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# Pedagogical Perspectives on Counselor Education: An Autoethnographic Experience of Doctoral Student Development

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## Pedagogical Perspectives on Counselor Education: An Autoethnographic Experience of Doctoral Student Development

### Abstract

Are counselor education doctoral students effectively prepared for their roles as instructors? We, as six counselor educator doctoral students, explored the importance of intentional pedagogical training in this autoethnographic phenomenology. Analysis demonstrated how an instructional theory course, experiential learning, and self-reflection contributed to increased self-efficacy as emerging counselor educators.

### Keywords

pedagogy, doctoral students, autoethnography, counselor education

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# **Pedagogical Perspectives on Counselor Education: An Autoethnographic Experience of Doctoral Student Development**

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*There is minimal literature related to understanding what training factors contribute to the development of qualified counselor educators. Specifically, we wondered if counselor education doctoral students are effectively prepared for their roles as instructors. We chose an autoethnographic phenomenology method as a means for exploring the experiences of doctoral students' pedagogical development in a doctoral instructional theory course. We sought to understand the essence of our experience through written reflection, photography, and group reflective processes. Analysis revealed the value we all obtained through the instructional theory course, experiential learning, and self-reflection, which contributed to increased self-efficacy as emerging counselor educators. The essence of our experience is described through seven descriptive themes—delineated as methods of coping and reinforcing. The results demonstrate the benefit of including an explicit pedagogical course in counselor education curriculums. Keywords: Pedagogy, Doctoral Students, Autoethnography, Counselor Education*

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## **The Development of Pedagogical Self-Efficacy in Counselor Education Training**

The identity of a counselor educator is multi-faceted; it involves taking on a spectrum of leadership roles within higher education as instructor, supervisor, and researcher, in addition to integrating foundational clinical experience (Baltrinic, Jencius, & McGlothlin, 2016; Sears & Davis, 2003). Different aspects of training may be utilized more than others, depending on the culture and expectations of counseling programs where doctoral graduates

are eventually employed. Regardless, it is implied that the training includes teaching doctoral students how to teach with the inclusion of developing one's own pedagogy and how that instructional theory is implemented in the classroom. For the purpose of this article we employed the Oxford Dictionary definition of pedagogy as the "method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept" (Oxford Dictionary, 2017, "Pedagogy"). As a research team, we wanted to explore the professional development of counselor education doctoral trainees engaging in a course on pedagogy. This line of inquiry aligns with a call by accreditation standards for an evaluation of pedagogy in counselor education (Barrio Minton, Wachter Morris, & Yaites, 2014; Council of Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016).

Increasingly in counselor education, foundational teaching experience is being highlighted as imperative for faculty candidates to possess (Baltrinic et al., 2016; Barrio Minton et al., 2014; Hunt & Gilmore, 2011; Malott, Hall, Sheely-Moore, Krell, & Cardaciotto, 2014; Orr, Hall, & Hulse-Killacky, 2008). While the prioritization of teacher training versus research training may vary across counselor education programs, faculty promotion criteria now more strongly emphasize a teaching focus over scholarship (Baltrinic et al., 2016; Barrio Minton et al., 2014; Orr et al., 2008). The 2016 CACREP standards reflect this shift, with more emphasis placed on the importance of explicit training for doctoral students in instructional theory, than had existed in previous versions (CACREP 2001, 2009).

The 2016 CACREP standards explicitly state the importance of counselor education doctoral students developing a professional identity related to teaching practices and responsibilities (CACREP, 2016, 6.B.3). This expectation includes the requirement to partake in learning experiences focused on instructional theory and methods relevant to counselor education. CACREP standards are designed to allow programs to determine how criteria are fulfilled; however, the teaching training requirement is not standardized across counselor education programs. Therefore, it is difficult to assess how effectively doctoral programs are prioritizing this component of students' development (Malott et al., 2014) and, relatedly, how prepared graduating candidates are for achieving success in counselor education positions. As doctoral students in a counselor education program, we became interested in investigating what the impact of pedagogical training was on our development as instructors.

A literature review revealed scant research that focused on the pedagogical component in doctoral level counselor education training. Between the late 1990's and early 2000's, multiple authors have identified a lack of attention paid specifically to pedagogy in counselor educator training. In 1998, the editors of *Counselor Education and Supervision* highlighted that pedagogical development needs to be emphasized in doctoral level training (Fong, 1998). Granello (2000) expressed concern that "counselor education lacks a coherent, articulated pedagogy" (p. 270). Barrio Minton et al. (2014) conducted a content analysis of peer-reviewed articles on the scholarship of teaching and learning published by ACA and its divisions between 2001 and 2010 and found only 2.17% of the published literature attended to doctoral level teacher training practices. Within this review (Barrio Minton et al., 2014), pedagogy was most commonly addressed in relation to its impact on master's students' development, but not how doctoral students develop a teaching philosophy that informs their methods (Brackette, 2014; Brubaker, Puig, Reese, & Young, 2010; Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007; Guiffrida, 2005; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). Barrio Minton et al. (2014) also assessed the presence of pedagogical theory utilized in articles and found that only 34 of 230 were clearly grounded in instructional theory while a large sample of articles either only minimally attended to instructional theory or relied on counseling rather than education-based philosophy for the basis of their pedagogical arguments. This review revealed a gap in research focused on instructional training and the need for further investigation into

efficacious methods and experiences. As the authors contended, “There is a need for rigor in teaching about teaching” (p. 162). This assertion was congruent with our study’s pursuit of insight into the impact of pedagogical training on counselor educator development.

Additionally, this call for focused attention on pedagogical training of doctoral students increasingly emerged in counselor education literature between 2011 and 2016 (Baltrinic et al., 2016; Fazio-Griffith & Ballard, 2016; Hunt & Gilmore, 2011; Malott et al., 2014; McCaughan, Binkley, Wilde, Parmanand, & Allen, 2013). Malott et al. (2014) sought to identify effective teaching strategies and recommend pedagogical preparation during doctoral level training, using evidence-based teaching practices outside of counselor education. Fazio-Griffith and Ballard (2016) proposed a framework for counselor education training programs using transformational learning theory. Both articles provided an intentional framework for training doctoral students; however, they were conceptually- and not research-based. Several research studies examined the training practices utilized in counselor education programs with results indicating the significance of different aspects of intentional learning experiences (Baltrinic et al., 2016; Hunt & Gilmore, 2011; McCaughan et al., 2013). Specifically, exposure to teaching philosophy through coursework and practical application (Hunt & Gilmore, 2011; McCaughan et al., 2013) and the role of relationship and mentorship through co-teaching (Baltrinic et al., 2016; Hunt & Gilmore, 2011) were found to positively contribute to perceived competence and self-efficacy of counselor educators in training. While these studies all focused on the training practices of counselor education doctoral students, Hunt and Gilmore (2011) based their recommendations on counselor educators rather than doctoral students’ perspective, Baltrinic et al. (2016) specifically examined the impact of co-teaching, rather than the entire training experience, and McCaughan et al. (2013) analyzed the use of constructivist teaching interventions from a quantitative perspective and suggested future research focus on the deeper experience of “the internal and interpersonal processes that occur when pedagogical theory is both learned and implemented” (McCaughan et al., 2013, p. 104). The results and limitations supported our assumption that the investigation of doctoral students’ training experiences would be beneficial toward understanding what training factors contribute to the development of qualified counselor educators. Therefore, we began our inquiry with the broad question: What are the experiences of six counselor education doctoral students in an instructional theory course?

## **Methodology**

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

The original purpose of this research was to examine the impact of training specific to counselor education doctoral students’ pedagogical development. We determined our question would be best explored through qualitative means, as we strove to understand the essence and influences of pedagogical development. We deemed autoethnographic phenomenology as an appropriate research design for studying our own development. The search for the essence of an experience (van Manen, 1990) and reflective autoethnographic methods (Muncey, 2010) allowed us to examine and find ways to express our unique experiences and access insight into our counselor educator identities. The two forms not only philosophically aligned with one another but also with the subject of pedagogical development. As van Manen (1990) identified, the primary drive behind hermeneutic phenomenological reflection is pedagogical in nature, and self-reflection in phenomenological research is necessary in order to produce valuable analysis. We also aligned with van Manen’s (2007) assertion that phenomenological research should be connected to something deeper than simple inquiry: an investigation that “infuses us,

permeates us, infects us, touches us, stirs us, and exercises a formative affect” (p. 13). This belief matched our desire to explore our philosophy of teaching and what contributed to the depth of our learning.

We decided to explore our own personal experiences of developing an emerging pedagogy as counselor educators not with the assumption that our training as educators would be preferable to anyone else, but rather with the intent to describe how this specific experience impacted our development. Autoethnography as both a method and a process (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 1) originated as a form of qualitative research that celebrated the lack of utility of a single, objective narrative, and strove to bring voice to topics in research that seemed to be absent (Muncey, 2010). While we sought to pull out the essence of the experience that illustrated this stage of our development, the design also allowed for individual narratives to emerge through the phenomenon’s essential themes (van Manen, 1990). Our interest in understanding the key influences of pedagogical development and our philosophical beliefs in the significance of subjective experiences led to the designation of an autoethnographic phenomenology as our research design.

### **The Utility of an Autoethnographic Stance**

In accordance with a desire to understand how our own pedagogical development was affected by our program’s training methods, autoethnography allowed us to access insight into the phenomenon, as both researchers and participants. An autoethnography is defined by Spry (2001) as “a self narrative that critiques the situations of self with others in social contexts” (p. 710). Autoethnographic methods facilitated the examination of building our own individual instructional theory and approach, as well as giving voice to our stories of pedagogical development. Our intent was to share the meaning and growth gained through intentional engagement in the training experience. We aimed to demonstrate the truths of our situated identities as researchers and participants, instructors and students. The following section provides the reader with a foundational context for who we were as researchers and participants.

### **Participants**

Our dual roles as self-selected participants and researchers are a condition of the autoethnography methodology (Muncey, 2010). We agreed on engaging in this study through thoughtful dialogue about the process and implications. We carefully considered the focus and level of disclosure of our experiences. Due to the nature of autoethnographic practice, involving each of us serving as researcher and participant, there was inevitably crossover between the two roles. We regularly discussed the duality of our position in the study and worked to maintain brackets around each function.

The participants consisted of six second-year doctoral counselor education students enrolled in an instructional theory course at one CACREP-accredited university. This counselor education program uses a cohort model; therefore, all six individuals began the program together and were all on the same trajectory toward graduation. The instructional theory course was a program-specific requirement for the completion of the doctoral degree, and all six members of the cohort were enrolled in the class and participated in the study. Four cohort members were enrolled at our program’s main campus, with two students at our satellite campus. Classes were conducted using video distance technology.

All six participants were female, and ages ranged from late twenties to early-fifties. Our cohort represented a spectrum of other demographic identifiers such as ethnicity and religion, however, these facets of our identity were not found to be directly relevant to the

results and are not elaborated on here. A., T., and K. all entered the doctoral program directly after completing their master's degrees. B., L., and S. had spent a number of years as professional counselors prior to becoming doctoral students, and both S. and L. had previous experience as adjunct professors in counseling programs. Regardless of level of teaching experience, all participants identified with having never received formalized instructional theory training.

### **Training Structure**

We include here a description of the specific structure of our instructional theory course and related teaching experiences that were a vital component of our counselor education training. During the second year of study, cohorts are enrolled in a four-credit instructional theory course. One hour consisted of the cohort (four students at the main campus, and two at our satellite location) teaching a one credit undergraduate course, *Introduction to Counseling*. The cohort members took turns facilitating class discussions or co-taught together on certain topics. Although we took turns facilitating each class, all members were present in the classroom and part of the class discussion so that consistent contact with the students was maintained. We were also responsible for developing the syllabus and assignments and evaluating the students under the supervision of our course instructor. Our course instructor also served as our research advisor and is the seventh author of this article. The undergraduate students were aware they were being taught by doctoral students in training and that the classes were videotaped and observed by our course instructor. The remaining three hours consisted of all six cohort members and our instructor watching portions of that week's class and providing feedback to those who facilitated—on both campuses. Additionally, class time was used to discuss course material related to educational philosophy, pedagogical methods, and other teaching-related texts. We were encouraged each week to synthesize the information from our readings, our experiences teaching and observing in the classroom, and class discussions in an effort to further our development. In addition to the undergraduate course, all cohort members were co-teaching between three and five master's level counseling courses with doctoral level instructors as well as periodically facilitating ethics and supervision workshops provided by the counseling program for community mental health professionals. So while our teaching during the undergraduate course was the most often observed, we were consistently engaged in teaching or co-teaching with other instructors in the program. This expanded our learning through exposing us to different course material, settings, and teaching styles.

### **Data Collection**

There were three methods of data collection employed in this research: weekly written reflections, weekly photography submissions, and a structured group process, facilitated at the middle and conclusion of the semester. We developed these methods in an effort to evoke different insights from a variety of self-reflection techniques, validated as appropriate forms of qualitative data (van Manen, 1990). The writing permitted us to privately contemplate and articulate the weekly experience we were having related to our pedagogical development. The photographic data created an opportunity to reflect on our process from a metaphorical lens and capture an image, which visually expressed our development, and how it was impacting us in that moment. The two group processes provided a space to share our experiences with one another through a structured conversation format, allowing us to connect and potentially access additional insight through the co-construction of meaning. The three forms of data also attended to different styles of processing and expressing information,

where participants had the opportunity to capture their experience through writing, verbal processing, and imagery.

The initial isolation of the journaling and photo documentation process allowed us to privately explore both comfortable and uncomfortable feelings. Each week we submitted our journals and photograph to our course instructor (i.e., the seventh author). While we were given an overall grade in the course based on our level of engagement, the journal and photographic submissions were not assigned grades. In the subsequent phase, while engaging in the coding and analysis of data, cohort members were then given a window into each other's experiences through our words and photographic images. The autoethnographic research format allowed us to individually reflect and also be periodically exposed to one another's perspectives. This structure gave us the opportunity to learn and be impacted reciprocally by one another.

**Written reflections.** We completed weekly journals answering the following questions: (1) What are your thoughts and feelings as you engage in pedagogy and in the course this week? (2) What was challenging for you this week? (3) What was most significant for you from this week in regard to your pedagogical development? These questions were developed by the research team, under the supervision of our instructor, who assisted us in establishing appropriate qualitative and phenomenologically based prompts. van Manen (1990) and Muncey's (2010) descriptions of phenomenological and autoethnographic inquiry also informed our questions. We strove to ask questions that were both open-ended and non-restrictive while remaining focused on the essence of our weekly pedagogical experiences.

**Photographs.** Along with journal entries, every week we each took a photograph with a connected caption which attended to our pedagogical development. We had the option to expand upon the meaning of our photographs in our journal entries and to use them as responses to the prompts. Photographs can be used in autoethnography to provide a visual and metaphorical representation of experiences (Muncey, 2005). Harper (2002) detailed the value of using photo or image elicitation in research, pointing out that, from an evolutionary standpoint, the visual processing parts of our brains are older than the verbal portions, and hence images can arouse deeper insight into what we are experiencing (p. 13). Photographs served as another method for sharing, as well as expanding our analysis. Interpretations of photographs were based on the individual's perspective of their submission and related captions.

**Group process.** In pursuit of a richer understanding of participants' experiences, we included two group process sessions as our third form of data collection. The groups provided an opportunity for further analysis (Plummer-D'Amato, 2008). The first session was conducted after six weeks of journal writing, at mid-semester, and the second was conducted six weeks later, closely following the conclusion of the instructional theory course. The opportunity to externally process our individual experiences and also be exposed to others' perspectives deepened the overall meanings we made. We used the same prompts from our journal submissions and constructed additional significance from the discussions. The group process was audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed, first individually and then as a group. Combining our two campuses names, we called this the Meritello process, which we felt spoke to the co-construction of meaning elicited through the encounter.



## **Trustworthiness**

Prior to embarking on this endeavor, we considered how we each served in simultaneous roles as researcher and participant and employed trustworthiness techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to attend to how each position might reciprocally influence the other. Lincoln and Guba (1985) frame trustworthiness as the evaluation of a study's worth through establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This is essentially post-positivist language for assessing a qualitative study's version of reliability and validity, using constructivist language that acknowledges the inherent subjectivity of truth. Techniques outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were employed to demonstrate our study's trustworthiness: persistent observation and reflexivity of researchers, triangulation of methods, member checking, providing thick description of our methods and analysis, and confirmability audits.

The specific strategies for increasing trustworthiness consisted of (a) persistent observation and reflexivity through identifying and attending to assumptions we had related to the study's focus; (b) member checking and providing thick description through continuously examining our methods and staying attuned to each role as researcher and participant; (c) confirmability audits conducted by our course instructor to monitor our research methods and identify any potential diversions away from rigor, or influence of biases; and (d) triangulating our data using three forms of data collection. We each took on the responsibility to approach our research methods with a discerning eye and strove to keep ourselves accountable to any threats to the trustworthiness of the study.

**Persistent observation.** Before beginning data collection, we met as a group to identify our individual and collective assumptions and biases related to the study. Persistent observation is utilized in qualitative research to achieve depth of examination and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The main assumption we identified as we began to develop our research approach was that intentional pedagogical training would somehow impact our development as future counselor educators—although we did not have a preconceived notion of what this impact would be specifically. This was based on both the influence of our faculty and colleagues who were further along in the program than we were and who often expressed the importance of the instructional theory course. As participants, there was no need to bracket our experience in our journal, photography, and group processing, as we were tasked with exploring and expressing our experience. However, when we analyzed the data, we listened for any potential biases or assumptions in one another's interpretations and used the supervision with our instructor to minimize this effect.

**Member checking and providing thick descriptions.** Muncey (2010) spoke to how an advantage of taking on both roles of participant and researcher is that, as participants, we possess an insider's understanding of the rationale behind the study which has the potential to increase our investment in searching for meaning. She emphasized that as the philosophy of autoethnography overtly acknowledges the subjectivity of reality, as researcher-participants we are not purporting to possess an "unchallengeable truth" (2010, p. 33) but rather a personal truth, grounded in a particular time and space. Muncey also acknowledged the potential threat to trustworthiness: that the researcher-participants may be blind to their own assumptions.

Before beginning our research, we determined what distinguished our roles as participant versus researcher while acknowledging that the methodology called for inevitable intersection. Meeting each week for our qualitative methods and instructional theory course served as our primary method of monitoring our roles. During our instructional theory course,

we were primarily in the role of participants, engaging in didactic and experiential learning and reflecting on the process of pedagogical development through classroom discussion and our weekly journal and photograph submissions. Class time focused specifically on the theories, techniques, and application of education as well as what arose for us personally. Time in the qualitative methods class focused on our education and development as researchers, using reading materials and engaging in discussions on how to conduct sound and ethical research. Class time was also utilized for examining the weekly progress in our research and what we were noticing and learning from our study. During this time, we purposefully avoided conversations specifically related to our teaching development. While we consistently revisited and prioritized staying attuned to the duality of our roles, we also recognized the fluidity involved in autoethnographic methodology. Ellis (2000) described autoethnographic research as requiring the researchers-participants to vacillate between observing and experiencing a phenomenon and seeking meaning of the experience. Therefore, our member check process sought to enhance the validity of our finding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), while also acknowledging the absence of a fixed, objective truth (Muncey, 2010).

We further sought to enhance our trustworthiness by externally processing our methods, and then providing thick descriptions of our methods and subsequent analysis. Thick descriptions are defined in qualitative research as providing detailed accounts that allow one to assess the transferability of data findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We tracked our experience through verbal and written detailed accounts that outlined the intentionality behind our decisions.

**Confirmability audits.** Our instructor, who taught both our qualitative research methods and instructional theory course, audited our research process and sought to assess whether our conclusions were grounded in the actual data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the instructional theory course, he facilitated discussions regarding our reading and weekly teaching experiences. As the course progressed, he challenged us to find our own answers to philosophical and practical questions, as confidence and self-efficacy increased. We had taken a course in qualitative research philosophy the prior semester, and so in the qualitative methods course, our instructor served more as a research supervisor than instructor. He encouraged us to determine as a group how to engage as researchers and participants, reminding us to return to the content from the previous semester. He also provided feedback and guidance, to ensure we were conducting ethical research. He viewed our weekly submissions and, while feedback was provided on the submissions, it was reflective rather than directive. The intention was to validate and potentially challenge us to further explore aspects of our experience, without leading or informing us of what that experience ought to be. During our two group processes, our instructor observed the session via video technology, so that he was able to supervise and assess our rigor, but not interject his voice into the discussions.

**Triangulation of data.** We triangulated our methods by collecting and analyzing three types of data, creating an opportunity to expand our understanding of the topic through multiple forms of exploration and expression. In describing the various forms of phenomenological data collection van Manen (1990) asserted that "... we need to search everywhere in the lifeworld for lived-experience material that, upon reflective examination, might yield something of its fundamental nature" (p. 53). He describes the value of lived-experience descriptions, journals, art, and interviewing, as a means to widen and deepen the search for the essence of the lived experience. The journals allowed for private reflection and meaning making to occur outside of the classroom, the photographs accessed insight from a

different, non-verbal part of our brains that we then ascribed meaning to, and the group process allowed us to interview one another and elicit further reflection and felt significance.

### **Data Analysis**

In an effort to grasp the essential meaning gained from the instructional theory course, we engaged in coding practices. van Manen (1990) emphasized the importance of freely searching for meaning balanced with structure and intention. We determined our analysis plan from this assertion, choosing to code the data first at the halfway point and then at the conclusion of the semester. Using van Manen's (1990) holistic, selective, and line-by-line approaches, we first individually coded our own journal and photographic data, as well as individually coding the group processes. The photographs were coded by the captions provided by each individual. The group data transcription, coding, and analysis occurred within a week of each group process.

We each constructed a list of themes we saw emerging from our own data and met as a group to share what significance we uncovered. At this time, we were given access to one another's journal and photographic data and, while the process was collaborative in seeking out meaning and themes, it was ultimately up to the individual to determine whether the analysis made by the group matched the meaning gleaned from our own submissions. This served as a member check. When discrepancies arose regarding designation and definitions of themes, we sought to understand the source of the disagreement. These issues were ultimately resolved by the development of incidental themes that were significant to some but not all participants. Our instructor monitored our analysis process and continuously prompted us to articulate clearly how we found meaning in the data, and how the essential themes were identified and clarified.

During our first coding session, eight essential themes were defined with which all six participants agreed. Our instructor reviewed our themes and the data that supported their formation to check for unfounded assumptions or weak rationale. The second round of coding involved the same structure as the first: individual coding of our own material and the group process, followed by analyzing one another's submissions and determining final themes as a group. In reviewing all the data as a whole, we found the second-round analysis solidified the significance of the established codes, and also revealed several incidental themes. Some themes were reworded or merged together, and the coding concluded with seven essential themes, that all participants identified as having experienced.

### **Results**

As a group we began this research with diverse experiences across our personal and professional lives. Therefore, the process of deciphering what was a shared theme, experienced in varying ways by all and what was an encounter unique to one or several participants was a task that required intensive exploration. Our varying degrees of counseling and teaching experience created nuances in our processes, yet we all identified the value of each training component and concluded the seven themes selected represent the essence of what we all encountered.

### **Essential Themes**

The role and impact of the pedagogical training are elaborated upon through seven essential themes, delineated as methods of coping and reinforcing. While all participants identified with experiencing the seven themes, the interactions between the methods of

coping and reinforcing were not uniform. The methods of coping involve the inner affective and cognitive processes that could be both beneficial and destructive, and also the internal regulation that allowed us to persevere. The methods of reinforcing relate to tangible, external influences that bolstered our pedagogical development.

### **Methods of Coping**

**Fear and self-doubt.** The concept of experiencing fear and self-doubt in our pedagogical development was clearly present in all participants' entries and was felt more significantly in the first half of the semester than in the second. We all described feeling some level of fear and self-doubt as we began teaching and were exposed to course material. At times we simply feared that we were not capable of succeeding as counselor educators, as well as comparing our abilities to that of our colleagues in the program and at conferences. It was also described in relation to feeling responsible for the students' learning. T.'s third reflection highlights each of these facets, describing the struggle of not only questioning one's abilities, but also having that doubt exacerbated by measuring oneself against others' perceived skill, and the weight of feeling accountable for the students' success. "I found that I was comparing myself and just in a really dark place of not knowing. I felt so much responsibility for their growth and started to question my ability to be a counselor educator." K. also identified comparing herself to colleagues as an initial source of self doubt, reflecting, "It is hard not to compare when in such a small group where we see each of our failures and successes, but I know that doing so is not adding to my development." Others described parallel experiences of coming to recognize the lack of utility in such a focus. A.'s photographic submission depicts a self-portrait taken an evening after class where she felt defeated and overwhelmed in regards to her efficacy as an instructor. This followed an earlier teaching experience that had felt validating, but in that moment the current "failure" seemingly erased her earlier sense of accomplishment and progress. She recognized being in a place of self-doubt, but also that she was still in contact with the part of herself that knew she would continue.

**Intentional authenticity.** A generalized motive that appeared throughout the research, was working to find a congruent version of ourselves within our teaching roles. Working to find one's authentic identity, and intentionally using the self as a tool, was a reoccurring theme for all six participants. Some described how, through learning more about themselves, their ability to be intentional in their teaching practices increased. Others spoke about how authentic interactions as instructors became easier as they encountered their fear of failure, while also beginning to acknowledge that they had something to offer as educators. Honest engagement with oneself connected to an ability to authentically engage with students. S. described this shift in her interactions with students by sharing "I feel much more comfortable when I teach, as I embrace integrating qualities that are congruent with who I am." B. shared a similar awareness in the group process, describing the importance of being intentional through "... looking at yourself, as far as what type of educator do you want to be and how are you projecting that when you're in the classroom as the educator."

The intentionality behind our development as teachers was what propelled us to delve intrapersonally into the experience. For example, L. described her effort in being authentic and embracing her decisions within the classroom, even when such choices were at times met with resistance. She photographed a critical evaluation from a workshop she facilitated. She strongly identified with teaching experientially, and the student feedback was a suggestion to provide more didactic instruction. This was unanticipated and highlighted her awareness of how educators affect the world around them. L. described reconciling the feedback by staying

connected to her intentions as the instructor while focusing on the experience, worldview, and values of the student. This facilitated compassion for the student combined with the understanding that new learning can be very uncomfortable, which helped her resist the temptation to change her pedagogy. Instead, she was able to trust herself in continuing to be an authentic professional with an experiential and engaged pedagogy. As an educator, she was learning how to authentically and fearlessly fully engage herself.

**Openness within the struggle.** A method of coping we all experienced and honed as the semester progressed was a willingness to remain engaged in the process of developing a pedagogical identity, amidst uncertainty. The openness within the struggle facilitated our ability to see the function of the discomfort, even as it was occurring. Several participants referenced a desire to begin learning how pedagogy related to an individual's style and philosophy. This was expressed as "learning the secret hand shake" or "becoming a part of the club."

During the group process we reflected on how our growth and maturation could not occur without struggle. Some challenges involved developing the confidence to accrue concrete, theoretical knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge in the classroom. We were discovering how to attend to different learning styles of students, who faced their own set of challenges in processing and internalizing the course content. Other challenges related to overcoming old ways of thinking and being willing to take risks with our students, our classmates, and ourselves, as described here by A. "This relinquishing of long-held beliefs about my capabilities has created more space for me to enjoy teaching, engage more spontaneously, and tolerate constructive feedback."

**Navigating opposing forces.** This theme emerged primarily from our photographic data. While there was evidence found supporting the theme in our journal entries and discussions, it was our analysis of the photographs that first elicited insight related to this theme's presence. T. submitted a photograph she described as demonstrating the choice of interpreting an experience from either a defeated or motivated stance. This metaphor held potency in how it paralleled our options in interpreting our struggles and success in our pedagogical development. We strove to balance accepting where we were at in our process, while remaining open to internal and external feedback that contributed to our growth.

Also revealed through our data was the reward that came from not succumbing to one extreme or another and maintaining a balanced perspective toward our development. Others' photographic data reflected this method of coping, often using light as a metaphor of balancing forces in our lives. B.'s photograph of a crescent moon with the caption "Living in darkness with small glimmers of understanding" illustrated this theme. Two of K.'s photograph captions were "Dark and Light." S. used a photograph, reflecting the same concept through a different metaphor, captioning an image of mountains with "The peaks and valleys balance each other."

Our group process revealed other aspects of this theme. L. described her realization of the interaction and interrelationships between the information that was being provided in the instructional theory course, and the information she accessed from within herself. She first described the value she ascribed to the course material and class discussions. She then contrasted this initial impression with what she discovered later in the semester; that beyond applying the content of the course, we were also being invited to turn within in order to grow as instructors. She described this realization with the acknowledgment

We each have our own development to do and it's not this learning outside, I mean, part of it is learning outside but then a lot of it is looking inside to each of us and for me looking inside to see what is MY pedagogy.

## Methods of Reinforcing

**Impact of other.** There were a variety of relationships that affected us throughout this experience, and reinforced both our learning and our trust in the process, identified by the group as the impact of other. Our instructional theory course was initiated with discussions related to educators who influenced our development and modeled the type of qualities we wished to manifest. We also considered educators who we were negatively impacted by and did not want to model our methods after. Regarding how participants were impacted by one another, journal entries revealed the ways we learned from each other, and how connected and subsequently safe we felt. Throughout our process as a cohort we acknowledged how different we were from one another regarding personalities, life phase, and priorities. Yet through our experiences together we were able to establish a productive and respectful dynamic, which allowed us to work well as a group. Healthy relationships fostered safety in the classroom, where we were able to accept one another's feedback, both constructive and validating. During the first week of teaching, K. described how the feedback from the cohort affected her. "They were very caring, kind, and supportive and that was unexpected for me. I found myself touched by my cohort's response to my teaching and it helped me build my confidence." Lastly there was the impact the students had on us as evolving educators. At times there were challenging experiences with students, commonly related to holding boundaries and navigating value conflicts, which created opportunities for us to learn how to manage classroom discord. More often, we experienced validating, affirming interactions with students, which fueled our sense of purpose and motivated us to continue.

**Growth-promoting experiences.** We discovered throughout the semester that our openness to the struggle created the opportunity for growth-promoting experiences. Our engagement in the training was reinforced through the practice of taking risks and being uncomfortable, and then recognizing the learning that became available through tolerating the discomfort. Participants often described growth-promoting moments as scary or uncomfortable, yet through accessing courage we persevered and experienced the value of taking risks in relation to our emerging identities. Balancing this challenge, with receiving external affirmation that we were developing as educators, motivated us to continue.

Taking risks was evidenced in a variety of ways. Most described trying something new, unique, or scary connected to their pedagogy. Many of us described a desire to distance ourselves from traditional ways of teaching, for example taking a discussion-based versus didactic approach. S. explored such a distinction, reflecting how after years of teaching as an adjunct professor "I felt very much out of my comfort zone taking this approach; however, the value of having the discussion, rather than me trying to spoon feed the information seemed more meaningful for students." The visual data also depicted the impact of taking risks in the classroom. T.'s picture visually represented her experience of choosing to teach on a topic that she feared she was too unfamiliar with to present. Having a subsequently successful experience and receiving positive feedback led to her desire to continue "taking the jump" in teaching other topics that she previously shied away from. While the experiences were numerous and diverse in their impact, similar threads tied together the common theme and impact of growth-promoting experiences.

**Light at the end of the tunnel.** The final method of reinforcement we discovered in our experience was choosing to look ahead and access perspective on what we were moving toward, the light at the end of the tunnel. There were aspects of engaging in the pedagogy course that were described as uncomfortable. Each of us experienced a time when we felt the journey was distressful, and something we had to endure. The specific situations varied from moments spent in heavy “self-analysis,” to “worrying that the feelings would not subside,” and “fears about how to manage uncertainties of the future.” K. stated in her journal, “I am seeking light, but seem to be clouded over with frustration.” B. writes, “I am worried this will always be uncomfortable, and hopeful that I can manage these uncertainties.”

The manifestation of the fear for each of us was like being in a kind of darkness, as if we were in an unlit tunnel. We knew we were on a path moving toward something; however, we had to endure dark moments along the way. Each time we found ourselves in the darkness, we also inevitably found hope. A. reflected on her first experience of showing a tape of her teaching to the cohort and how facing her fear of not being good enough “was hard to encounter and even harder to let everyone see me dealing with it.” She went on to describe how that moment was beneficial to her development, as she realized the level of self-criticism, she was exercising was detrimental toward her goal of becoming an effective educator. She cited the discussion with her cohort as contributing to her increased ability to trust herself and her potential.

The phrase, a light at the end of the tunnel resonated with all of us. Although the path of learning was dark at times, and the future uncertain, we saw the possibility of who we could each become as counselor educators, and we called that awareness light. S. stated in her journal, “Understanding my life’s purpose allows me to embrace the process of change and be open to defining that as I go. My emergent pedagogy is an example of that.” The instructional theory course facilitated the meaning made regarding our pedagogical development.

As a group we chose to engage in this reflective research process in an effort to understand the experience and impact of a focused pedagogical training system, and what themes fundamentally characterized the endeavor. The seven essential themes that emerged from our data consist of the methods and influences that positively affected our pedagogical development and increased our sense of self-efficacy as counselor educators.

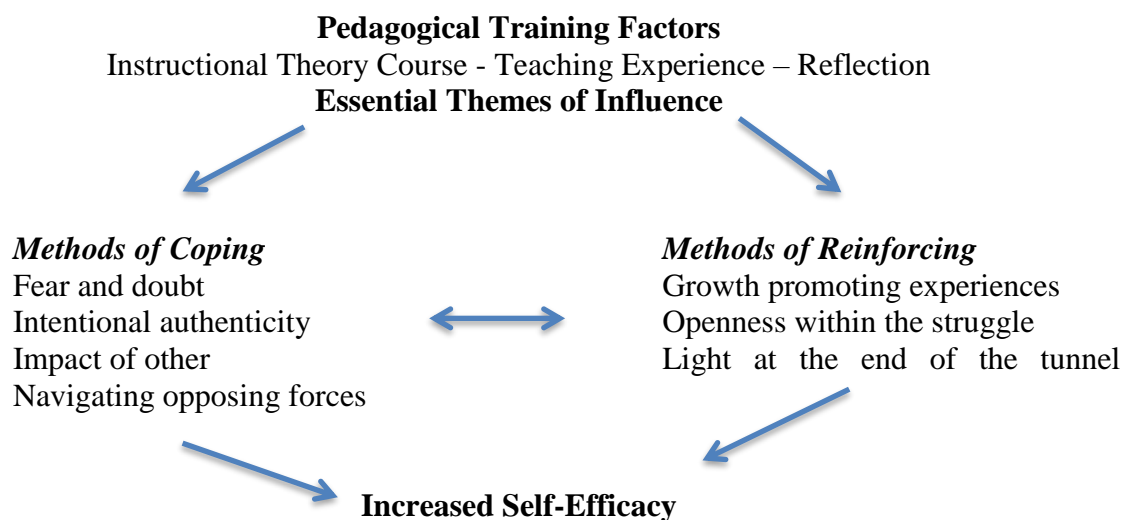
## **Relationship of Themes**

We initiated the exploration in an attempt to understand how our training, specific to teaching practices, impacted our development, without an assumption of what specifically the training experience would provide. From our analysis, we found three aspects of our training: (1) the instructional theory course; (2) consistent teaching experiences; and (3) the opportunity to reflect on our learning privately and as a cohort all positively contributed to our development. Figure 1 provides a graphic illustration of these concepts in relationship to one another. The instructional theory course exposed us to teaching philosophies and a place to explore meaning related to our role as counselor educators. Regular teaching experiences allowed for the practical application of our developing philosophy and experimentation with specific pedagogical techniques. Having faculty and peers observe our teaching and provide immediate feedback facilitated the further synthesizing of theory and practice. The feedback portion of the class also offered a place for us to express our fears and frustrations and have our experiences validated, which we believe increased our sense of motivation and confidence in our own potential. The class discussions and journals invited us to reflect both publicly and privately on what we were learning, struggling with, and who we were becoming. At the conclusion of the semester, we found that the training, shaped by the seven

themes contributed to a stronger professional identity and sense of self-efficacy as instructors. These experiences were foundational toward our development as counselor educators and were aligned with prior research findings of Barrio Minton et al. (2014), Baltrinic et al. (2016), Hunt and Gilmore (2011), Malott et al. (2014), and Orr et al. (2008).

Throughout the semester, particularly in the first half, we all experienced fear, and doubted our ability to successfully serve in our instructor roles as counselor educators. An antidote to the self-doubt was the choice to access patience in acknowledging the discrepancy between who we were in that moment and who we envisioned ourselves becoming. We managed not judging ourselves too harshly for where we were in our development by acknowledging where there was room for growth. Our self-doubt was normalized by the fact that it was essential to all of our processes. Our time spent engaged as a group created an opportunity for shared meaning in owning what scared us, and not veering away from the discomfort of the experience. We believe this contributed to the attrition of fear and doubt in the second half of the semester.

Figure 1: Experience of our Pedagogical Development



Having the freedom to express a congruent version of ourselves in the classroom also contributed to our growing sense of agency. The more we were able bring a congruent version of ourselves into the classroom, the more self-efficacy we accessed. The shared experiences of fear and doubt, and not having to hide that discomfort, as well as the discovery of an authentic professional self, contributed to our openness within the struggle. This struggle was ongoing, even as we begin to define our pedagogical intentions and clarify our educator self within our professional identity. However, we each had actualizing moments, which helped to crystallize our pedagogical intentions. This balancing of using what we knew while being willing to try new implementations again revealed how deeper learning was achieved through choosing to access optimism, amidst the self-doubt. This continual awareness provided the opportunity to acknowledge the darkness of some moments in the developmental process, while also searching for the light that helped illuminate our path. This awareness emphasized the implications of taking risks and negotiating opposing inclinations inside of us.

In addition to these methods of coping, the learning that occurred in relationship, growth promoting experiences, and the awareness of our inevitable goal of being successful educators served as methods of reinforcement that propelled us forward and advanced our belief in our abilities. Risks we took in our roles as educators promoted our pedagogical



development and increased our sense of empowerment. For many, developmental progress became more evident as we connected with our respective instructional theories and subsequently took opportunities to try integrating them into practice. We each engaged in opportunities of trying out new teaching styles or techniques, which were often experienced as both terrifying and exciting. This courage became easier to access as we received more positive feedback from our students and one another, related to the risks we chose to take in the classroom. Receiving support and encouragement from others provided a secure base to branch out to new areas. Moments of witnessing student learning was also described as powerful and growth promoting. As a group we were aligned in the belief that the experience was something beneficial to endure. Through this investigation we discovered each aspect of the training, in conjunction with the methods of coping and reinforcing allowed us to examine our pedagogy and techniques in a safe and challenging environment. The training and attunement to our instructor development led to the increased sense of self-efficacy as emerging educators. Granello (2000) previously called for a clearer articulation of counselor education pedagogy. Our experience demonstrated that while we each came in contact with the seven essential influences in our own unique ways, we all emerged with a foundational sense of our own pedagogy.

### **Discussion**

Our experiences help to answer Barrio Minton et al.'s question of "How can we educate the next generation of counselor educators to help them develop into teacher-scholars?" (2014, p. 175). Our findings not only illustrated an experience that synthesized the significance of the training elements, but that also cultivated a strong sense of pedagogical self-efficacy. Our results are aligned with previous studies that cite didactic coursework (Hunt & Gilmore, 2011), experiential learning (Baltrinic et al., 2016; Hunt & Gilmore, 2011), and the significance of internal and interpersonal processing (McCaughan et al., 2013). While other studies explore certain aspects of training that are found to be beneficial toward doctoral students' development, our research findings demonstrate the importance of all three training components as well as their interaction with one another, and how this directly increased our sense of self-efficacy regarding our teaching abilities. This growing body of literature on the subject of pedagogy development in conjunction with our experience of pedagogical self-efficacy in counselor education has the potential to inform other doctoral training programs on the importance of intentional, structured training methods.

This study used qualitative methods incorporating phenomenology and autoethnography to gain a rich understanding of the perspective of six doctoral students' experience of a pedagogy course. The primary limitation of this study is that it is not generalizable to all doctoral students within counselor education. The results of our research speak to the experiences of six women from one CACREP accredited program. Our experiences may be transferable to other doctoral students, both men and women, in other counselor education programs. We expected to have individualized experiences, which is a notion that is supported in qualitative literature (Stanley, 1993). Autoethnography is posited to be a social experience and that is true for us enrolled together in a pedagogy course (Mykhalovskiy, 1996). We did not accrue our experiences without the influence of each other's experiences, therefore, we believe our results are transferable (Stanley, 1993).

The duality of our roles as the researchers and participants created a challenge of delineating our responsibilities which we strove to effectively balance and maintain through trustworthiness techniques. Triangulation of methods, research mentorship from our instructor, and the use of transparency enhanced the trustworthiness of our research. Having both researcher and participant perspectives present ensured that the data was grounded in

our lived experience, provided opportunities for clarification to journal writings and photographs, and required vulnerability and reflexivity. However, serving as both researchers and participants may still qualify as a limitation of the study. As researchers we consistently discussed how we were proceeding with the investigation while wearing both hats. While roles were continually identified and clarified, the fluid nature of both van Manen's methodology and autoethnography supported a natural movement in and out of these two roles. While there was a certain depth and value found in accessing our own experience while analyzing our data, other individuals' perspectives on the data might have garnered further insight into the analysis.

In recognizing the limitations of this research, we also acknowledge the value in continued investigation of the topic of pedagogical development of counselor educators. Our research allows the reader to gain perspective into our experiences of pedagogical development and can be adapted for use in other counselor education doctoral programs, regardless of program format. We strove to create an opportunity for doctoral students and counselor educators to connect to the personal thoughts, emotions, and lived experience shared, and reflect on their own growth process toward pedagogical self-efficacy. Embarking on further explorations can assist counselor educators personally in their own pedagogical development, as well as fine tuning strategies for mentorship of counselor education doctoral students. Researchers may use similar methods to explore other perspectives, in order to expand the depth and richness of the lived experience shared in this study. The use of qualitative methods may be used to explore the development and creation of theoretical movements, which mirror or contrast the format we were exposed to. Quantitative methods may be employed to explore pedagogical topics such as self-efficacy, and the frequency, competence, and existence of this phenomenon at a larger scale to provide generalizable data. Additionally, it would be useful to explore the pedagogical developments of new counselor education faculty and how they were impacted by their foundational training experiences as educators. Qualitative study, particularly grounded theory, would be useful in exploring the developmental process in other programs and expand upon our experiences of pedagogical self-efficacy. Lastly, further inquiry into how pedagogical training differs for counselor educators, in contrast to other disciplines, may assist our profession in identifying effective training practices. While distinctions between teaching in counselor education and other academic fields do exist, those components were not directly significant to our results. It may be a useful endeavor for future research to focus on the specialized training involved in counselor education and related field, such as the strong personal and professional identity connection, the significance of boundaries and disclosure, and the presence of personalization related to mental health issues that arise for students in the classroom. With a dearth of current research on this topic, the possibilities for inquiry are vast, and more research is needed to expand the current knowledge on the topic of pedagogy in counselor education.

### **Implications**

The examination of the experience of counselor education doctoral students' pedagogical development demonstrated the positive, growth-promoting impact of intentional, structured training related to instructional theory and practices. As participant-researchers, we identified that the instructional theory course, regular opportunities to teach undergraduate and masters students, and reflection all contributed to a meaningful exploration of teaching philosophy and professional identity. The training, as well as our shared methods of coping and reinforcing resulted in the development of a strong foundation of self-efficacy in our identities and abilities as educators. As our group process highlighted, the pedagogical development is "continuing"; we continue to move, breath, and grow as emerging counselor

educators. Having now graduated and moved forward into our roles as counselor educators, we more fully believe that in order to be successful in all aspects of our identity (i.e., instructor, supervisor, and researcher), a sense of self-efficacy is critical. We promote the idea of counselor education programs integrating structured and varied training practices into their doctoral programs of study in order to provide doctoral students with thorough, effective training as emerging educators.

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