

Professional Issues in Counseling
2008, Volume 8, Article 5, p. 45-51

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Brigid M. Noonan, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department of Counselor Education
Stetson University, DeLand, FL

In this article, the author discusses the decision to become a counselor educator. Exploration surrounding personal and professional relationships, mentoring, and the balance between teaching, scholarship and service, as well as on-going professional development are presented.

On Becoming a Counselor Educator: One Person's Journey

Carl Rogers (1961) wrote:

... we can choose to use the behavioral sciences in ways which will free, not control; which will bring about constructive variability, not conformity; which will develop creativity, not contentment; which will facilitate each person in his self-directed process of becoming; which will aid individuals, groups, and even the concept of science, to become self-transcending in freshly adaptive ways of meeting life and its problems. The choice is up to us, and the human race being what it is, we are likely to stumble about, making at times some nearly disastrous value choices, and at other times highly constructive ones. (p. 400)

Making the career decision to become a counselor educator has been a journey filled with hills, valleys and plateaus. Having stumbled a bit along the way, I have made some rather dubious choices, but the decision to become a counselor educator was never in question. Interacting with people has always been a great love of mine, whether a waiter, bartender, receptionist, researcher, clinician, or as an educator. Writing this piece as I wend my way through the sometimes-murky waters of academia, I find that no matter what course I am teaching, on which committee I serve or am being asked to serve, whether contemplating a research project or participating within the community, there always exists electricity and creativity in our field. My hope is that we, as counselor educators, will continue to nurture the field of counseling, our students, and ourselves passionately. If you had asked me 10 years ago what a counselor educator was, I would have a very different answer than the one I would give today. Moreover, if you ask me 10 years from now, hopefully, a different answer will ensue.

Email: bnoonan@stetson.edu

When I first began my foray into this field, I had no idea what lay ahead. This article will explore one journey into the process of becoming a counselor educator. Coupled with relevant research, areas addressed will be the various roles in a counselor educator's life, including the mentoring relationship, life in academia (e.g., teaching, scholarship and service), life as a clinician, and on-going professional development.

Balancing Relationships

In their research examining strategies successful for senior counselor educators, Niles, Akos, and Cutler (2001) identified many different areas (e.g., research, service, balancing time, overcoming obstacles, and coping with demands of multiple life roles) important for new counselor educators to be aware of when entering the field. In particular, their discussion concerning how to balance multiple life roles is critical for us to consider. Investigating the sense of well-being felt by counselor educators', Leinbaugh, Hazler, Bradley, and Hill (2005) further revealed that a sense of balance between work and other aspects of life is an important element to having a satisfying career. Half way through my 8th year as a counselor educator, it has become increasingly apparent that I now realize the critical import of the word "balance." To be blunt, I am not very good at it. Balancing the multiple roles of self, wife, daughter, sister, friend, colleague, mentor and counselor educator has proven to be quite precarious at times. However, discussing the "how to" with my own mentors, as well as my partner and friends really helped me prioritize and work on managing these roles, all of which I wanted to and chose to juggle. My partner is a wonderful teacher and has given me great support in terms of my career goals.

Learning to balance has helped me gain greater insight in terms of my relationships and how critical they are to my success as a counselor educator.

Mentoring

Casto, Caldwell, and Salazar (2005) articulated the essential task of mentoring within the counselor education field, particularly female counselor educators and their students. Specifically, the authors illustrate the difference between those who begin their career in a mentor/mentee relationship, and those who do not have that experience. Furthermore, a positive mentoring relationship creates an environment for the counselor educator to grow as a professional, as the mentor teaches their mentee "the ropes" about the academic world. Whether it is a formal (e.g., senior faculty member assigned to a junior faculty member), or informal (e.g., the mentoring relationship develops on its own) relationship, the mentor's role is multifaceted. Providing support at all levels is key, even if that support proves challenging and confronting to the mentee. Hill, Leinbaugh, Bradley, and Hazler (2005) further note the importance for junior female counselor educators to have at least three senior faculty members on their mentoring committees. When I arrived at my current institution, I was unsure what to expect regarding a mentoring relationship. My experience has been extremely positive particularly because of the characteristics noted above. Specifically, when I arrived I negotiated two years toward my tenure and promotion. Needless to say I was "under the gun" concerning establishing a publishing agenda. My mentor and I sat down and mapped out a writing agenda that consisted of me writing one day a week. Additionally, I was to present at state, regional, national and international conferences, and wherever possible, turn those presentations into publications. Moreover, my

mentor invited me to co-write a book chapter and two journal articles which were eventually published.

This mentoring relationship has proven to be particularly positive and productive because of the characteristics noted above. This kind of relationship is one that I want to engender in my colleagues and students as they progress through the academic world.

Life in Academia

Learning how to be an academician has been ongoing. When first leaving the doctoral program eight years ago for a tenure-track appointment, I thought I knew what it would be like. The enormity of what it takes to “be” a counselor educator did not hit me more than in that first semester. I believe, like many careers, one can partake in informational interviews or job shadowing, but not really have a clue about all the details associated with being part of a faculty. Since I had been a graduate assistant, I thought I had my finger on the pulse of what it meant to be a faculty member. Again, I was proven wrong. My colleagues, thankfully, were supportive and welcoming, but like many institutions, overwhelmed with their teaching and advising responsibilities. I took on many roles at the university and system level which proved to be interesting and added to my portfolio, but in the end became too much. During an accreditation process, faculty and staff were at odds, and the lesson learned: taking on too many assignments, whether teaching or administrative can establish certain roles that, as a faculty member, can be detrimental to advancement. Recognizing mistakes and learning about my limitations was an education, and is an area that will always involve improvement. Eventually, it became apparent that this particular position would no longer provide professional worth and pleasure. Though promotion and tenure were likely, my personal fulfillment was in question. A decision to leave was inevitable, and once announced, produced dissension within the department preventing a clean break. This is a source of sadness and somewhat bittersweet for me; however, leaving and starting over has been, personally and professionally, one of my best decisions, and at the same time one of my greatest challenges.

Teaching

My previous experiences have helped me fine tune the art of teaching students how to become counselors continues, which is a great joy. Preparing lectures can be arduous, but when light bulbs go on and the students internalize the message that is truly a wonderful and meaningful experience. Not just for the students, but for me as well. Teaching our students what it means to be an advocate for their clients, empowering them to step outside their “box”, role-playing different client scenarios, challenging biases, engaging in discussions that are sometimes painful, yet valuable and practical for the student (and teacher) is a continual delight. How we connect with our clientele (e.g., students) is a(n) unique process, and it is through our ongoing professional development and in our professional organizations where we garner ideas, methods and techniques to further the education of our students.

Scholarship

The scholarly agenda within the faculty appointments has been a challenge for me from day one. Working at two teaching institutions, I have learned that production of scholarly work requires ingenuity, thought, and excellent time management skills. Having a mentor, whether the chair or other faculty colleagues, sit down and explain to you what it means to publish is essential if a career in academe is part of your career journey. Knowing this and doing this are two entirely different matters. Establishing a writing day, what is it that you will be researching, how you will go about the rejection and resubmission process, and writing as a single author, second or third author, in addition to choosing which journals to seek publication is all part of the process. Having an individual show you the “how to” is, in my opinion, critical to the success of a counselor educator. It has only been in the last few years, with the help and support of mentoring and colleagues, that I feel somewhat successful in this particular endeavor.

In a study examining the scholarly productivity of counselor educators, Ramsey, Cavallaro, Kiselica, and Zila (2002) found that although they show high levels of success in more traditional forms of scholarly activity (e.g., journals, books, book chapters), counselor educators are also increasingly involved in other writing activities such as grants, book reviews, and training manuals. These other writing activities may or may not have a positive impact on the promotion and tenure process. The authors concluded that although counselor educators will proceed with a scholarly agenda that is successful for promotion and tenure, their commitment to the field of counseling is also an essential piece to their intrinsic success. Furthermore, the authors state, “that senior faculty encourage their junior colleagues to develop a balanced approach to scholarship that will help them succeed in both the academic and counselor education culture.” (p.53). Another study (Leinbaugh et al., 2005) further indicated that faculty members are motivated and satisfied more in their career by intrinsic versus extrinsic rewards.

Service

As I established my role as an effective educator and fledgling author, I became more involved in the service aspect of the university and the community. This third piece ([1] teaching, [2] scholarship and [3] service) of the promotion and tenure puzzle is somewhat more ambiguous than the first two areas. Service has different meanings to promotion and tenure committee members. It behooves us to find out from the beginning what service means and how it will be examined once a faculty members’ dossier is submitted. Service to the university (taking particular roles at both college and university levels), service to the community (volunteering, etc.), and service to our profession hold different distinctions among faculty. Each has its merit; however, I am biased toward service to the community and our profession. In 2005-2006, many individuals from our profession volunteered their time, monies, and skills to the survivors of many different disasters, particularly the survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. A conference held in New Orleans illustrated that the American Counseling Association (ACA) provided 20% of mental health relief to the Gulf Coast, only second to the efforts provided by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (Kennedy, 2006). My time involvement at all three levels has given me a deep appreciation of building and fostering relationships with individuals who hold different viewpoints, values, and principles. Whether mentoring an adolescent, working with Katrina survivors in the Gulf, attending a workshop with colleagues

regarding diversity on campus, or serving on a national committee, these service activities have facilitated my growth as a counselor, as well as an educator, and person.

Clinical Work

As I begin to position myself with a scholarly agenda and service, I have become much more aware of the importance of time management. These skills also play an important role for those who want to establish a private practice while in a faculty position. This particular area (e.g., clinical experience) associated with being a counselor educator is, in my opinion, an important element to the teaching profession. Do I believe that we make better educators having had clinical experience? Absolutely! Is it essential to the teaching process? I believe that it is. Now, I may receive backlash for this, however, in my opinion it is similar to asking someone to engage in a therapeutic relationship without ever having had the experience. I am sure that it is not fair to either party, just as I do not think it is fair for the teacher-student relationship to have an educator who has never been involved in the clinical world. Without that clinical component, we cannot help our students understand and appreciate the nature and value of our work. The establishment of clinical work while teaching, whether in private practice or a group practice, requires both balance and time management.

Professional Development

Continuing to grow as a counselor and educator takes preparation and planning. Ongoing professional development is an area where I continue to expand. Learning never ends, and the development in our field continues. Therefore, it is our responsibility to constantly be aware of the changes taking place. Whether through reading, workshops, conferences, continuing education units, etc., it is the responsibility of the counselor educator to upgrade and refine skills and perhaps redefine goals.

Obtaining licensure and/or certification is another area that deserves mention. As stated previously, having clinical experience in the education of our students is an important element. As ethical counselor educators, having the requisite credentials is imperative whether working in the classroom or within therapy. Whether a licensed clinical professional counselor, licensed mental health counselor, licensed marriage and family therapist, licensed professional counselor, nationally certified school counselor, nationally certified gerontological counselor, nationally certified career counselor, etc., it is our responsibility to obtain the appropriate education, training and credentials. These credentials, in my opinion, give us credibility with our students, as well as within our profession. Personally, this professional identity and affiliation, whether as a counselor educator, a counselor, or both, establishes a strong foundation and assists us in collaborating and connecting with our colleagues in the different professional associations. As a licensed clinician in two states, keeping current with continuing education units and the field in general inspires me to be the eternal student. I am one of those individuals who truly enjoy going to workshop, conventions and taking classes, not only to meet old friends and colleagues, but to update my clinical “toolbox.” I discuss this frequently with my students and impress upon them that their education is just beginning.

As noted in a study about the career paths of professional counseling leaders, Magnuson, Wilcoxon, and Norem (2003) observed that individuals who are involved with their professional

organizations (e.g., ACA and specific divisions within ACA) feel more connected, learn and grow as counselors when they stay actively engaged.

Implications for Counselor Educators

The ongoing transforming satisfaction in becoming a counselor educator continues to challenge and empower me. Hoshmand (2004) noted that we should have a commitment to our students and profession to nurture and maintain the highest standards. As mentioned earlier, developing a professional identity contributes to this commitment. Future research could examine how counselor educators develop a professional identity while enrolled in masters and doctoral work. Hill (2004) suggested that the literature is scarce in examining the experiences of counselor educators. Through qualitative or quantitative design, examining the experiential piece of counselor educators, and the challenges presented, may help in formulating a model for continued growth, whether for pretenured or tenured faculty members. Specifically, the “why” would be an important facet in examining counselor educator development. As I continue my growth, that question or choice has never been difficult to answer. For me it is somewhat simplistic, I am passionate about the art of teaching and engaging individuals in how “to be” counselors. As Rogers (1961) previously noted, making choices, whether constructive or stumbling, my decision to become a counselor educator has been a journey I hope to continue for many years.

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