

## **Exploring Counselor Educators' Pedagogical Practices: Cultivating Competent Counselors through Increased Cognitive Complexity and Reflective Practice**

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*An extensive amount of research has underscored the benefits of developing higher levels of cognitive complexity and reflective practice among counseling professionals (Buser, 2008; Choate & Granello, 2006; Fong, Borders, Ethington, & Pitts, 1997; Granello, 2002; Pietrzak, Duncan & Korcusk, 2008). This exploratory study examined the degree to which evidence-based pedagogical methods promoting cognitive complexity and reflective practice exist within graduate level counseling classes.*

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**A**s the counseling field advances to meet the diverse and ever-changing needs of today's society (Hayes & Paisley, 2002) there remains a demand for counselors who are culturally competent, ethically informed, flexible, concerned, creative, open to the worldview of their clients', and possess the ability to both communicate and reason on a more advanced level (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002). Perry (1970) identified cognitive complexity as a factor that increases one's ability to embody those necessary characteristics; wrestle with thoughts that are abstract, maintain an internal orientation, look to others less for social cues, capable of internal decision making, comfortable with ambiguity, and having the ability to differentiate and integrate numerous constructs.

In addition, clinicians and researchers have increased their emphasis on the importance of counselors' ability to meet the needs of a more culturally diverse clientele. Skills such as the need to develop culturally and ecologically valid case conceptualizations, understand the nuances of bicultural clients, and demonstrate complexity of thinking

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across cultural lines each requires a higher level of thinking. In order to obtain this higher level of thinking, counselors in training must constantly reflect on one's own values and biases in relation to the client. Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003) capture the essence of reflection as, "a continuous and focused search for a more comprehensive, nuanced and in-depth understanding of oneself and others, and of the processes and phenomena that the practitioner meets in his/her work" (p. 29). Given these increasing demands for advanced skills in clinicians, cognitive complexity and reflective practice are paramount in the education of counselors (Lee, 2005).

Consequently, there is an impetus to understand what counseling education programs need, pedagogically speaking, to establish a quality standard, promote higher levels of cognitive complexity and reflective practice, and produce effective counselors to meet these high expectations (McAuliffe, Grothaus, Jensen & Michel, 2012; Peace & Sprinthall, 1998; Sexton, 2000). This exploratory study sought to gather an initial understanding of the extent to which proven methods for enhancing counselor cognitive complexity (CC) and reflective practice (RP) were implemented in one counselor education program. A review of the literature on CC & RP and currently recommended pedagogy is followed by the design and results of this exploratory study which asks two main questions. First, to what extent are the empirically supported teaching strategies for enhancing CC and RP being implemented in the classrooms of one particular counseling program? Second, are the perceptions between students and faculty regarding how often these strategies are applied different?

### **Understanding Cognitive Complexity & Reflective Practice**

The development of CC directly relates to the development of counselors' expertise in clinical diagnosis and client conceptualization, increased empathy for clients, cultural competency, and decreased anxiety (Borders, 1989; Duys & Hedstrom, 2000; Fong, Borders, Ethington, & Pitts, 1997; Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2009a, 2009b; Granello, 2010). Similarly, reflective practice (RP) is also a component of a counselor's education that is critical to cultivating these desired qualities (Choate & Granello, 2006; Giovannelli, 2003; Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Guiffrida, 2005). Research explicitly addresses the need to utilize a multidimensional classroom approach that engages cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of student learning—specifically as it relates to preparing counselors on the importance of culture and multicultural counseling approaches (Hunt & Gilmore, 2011; Kember, 2009). This underscores the need for pedagogical practices that help develop more cognitively complex students who are able to reflect on their own personal and professional need for change (Toporek & Reza, 2001). While the established multicultural counseling standards (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) offers a guide, the means to achieve these standards is an area that continues to require educators' attention. Deliberate teaching strategies focused on student achievement of these standards should increase the probability that graduate level counselors will have the skills to differentiate more client variables and honor the complexity of each client.

Research expanded to measure counselors' CC as well as to determine what specific, professional fruits came from those counselors who tested at high levels of cognitive

development (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Burleson, 2006; King and Kitchener, 1994; Perry, 1981). Goldberg (1974) determined that counselors operating at more complex levels were less direct with clients. Borders (1989) showed that counselors were less likely to view their clients in a negative way. More recently, other authors (Choate & Granello, 2006; McAuliffe et al., 2012) have noted that CC in counseling has been linked to more refined descriptions of clients, less perseveration on self and inadequacies, increased accuracy of clinical diagnosis and conceptualization of cases, more effective utilization of empathy, and acknowledgement of multi-cultural factors and diversity.

Reflective practice consists of a process that is active, utilized by counseling professionals to recognize how various factors (historical, social, cultural, cognitive, and personal) influence professional insight and application (Schon, 1983). It is a highly desirable skill for all practitioners, but particularly for novice counselors (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012), as it produces an opportunity to join theory and practice by encouraging new practitioners to consider real life scenarios and diverse cultures through theoretical lenses. RP increases counselors' ability to be objective, empathetic, culturally responsive, and ethically committed to the needs of their clients (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; King & Kitchener, 1994; Perry, 1981). These skills are particularly important as distance learning and training of international students increases (Cook, Lei, & Chiang, 2010; Wikinson, 1999). Furthermore, reflexive practice and reflexivity call on counselors to consider their own limitations and areas of strength, something the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop, 2009) specifically addresses as a competence for good professionalism (Mulvey, 2013).

Reflective practice is not limited to merely asking counseling students to spend time thinking about their day at internship or free write on their feelings. RP involves the ability to detect a problem, frame an issue, reframe the issue in a new light, make a decision, and then take action (Whittaker & Van Garderen, 2009). British authors Rose, Loewenthal, and Greenwood (2005) extended this notion using Mezirow's (1990) work to highlight *transformative learning*. Transformative learning is distinguished from memorization or stagnant absorption of information as a critical reflection where new meaning comes forth as a result of challenging, questioning, and changing previously held beliefs and thoughts. This lifelong learning is contingent on lived experiences, deepening thought and reflection to illuminate the true meaning of the particular experience (Rose et al., 2005). Counseling across cultural divides and within diverse populations place counselors and counselor educators at a pivotal crossroad that requires this type of shift in thinking and approach in order to continue to produce counselors capable of tackling today's issues (Cannon, 2008; Guiffida, 2005; Schmidt & Adkins, 2011). This shift occurs through reflective practice and engaging in transformative learning which works to increase clinicians' awareness of self, potential for blind spots, and the need to grow in both clinical understanding and interventions.

Counselor education has always operated from a developmental perspective, taking into consideration cognitive components and reflective aptitude; however, the standing question asks whether (or the degree to which) counselor education programs convey that through their teaching. Buser (2008) wrote that although clinical competence was

understood to include cognitive skills and reflective practice, few researchers have investigated the development of such skills over the course of counselor training.

Research continues to support the fact that multicultural counseling is a complex aspect of counseling that requires just that—complexity of thought and action as well as the ability to change and flex with increased awareness (Toporek & Reza, 2001). In the article *The Complexity of Thinking Across Cultures: Interactions between Culture and Situational Context*, the authors' research supports the premise that differences in cognitive complexity across different cultures is more nuanced and subtle than they may seem at first look (Conway, Schaller, Tweed, & Hallet, 2001). Therefore, increasing CC and RP within counseling classrooms directly impacts the development of counselors who are able to grasp the conceptual framework of multicultural counseling. It also calls for different modes of learning that integrate culturally competent and responsive approaches with clients through self-assessment as well as developing the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and skills required to address racial and social forces at play for clients and counselor alike (Toporek & Reza, 2001).

Still, beyond understanding the concepts of CC and RP and the measurable benefits, there remains the necessity to clarify the degree to which counselor educators remain focused on explicitly promoting students' development in these areas. Research exists to support certain classroom practices which enhance CC & RP. However, research is needed to explore whether or not these classroom practices are actually implemented, especially considering the fact that several studies have shown little to no growth in CC by master's level counseling students (Eell, Lombart, Kendjelic, Turner, & Lucas, 2005; Fong et al., 1997; Granello, 2000; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1995).

The primary research question for this study was: To what extent are counselor educators utilizing intentional pedagogical practices aimed at developing CC and RP with continuity? The second question was: Do any differences exist between the perceptions of counselor educators' and counseling students' with regard to these practices? The researchers developed a survey with items focused on these teaching methods; changed the wording slightly for each version (faculty/ student); and asked participants to share the extent to which these methods were applied in a particular course. Findings from this exploratory study are shared along with statistical comparisons and pedagogical recommendations.

### **Pedagogy for Cognitive Complexity & Reflective Practice**

History and tradition have been the primary pedagogical guidance for counselor educators. However, Arredondo and Arciniega (2001) argued that counseling programs need to reorient themselves to academic settings that reflect changes in the environment and culture by questioning the norm as it currently exists. In addition to questioning the norms as they exist, King (2003) noted that the educational goal of higher education in general is to increase abilities related to the depth, analysis, and critique of information.

Concrete strategies are available to assist counselor educators' focus on the process towards competency and the cognitive development of students, such as more intentional teaching and ordering of coursework (Granello, 2002; Fong et al., 1997). Additionally, the

importance of evaluating and assessing students' current abilities and depth of understanding are critical in optimizing classroom benefits. Bloom's Taxonomy, "is one of the most widely accepted models of cognitive abilities and educational objectives used in education...the model has enormous influence" and it remains a key factor in garnering educational outcomes regardless of the subject matter (Granello, 2001, pg. 295). Utilizing Bloom's cumulative levels of learning (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation), classroom tasks and discussions should engage the hierarchical level that the student is at and push them towards successful completion and therefore increased cognitive complexity (Granello, 2000, 2001). However, research suggests that rather than tailoring classroom instruction based on the current cognitive abilities' of counselors in training and pushing students forward from that point, counselor education programs are largely a function of traditional methods as opposed to empirically based and student-centered (Brendel et al., 2002; Fong et al., 1997).

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has played a major role in addressing concerns within counselor education (Schmidt, 1999); additionally, mandatory supervision probation periods have been included for novice counselors, and the number of hours required for clinical internship experiences has increased over time (Peace & Sprinthall, 1998; Sprinthall, Reiman, & Thies-Sprinthall, 1996). Nevertheless, Fong et al. (1997) found that students' participation in a counselor education program that was accredited by CACREP did not necessarily result in increased levels of CC and there is little research reflecting demonstrable growth in CC and/or RP due to the aforementioned requirements. Additionally, McGlothlin and Davis (2004) noted that "future research needs to address pedagogical practices in counselor education to ensure that the beneficial standards are being effectively relayed to students" (p. 284).

The major theoretical assumption of cognitive development is that all humans progress through sequential stages of cognition as they construct meaning from experience (Sprinthall et al., 1996). Higher-level stages of cognitive development are associated with numerous altruistic behaviors and are also a reflection of the counselor in training's ability to accurately interpret interactions between the client and their world, the client and themselves as counselor, and the impact that has on progress towards change (Little, Packman, Smaby, & Maddux, 2005). Identifying pedagogical approaches said to influence CC is a major step toward understanding and intentionally promoting counselor development beyond basic skills into advanced stages of cognitive development.

All students will enter counseling programs at varying levels of cognitive complexity particularly those with prior exposure to more than one culture or if they identify as multicultural or bicultural. These factors may enhance students' ability to identify, process, and organize everyday cultural meaning (Benet-Martinez, Lee, Leu, 2006). However, pedagogical approaches that evaluate students' baseline, assess their level of engagement, challenge and promote interaction with students and between students, monitor progress, and remove the teacher as the expert imparting knowledge and instead position the student at the heart of the learning are critical to enhance learning and cognitive development (Kember, 2009). Similarly, Nelson, Neufeldt, and Allstetter (1998) urged counselor educators to limit pedagogy that proliferates the "educational bank" where

teachers are making deposits of information and students are saving the information. Rather, empowering students to utilize discussion and review difficult case studies where students must conceptualize, apply theory, and create diverse hypotheses as opposed to dualistic thinking, is needed (Nelson, et al., 1998; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Sexton, 1998; Sexton & Griffin, 1997; Wendler & Nilsson, 2009).

Cognitive complexity is developed by educators through these specific classroom interventions, but also through a classroom culture that is intellectually safe and promotes opportunities for meaningful interactions between students and professor (Briggs & Pehrsson, 2008; Magnuson et al., 2003; Paul, Stein, Ottenbacher, & Yuanlong, 2002; Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989; Rest & Narvaez, 1994; Schrader, 2004; Sexton, 2000). Developing CC in the classroom must involve both the individual and group settings where students receive feedback and are challenged by concerned peers and instructors as well as develop inter (group setting) and intrapersonal (individual setting) skills needed in counseling, including self-awareness (Nelson et al., 1998; Norcross & Lambert, 2011; Whitebook, Sakai, Kipnis, Bellm, & Almaraz, 2009). Opportunities for classroom discussions, online discussion boards, and written work that are shared in a group setting increases CC by looking for diverse options to a situation in a differentiated and professional manner (Giovannelli, 2003; Kelly, 1955; Reed, 2010; Sells, Tan, Brogan, Dahlen & Stupart, 2011).

As mentioned above, reflection is ongoing work to more fully understand self, others, and the world and the intricate places that those may interact, conflict, exclude, or complicate. This critical, continual self-reflection is an important distinction between counselors who continued to develop and grow professionally versus those who face professional stagnation and burnout (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). Reflection also plays a key role in the development of cultural competency and awareness in novice counselors. West-Olatunji, Goodman, Mehta and Templeton (2011) identified and emphasized the importance of improving counseling students' cultural responsiveness through opportunities for self awareness and reflection. This awareness and reflection aids in the growth of cultural competence as it sheds light on areas of personal bias, socially embedded schools of thought, and unconscious perspectives. Ultimately this moves counselors to more socially just approaches and actions (D'Andrea, 2005; Ivey & Collins, 2003; West-Olatunji et al., 2011).

Ostermann and Kottkamp (2004) depict a four step reflective cycle that involves the counselor first *identifying a problem*. Then they *observe and analyze the situation* (questioning assumptions and critiquing previously held beliefs). The third step is *abstract re-conceptualization* wherein innovative thinking and understanding come forth. Finally, the fourth step, *active experimentation*, involves putting new notions into practice (NICE, 2012). King and Kitchener (1994) are renowned researchers in the area of reflection, establishing the *Reflective Judgment Model* somewhat based on Dewey's work (1933). This seven level model used with adolescents is broken down into pre-reflective thinking, quasi-reflective thinking, and reflective thinking (King, 2009; King & Kitchener, 1994).

While intellectual disposition, personality traits, social, cultural, and historical variables contribute to the development of reflective judgment, intentionally targeting these skills and creating a pedagogical environment conducive to reflection enhances a

student's level of reflective judgment (Argyris, 2006; Fischer, Bullock, Rosenberg, & Raya, 1993; Fischer & Lamborn, 1989; Schrader, 2004). This time for reflection on a new situation or dilemma (reflection *on* action) ideally occurs first in an artificial [educational] setting where there is support for the learner and thus safety. Making sense of unknown situations and applying resources creatively to work through non-routine circumstances begins to stretch students' ability to tolerate doubt and uncertainty (Argyris, 2006, Neufeldt, Karno, & Nelson, 1996) and eventually prepares them to engage in this same medium outside the classroom, perhaps in a clinical setting (reflection *in* action). RP can be developed in numerous ways such as the frequent use of Socratic questioning that encourages self-initiated discovery (Overholser, 1991) as well as the use of journals and frequent, individualized feedback (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012). King and Kitchener (2002) provide seven concrete strategies (see Figure 1) for counselor educators looking to encourage RP in their students.

Figure 1 *Encouraging Reflective Practice*

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1. Exhibit respect for students to foster challenging discussions and parse out difficult topics
  2. Conduct classroom discussions; provide follow-up resources to process the information.
  3. Provide frequent occasions to develop/defend opinions via the analysis of others' work/ideas
  4. Educate about how to collect/evaluate the relevance of information and create informed judgments about the material.
  5. Consistently offer feedback that attends to *both* cognitive *and* emotional needs and support.
  6. Assist in judgment areas of doubt/hesitation and how to create a systematic approach to gaining certainty or understanding in these times and places.
  7. Provide multiple settings for students to develop reasoning abilities in order to garner confidence and practice the application of thinking and reflection skills.
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*Adapted from: King & Kitchener, 2002*

A student centered approach must be at the heart of pedagogical interventions aimed at developing reflective judgment. Samuelowicz and Bain (2001) point out that as part of developing professional expertise, students should learn to reflect on their approaches, to judge what works and what does not, and to identify the reasons for

successes or failures. To illustrate this learning approach Miller (2001) used the effective analogy of a coach who watches a novice runner and then helps merge natural ability with improvements of form. Similarly, King (2003) wrote that teachers must abandon the “I pitch, you catch” view of knowledge acquisition” (p. 24) and put the student in a reflective and central role in the learning process.

The extent to which pedagogical practice aimed at CC and RP must be implemented for growth to occur is not directly addressed in the literature, as far as recommendations for specific percent of classroom time or number of occurrences per semester. The research does indicate that continuity is necessary noting that at least six months are needed for growth in the complexity of cognitions and to develop the second nature habituation of reflection (Cannon, 2008; Rest & Narvaez, 1994). In addition to those pedagogical recommendations for cognitive complexity, research directly states that it is in the best interest of counselors to “work towards understanding clients who come from non-dominant cultures.” Research continues to state that this understanding is increased *through reflection* or “actively becoming aware of assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, preconceived notions, and personal limitations” (Fawcett, Briggs, Maycock, & Stine, 2010, p. 3) In short, the need is for sustained classroom pedagogy that cultivates counselors who reflect an understanding of their own worldviews and the ability to cognitively process the way that impacts client care (Fawcett, et al., 2010).

These developmental points are clearly important and the strategies known to target these developmental needs in counselors must be explicitly and intentionally applied. This inquiry sought to gather information which might enhance our understanding of the techniques currently utilized so that educators might begin to increase or decrease certain practices as well as hone in on the amount of shaping and explicit teaching needed in these areas-- something that the research has yet to shed light upon.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were graduate level counseling students and professors currently enrolled and teaching in a master’s in counseling program at a private university in the Northeastern United States. Of the 224 students currently enrolled in classes, 90.2% (n=202) participated in the study and 183 students generated usable data. Of the 22 courses being taught during the semester, 18.6% (n=34) of the 183 student participants were male and 80.9% (n=148) were female; one student did not respond to this question. Of the participants, 170 (92.9%) were Caucasian, 4 (2.2%) African American, 3 (1.6%) Hispanic, and 5 (2.7%) identified as “other.” One student did not respond to this question. Regarding age range, 61.7% of the participants were 20-25, 19.7% were 26-30, and 21% were 31-40. Of the 183 students 78.7% were full time and 19.1% were part time. Faculty participants (N=19) were 57.9% (n=11) male and 42.1% (n=8) female and their ages ranged from 31- 70 with the majority (47%) being between 61-70 years old, with 94.7% (n=18) being Caucasian. Most faculty (89.5 %) faculty reported full time status. Additional



information including student progress within the program, years faculty members have taught, and program alignment can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1** Participant characteristics

Characteristics (n=202)	Students (n=183)		Faculty (n=19)	
		%		%
<b>Credits Taken</b>				
Under 12	69	37.7	-	-
12-24	29	15.8	-	-
24-36	25	13.7	-	-
36-48	50	27.3	-	-
48+	10	5.5	-	-
<b>Years Taught</b>				
5-10	-	-	3	15.8
11-20	-	-	10	52.6
21+	-	-	6	31.6
<b>Program</b>				
Clinical Mental	62	33.9	3	15.8
School	106	57.9	11	57.9
Career	0	0.0	1	5.3
Addictions	0	0.0	3	15.8
Other	15	8.2	1	5.3

## Measures

In order to answer the research questions, participants completed one of two versions of the *CC and RP Survey* (CCRP) depending on their status, either the *Counseling Student* version (CCRP-S) or the *Counselor Educator* version (CCRP-CE). The content of each statement remained the same except for the sentence stem (i.e. Student version: "The professor of this class asks me to self-evaluate my progress in the course;" Faculty version: "I ask students to self-evaluate their progress in this course." The CCRP collected information in three areas: participant demographics, evaluation and assessment of CC and RP, and pedagogical practices that promote CC and RP.

Directly related to the research questions, the CCRP was developed by the researchers primarily to collect requisite information regarding the implementation of classroom teaching practices related to CC & RP. Secondly, gaining the perspective of both students and faculty would give researchers the opportunity to compare responses on parallel questions from educators and students within the same course to evaluate similarities and differences in participant responses about how often these practices are

utilized. The survey questions were developed utilizing the literature that highlights numerous recommended classroom practices for enhancing CC and RP with counselors in training such as the use of journaling, case studies, assessing level of engagement, monitoring progress, the use of discussion with peers, writing as a means of reflection, and experiencing cognitive dissonance (Buser, 2008; Fischer & Pruyne, 2002; Giovannelli, 2003; Granello, 2002; Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Hawley, 2006; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Orr, Hall, & Hulse-Killacky, 2008; Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1993; Whittaker & Van Garderen, 2009). Drawing from the literature, CCRP survey questions were created to explore counselor educators' classroom practices that target skills beyond basic comprehension, such as synthesis and analysis (Granello, 2000).

Educational research (Kember, 2009) continuously emphasizes the need to assess the engagement level of students so that optimal learning (and thus growth in CC and RP) can take place. This emphasis on *evaluation and assessment* (EA) of CC & RP and general level of student ability and engagement encouraged the researchers to include additional questions specifically focused on this area. This section of the survey sought participant feedback through questions such as: I survey students (my professor surveys me) in writing for feedback regarding their (my) level of engagement with the course; I assess (my professor assesses) the current level of individual student ability and tailor(s) assignments to challenge students at their individual academic/ professional level. Participants were given Likert Scale response options about frequency: (1) *Always*, (2) *Sometimes*, (3) *Rarely*, (4) *Never*.

The principle component of the survey is focused on explicit teaching practices from the literature (Kember & Kwan, 2000; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Schmidt & Adkins, 2011). Additionally, the research that addressed classroom pedagogy specifically identified the use of journals, classroom discussions, debates with peers, written justification of one's opinion, Socratic questioning, as well as others. This research informed the Pedagogy (P) section of the survey that aimed to explore the degree to which these various teaching strategies were taking place. Survey questions about pedagogy (P) quantified frequency of implementation based on a traditional 15 week graduate school semester: (1) *Each Class* (100% of the time), (2) *Every other class* (75% of the time), (3) *4 times a semester* (50% of the time), (4) *Once a semester* (25 % of the time), (5) *Never* (0% of the time). (The main idea of each survey question asked can be seen in Tables 2 and 3.)

The survey was developed over a ten month period which included an iterative process of locating in the literature the most frequently cited teaching strategies meant to enhance CC & RP, including those strategies in the survey, reviewing and piloting the survey questions with graduate students and a counselor educator, and making changes based on feedback. This is the first time this measurement tool has been used in research. Chronbach's alpha for the 15 items of the CCRP survey was .849. The EA subscale consisted of 4 items ( $\alpha = .71$ ), and the P subscale consisted of 11 items ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

## **Procedure**

A convenience sample of counseling students and faculty was utilized by notifying instructors of the study being conducted. Counseling professors were invited to allot time during each of their classes for students, as well as themselves, to complete a brief survey. All participants agreeing to participate were asked to read and sign the informed consent explaining the purpose of the research, what was expected of the participants, the procedures, and issues regarding the confidentiality of data. Because a percentage of the participants in the sample were currently enrolled or instructing multiple courses, some participants filled out the survey for more than one course; however, each survey explicitly stated that responses requested pertained to the particular course that they were completing the survey in. Each faculty member was given one CCRP-CE for themselves as the instructor, and the correct number of copies of the parallel CCRP-S for each of their students.

Data was collected from nineteen different counselor education courses. The CCRP surveys were distributed during the final weeks of the academic semester in order to ensure both students and faculty had experienced a sufficient level of time in the particular course they were evaluating. Students completed the questions within the course that they were surveying and were given as much time as they needed. Most participants finished in approximately ten minutes. Surveys were collected and sealed in an envelope and returned to the researcher, yielding a 90.5% response rate.

## **Data Analysis**

Each survey was examined for completeness prior to data entry. Any CCRP questionnaires that were more than 75 percent incomplete were not included; nine surveys were removed for this reason. Descriptive statistics were performed for all the variables related to demographics. Means and percentages were computed for sex, age, ethnicity, employment/student status, time within counseling program (as teacher or student), and concentration within the counseling program. Means and percentages were also computed for responses to each survey item as well as each survey section in order to explore the first research question. Frequencies were utilized to determine the extent to which CC and RP were evaluated or assessed, and the extent to which teaching practices were being employed. The questionnaires were coded and organized so that various comparisons could be made; specifically related to the second research question, researchers were interested in differences between faculty members' responses and students' responses across courses. *T*-tests were used for this comparison with significance set at .05.

## **Results**

The first research question explored the degree to which these counselor educators are utilizing intentional teaching practices aimed at developing CC & RP with continuity. As seen in Table 2, results for the evaluation and assessment (EA) section show that students and faculty reported that EA techniques were utilized an average of *sometimes*.

Table 2 Section "EA" means

Item	Student <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Faculty <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
	(n=182)	(n=19)
Ask for feedback at least 2X semester	1.8 (.86)	1.3 (.48)
Survey level of engagement	2.3 (1.0)	1.8 (.83)
Assess current level, tailor instruction	2.4 (1.1)	2.1 (.97)
Self-evaluate progress	2.0 (.96)	2.1 (1.2)
Total EA	2.1 (.71)	1.8 (.57)

*NOTE:* EA: (1-4): (1) Always, (2) Sometimes, (3) Rarely, (4) Never

Table 3 displays student and faculty mean scores within the pedagogical practices (P) section representing the extent to which participants believed certain pedagogical practices that promote CC and RP, were applied in these particular courses. Students and faculty reported that these teaching strategies occurred on average about four times a semester. Importantly, some of the more often recommended strategies for enhancing CC and RP were applied minimally within this particular sample. For example, participants reported that four of these methods (bolded in Table 3) were occurring as little as once a semester. A review of the mean scores shows that for 5 out of the 10 questions, students' report that these particular classroom practices occurred less often than the corresponding faculty member's reported them occurring within the same class.

Table 3 Section "P" means

Item	Student <i>M</i>	Faculty <i>M</i>
	( <i>SD</i> )	( <i>SD</i> )
	(n=182)	(n=19)
Experience cognitive dissonance	<b>3.9</b> (1.0)	<b>4.1</b> (1.2)
Provide individual, timely feedback	<b>3.7</b> (1.4)	3.4 (1.5)
Make explicit connections between material and field	1.9 (1.1)	1.6 (.96)
Examine case studies and apply knowledge	2.8 (1.3)	2.6 (1.3)
Construct inform opinion on debatable counseling topic	3.0 (1.4)	3.1 (1.4)
Analyze position of classmates, compare contrast with personal opinion	3.2 (1.4)	3.1 (1.6)

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Write papers with a critical eye	2.8 (1.2)	3.4 (1.0)
Attend to emotions and cognitions in reflections	<b>3.8</b> (1.4)	<b>3.9</b> (1.4)
Prioritize theory or skill to use	2.8 (1.4)	3.0 (1.2)
Debate relevant topics with peers	3.3 (1.4)	3.2 (1.6)
Assess progress towards personal/professional goals	2.6 (1.3)	<b>4.2</b> (1.2)
Total P	3.1 (1.3)	3.2 (1.3)

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*NOTE:* P: (1-5): (1) Each Class, (2) Every other class, (3) 4 times a semester, (4) Once a semester, (5) Never

Secondly, the researchers sought to explore potential differences within these counselor education classrooms between the self-report of the instructors and the experience of the students with regard to both the EA and P sections. Multiple *t*-tests were used to determine whether the student and faculty responses on the different sections of the survey as well as each of the individual survey items were significantly different. The first *t*-test compared all students and faculty participating in the study. Both categories (EA, P) of the CCRP showed statistically significant differences. The faculty's self-reported frequency of evaluation and assessment (EA) of CC and RP were significantly greater than students' reporting of their experiencing those methods ( $t(196) = 2.38, p < .05; d = .523, r = .253$ ). The comparison completed for the P section also showed a significant difference between students and faculty, but not in the same direction as the EA section. Counselor educators reported implementing pedagogy that targets CC and RP significantly less often than students' reported they had experienced the pedagogical approach within the same classrooms ( $t(184) = -2.54, p < .05; d = .543, r = .262$ ).

Another *t*-test was performed to determine differences between student and faculty responses on the specific questions posed in each section. Table 5 shows a significant difference between perceptions of student and faculty for four of the questions. The reporting on the specific questions confirms the general trends found in the initial comparison, yet offers additional insight. For the EA section, there is a significant difference between student and faculty perceptions about the occurrence of asking for feedback from students at least twice a semester and surveying the students' level of engagement with the course material. Faculty reported both occurring at a higher frequency than students reported experiencing them. Finally, for the specific pedagogical practice of writing papers with a critical eye and assessing progress towards personal goals, students reported them happening more often than educators reported requiring them.

Table 4 *T-test Students and Faculty*

Section	Question	t-score	Mean Diff.	<i>d</i>	<i>r</i>
EA	Ask for feedback at least 2X semester	3.99*	.511	.718	.338
	Survey level of engagement	2.37*	.487	.846	.390
	Assess current level, tailor instruction	1.56	.370		
	Self-evaluate progress	-.087	-.025		
P	Experience cognitive dissonance	-.679	-.193		
	Provide individual, timely feedback	.863	.311		
	Make explicit connections between material field	1.54	.365		
	Examine case studies and apply knowledge	.366	.118		
	Construct informed opinion on debatable counseling topic	-.183	-.060		
	Analyze position of classmates, compare contrast with personal opinion	.324	.127		
	Write papers with a critical eye	-2.51*	-.626	-.543	-.262
	Attend to emotions and cognitions in reflections	-.970	-.335		
	Prioritize theory or skill to use	-.601	-.182		
	Debate relevant topics with peers	.279	.107		
	Assess progress towards personal/professional goals	-5.39*	-1.54	-1.28	-.539

\*p &lt; .05

### Discussion

Faculty and students within this sample reported an overall moderate use of the teaching strategies (P) recommended for promoting CC and RP. However, when examined by individual survey items, it becomes clear that certain critical teaching strategies were not being utilized, specifically: enabling opportunities for students to experience cognitive

dissonance (about once a semester), providing individualized and timely feedback (about once a semester), and attending to both cognitive and emotional factors in student reflections (about once a semester). Because these are three of the included in some of the recommended interventions in the literature around developing CC & RP, these results reveal that faculty within this sample were not applying some of the empirically supported practices aimed at developing CC and RP. While these are observations from self-report surveys from a small (inherently limited) convenience sample at one university and require confirmation through replication, the data collected might begin to illustrate the extent to which best practices are being applied in one counselor education setting and potentially act as a guide for further exploration of this element of counselor training. While the authors acknowledge that this very limited sample can by no means speak to all university trends, these findings tend to support the calls in the literature for creativity and greater attention to intentional pedagogy (Chang, 2011; Guiffida, 2005; Hawley, 2006; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Kiener, 2010; Westergaard, 2012) and more thoughtful classroom and program structure (Briggs & Pehrsson, 2008; Magnuson et al., 2003; Schrader, 2004; Sexton, 2006). Therefore, these authors offer some specific implications born from this exploratory inquiry.

### **Implications of the Study**

#### ***Engage, Stretch, and Build Upon Student Knowledge***

This study sought to explore the degree to which critical classroom teaching practices were occurring in one master's level counseling program. Kember (2009) identified teaching practices of award winning educators stating that: "Meaningful learning is most likely to occur when students are actively engaged with a variety of learning tasks" and discussion is an important learning activity (Kember & McNaught, 2007, p. 46). This implication hinges on the previously stated concept of the student-centered learning environment. Pedagogically sound practices that provide students with the opportunity to be actively engaged, identify, explore, and deconstruct aspects of counseling, align with the constructivist approach. These strategies do so by engaging in the meaning making process including, but not limited to, activities such as conducting case analyses from a cultural perspective or presenting dilemmas that force students to grapple with previously held beliefs about self or others (McAuliffe et al., 2012).

In this way, knowledge is subjective and varies depending on the mental construction of the observer (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000); therefore, learning occurs when the student is actively engaged in individual and collective reflection and discovery (Mezirow, 1997). Behaviorist transmission of facts alone fails to cultivate awareness and promote the reflection needed for the professional growth of a counselor. The absorption of information regarding counseling and various interventions can be rapid, whereas a judgment about when to apply the intervention matures slowly (Nelson et al., 1998). The learner centered model that focuses on developing expertise through making meaning and grappling with novel situations facilitates understanding and higher order thinking over time (Kember 2009; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001) and more closely resembles the situations

encountered by a counselor and the skills needed to be successful (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 1999).

The importance of meaningful discussion, student engagement, and classroom interest level are often overlooked. For example, within the findings presented here, students' report that they were asked to analyze the position of their classmates and then compare and contrast that with their own opinion only about *four times during the semester*, an activity that generates discussion as well as engagement. Specific interventions and activities such as classroom discussions, Socratic-questioning, journal writing, individual personal reflection, and reflecting teams are educational methods that engage varied learning styles and provide feedback on reflection and student connection (Guiffreda, 2005; McAuliffe, et al., 2012; Minor, Pimpleton, Stinchfield, Stevens & Othman, 2013; Overholser, 1991).

Journal writing can encourage students to reflect on personal, classroom, or clinical experiences and, when possible, offer stimulating prompts that direct students writing into new growth areas. Informed by Bloom's Taxonomy as an intentional tool for targeting student development (Granello 2000, 2001), a possible synthesizing activity that involves personal reflection, writing, and feedback is the use of videotaped counseling sessions to promote reflection on internal processes that occurred during the session (Stinchfield, Hill & Kleist, 2010). This is also an effective way to incorporate real-life dilemmas, situations, and issues pertaining to culture, bias, and transference.

### ***Utilize Assessment to Drive Instruction***

Within the evaluation and assessment section of this exploratory study there was a significant difference between the faculty and student responses when surveyed about how often they ask, or are asked, about level of engagement with the course and the material presented—where students say it happened less than faculty reported. In addition, the findings from the survey show that faculty *sometimes to rarely* assessed students' current ability level in order to drive instruction. Level of engagement can be increased and learning enhanced by using a measure of cognitive complexity such as the W. H. Crockett's Role Category Questionnaire (Crockett, Press, Delia, & Kenney, 1974), the Learner Environment Preferences (Moore, 1989), or the Counselor Cognitions Questionnaire (Welfare & Borders, 2010). Supervisors can garner individual supervisee levels of cognitive functioning and use that information to adjust their pedagogical methods accordingly (Granello, 2002; Welfare & Borders, 2010). Granello (2000) suggests supervisors could also apply Bloom's Taxonomy, and then select an appropriate intervention to provide optimum structure to encourage growth. Pedagogy is then sculpted around the information gained from cognitive assessments—challenging students to move their epistemological position, push capacity, and encourage cognitive growth.

Regarding measures of reflection, Mann, Gordon, and MacLeod (2009) completed a systematic review of reflection within healthcare professions with one area of focus on whether or not level, frequency, and depth of reflection can be assessed. They found that several measures for reflection exist, while each admittedly possesses limitations and needed further research. Kember and Kwan (2000) used a 16-item survey questionnaire to



assess level of reflective thinking in students, specifically measuring four constructs as described by Mezirow (1991): habitual action (activity that happens automatically), understanding, reflection, and critical reflection (Mann et al., 2007). Other measures include the *Reflection Questionnaire* (Kember & Kwan, 2000) and a semi-structured reflection questionnaire used by Mamede and Schmidt (2004).

### ***Incorporate Various Forms of Feedback***

Feedback can be critical to growth in both CC and RP and extremely effective after the completion of role-plays and videotaped sessions to monitor student growth and development (Duys & Hedstrom, 2000; Kiener, 2010; Stinchfield et al., 2010). According to Schmidt and Adkins (2012), the use of personalized feedback for student growth is central to the educators' role since the students' ability to reflect critically cannot be assumed (Reiman, 1999).

Graduate level students require a depth of training and professionalism that necessitates the input of a more knowing other, presumably the counselor educator (Briggs & Pehrson, 2008; Westergaard, 2012). Papers that go without meaningful comments, journals that come back with little to no responses, and role plays that hang in the balance without critique after they are completed remain unfulfilled learning opportunities. Kiener (2010) asked, "has education evolved to an unbalanced emphasis on grading rather than on effective feedback?" And he suggests combating that imbalance by creating a "culture of continual feedback and revision" (p. 69). Schmidt and Adkins (2012) also noted that: "when students received only minimal feedback on journal entries, they regarded the exercise as significantly less beneficial" (p. 92). In addition, Choate and Granello (2006) explored the pay-off of including a supervised experiential component for graduate level counseling students that incorporates reflection activities and challenging new clinical experiences. Counseling students in this study report that on average their professors *sometimes* asked for feedback twice a semester, and that their counselor educators provided individual and timely feedback to their work approximately *once a semester*. Faculty counterparts showed no significant difference for their responses to how often they provide individualized and timely feedback—they also stated they do this approximately *once a semester*.

A common element of teaching strategies that fosters critical thinking is the use of thoughtful questions that stimulate deeper reflection (Overholser, 1991). Providing concrete written feedback to students' written contributions is a good time to offer these types of thoughtful questions and push students' thinking on particular issues (Guiffrida, 2005) while simultaneously conveying to students that the educator is engaged, cares about the quality work, and establishes a mutual commitment to best efforts that further motivates students in the future.

Any activities or assignments completed without the feedback from a more knowledgeable other will leave the learner at their current epistemological point since they will not be reinforcing, amending, or adding to their body of knowledge (Schrader, 2004; Briggs & Pehrson, 2008). With this said, feedback does not insinuate praise; most supervisors withhold feedback, particularly feedback regarding performance (Hoffman, Hill, Holmes, & Freitas, 2005); if feedback is provided, it is often general and positive

(Friedlander, Siegel, & Brenock, 1989; Reese, Toland, Slone, Norsworthy, 2009). Therefore, constructive feedback should include a balance of support as well as challenge in order to move the epistemological position.

### ***Collaborate On and Evaluate Student Goals***

Faculty reported that on average they assess their students' progress towards personal and professional goals *between rarely and none of the time*. Increased collaboration with students in this area could include: creating personal narratives in which students reflect on what has shaped them and how that has happened; actively participating in role plays and small group discussions where students thoughtfully evaluate their actions and those of their peers; writing essays reflecting on growth, strengths, weaknesses, instincts, and anticipated difficulties; consistently using reflective journaling with faculty feedback; and working to identify and understand the origins of their own biases and cultural assumptions (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Buser, 2008; Cannon & Frank, 2009; Choate & Granello, 2006; Hawley, 2006; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001).

### ***Focus on Doctoral Training***

The final and more global potential implication of this research is rooted in the literature and regards the need for an increased focus on training and supervision within doctoral programs (Desmond, Rapisarda, & Nelson, 2011; Golde, 2006; Golde & Bueschel, 2004; Meacham, 2002; Silverman, 2003). The future of the counseling field will be determined in large part by the quality of counseling students produced today; consequently, there is a need to consider the current standards in training counselor educators to do just that—educate. This increased focus on teaching in counseling is said to have started with Boyer's (1990) redefinition of scholarship. Boyer underscored the importance of teaching, noting the unquestionable connection between teaching and learning, and learning and professional capability (Austin, 2002).

The literature states that the emphasis on research, publications, and clinical work has consequently contributed to graduates who are often unprepared for the role of educator (Hunt & Gilmore, 2011). Qualitative research with new professors revealed that the educators felt "competent clinically," but "completely ill prepared" for their role as a teacher (Magnuson, Norem, & Lonneman-Doroff, 2009, p. 176). As we look at the needs of future counselors and the preparation of students to enter the field, it seems imperative that counseling students receive training from educators who feel confident and competent with regard to their teaching abilities and effectiveness. While the research done in this particular study does not directly engage the issue of doctoral programs comprehensive preparation of PhD students, it does implicitly speak to the need for counselor educators who are intentionally utilizing various research-based pedagogical methods to target and develop cognitive complexity and reflective abilities.

## Limitations

The results of this exploratory study and pilot use of the survey instrument should be considered in light of various limitations. One significant limitation mentioned throughout is the use of a small convenience sample. A larger and more diverse sample representing multiple programs is needed in order to draw conclusions applicable to counselor education at large. Another limitation of the findings is the need for refinement and clarification of the survey instrument and the items within it. This was the first attempt at designing a survey intended to measure this aspect of pedagogy as well as its classroom presence and perception by students and faculty; it will require further development. For instance, the evaluation and assessment section of the survey needs to either include additional questions or be subsumed into the pedagogy section. Now that initial research using the survey has been completed, these limitations will inform future versions of the survey with the intention of refining and garnering the data needed about the current state of counseling classrooms.

## Conclusion

There is still much to be uncovered about CC and RP and their role in counseling and counselor education. At this time there are differing viewpoints presented among researchers and practitioners about the degree of urgency as well as the most successful means for enhancing these qualities within counselor preparation. In fact, research is available that suggests current counselor training may not impact counseling effectiveness to the degree that is currently assumed (Ronnestad & Ladany, 2006). Therefore, future studies in the areas of CC and RP should focus more specifically on the classroom interventions themselves and training approaches, specifically examining the degree to which particular pedagogical approaches actually promote growth in CC and RP. With this understanding of *how much* (or if) these teaching and training methods produce the desirable results they hope for in their students, teachers could prioritize classroom practice based on this information. This also impacts the choice to include classroom interventions that target the areas of need as well as goals of their individual students. Above all, more research is needed within the United States as well as on a global level to test and track the growth of graduate students' cognitive and reflective development including a baseline at the start of a preparation program, intermittent data to gauge progress, as well as exit data to assess both the level of preparedness for the field and the effectiveness of academic programs. Furthermore, follow up with these students could continue to help shed light on the degree to which these classroom methods and emphasis on CC and RP influence their long-term success as a counseling professional.

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