances, and group dynamics.
Multicultural	Lost (2004-2010)	Scripted program	Follows the group dynamics and conflicts, through various stages, of strangers who survived a plane crash on a deserted island
Open	Starting Over (2003-2006)	Reality program	Illustrates women's diverse issues and life experiences and how the group leader assists them to problem solve while they reside together.
Closed	Survivor (2000-present)	Reality program	Highlights group dynamics among sequestered strangers competing in teams and as individuals.
Voluntary	Big Brother (1999-Present)	Reality program	Features the group dynamics of sequestered strangers residing with a diverse group of housemates for 3 months and competing for prizes
Involuntary	Rehab with Dr. Drew (2008-2012)	Reality program	Focuses on group counseling sessions of people being treated for drug and/or alcohol addiction

### Conclusion

As Millennial students constitute a growing number of graduate students, counselor educators need to connect effectively with a generation of students who use electronic devices,

entertainment media, and on demand services with ease. The counselor educator's use of television viewing for assignments and discussions can support students' group skills development and may appeal to their preferred mode of learning (Pew Research Center, 2010; Tyler & Reynolds, 1998). Additionally, watching programs can appeal to students who are visual or auditory learners, as well as to students with undergraduate majors outside the social sciences who have limited previous experience in group work or human relations training (Bruck, 2001).

Watching programs as a course requirement has the potential to introduce students to a wide variety of character behaviors, issues, worldviews, and human differences, thus preparing them to work with a diverse clientele. Pierce and Wooloff (2012) posit that focused viewing of programs has the potential to "heighten counselor sensitivity to diversity and help them evaluate their own ability to engage in helping relationships with various client populations" (p. 54). Therefore, one outcome of extending beyond students' social comfort zones through watching programs is an early awareness of counseling interests or niches with specific populations (e.g., lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered/questioning/ clients) or in specific settings (e.g., group work or substance abuse).

We have explored the feasibility of watching group-themed reality and scripted television programs as a pedagogic resource to meet the needs, interests, learning styles, and preferences for academic engagement of a growing number of enrolled Millennial students in counselor education programs. McGlynn (2005) notes, "What is going to be needed in our diverse classrooms is a variety of teaching methods which will enable us to meet the needs of as many students as possible" (p. 13). While observing others in a group setting (e.g., DVDs, clinical observations) is a common pedagogic tool for teaching group work (Furr & Barrett, 2000;

Stockton & Toth, 1996), watching others in group-themed television programs is an untapped teaching resource, based on the results of our literature review. Researchers, who focused on movies and group work (e.g., Robinson, 2003; Tyler & Reynolds, 1998; Wedding et al., 2010), concluded that movies enable students to observe group dynamics and grasp group work concepts without immersing themselves into the scene or influencing the outcome. The same might be tenable for television programs.

The educational efficacy of watching programs to teach group work has not been adequately assessed (Schwitzer et al., 2005). Shostrom's (1968) evaluation of Therapy (1966-1967), is more anecdotal rather than rigorous and does not address its use in academia. The profession would likely benefit from evaluation research to determine if watching group-themed television programs while using "focused viewing" is an effective practice.

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## Appendix

### Reflection Questions

#### General/Introduction

- What is the name of the program?
- What is the general purpose of the program? Is it a reality or scripted show?

#### Group Theory

- Describe the theoretical orientation(s) you believe were used.
- Describe the transition through the stages of group development based on [insert preferred model].
- How would a [select a theoretical orientations] group leader conceptualize group dynamics and implement interventions?

#### Content

- How many people are involved as the core group?
- Is the membership homogeneous or heterogeneous? Voluntary or involuntary? Closed or open? How does each of these contexts affect group dynamics?
- What topics or issues are discussed or highlighted?
- Describe any ethical issues or dilemmas observed. How might you, as the group leader, address them?

#### Diversity

- Describe diversity and multicultural issues and differences (interpret diversity and multicultural in a broad context). What is the impact of diversity and multicultural differences on members?
- Which of the following multicultural group work models apply best and why: [insert preferred models]
- How would you use diverse worldviews and coping strategies to support behavioral change, self-disclosure, and cohesion?

#### Group Process

- What is the quality of interaction among and between members? Between members and group leader(s) (including designated and self-appointed leaders)?
- Identify types of power demonstrated (e.g., reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, expert power, informational power).
- How did appropriate or inappropriate self-disclosure facilitate or hinder interactions?
- Describe the task and maintenance roles demonstrated by each member and how they contributed to or hindered group cohesion and group dynamics.

#### Group Interventions

- Describe facilitating individual and group interventions/helping techniques. Describe their effectiveness (or ineffectiveness).
- Identify group facilitation techniques used by the designated or self-appointed leader(s). How were techniques effective or ineffective?

#### Group Leaders and Leadership Skills

- Describe the leader's or co-leaders' facilitating skills. If this was a leaderless group, how were leadership roles and tasks handled? Were they effective in facilitating group dynamics?
- Describe the strengths and weaknesses of the leader's/leaders' skills.
- What did the members or leaders do that is similar to, or different from, your personal style of membership and leadership within groups? Contrast the efficacy of your leadership style with theirs.
- How did the group leader(s) handle challenging members, e.g., intellectualizers, criers, storytellers, soothers, scapegoats, monopolizers, among others?

#### **Outcome**

- What are the expected or unanticipated outcomes and how did ethical issues and dilemmas affect the outcome?
- What assessment procedures would you use to evaluate the effectiveness of the group's outcome and the effectiveness of individual members' degree of behavioral change?

#### **Intervention Plan: Student as Group Member**

- How would you encourage group cohesion?
- How would you influence group dynamics?
- How would you handle conflict appropriately?
- How would you handle diversity and multicultural issues?
- How would you handle ethical issues?
- What task and maintenance roles would you use to influence group dynamics?

#### **Intervention Plan: Student as Group Leader**

- How would you handle inappropriate self-disclosure?
- How would you handle your own self-disclosure?
- How would you evaluate the effectiveness of the group's outcome?
- How would you handle diverse worldviews?
- How would you handle ethical issues or dilemmas?
- Identify dysfunctional behaviors. Which character(s) appear(s) to employ behaviors most threatening to group cohesion? What are some interventions to address these issues?

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