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Strategies for Effectively Teaching Career Counseling

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Counselor educators often express intimidation and frustration when assigned to teach a course in career counseling. Although career counseling is a required curricular component in counselor preparation programs, it is unlikely to find more than one faculty member at a particular institution that has a genuine interest in teaching this course to counselor trainees, and in many cases newly hired assistant professors are assigned to teach this class. In addition to the lack of interest in teaching career counseling, this class also tends to be less than enthusiastically received by counselor trainees compared with other course work. Therefore, the focus of this article is to share “best practices” to engage counseling trainees in learning about career counseling and career development.

This article focuses on four key points in instructing counseling trainees in the value of career counseling, which include: a) the use of technology in career counseling instruction; b) the applicability of career counseling theories; c) the job search components; and, d) the implementation of unique career counseling strategies. This article will review how each component may be used in the career counseling class with specific examples provided. By implementing the following strategies in one’s career counseling class, trainees will be more actively engaged in learning about their own career development and how the information relates to their work as counselors.

Using Technology in Career Counseling

Technology and the Internet are invaluable resources in the field of career development. Clients are able to type and click their way to an unlimited amount of information on any topic. So, one can not over emphasize the need for implementing technology into one’s career counseling course with the understanding that some web sites are more credible and reliable than others.

One example of incorporating technology into the career counseling class includes having each student find a career website to share with the class that would be of

value to them in their future practice as a professional counselor. For example, the Occupational Outlook Handbook (<http://www.bls.gov/oco/>) is a good example of a career development web site that provides a variety of resources for all career seekers. However, due to the proliferation of web resources, it is sometimes difficult to sort through those that are reputable and those that provide inaccurate information. A six-step checklist for evaluating a web site includes answering the questions is included in Table 1.

Using these guidelines, trainees write up a one-page description of the web site, rate it from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), and post this information to the course web site to benefit all class members. The culminating component of this activity is the sharing of the career web site with the class through a brief presentation to demonstrate any of the benefits or drawbacks when using the site with clients.

Career Counseling Theories

Career theories are one of the most important components of the class because they help the counseling trainee develop a framework and understanding of the career counseling process (Gibson & Mitchell, 2006). Although studying theories is often dull and often contributes to the disinterest in this class, the use of creative strategies facilitates students' learning and further comprehension of career development. A theory collage is an example of a unique strategy for teaching the theories portion of the class. Counseling trainees are randomly assigned into groups of two or three given a specific career counseling theory, and are instructed to create a collage that represents the concepts of their assigned theory. The trainees are given approximately one hour to complete this assignment in class, and are given permission to use available resources to research their career theory such as the textbook, the internet, and lecture notes provided by the instructor on the course web site. Second, students are instructed to go to web sites with graphics to include in the collage such as <http://www.google.com> (image section), <http://www.picsearch.com>, or another web site with graphics to include in the collage. The counseling trainees select up to 10 pictures that describe the key strategies of their assigned career counseling theory. Next, using PowerPoint, trainees create one to two slides and arrange the selected pictures in a clear format that succinctly summarizes the assigned career counseling theory. After completing the assignment, the trainees post their collages to the course web site, and each group shares their career counseling theory with the entire class (see Figure 1).

The Job Search

An important focus for counseling students, as well as their clients, is the task of seeking out career employment. One goal of the career counseling class should be to educate counselor trainees about tools that can help their clients throughout the career development process. However, a secondary goal is to improve the career development of the students while enrolled in the career counseling course. These tasks can be accomplished by including resume and cover letter writing, career assessments, interviewing strategies, and networking techniques as classroom assignments.

For example, one assignment requires the counselor trainees to locate a job advertisement of interest to them upon graduation. The trainee is then required to write or revise his/her previous resume and cover letter in line with the advertised job description. This resume and cover letter are submitted to the instructor with the job advertisement for review and feedback.

The second assignment is for the students to conduct a mock interview with a classmate which can be accomplished either in class or assigned as homework. A class discussion is conducted regarding interviewing strategies, and following this discussion the trainees are provided with a list of commonly asked interview questions and a rating sheet. Each student conducts a 10-15 minute interview with a partner and then feedback is provided. If the activity is completed during class time, the instructor can also be observing, providing feedback, and making sure the activity is conducted according to the instructions. Not only does this exercise prepare the students for future job interviews, this exercise can also serve as a foundation as a role-play for future clients seeking job opportunities.

Career Counseling Activities

In order to engage career counseling clients in the career development process the counselor trainee needs to have several career counseling activities at his or her fingertips when working with a client. Clients will often disclose a variety of concerns such as job loss, career changes, anxiety related to job seeking, or the need for basic career skills such as resume writing and interviewing. Therefore, counselor trainees should have examples of strategies that will work.

One way to assist the counselor trainee is to assign each student a career counseling activity for his or her desired population. For example, counselor trainees are to modify an already existing career counseling activity to fit their desired population and concern, or create their own activity. For example, the Vocational Information Center web site (<http://www.khake.com/page94.html>) provides several activities that can be modified for a specific clientele. It is important to ensure the counselor trainee does not just use an activity that is already in existence, but modifies or uses the activity in a unique way that serves a specific client need. In addition to activity development, the counselor trainee must also put together a one page summary of the activity to share with classmates. This summary includes an activity objective, client population, materials needed, step-by-step procedure, and an expected outcome for the client. Each activity is presented to the class and posted to the course web site so each counselor trainee has access to each posted career strategy to use with a future client.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching career counseling does not need to be associated with the negative connotations often carried by counselor educators and trainees. When counselor educators create unique interactive strategies that are applicable to career development concepts and are pertinent to one's personal and professional life, trainees may develop a

greater appreciation for the power of career principles in all aspects of life. A school counselor would be remiss in not discussing career aspirations as he/she assists students in course selection. Likewise mental health counselors would need to address career and personal concerns while working with a dual-career couple troubled about the amount of time they spend at work away from their children. Through the use of creative, interactive strategies, trainees can be actively engaged in learning about their own career decisions, apply successful career-seeking tactics as they enter the profession of counseling, and relate this knowledge to future clients.

References

Gibson, R. L., & Mitchell, M. (2006). *Introduction to career counseling for the 21st century*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Table 1:

Who	What	When	Where	Why	How
Who is the author of this site? Credentials?	What is the purpose of the website? Does it exist to promote a product?	When was the website updated?	Can the author or publisher be contacted? Does the domain include .gov, .edu, .net, or .com?	Why is this information on the internet? Is it to highlight a particular person or product?	Accurate is the information? Are the hyperlinks updated? Are the citations correct?

Figure 1:

Ginzberg's Theory

Fantasy stage (up to age 11)



Tentative stage (age 11-17)



Realistic stage (age 17-adult)

