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Article 45

Student Remediation: Practical Considerations for Counselor Educators and Supervisors

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When implementing student remediation in counseling graduate programs, resources available to counselor educators and supervisors include scholarly work in the professional literature, the American Counseling Association's *Code of Ethics* (ACA, 2005), and the Accreditation Standards from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009). The Code and Standards have established the current known parameters surrounding remediation, providing a broad, overarching umbrella for implementation. This inherent broadness is part of the challenge; a general dilemma that arises is the specific mechanics of how to go about remediating students. The necessity and charge to remediate is clear, but that charge may be the only aspect of remediation that is clear. This conundrum represents the main ethical and legal problem when undertaking student remediation: what exactly to do?

In the past two decades, several gatekeeping models emerged that address the dismissal of graduate students (Baldo, Softas-Nall, & Shaw, 1997; Bemak, Epp, & Keys, 1999; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Kerl, Garcia, McCullough, & Maxwell, 2002; Lamb, Cochran, & Jackson, 1991; Lamb et al., 1987; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; McAdams, Foster, & Ward, 2007; Wilkerson, 2006). Within these models, remediation frequently is mentioned as a possible step; however, the emphasis is on dismissal procedures and remediation as a process is not detailed. More recently, scholarly work in the professional literature has explored the challenges of remediating students and has offered suggestions for remedial interventions and remediation plans (Dufrene & Henderson, 2009; Elman & Forrest, 2004; Gilfoyle, 2008; Henderson, 2010; Kaslow et al., 2007; Kress & Protivnak, 2009; McAdams & Foster, 2007).

Standards and Ethical Code

The CACREP *Standards* require that programs have a student retention policy that addresses remediation procedures (2009, Section I.L). The *Standards* glossary further defines student retention policy as “the policy by which program faculty members evaluate each student for academic, professional, and personal fitness to continue in a counseling program... [and] outlines procedures to be followed if a student does not meet program criteria” (p. 62). Details or guidelines regarding what constitutes such procedures are not included. However, the *Standards* do address the requirement that any institutional due process policies be followed as well as any applicable ethical codes when considering gatekeeping actions, such as student dismissals; these directives underscore the broad legal canopy that is inclusive of remediation and also endorses the current professional ethical codes.

Similar to CACREP’s reliance on the pertinent ethical codes, the literature also frequently consults the ethical codes when discussing remediation and student dismissals (Baldo et al., 1997; Bemak et al., 1999; Bhat, 2005; Forrest, Elman, Gizara, & Vacha-Haase, 1999; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Kerl et al., 2002; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; McAdams & Foster, 2007; McAdams et al., 2007; Olkin & Gaughen, 1991; Wilkerson, 2006). A frequent theme in the literature is the lack of direction in the ethical codes on the specifics of how to remediate counseling students (Bemak et al., 1999; Bhat, 2005; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; McAdams & Foster, 2007; Wilkerson, 2006); this observation incorporates a common reflection regarding ethical codes in general, which are devised to have a broad applicability and not to provide “absolute guidance” (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003, p. 33). Another recurrent sentiment in the literature is the overarching ethical imperative that compels gatekeeping and student remediation: protecting client welfare and the public from harm (Baldo et al., 1997; Bemak et al., 1999; Bhat, 2005; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Kerl et al., 2002; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; McAdams et al., 2007; Olkin & Gaughen, 1991). This ethical imperative requires faculty and supervisors’ action when confronting challenges with students’ performance.

In the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2005), remediation is specifically addressed twice, first as a directive for supervisors (F.5.b) and second as a directive for counselor educators (F.9.b), to “assist students in securing remedial assistance when needed” (p. 16). The phrase ‘when needed’ implies a subjective decision and possibly sits at the crux of the murkiness regarding remediation. In both standards, remediation is laid in the context of evaluation: through ongoing evaluation students’ ‘limitations’ (F.5.b) or ‘inabilities’ (F.9.b) would be identified. In addition, the ACA *Code* includes the proviso to consult and to document referrals for remedial assistance (F.9.b). For counselor educators, the legal doctrine of due process also is mentioned explicitly, “to... provide students with due process according to institutional policies and procedures” (p. 16). Wilkerson (2006) posited that these standards were included to underscore the importance of the responsibility to remediate but that execution of the mandate was left for individual programs to devise; this sentiment is in keeping with the view that ethical codes do not always contain clear directives and that ethical decision making must be the next step for professionals facing an ethical dilemma (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2003; Herlihy & Corey, 2006).

The *ACA Code of Ethics* (2005) also addresses personal counseling as an intervention to be used with student remediation. Standard F.9.c sanctions requiring personal counseling as part of the remediation process, directing faculty to provide appropriate referrals if requested or if required. However, scholars have criticized the use of personal therapy as a remedial intervention (Kaslow et al., 2007; Olkin & Gaughen, 1991; Schoener, 1999; Vasquez, 1999). Once more, the mechanics of how to implement an ethical standard remain in question, a familiar theme related to the broad areas adrift within ethical codes (Herlihy & Corey, 2006). No other interventions are mentioned in the code as directives for remediation.

Remedial Interventions

The question of how to address student challenges during the remediation process is accompanied by a paucity of empirical research within counseling (Forrest et al., 1999). The literature has offered a small array of suggestions for remedial interventions, the most common being personal therapy (Forrest et al., 1999), which has received a fair amount of scrutiny from scholars. In addition to personal therapy, other remedial interventions include increased supervision, the repetition of academic and clinical course work, additional assignments, and student restrictions within the program (Biaggio, Gasparikova-Krasnec, & Bauer, 1983; Bradey & Post, 1991; Fly, van Bark, Weinman, Kitchener, & Lang, 1997; Henderson, 2010; Kress & Protivnak, 2009; Lamb et al., 1987; McAdams & Foster, 2007; Olkin & Gaughen, 1991; Procidano, Busch-Rossnagel, Reznikoff, & Geisinger, 1995; Russell & Peterson, 2003).

Personal Therapy

Lamb et al. (1987), in one of the early scholarly works that addressed remedial interventions, suggested as appropriate the use of personal therapy, especially if student concerns involved psychological issues. However, the authors cautioned that the use of personal therapy should not “create conflicts of interest” (p. 601) and suggested that outlining an agreement in writing may be necessary to clarify the purpose of therapy as well as how progress within therapy would be reported to the program. Lamb et al. seemed to foreshadow the future criticism of personal therapy as a remedial technique and the accompanying conflicts of interest. Subsequently, Schoener (1999) critiqued personal therapy as a remedial intervention and found the use flawed due to the common lack of evaluation by programs in determining if therapy was the most appropriate intervention, as well as what type of therapy would be best. Vasquez (1999) noted the inherent ethical dilemma in the use of personal therapy in remediation and questioned how programs would balance accountability with confidentiality. Likewise, Olkin and Gaughen (1991) posed several reservations over the use of personal therapy, including its appropriateness as a remedial intervention and whether the confidential nature of therapy potentially prohibits the program’s involvement in goal-setting with students. Recently, Kaslow et al. (2007) criticized the use of personal therapy for a broad assortment of shortcomings, including the lack of guidelines on how to handle confidentiality and the lack of research demonstrating its effectiveness as a remedial intervention.

Despite these criticisms, the use of personal therapy as a remedial intervention appears to be quite common. For instance, Procidano et al. (1995) found that 28% of

programs referred students to personal therapy, which is similar to Bradey and Post (1991), who reported that 23% of counselor education programs used therapy referrals with challenging students. Olkin and Gaughen (1991) reported that personal therapy was used by 77% of programs surveyed, the most frequently used method of remediation in their study. Additionally, one half or more of Council on Accreditation of Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) accredited programs surveyed by Russell and Peterson (2003) indicated using personal therapy as a remedial method. Personal therapy also was cited as a suggested remedial intervention (Kress & Protivnak, 2009) and as a response to unsatisfactory evaluations of students (Biaggio et al., 1983).

Recognizing the common use of personal therapy in remediation and the lack of research on the topic, Elman and Forrest (2004) conducted exploratory interviews with 14 APA-accredited training directors regarding the use of personal therapy in remediation. The majority of training directors utilized what Elman and Forrest labeled as a hands-off approach to the use of personal therapy as a remedial intervention, which placed the main priority on students' confidentiality while in therapy. Other characteristics of the hands-off approach included the following: (a) the program recommending, rather than requiring, personal therapy, (b) the program not participating in selecting the therapist or ascertaining if students actually attended therapy, (c) the program not communicating with the students' therapists regarding remedial goals, and (d) the program possessing no knowledge of therapists' opinions regarding students' suitability to practice. In contrast, Elman and Forrest recommended that programs adopt more of a hands-on approach when using therapy as a remedial intervention, which would entail the following: (a) developing detailed policies regarding the use of therapy during remediation, (b) developing specific remediation plans for therapy that stipulated the necessary outcomes of therapy, and (c) establishing the proficiency of the therapists who provide counseling to remedial students.

Additional support is offered in recent literature regarding the use of personal therapy as a remedial intervention. Recommendations are similar to Elman and Forrest's (2004) suggestions, such as developing plans which detail how the outcome of therapy will be communicated to the program (Gilfoyle, 2008; Kaslow et al., 2007). Gilfoyle (2008) also noted that the use of personal therapy as a remedial intervention has yet to be tested in the courts. Considering such, the author recommended that programs take precautions to communicate in writing the potential use of personal therapy as a remediation technique to all students through the student handbook and website. In addition, the author stated that ethical considerations should be reviewed with treating therapists before the onset of therapy with students.

Increased Supervision

Lamb et al. (1987) posed several other possible remedial interventions that could be considered when addressing challenges with students, deeming increased supervision as "an expected first alternative when problems are first noted" (p. 601); increased supervision also is suggested as a remedial intervention in more recent literature (Kress & Protivnak, 2009; McAdams & Foster, 2007). The practice of using increased supervision as a remedial intervention is evidenced in empirical studies documenting its use by training programs; for instance, Olkin and Gaughen (1991) reported that 40% of programs used increased supervision, similar to the results of Russell and Peterson

(2003), who reported that one-half or more of the surveyed COAMFTE program directors used increased supervision as well. On the lower end, Procidano et al. (1995) found that 12% of programs used increased supervision.

Repeating Coursework

Additional suggestions by Lamb et al. (1987) for remedial interventions included the reduction of students' clinical caseload. This suggestion is found in slightly differing versions in other sources in the literature, for example, Biaggio et al. (1983) reported not permitting students to enroll in practicum as a programmatic response to unsatisfactory evaluations. Similar programmatic actions included removing students from clinical course work (Fly et al., 1997; McAdams & Foster, 2007) and requiring the repetition of practicum or internship (Olkin & Gaughen, 1991).

Another suggestion for remedial intervention was completion of certain academic course work (Lamb et al., 1987). Within the realm of academic course work as a remedial tool, Olkin and Gaughen (1991) reported that 70% of programs used the repetition of course work in student remediation, as well as requiring extra course work (38%) and tutoring (32%). A survey of COAMFTE program directors also indicated similar findings, with one-half or more using increased contact with a faculty advisor during remediation and mandating that students repeat academic course work (Russell & Peterson, 2003). McAdams and Foster (2007) also suggested the repetition of other pertinent course work as a remedial intervention, similar to Kress and Protivnak (2009), who offered remedial interventions related to academic course work, such as the assignment of additional writing activities, for instance a reflective journal or research paper, and requiring the completion of continuing education workshops related to the remedial issue.

Other Remedial Interventions

Other sources in the literature indicated the occurrence of what seems to be some form of remediation but did not provide details on what that entailed. For instance, Biaggio et al. (1983) reported in their survey of clinical psychology programs that 73% of master's programs and 88% of doctoral programs would warn students after unsatisfactory evaluations and provide students with a "prescription for change" (p. 14); a description of that prescription was not provided. Similarly, in an exploratory study of psychology programs, Fly et al. (1997) found that the most frequent program response (44%) was "confrontation with a stipulation for some kind of remedial action, such as restitution, probation, reimbursement, and so forth" (p. 494), but no further details were supplied. Bradey and Post (1991) also found that 43% of counselor education programs used faculty review when deciding if students could continue in a program, but particulars were not provided.

Student Restrictions

Within the context of gatekeeping, the use of some form of restriction of students' participation in the program was reported as an intervention. A common example of this restriction was the requirement or suggestion of a leave of absence from enrollment in the program (Biaggio et al., 1983; Russell & Peterson, 2003). Olkin and Gaughen (1991) reported that 62% of programs surveyed used a leave of absence, and Procidano et al.

(1995) reported 11% of programs surveyed used a leave of absence. Other methods to restrict students' participation in the program included placing students on formal probation and issuing a warning or counseling students to withdraw from the program (Biaggio et al., 1983). Fly et al. (1997) found that 3% of programs surveyed counseled students to withdraw and Procidano et al. (1995) reported 18%. Several studies indicated that final dismissal from the program was the response to challenging students (Biaggio et al., 1983): Fly et al. (1997) found 22% of surveyed programs dismissed students and Procidano et al. (1995) reported 39%.

New Avenues for Remediation

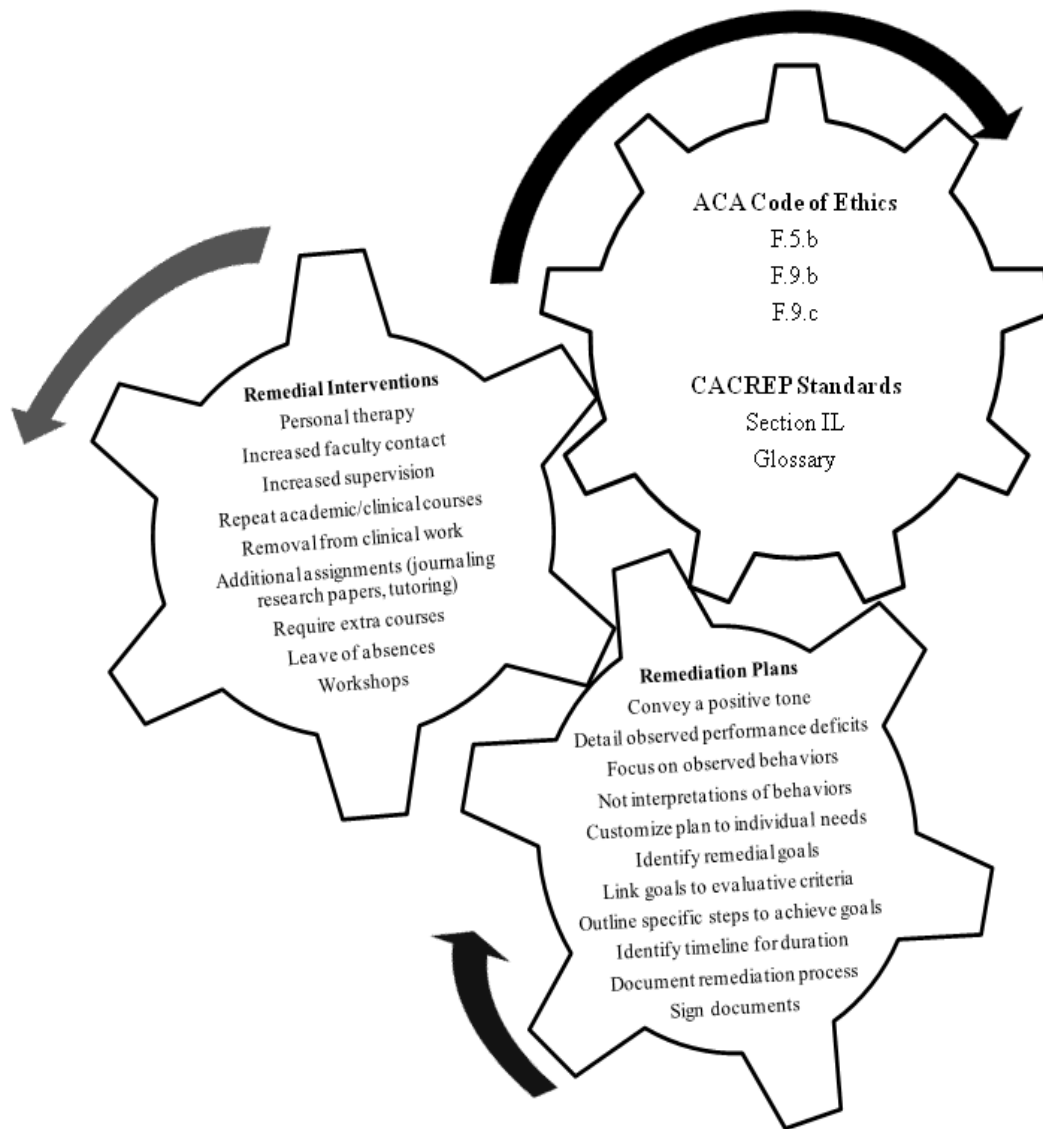
Recently, the conceptual literature on remediation has undergone somewhat of a renaissance, beginning to discuss and illustrate the remediation process rather than only isolated remedial interventions, providing nuance that is lacking from the empirical literature. McAdams and Foster (2007) presented a framework for the remediation process informed by a review of pertinent case law, detailing how to infuse substantive and procedural due process within remediation. For instance, the authors recommended the types of interventions applied match the nature and extent of the observed student challenges and that the spirit of the interventions be remedial in nature and not punitive. Kaslow et al. (2007) suggested similar guidelines, including the following: (a) remediation plans adopt a positive tone, (b) outline the observed performance concerns, and (c) demonstrate how those concerns are related to established evaluative criteria. Gilfoyle (2008) offered recommendations that remediation plans: (a) link the observed behaviors to the established evaluative criteria, (b) identify the remedial goals, and (c) specify the methods to achieve those goals. Gilfoyle further recommended that programs focus remediation plans on observed behaviors rather than an interpretation of those behaviors, such as a diagnosis.

In addition to recommendations on how to incorporate substantive due process during remediation, McAdams and Foster (2007) outlined how procedural due process can be accounted for, such as defining remedial expectations before implementing them and establishing routine student evaluations. This mirrors the proposals from Kaslow et al. (2007) that remediation be adopted with a spirit of full disclosure and that students be informed of routine evaluations and potential outcomes of the evaluations, such as remediation or dismissal. The authors also suggested detailing the necessary steps in remediation plans for students to achieve competence and establishing the expected timeline for the duration of plans. Additionally, McAdams and Foster stressed the importance of documentation during the remediation process, which was also emphasized by Jackson-Cherry (2006). Further guidelines from McAdams and Foster included customizing remediation to individual students in order to fulfill the legal doctrine of fundamental fairness.

New contributions to the conceptual literature on remediation were found in two recent scholarly works devoted to remediation plans (Dufrene & Henderson, 2009; Kress & Protivnak, 2009). Dufrene and Henderson (2009) offered a framework to develop Individual Remediation Plans (IRP) that incorporates regular evaluations and systematic documentation. Kress and Protivnak, referring to their framework as a Professional Development Plan (PDP), outlined a procedure to develop a PDP as “a behaviorally

focused remediation plan and contract created by counselor education program faculty” (2009, p. 157). Both frameworks incorporated several similar elements found in the existing literature, such as stating expectations and goals in the positive as an expected competency, itemizing remedial interventions developed specifically for the individual student, establishing the time frame for the plan, and signing the document.

Figure 1. Codes, Standards, Remedial Interventions, and Suggestions for Developing Remediation Plans



Within the psychology literature, recent scholarly work has adopted a proactive tone as well. The aforementioned work of Kaslow et al. (2007) articulated proposals for the profession for identifying and intervening with student challenges, such as “When assessing competence problems, define key terms, establish benchmarks for performance, and develop a categorization schema” (p. 480). The work of Kaslow et al. complemented Lichtenberg et al.’s (2007; both are members of the APA Task Force on the Assessment

of Competence in Professional Psychology) analysis of challenges to evaluating competence; challenges identified included defining competencies, limitations in assessing competence, and dual roles for educators and trainers. Additional recent scholarly work has examined the programmatic response to challenging students. For example, alternate stances for graduate programs to consider when conceptualizing and addressing concerns with students have been offered, such as an ecological or systems perspective by Forrest, Shen Miller, and Elman (2008), who recommended that programs should remember the effects of the system, which can be flawed and imperfect, on individual students. Similarly, Wester, Christianson, Fouad, and Santiago-Rivera (2008) suggested that faculty adopt an information processing approach to problem solving when addressing student competence issues. Refer to Figure 1 for a summary of the remedial interventions and suggestions for the development of remediation plans discussed in the literature.

Suggestions for Future Research

Other than Elman and Forrest's qualitative study (2004), empirical data regarding remedial interventions is not abundant and consists mainly of descriptive survey data. An area for growth is scholarly research on remediation; as Forrest et al. (1999) stated, "we appear to be relying on intuitive and rational processes without the benefit of empirical knowledge to inform our critical decisions about the identification, remediation, and dismissal of impaired trainees" (p. 675). Future research examining the remediation process would aid in the development of additional remedial interventions (Forrest et al., 1999). Additionally, Vacha-Haase, Davenport, and Kerewsky (2004) critiqued the existing remedial interventions and noted lack of consensus regarding the use of personal therapy and increased supervision as remedial interventions. Of like mind, Vasquez (1999) also criticized the lack of knowledge regarding remedial interventions, especially the link between remedial intervention and remedial concern, which was echoed by Kress and Protivnak (2009). Other areas identified for future research included examining the outcomes of remediation plans, the experiences of faculty and students participating in the plans (Kress & Protivnak, 2009), the duration of remediation, the accompanying nature of remedial supervision, and the extent of documentation necessary with remediation (McAdams & Foster, 2007). Vacha-Haase et al. also noted the need for empirical data regarding the entire remedial process. Continued research and dialogue is necessary to further define the components of remediation.

Conclusion

The concept of remediation in counselor education programs and related mental health fields appears to be entering a phase of growth indicated by the emergent scholarly work in the literature. While the gatekeeping models laid the foundation for student dismissals, recent contributions have focused more on remedial interventions and remediation plans, expanding the resources available to counselor educators and supervisors undertaking student remediation. The interventions presented in this article were reviewed to provide resources for counselor educators and supervisors for practice. Personal therapy, additional course requirements, and increased supervision, among other

techniques, are remedial interventions available to address student challenges. With the practical considerations found in the literature, counselor educators and supervisors are afforded guidelines when implementing remediation and fulfilling the ethical obligation to assist students when necessary in obtaining remedial assistance.

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