

Article 39

Increasing Student Self-Efficacy Through Counselor Education Teaching Methods

Justin Brogan, Elisabeth Suarez, Mark Rehfuss, and Ron Shope

Brogan, Justin, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Counseling and the Department Chair of Counseling Programs at Grace University.

Suarez, Elisabeth, PhD, is an Adjunct Associate Professor of Counseling at Regent University.

Rehfuss, Mark, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Counseling and Human Services at Old Dominion University.

Shope, Ron, PhD, is a Professor of Communication & Research and Director of Assessment & Institutional Research at Grace University.

Introduction

The education of future counselors is a cornerstone of the counseling profession. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) provides guidelines aimed at determining overall course content (CACREP, 2009). CACREP standards are intended to provide standardization across counseling programs to ensure students receive an equitable education (Wilcoxon, 1990). CACREP guidelines, however, do not address the “overall conceptual models or theoretical justification on how the entirety of the material in the graduate training of master’s-level counselors can best be presented to maximize student learning” (Granello & Hazler, 1998, p. 89). Since research has not yet fully addressed effective pedagogy in counselor education, this study looked at two different teaching methods and their effect on self-efficacy (Fong, 1998; Granello & Hazler, 1998; Hoshmand, 2004; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998; Sexton, 1998).

As counselor educators look at the development of future counselors, counselor self-efficacy (CSE) has been proven a vital component in the provision of efficacious treatment (Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998). While elements of self-efficacy have been researched in relationship to supervision style, most pedagogical aspects of counselor education have been ignored, including CSE (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998; Sexton, 1998). Having a greater sense of perceived competency or self-efficacy determines how people behave, how they think, and how they react emotionally to strenuous situations (Bandura, 1982). Additionally, increased measures of CSE enhance counselor performance, improving the ability to assist clients in meeting goals (Griffith & Frieden, 2000).

Counselor Education Pedagogy and Self-Efficacy

Counseling pedagogy has been largely left for those with educational training to determine what methods should be utilized in the classroom and which are most effective to disseminate information to students (Fong, 1998; Granello & Hazler, 1998; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). This absence has become a problem because educators face increased scrutiny to ensure graduates are able to meet the demands of an increasingly complex workload (Palmer, 2007). Additionally, counselor educators must effectively defend pedagogical practices, especially when students cause clients harm (Sexton, 1998). Furthermore, counselor educators have no knowledge which educational method is best at increasing specific counselor skills, leading them to call for studies to validate pedagogical practices (Fong, Borders, Ethington, & Pitts, 1997; Granello & Hazler, 1998; Morrisette & Gadbois, 2006; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998).

The Socratic teaching method (STM) dates back more than 2000 years (Hoover, 1980). This method denotes the teacher as an expert who leads students on a journey. The student is required to accept concepts as understood by the teacher and then apply them to current dilemmas or questions (Jarvis, 2002). The STM is based on the presumption that the learner has the knowledge within, or the capacity, to develop a solution to any given problem (Pekarsky, 1994). Through carefully planned questions, the student is led to understand the inconsistencies of their position (Pekarsky, 1994). In this process of questioning and discovery, the student engages in critical thinking (Jarvis, 2002). The great strength of the STM is that it encourages independent thinking skills, confidence, and self-reasoning and brings students into the discourse, which is directed toward a search for truth (Jarvis, 2002).

The lecture teaching method (LTM) is the single most utilized teaching method and clearly delineates the roles of teacher and student (Hoover, 1980; Jarvis, 2002; McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006). Lecturing has evolved since its initial introduction, and there are many varying techniques that may be employed in the course of a lecture to stimulate learning. Lecturing summarizes a wide variety of information from varying sources, provides a conceptual framework for assigned reading, directs attention to key components, adjusts material to meet the needs of students, orients students to new material, and communicates enthusiasm for a given subject (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006).

CSE was birthed from Bandura's (1994) theory of perceived self-efficacy. Bandura defined perceived self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 71). Bandura noted that a person with high self-efficacy is more likely to accept greater challenges, recover quickly from failures, and attribute failures to a lack of training. Bandura's research on perceived self-efficacy has led counselor educators to CSE (Larson & Daniels, 1998).

CSE has been defined as therapists' beliefs regarding their ability to provide therapy for a client in the near future (Bandura, 1982; Larson, 1998; Larson & Daniels, 1998). Larson (1998) further described CSE as a process whereby counselors reflect on their perceptions through knowledge from experience and education in order to better perform counseling tasks. Furthermore, CSE describes therapists' ability to accept and succeed under challenging situations, set taxing yet achievable goals, have positive and

helpful thoughts, and use their current combined abilities to formulate a treatment plan (Larson, 1998; Larson & Daniels, 1998). Additionally, CSE includes the ability to think reflectively through introspectively looking into one's own theories (Irving & Williams, 1995). Lastly, CSE has been identified as one of three core reliable predictive factors for selecting and training future counselors (Urbani et al., 2002).

Understanding how counselor educators impact student development is an important aspect of professional growth (Sexton, 1998). It is important to first understand if teaching methods increase CSE as a measure of student development. Furthermore, looking at specific teaching methods assisted to further determine faculty's ability to impact student change based on the style of classroom interaction. The STM and LTM are two largely used teaching methods; this study started with further understanding these teaching methods. Lastly, allowing the participants' voices to be heard, this study allowed students to describe their change, which helped explain the results from the participant's perspective.

Participants

The participants were selected from a regionally accredited graduate counseling program in the Central Midwest of the United States. Students selected for participation had completed a course in Helping Relationships and Professional Orientation as defined by the CACREP standards. The 17 participants in this study, three male (17.6%) and 14 female (82.4%), were between the ages of 23 and 55 with a mean age of 37. The study participants were 31% of the overall graduate counseling student population. The ethnic composition of the sample consisted of 12 European American (70%), 2 African American (12%), 2 Latin American (12%), and 1 immigrant from India (0.6%).

Procedures

The mixed methods design used in this study was an embedded design, which consisted of two separate, yet equally significant, phases: quantitative followed by qualitative (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The quantitative measure was administered prior to and following exposure to the teaching methods. Next, a semi-structured interview was completed with all members of the STM and LTM groups. Qualitative data were collected and interpreted to assist with explaining what key factors led to changes or lack of changes in the quantitative data. The quantitative data and analysis provide a general understanding of the research problem. The qualitative data and analysis explain the results from the participants' perspective (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Three measures were used in this study: (a) a demographics questionnaire; (b) the Counselor Self-Estimate Inventory (COSE) developed by Larson et al. (1992); and (c) an interview protocol. The demographic questionnaire provided characteristic information about participants. The COSE is a 37-item instrument utilizing a 6-point Likert scale to determine participants' degree of agreement with regards to their confidence in their present counseling ability. The COSE measures five underlying factors: self-assurance using therapeutic microskills, presence regarding the counseling process, managing challenging client behavior, engaging in culturally competent therapy, and awareness of

personal values (Larson et al., 1992). The COSE has a high reliability with an alpha of 0.93, indicating that the test is consistent over time. Higher scores on the COSE indicate stronger perception of CSE, thus increased feelings of counselor competence to provide counseling in the near future.

An 11-question, open-ended interview protocol was developed after analysis of the quantitative data to determine information related to student perception regarding increases in CSE and based on the design developed by Creswell (2009). Questions on the protocol explored each of the five factors of the COSE, factors that may have affected results (such as trainings in ethics and cultural awareness) and other issues that may have contributed to increased measures of CSE according to the students. The verification strategy utilized was member checking; additionally, themes and codes were confirmed by an independent researcher (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

The independent variable for this study is the pedagogical format and has three levels: Socratic teaching method, lecture teaching method, and no-teach method (NTM). The no-teach method was comprised of students who were interested in participating in the study, but were unable to attend the course, thus assigned to the control group. The dependent variable is counselor self-efficacy as measured by the COSE. The research questions sought to understand if there is a relationship between teaching methods and CSE, if there is a difference in CSE when taught by the STM or the LTM, how students described their change in self-efficacy, and how the perspectives of the students in the one-on-one interviews helped to explain the results regarding CSE that were found using the COSE. The study was a pretest-posttest randomized quasi-experimental design. Participants were drawn from an existing pool of students with random assignment into the lecture and Socratic groups. The no-teach group was selected from the remaining pool of students in the program who met criteria and volunteered to participate. Due to the small sample size, effect size was analyzed.

Results

Descriptive analysis explored mean scores and standard deviations for each group's COSE scores. The COSE scores were then further broken down using the five factors described by Larson et al. (1992), which consist of the following: counseling microskills, counseling process, counseling challenging clients, cultural competence, and values. Effect size (Cohen, 1988; Hedges & Olkin, 1985) was utilized comparing the means and standard deviations of the overall COSE scores for the three groups. Results of the three groups are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1
Effect Size of COSE Scores by Group

<i>Teaching Method</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>	<i>Effect Size</i>
Socratic	0.43	Moderate
Lecture	0.14	Small to Trivial
No Teach	0.02	Trivial or No

Results show an increased effect size for the teaching groups with the STM group yielding the highest effect. Comparing the groups showed interesting results, as does each of the five factors. Effect size for the five factors are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2

Effect Size for the Five Factors

	<i>Socratic</i>	<i>Lecture</i>	<i>No-Teach</i>
Counseling Microskills	0.53	0.04	0.20
Counseling Process	0.62	0.24	0.22
Counseling Challenging Clients	0.67	0.09	0.08
Cultural Competence	0.46	0.32	0.07
Values	0.15	0.04	0.02

Hypothesis 1—students will increase their CSE by participation in a counseling course as measured by the Counselor Self-Estimate Inventory—and Hypothesis 2—graduate counseling students taught using the STM will develop greater self-efficacy to practice learned techniques than those taught using the LTM as measured by the Counselor Self-Estimate Inventory—were accepted with limitations.

Students in the STM group described the class as a process rather than a typical classroom course. This classroom process, or guided learning, was completed as a group who shared an experience. Students felt as though they were using their discussion skills to process group thoughts, which is the application of how they would engage their future clients. Students' verbiage regarding how they felt about themselves changed at the conclusion of the study. Students talked about how the ability to practice skills was a reason for their increased measures of confidence. A student noted, "especially this late in the game, going through the last stages of internship, finishing up courses. It was yet another nudge towards becoming a professional so it kind of helped push me just a little bit further." A newer student to the program noted that "I'm not ready to counsel tomorrow, of course, but it just made me more confident."

Students in the STM group talked about themselves and how their participation in the course changed how they view themselves. Students' changed or increased use of self-awareness occurred on two levels. First, students noted that the group reaction to the process increased their awareness of where they were individually. Second, they described a change in self-awareness that occurred through their own insightful thoughts in response to the course. Students indicated that through the interaction with the course material and classroom interaction, they became aware of personal deficits, areas where they feel they need to grow, and general areas where they need to apply skills that they had not previously understood. When they spoke about their experience, they linked their own growth to the increased bonds with their peers. Part of the personal growth described was the increased perception of competence when working with a diverse set of people.

Students in the LTM group talked about how the class bolstered their confidence. The comments by students seemed to fit into three basic categories. First, students talked about how the course reinforced learning of old concepts and the addition of new techniques. Second, the aspect of confidence related how students expected course material to translate into future abilities. The last aspect of confidence discussed by students was a comfort with what they already knew. A student said, "I haven't had an

epiphany of a huge change in myself. I think that it confirmed for me where I was,” referring to their measure of CSE.

There was an overwhelming number of comments from students in the LTM group about being exposed to various types of information. Information was divided into three basic subgroups. First, students talked about how they were given professional examples and reviewed skills. A student noted, “He had a lot of interjections from just his personal experience, which I think usually are the most helpful and you can relate to them.” Second, students noted they had been exposed to new material or exposed to material for a second time, giving them the ability to further digest concepts. Third, there were comments regarding how the professor was able to project a large volume of information at the students. One noted, “He answered any and every question we had. He was like a living encyclopedia.” This transfer assisted the students by giving them hope that they would be able learn the material presented and eventually integrate it into their future practice.

The lecture and Socratic groups talked about their experiences from similar yet very different perspectives. A cross-analysis of themes highlighted common themes as well as contrasted how each group talked about their experience. Students in the LTM group talked about learning from a practical position, they felt learning would be applicable to their future practices. Students in the STM group talked about learning as a process, a journey through which they gained insight and understanding. Both groups talked about learning from their own perspective; each group also talked about a sense of awareness. Both groups described a similar form of confidence as a theme of their experience. The STM group had two themes not described by the LTM group. Personal growth described the group’s shared experience in how they related to each other while they worked through discussions. Additionally, students in the STM group portrayed counseling skills as a description of how they grew in response to the course, and they were able to attain greater understanding and utilization of their skills. The LTM group’s theme, not mentioned by the STM group, was information. Students said information represented the great amount of information and material covered during the course.

The third research question sought to understand how students described their changes in CSE. Results suggest that there were similarities and differences in how counseling students discussed their change in self-efficacy. The similarities were that both groups discussed confidence, a type of awareness, and a form of learning as key components of the course. The key differences portrayed by the groups were how students in the STM group described personal growth and counseling skills, while the LTM group talked about information as themes for their experiences, respectively.

The final research question sought to understand how the perspectives of the students in the one-on-one interviews help to explain the CSE results. Results indicate that the way in which the course was taught directly impacted how students were able to effectively discuss the application of counseling microskills. The interaction provided in the STM group seems to have accounted for the difference in this factor in that students were able to actually practice the skills through discussions with each other as they were delving into the questions posed by the professor. Skills represent one factor of microskills, while counseling process represents a similar aspect.

Discussion

Members in the STM group discussed several principles of group interaction similar to what would be expected in therapy groups. Group members talked about how participation gave them a greater understanding of how to evaluate their own thoughts in respect to the overall themes discussed. The development of this skill, or “development of socializing techniques” (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, pp. 16-17), was a process whereby students were able to gain immediate feedback into their own interactions in the group setting. Furthermore, students spoke of interpersonal learning whereby they gained “insight” (p. 19) into their own group interactions (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Students also talked about a hope, specifically being able to utilize their newly learned skills in future settings. “The instillation of hope” is seen as significant aspect of the therapeutic experience (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005); placebo or hope has been noted to encompass 15% of the overall therapeutic recovery process (Duncan, Miller, & Sparks, 2004). Additionally, the STM group noted the togetherness shared through the group experience or the understanding that they were not alone in having not fully formulated their thoughts. Universality gives the recipient the comfort that their own life script does not rest too far from that of others and that they too are part of the human experience (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). The STM group also experienced social learning through “imitative behavior” (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Members of both groups talked about the “imparting of information” as a significant aspect of their experience (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 8) but from different perspectives. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) broke “imparting of information” down into two categories, didactic instruction and direct advice (pp. 8-13). The LTM group described didactic instruction as their mode of imparting information. The STM group described a group process of giving and receiving advice from both peers and their peer facilitator. While participants’ mirrored aspects found in various characteristics of group therapy, they also demonstrated varying levels of attainment of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956; Granello, 2001; Krathwohl, 2002).

Bloom’s Taxonomy discusses students’ movement from a simple to an advanced level of educational behaviors (Bloom et al., 1956). Bloom’s Taxonomy has become a benchmark for understanding and evaluating the depth of students’ thought processes and writing abilities. Bloom’s Taxonomy utilized the following levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Granello, 2001). For a counselor educator, it should be important to note that students must understand course content from a variety of levels; however, as students move closer to graduation they should be able to attain the highest order educational behaviors prescribed by the taxonomy. Student comments from the LTM and STM groups were evaluated based on the Bloom’s Taxonomy for complexity.

Students in the LTM group, although they may have progressed beyond knowledge and comprehension, did not describe that as their experience. The bulk of their experience was in the comprehension level of the taxonomy. Students described the initial level of the taxonomy using the theme information to describe the method of delivery of course content and their personal level of engagement. Students used the remainder of the themes—validation, practical learning, and awareness—to describe their educational processing of the material and the delivery method level of that material.

Students in the LTM group did not seem to attain higher order taxonomy thinking skills beyond the delivery method of the instructor. While students in the LTM group attained comprehension level of critical thinking skills, the STM group attained a higher level of thinking skills.

The STM group processed material as a group and were able to attain five of the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956). There was no evidence to support attainment of the fifth level (synthesis) of Bloom's Taxonomy, although the lack of evidence does not necessarily indicate their lack of attainment. The STM group utilized the application, analysis, and evaluation levels of the taxonomy to process new information. The application level of the taxonomy notes that a student will correctly understand and apply course material to a given problem (Bloom et al., 1956). The analysis level of the taxonomy notes that students will be able to break course material down into its core parts, note the connection between those parts, and recognize the organizational principles of the parts in relationship to the whole concept (Bloom et al.). The evaluation level of the taxonomy is characterized by making judgments about learned concepts (Bloom et al., 1956). Students in the STM group described the characteristics of their discussion sessions, which included knowledge and comprehension of the course material as described in their themes—guided learning and counseling skills. Where the STM group exceeded the LTM group was with their application of the material as described in their theme—counseling skills. The STM group talked about how their learning reached a higher critical thinking level, including an analysis of the concept. Students noted that the learning was more than factual, but included an interactive component where all members furthered thoughts of their peers.

Results indicated that the way the course was taught directly impacted how students were able to effectively discuss the application of counseling microskills. The interaction provided in the STM group seems to have accounted for the difference in this factor in that students were able to actually practice the skills through discussions with each other as they were delving into the questions posed by the professor.

Counseling process represents how a therapist directs the session and represents the flow of the session from beginning to end, whereas skills represent the actual skills used in the session and process. The STM group outperformed the LTM group in increasing CSE, which seems to have been accounted for by guided learning, a process whereby students interacted with their peers with faculty direction.

Dealing with difficult client behavior describes a counselor's ability to manage challenging clients. Challenging client behaviors range from suicidal to unmotivated clients; it also includes alcoholics and clients who are silent, giving little to the process. The STM group far outperformed the LTM group, which was related to two factors, increased empathy and personal discovery. During an open discussion, students in the STM group talked and processed their positions and fears in the group format. The LTM group described situations that would be fearful, but did not process them with the class.

Cultural competence describes a counselor's ability to act competently when interacting with people from various cultures or socioeconomic groups. Both the STM group and the LTM group discussed the aspect of cultural competence, which included a measure of cultural empathy. Additionally, students were able to discuss how that understanding related to their personal views of cultural awareness, which further increased their understanding of cultural competence.

Values represent a counselor's ability to maintain an unbiased approach without imposing one's own personal values into the counseling relationships. This is the one measure where the LTM group slightly outperformed the STM group. However, the pre- and post-measures on the values questions indicated that students felt they had a high sense of values at the beginning and maintained that level at the conclusion of the study.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

Limitations to the study include aspects of the research design, the statistical method used to interpret the quantitative data, a small sample size, the population, and the use of self-efficacy as the singular focus of measurement. The study used a quasi-experimental design due to the method of selection of participants. An additional limitation related to the research design was the use of a seminar-style course rather than a traditional full-semester course. Due to low participation, effect size was used to determine the effect treatment had on the groups, which precluded significance. The use of effect size for interpreting data, rather than a test of significance, was a major drawback as was the relatively small sample size (Schmidt, 1996). The relatively small size of the sample precludes generalizing the study to vast populations of students and by proxy how counselor educators direct classrooms with various teaching methods. The population was drawn from a private Midwestern university that educated from a biblically integrated perspective, and the ethnic diversity was not representative of the general population.

Although there are several limitations to this study, the findings of this study will serve as a pilot study that aims to validate current pedagogical practices. Because this is the first known study that seeks to validate counselor education teaching methods for a specific course and outcome, it is recommended that the results be repeated, taking into consideration the aforementioned limitations. A suggested related study would be to use counselor conceptual level and ego development as measures to determine effective pedagogical practices (Beutler, Machado, & Neufeldt 1994).

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