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Students with Problems of Professional Competency and their Impact on Proficient Students in Counseling Programs

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Abstract

Students with problems of professional competency (PPC) issues enact a negative toll on proficient students and require increased faculty attention. While there are resources aimed at supporting students with PPC, we will explore proficient students' experience of stress and needed supports as a result of classmates with PPC.

Keywords

Problems of Professional Competency (PPC), Gatekeeping, Remediation, Faculty Support, Proficient Students

Author's Notes

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As a profession, the function of counselor educators is intimately entwined and contingent upon the faculty providing skilled instruction, development, and support to counselors-in-training as they progress through the role of student to emergent practitioner. However, within all professional counseling programs, particular student competency problems, that is, both student clinical and interpersonal performances that reveal an inability or failure to meet essential proficiency standards arise and challenge the faculty as well as the established norms of classroom cohesion (Elman & Forest, 2007; Kallaugher & Mollen, 2017). Furthermore, counseling students with the above noted problems with professional competency (PPC) enact a negative toll on the competent students both in and outside of the classroom and require increased time, attention, and other resources from the department as a whole.

PPC Terminology Explanation

Before progressing to a discussion on how students with PPC present and adversely affect their classmates, it is important to examine and define the above terminology of PPC as it is utilized in this paper as well as its evolution over the past decade. As a prototype to the current and vast permutations of vocabulary used to describe student competency issues, the helping professions as a whole, including medicine, nursing, social work, psychology, and counseling, initially adopted the term *impairment* (Boisaubin & Levine, 2001; Elman & Forrest, 2007). In the realm of psychology, as noted in the 2006 American Psychological Association [APA] Board of Professional Affairs' Advisory Committee on Colleague Assistance [ACCA], the term *impairment* was sourced primarily to describe student deficiencies as a result of substance use (Elman & Forrest, 2007). Following a need to expand this classification, the ACCA refined and widened their definition to “a condition that compromises the psychologist’s professional functioning to a degree that may harm the client or render services ineffective” (ACCA, 2006, p. 21; Elman &

Forrest, 2007). Nevertheless, and despite the above revisions, the original term of *impairment* brings with it a host of confounding problems regarding its use as a label for evaluative processes. The most significant problem created through the use of the term *impairment* as a label to identify problems with professional competence is that the word is included in the definition put forth in the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990; Elman & Forrest, 2007). Therefore, the utilization of this specific terminology (impairment) is subject to all the rights, and protection of the ADA and misuse of the word may have legal ramifications (Elman & Forrest, 2007).

Instead, throughout this paper, we adopt the label *Students with Problems of Professional Competence (PPC)* to identify students with concerning behaviors and to delineate concerns in their professional capabilities rather than labeling them with an *impairment* which is a protected term suggesting that the student may have a disability (Elman & Forrest, 2007). We believe the distinction is an important one for educators because professional competency and disability are two vastly different terms that should be supported by educators in different ways. This paper focuses on professional competence behaviors versus inherent student disability. Furthermore, for use in this narrative, the term *problematic behavior* is defined as “student behaviors that have interfered with academic or counseling function and require remediation” (Kress & Protivnak, 2009, p. 156).

Rationale

While there is research and resources aimed at supporting students with PPC, the focus of this article is to explore the remaining proficient students’ experience of stress and impact to their work as a result of students with PPC (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013). As counselor educators, it is a duty of the position to ensure that student professional competence issues are acknowledged, addressed, and remediated (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016). When professional competence issues

are identified, significant faculty time and attention is spent on the process of correcting the competency issues (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013). Due to the increased faculty time and attention demanded by students with PPC, proficient students may inherently get less faculty time and attention. However, proficient students who may be excelling clinically and academically may have a set of needs throughout their own learning which includes increased faculty involvement in their successes and their progress. When faculty resources are pulled in an opposite direction focusing on PPC, proficient students may experience a gap in their learning needs. Ultimately, the application of this article is to explore the impact that students with PPC have on faculty and peer dynamics and suggest ways counselor educators may support proficient students in an effort to mitigate this impact.

PPC Presentation in Programs

When resources are pulled to attend to problems of professional competence, increased consultation, and creating remediation plans, often there are less resources available for other students who do not require as much attention. These students can be left to ‘fend for themselves’ potentially creating feelings of isolation and lack of support by their program and faculty members. Ultimately, negative feelings toward counseling programs may decrease investment and can impact personal and professional growth in counseling trainees. With decreased investment from students, faculty can begin to experience difficulties in their classrooms, more problems with cohort dynamics that require further time and attention, and poor programmatic ratings influencing interest from future students in the program.

Students with PPC can present with various difficulties in their programs. Barriers to success in counseling programs can be seen through personal characteristics, environmental factors, social experiences, and interactional supports (Bowen & Bok, 2000; Massey et al., 2006).

PPC students are not only defined by competency issues relating to clinical skills and counselor/client interactions, but also PPC issues may center around interpersonal interactions between colleagues and faculty (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). These interpersonal concerns for appropriateness for the profession account for slightly more dismissals from counseling masters programs than clinical skill deficiencies alone. Brown-Rice & Furr (2016), found that of all counseling students dismissed from a graduate program, the most frequently identified spheres for problematic behaviors, as expected, included inadequacy across clinical and academic skills. Nevertheless, it was found that inadequacy in interpersonal skills, inability to regulate emotions, and overall unprofessional behavior rounded out the areas most identified to reveal problematic behaviors or professional suitability concerns. Furthermore, Brown-Rice and Furr (2013) found that a student presenting with PPC concentrating around difficulties regulating emotion, either by suppression or over-expression, was the behavior that most negatively and acutely impacted their faculty and classmates alike. Emotion regulation in particular, while a necessary counseling skill to be measured in the client/counselor context, is a foundational aptitude that is indispensable for healthy interpersonal interactions, be they in a social setting or a counseling program (English et al., 2017). In this way, failure to regulate emotion in a graduate program can disrupt thoughtful communication within and among a cohort or class. A mastery of emotional regulation skills positively correlates to overall success rates in the completion of programs (Brown-Rice, & Furr, 2013). The inability for students with PPC to regulate their emotions can take a toll on the proficient students that surround them. Students with PPC may look to cohort members for emotional support in exhaustive ways, which can overwhelm proficient students, detract from the learning environment, and require them to focus on other students' problems rather than their own growth (Gaubatz & Vera, 2006).

PPC Students and the Impact on Faculty

Remediation Plans

Remediation plans, while lacking a grounded standard in the field of counseling, when implemented and monitored, are currently the standard in which students with PPC are allocated departmental resources, monitored, and evaluated (McAdams & Foster, 2007; Rust et al., 2013). Reasoning for the implementation of these developmental remediation plans range from giving time and space to the student to learn, providing individual learning plans to support students through their growth edges, and to justify dismissal should all remediation efforts be unsuccessful (McAdams & Foster, 2007; Rust et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the creation and implementation of these developmental procedures takes a considerable toll on the supervising faculty as the most common varieties of remediation include increased supervision, course repetition, additional assignments, and participation in personal counseling. All of these interventions mentioned, aside from the last one, gravely impact the faculty's time, effort and empathic abilities (Forrest et al., 1999; Rust et al., 2013). Focused attention towards a student with PPC reduces the time, effort, and attention allotted for proficient students.

Gatekeeping

While the professional counselor educator is ethically bound and obligated to professional standards and codes of ethics regarding the identification of students whose program performance suggests that they may be unsuited for the field of counseling, the required process of remediation and/or gatekeeping is not without debate, meticulous documentation, and legal advisements (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2016; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016; McAdams III, Foster, & Ward, 2007). Within this role of gatekeeper, one of the more challenging dilemmas continually encountered by

counselor educators, across training programs, is how to appropriately and accurately identify, accommodate and possibly dismiss students who are stalled or underdeveloped in their progression towards professional competence (Baldo et al., 1997). Previous research has shown that nearly every incoming class, across all graduate programs, have at least one student who will not be able to meet minimal professional standards and therefore, must be subject to remediation and possible program dismissal (Elman & Forrest, 2007; Forrest et al., 1999). These pervasive and foundational issues include a lack of consensus regarding what represents a competence problem and vast inconsistencies regarding the implementation of evaluation and gatekeeping procedures (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Forrest et al., 1999; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002).

Gatekeeping aims to ensure the health of the profession by controlling access to it through the evaluation of student suitability for the profession (Brear et al., 2008). While the monitoring of competency among student counselors has long been a primary goal of training programs, Olkin and Gaughen (1991) found that the majority of counseling programs rely on students with professional competency issues to voluntarily leave the program rather than outright dismissal. A 2004 study by Vacha-Hasse, Davenport, and Kerewsky found that 27% of the programs surveyed failed to intervene with a student with PPC solely based on the faculties' inability to agree on what type of remedial action or plan to implement (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013). Moreover, the gatekeeping role throughout counseling programs has been shown by Gizara and Forrest (2004) to increase emotional stress on faculty. A 1997 article by Baldo, Softas-Nall, and Shaw noted that faculty in counseling programs may hesitate in dismissing students for fear that the student may levy a lawsuit against the faculty and the university.

For faculty, navigating these inconsistencies requires time spent on gatekeeping at an individual faculty level as well as time at a programmatic level in departmental procedural

meetings (Oliver et al., 2004). The time spent here decreases attention toward proficient students. Without intentional focus by faculty on proficient students' needs, attention toward proficient students can become unprioritized. As the saying goes, '*The squeaky wheel gets the grease*'. The above-mentioned facets of remediation and gatekeeping have an exhausting effect towards faculty and focused attention towards a student with PPC reduces the time, effort and attention to the proficient students (Oliver et al., 2004).

PPC Students and the Impact on Peer Group

Awareness of PPC in a Graduate Program

There is a limited, yet growing, number of studies that focus on students' responses and observed impact on their learning community by classmates with PPC. Through the small body of literature, findings show that across counseling masters programs that are CACREP-accredited, 91% of students were aware of a classmate presenting with PPC (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). Nevertheless, there are no standard protocols in place for students to report the PPC of peers to faculty without shame, guilt, or fear of retribution (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013). This fact is only compounded by the findings of Foster and McAdams (2009) which support that proficient students may face more challenges and emotional stress when responding to classmates' PPC than experienced by supervising faculty. Parallel to the above findings, a 2006 study focused on counseling programs by Gaubatz and Vera, noted faculty reported only 9% of their master's level counseling students presented with PPC. In comparison, the master's level students expressed competency concerns for 22% of their classmates. As a way to explain the difference in perception, the authors suggested two possible reasons:

[1] the students have more constant contact with their peers and see them across settings which leads to a more complete understanding of their peers

[2] Students are more judgmental and harsher critics of their classmates than the faculty (p. 35).

It is the suggestion of this article and its authors that perhaps the discrepancy may be better explained by the emotional and psychological impact that students with PPC have on their peers that is not shared by the counselor educators. Moreover, additional support to the proficient students dealing with classmates PPC may help mitigate their emotional stress, resentment and compassion fatigue that comes from helping or wanting to help a suffering person (Craig & Sprang, 2010; Figley, 1995).

Disruptive Behavior of Students with PPC

Previous research surrounding PPC students recognizes that learning is not an isolated endeavor and proficient students are negatively impacted by the behaviors and conduct of their peers (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Forrest et al., 2008; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). While the above correlation between the impact of peers' PPC to the remaining students is known, it was not until recently that the dimensions in which this disruption occurs were proposed. Recent findings noted that students with PPC tend to interrupt and impact their peers across three broad dimensions: obstructions to the learning environment (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Rosenberg et al., 2005), interpersonal functioning (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Rosenberg et al., 2005) and the relationships with faculty (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Forrest et al., 2008). In regard to obstructing the learning environment, students with PPC were found by Rosenberg et al. (2005) to limit their in-class interaction and, thereby, affect group cohesion. Another study found that overall workloads of all students increased as classroom learning decreased. Both of these effects were seen as a direct correlative to the increased attention necessitated by the student with competency concerns (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013).

Students with PPC also can detract from the learning environment of the larger group if their stage of skill development is significantly behind that of the cohort. As an illustration of this principle, when disproportionate attention is given to students presenting with PPC during early stage skills training, proficient students may be stunted in their own growth as a counselor-in-training by an inability, as a class, to move past basic skill instruction, comprehension, and implementation. The findings of a quantitative study of graduate students in CACREP-accredited counseling training programs by Brown-Rice & Furr (2013), reported 68% of proficient students noted their program of study was affected by specific problematic behaviors of a classmate. We believe that counseling masters students, in parallel to qualitative findings from a clinical psychology study by Oliver et al. in 2004, would harbor and express resentment towards problematic peers. Reasons for such resentment by the proficient students might include increased workload, lost learning experiences as a result of focused attention on the deficient student, emotional/compassion fatigue, and feeling that the PPC student was not properly addressed by faculty, if at all. With all of the abovementioned negative consequences and given the limited research on this topic, it is currently hypothesized that the enactment of emotional, interpersonal, and academic elements that have been evidenced to be adversely affected by a classmate's PPC will inevitably decrease the proficient student's overall functioning, both in and outside of the classroom.

Suggestions for Support for Proficient Students

To date, there is limited research regarding how fellow students should respond to classmates who are exhibiting PPC as well as research identifying best practices and standard protocols for students to report the PPC issues of peers. Forrest et al. (2008), suggested that gatekeepers, "think and act ecologically" in response to emergent behaviors of concern that may

undermine students' competency (p.187-188). These authors suggested that a multi-level intervention provides the potential for mutual accommodation between a trainee and the multiple environments in which they are participating. Additionally, this approach allows for consideration of the impact of potential remediation on others within the training community (Forrest et al., 2008). Understanding the influence that students with PPC have on group dynamics necessitates the review of suggestions to mitigate the negative impacts.

In the following sections, possible recommendations are presented for consideration and implementation in counseling training programs to increase support for proficient students. Many of the suggestions involve increased faculty time and attention as the rationale for this paper suggests that faculty can pull their attention away from proficient students and place it unequally on students with PPC. It is our hope that counselor educators recognize the impact students with PPC can have both on faculty time and on their peers. Ideally, educators can respond and adapt appropriately to intentionally place boundaries around the amount of time spent with students struggling with PPC issues and focus needed time and attention toward proficient cohort members. In this way, the negative effects of students with PPC on faculty and peers can be softened.

Access to Faculty

In an effort to improve proficient student's experiences in their programs, increasing access to faculty may be a valuable tool and a great place to begin. Knowing at least one faculty member closely is correlated to increased satisfaction in one's academic life as well as greater future career aspirations (Komarraju et al., 2010; Rosenthal et al., 2000). By reinforcing positive interpersonal experiences with faculty, proficient students are more likely to seek out faculty support when engaging with the PPC of classmates. This may mean that students are given the ability to contact faculty in a variety of settings outside of the classroom; be that by email, by phone, video

conferencing or in person. Students who have access to informal contact have reported higher motivation and more engagement in their learning process (Komarraju et al., 2010; Thompson, 2001; Woodside et al, 1999). Faculty may consider providing increased office hour times for students to sign up to meet with them. Often, faculty office hours may fill up quickly or may be taken up by students with PPC concerns. Though it is understood that faculty time is limited with a multitude of responsibilities placed on professors, additional office hours designated for rapport building and creating connection with proficient students could be one way to improve proficient students' educational experiences. Investment of faculty time for proficient students in the beginning may lessen the attention necessary to address student concerns as the program progresses.

Faculty-Led Conflict Mitigation

Another suggestion to mitigate the impact of students with PPC on the rest of the group is to provide a designated faculty member to specifically handle conflict and student concerns. This faculty member may best serve the group by informing them of their specific role and inviting students to come and talk with them to address specific concerns as they present. This faculty member might also seek out students to meet with throughout their educational journey to bridge the gap between students and faculty and invite space for students to discuss concerns that might otherwise remain unspoken. The hours spent serving students in this capacity may fulfill requirements for the service pillar of the profession. This designated faculty member also may shift and change each semester so as not to overburden one faculty member by serving in this role semester after semester.

When conflict does arise in cohort or group settings, it can be difficult for students to navigate where to turn for faculty support, especially for proficient students who are not dealing

with PPC themselves. Students might experience a variety of emotions during these times such as anger, frustration, worry, helplessness, and guilt (Mearns & Allen, 1991; Rosenberg et al., 2005). The use of faculty as a mentor, confidant, and protector in this way has been shown to be an important support system above and beyond peer group support exclusively (Komarraju et al., 2010; Mann, 1992; Shore, 2003). Mentorship in counseling programs has been shown to be essential for incoming students' success (Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002). While it may be difficult to hold space for extreme emotions, anger can be healthy, constructive and informative. For faculty, there is merit in understanding students' expression of anger, reasons surrounding the emotion, and its origins (Thomas, 2003).

Solicitation of Information About Student Experiences

Faculty access and representation is one suggestion for student voices to be heard. However, some students may find it intimidating to talk directly with faculty about needing additional support for fear of drawing attention to uncomfortable topics or due to the vulnerability required in advocating for oneself. Some students may also need additional time to process their thoughts outside of a direct conversation with faculty. Providing an avenue to access faculty without having to initiate conversation about concerns may also be beneficial in lessening the burden of students with PPC on proficient students. Anonymous forums of communication between students and faculty may be helpful. For example, counseling programs can infuse an expectation within the program that faculty members formally discuss student experiences each semester. Faculty should meet on a planned schedule to discuss and strategize about how to best solicit feedback from students, perhaps through an end-of-semester survey. The use of a drop-box to solicit student concerns could also provide an avenue for anonymous communication between

the student body and faculty to reduce the intimidation felt by students associated with expressing concern for fear of retribution or dismissal of experience by faculty.

Scott and Rains (2005) identify the necessity for anonymous forms of communication as it has been found to promote open and honest feedback around sensitive issues. Students often have information that faculty are not privy to, yet such information could be helpful to the enhancement of student satisfaction with their programs and with their faculty. Foster and McAdams III (2009) outline a framework for transparency when working with issues of professional competence. They describe a need for a bottom-up approach to communication stating that students inform faculty of their “needs, values, perception, and opinions” which uniquely inform faculty of ways to best construct and tailor the learning environment (Foster & McAdams III, 2009, p. 276). With the use of anonymous communication systems, students could have access to faculty without the risk of identification and simultaneously faculty may be informed on how to best serve the needs of the students.

Infusing Learned Counseling Skills as Faculty

With all three of the proposed interventions to increase access to faculty, it is paramount that faculty approach concerns from proficient students with a nonbiased, nonjudgmental style and demonstrate the skill of bracketing the information so that students can talk to faculty about difficult information without fear of how they will be viewed or skewed for evaluations, future classes, future interactions etc. Not only is bracketing important, fundamental to a bottom-up approach in students informing faculty is the premise that students trust that their input is “welcomed, respected, and valued by the program and academic institution” (Foster & McAdams III, 2009, p. 277; Hurtado, 2007). Faculty must come from a place of curiosity, warmth, and expertise with an end goal of support and protection for proficient students. Increasing the access

for proficient students to faculty who are invested and interested in their growth and development may mitigate the impact that students with PPC have on proficient students and strengthen group dynamics.

As a counselor educator, part of the profession requires embodying and teaching a humanistic philosophy in order to support and reflect the inherent value of other individuals. In considering this philosophy, it is imperative that faculty in counseling programs quickly and effectively address the competency concerns while being responsive to the needs of both students with PPC and proficient students. When students with PPC rely heavily on their cohort members and peer group, this may drain the proficient students. Thus, the responsibility of the faculty is to identify the impact on the peer group that the student with PPC is having and act quickly and decisively to address the PPC concerns themselves so as to mitigate the impact on the proficient students. Accomplishing this task with as much transparency that is ethically allowed can have a number of positive impacts to proficient students. First, it may help proficient students witness and conceptualize what gatekeeping of the profession looks like to inform them of what they may be required to do in their future career (Foster & McAdams III, 2009). Second, it may bolster the confidence of proficient students in their faculty members to show that faculty can manage and respond to students with PPC (Rosenberg et al., 2005). Third, proficient students may give themselves permission to step out of the role of having to caretake students with PPC by giving up this persona to the supervising faculty. With the goal of transparency in what is ethically appropriate to discuss between students and faculty around PPC issues, faculty may find benefit in opening up dialogue to acknowledge changes in the group dynamics. This freedom could allow proficient students space to focus on their own personal and professional growth.

Personal Counseling

Used as a tool for remediation, access to counseling services help promote counselor health, wellbeing, and introspection; it is one of the most widely used remediation tools across all mental health professions (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Rosenberg et al., 2005). When suggested by faculty and when utilized by proficient students with an unaffiliate counseling professional, personal counseling is yet another support that could be implemented for classmates who are struggling with another student's PPC. It would be imperative to offer counseling services that are affordable, accessible, and separate than the university system that the students are currently engaged. This may help to ensure that students feel they can be open and honest about their struggles without fear of ramifications or dual relationships within their counseling programs and faculty.

Group Process Opportunities

Another suggestion for support for proficient students lays within group processing. When students with PPC rely on proficient students to tend to their needs, the resulting impact on group dynamics can give rise to interpersonal ruptures within the group. Cohort or group members may attempt to differentiate themselves from the group by the push of the shear emotional exhaustion that comes from attempting to manage a counseling program, their own development, and paying attention to the needs of students with PPC. A group process method that addresses the students' perceptions of their experiences at various stages throughout their programs could be beneficial in providing a platform for students to openly discuss their experiences. This group process may also serve to recognize other group members' experiences and help to normalize the process. Important to this proposed solution is the idea that this group processing should be directed and led by an unaffiliated skilled practitioner aimed at providing a safe space to bring to light any relevant group

dynamics that are at play on the learning journey. Counseling programs could partner with skilled practitioners outside of the university to lead process groups so that proficient students have a place to talk about their feelings. Both student-led and professional-led group processing could be beneficial. In unaffiliated-led groups, students may feel that their experiences, thoughts, and insights are heard and the relationship between faculty and students could be strengthened. Student-led process groups could be beneficial in providing a space that feels safer for students to discuss what is going on without the filter that may be present when interacting with faculty. A student-led group could be run by a student farther along in the program or in a different cohort who may be able to offer an 'outside' perspective, further normalizing the process. It is important to note that suggested group processing is not focused on specific PPC students, rather the processing should be a supportive exploration of the proficient students' thoughts, feelings, needs and experiences during their program.

Faculty Liaison and Mediator

While conflict is never easy, it generally occurs within any group setting. Conflict between proficient students and students with PPC can become an issue when the conflict goes unaddressed. In counseling programs, when conflict arises, a support for proficient students either witnessing or who have become a part of the conflictual situation is necessary. Therefore, faculty should have a distinct process for handling concerns. Imperative in this process is the timeliness of their response. Students want to know that faculty see the conflict and are competent in handling or helping students through the conflict. An appointed director to mediate or facilitate conflict resolution may allow students to feel supported and connected. As previously suggested by charging a faculty member with an extra duty, this duty could shift from semester to semester throughout the faculty team. Faculty addressing conflict could be imperative to stopping gossip that happens in group

dynamics which could lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection. With an appointed mediator of conflict, students may be able to repair injuries that occur in group dynamics.

While increasing the workload of faculty members is recognizably difficult and the authors empathize with the amount of work that faculty already have, the thought is that by infusing increased faculty support systems for proficient students throughout the program, the overall time demand on educators can be minimized. Investing in proficient students during the program may provide the support necessary so that faculty members are not simultaneously dealing with students with PPC and the negative toll that their behaviors have had over extended periods of time on proficient students.

Ethical and Multicultural Considerations

Accompanying all gatekeeping actions, be they, classroom grades, annual student reviews or remediation plans, faculty must consider ethical and multicultural implications when approaching students with problems of professional competence such as problematic behavior. As with all facets of counseling and counselor education, there are a number of presented ethical considerations at play surrounding the topic of gatekeeping by counselor education faculty. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) outlines specific guidelines to counselor educators that stipulate that counselors-in-training's education is always working toward the welfare of prospective clients. In order to maintain all standards, set in the ACA Code of Ethics, formal evaluation procedures are indispensable to the propagation of ethically sound professional training (Baldo et al., 1997).

When implementing ethical guidelines and creating definitions of what constitutes problem behavior, counselor educators must assess the expectations of their students for professional competence and the intersection between those expectations and students' cultural norms. The social construction of what constitutes proficient behavior versus problematic behavior

is based on the definitions from people with decision-making power in the program and are often rooted in subjective attributes of acceptable and unacceptable (Ziomek-Daigle & Bailey, 2010). Thus, students with differing cultural norms than the those held by the decision makers can experience being labeled as a student with PPC at a greater rate. Goodrich and Shin (2013) suggest that counseling programs should assess the demographic information of their students and which of those students are dismissed, held back, and pushed forward. Should these programs find few students from diverse cultural groups attending and graduating from them, it is the responsibility of the faculty to assess the systemic issues contributing to this phenomenon. In awareness of this, the implementation of gatekeeping to the profession must appear across a number of academic domains such that there is clearly articulated, written, and systemic gatekeeping and remediation expectations across all facets of a counselor-in-training's program (Schuermann et al., 2018).

There is a common fear or apprehension found amongst 38% of gatekeeping faculty members of being seen as culturally insensitive when initiating remedial plans with a counselor-in-training from a dissimilar cultural background (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). Faculty should be regularly consulting with other faculty surrounding PPC issues and decisions regarding dismissal from programs (Ziomek-Daigle & Bailey, 2010). The necessity and ethical responsibility of navigating PPC through a multicultural perspective, while essential, can take additional time, consultation, and attention which can impact the availability of faculty to address proficient students' needs. Therefore, by allowing the themes of multiculturalism, diversity and remediation practices to be interwoven, the gatekeeping practice must be an extensive process beginning prior to admission to a program. In doing so, the implementation of culturally responsive practices may be developed and established foundationally to ensure utilization across all stages of trainee development and lessen the time required for gatekeeping at specific points in the program, such

as practicum and internship (Ziomiek-Daigle & Bailey, 2010). With an understanding of the increased demand on faculty resources and the importance of multicultural considerations, dismissal is a decision that should not be entered into without great consideration.

Suggestions for Future Research

This conceptual article provides an initial examination into the possible impact students with PPC can have on proficient students in a counseling program. Additionally, this article hypothesizes how, when left unaddressed, failure to support proficient counseling students can decrease the skills of counselors-in-training and reduce efficacy through classroom disruptions, interpersonal conflict, and a decrease in overall wellbeing in response to peer PPC in the classroom. There are a number of suggestions for future research surrounding this topic. First would be the further development and implementation of the above possible interventions to mitigate PPC impact on proficient students. It would then logically follow to study the effectiveness of said interventions through the development and validation of an instrument to assess the holistic impact that peer PPC and problematic behaviors in the classroom have on proficient students in counselor master's programs. Through the development of such a measure, the value of mitigating interventions could be properly evaluated and adjusted based on the findings. Finally, conducting a qualitative analysis of proficient students would only work to expand and deepen the experiential understanding of the impact students presenting with PPC have on their proficient peers. This type of qualitative analysis might also explore how the relationship between peer PPC, and proficient students impacts proficient student efficacy in counseling, personal wellness, and confidence in their training, as well as the field of counseling as a whole.

Conclusion

While, hopefully, each counselor educator enters the field to foster growth, provide supportive instruction, and help develop a new generation of counselors, this idealistic presumption is uniquely and intimately interwoven to our role as a gatekeeper. Within all professional counseling programs, particular student competency concerns arise and challenge the faculty's established teaching models, classroom cohesion, and their ability to provide a utilitarian approach to their time and energy (Elman & Forest, 2007; Kallaugher & Mollen, 2017). Independent of the toll that students with PPC enact on their supervising faculty, students with PPC enact a negative toll on the proficient students both in and outside of the classroom (Rosenberg et al., 2005). While PPC, and the accompanying remediation and dismissal procedures that stem from it, has been researched time and again, this article focused on conceptual guidelines and strategies to help mitigate proficient students' experiences of stress, frustration, and anger throughout their graduate programs.

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