



Transformative Practices in Counselor Education: Creating Transparent Connections

Thomas Scofield, Ph.D., Kelli Saginak, Ed.D., Renae Reljic, Ph.D., and Amney Harper, Ph.D.

Transformative education is distinguishable by the relational process of emotional investment that embraces transparency and authentic partnership between learner and educator. Humility becomes an essential quality of the transformative educator who unassumingly guides the process of learning alongside the learner. The creation of transformative learning processes heartens our personal and professional selves to be open to ongoing development and integration through collaborative endeavors and discoveries.

Transformative pedagogy invites learners to engage in their learning in intentional, responsible and meaningful ways rather than as passive receptacles of information. Within this composition of learning exists a reciprocal nature of open-mindedness, personal freedom, and investment by means of risk-taking, and vulnerability through negotiated learning (Dewey, 1997; Habermas, 1985; Mezirow, 2000). Senteni (2005) offers that transformative pedagogy reconfigures the student/teacher relationship to one that grounds and secures the experiences of student and teacher in the knowledge and meaning of learning. Pedagogy in this form is an invitation, so to speak (Henriksen, 2006; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998), which allows students to consider alternative perspectives in a collaborative, interactive process of analytical thinking, where they actively participate in their learning, struggle with social issues, envision alternative possibilities, and engage in social action (Fear, et al., 2003; Nagda, Gurin, & Lopez, 2003; Meyers, 2008).

Transformative pedagogy moves beyond engaging with knowledge intellectually, which opens up vast possibilities within counselor education. When counseling students use the classroom to share their understandings and experiences, gain new perspectives, and process their experiences with one another, learning becomes interactive and multi-directional (within the self, from one student to another, from professor to student, from student(s) to professor, and within the professor). Facilitating novel and innovative strategies between instructors and students in counselor education necessitates teaching practices that evolve around developing meaningful classroom communities where

students analytically examine and engage in relationships with what they are learning in unison with the instructor. Likewise, the development of transformative classroom communities invites instructors to move from the stage and engage at a deeper level. Transformative pedagogy opens the possibilities for instructors to risk, taking the vulnerable step toward transparency in relationship with students and the classroom community.

The Concept of Transparency

Transparency is a necessary condition for creating transformative spaces because it facilitates a decrease in the hierarchical posture that separates students from instructors. Diminishing hierarchy moves all participants beyond the contextualization of interactions, through academic, curricular or programmatic experiences only. Through transparent and transformative processes, title and role no longer interfere with and precede the development of meaningful relationships and learning companionships. Transparent instructors model and mentor students toward transparent egalitarian positions, where contexts of mutuality and reciprocity prevail, whereby instructors demonstrate greater vulnerability as their personal selves. Thus, the learning environment becomes lucid, instructors reveal their methods of instruction, shed strategy in favor of collaboration, acknowledge their challenges openly, and join with the student through open and honest communication.

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The appreciation for transformative experiences makes us aware of the linguistic markers that might interfere with the conditions of empathy. For example, by removing titles (e.g., "client" and "counselor") when articulating the description of the helping relationship, students transcend their assumed role and functions and broaden their appreciation for mutuality and reciprocity

in relationship as the desired therapeutic end. The intentional removal of labels that represent hierarchical roles opens up possibilities for individuals to redefine their roles. Through transparent interactions, students are able to remove their focus from the professor as the authoritative voice and look to each other and to themselves for the construction of meanings within the information and experiences they acquire. To this end, a celebration of the subjectivity of the learner occurs through poly-vocal negotiations of the existing knowledge toward an evolving determination of what the learner accepts as personally meaningful (Freire, 1993; Foucault, 1977).

Discussion

Transformative pedagogy in counselor education has profound implications for instructors, supervisors, students, and clients. When counselor educators give themselves permission to step back, allow their students to grapple with course concepts together, they afford opportunities for the development of students' sense of self-efficacy. Students will exit a course knowing that all the connections and learning made within the course were a result of their own unique engagement, not the words of their professor. Likewise, the collaborative power co-created between the instructor and the student transforms the shape of future encounters for the student. As our students are empowered and gain self-efficacy through their coursework then they can leave with the capacity to create transformative spaces both professionally and personally.

Conclusion

Transformative pedagogy and transparency redefines the structure of learning and all that it entails. It allows students to see the humanity in their instructors, and many of the insecurities and mistakes that come along with that growth. The learning environment becomes flexible and therefore can meet each student where they are instead of expecting the student to alter him or herself to fit the traditional process of learning. Transformative pedagogy and transparency do not entail a loss of boundaries, only that boundaries are legitimate and necessary, and when a particular boundary becomes unnecessary, students and instructor, together, can invite questioning and perhaps co-create distinctions that are more workable. The flexibility inherent in such practices also allows students to reveal their authentic

selves, which ultimately helps them to connect personally with their learning. The hope of this digest is to offer the challenges and potential merits of these approaches and open up dialogue regarding transparency as it relates to the goals of professional counselor preparation. Determining the potential implications for counselor education will necessitate a call for definitive evidence to substantiate the efficacy of transformative pedagogy.

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Thomas Scofield, Ph.D., is Associate Professor, Kelli Saginak, Ed.D., is Associate Professor, Renae Reljic, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor, and Amney Harper, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor in the Department of Professional Counseling at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

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