

**Boundary Issues in Student/Professor
Relationship Within Counselor Education Program Perspectives**

George D. Vera

**Departamento de Psicología
Facultad de Humanidades y Educación
Universidad del Zulia**

Abstract

Although boundary issues in the professional counseling relationship have been a topic of considerable debate for many years, the boundary issues in the student/professor relationship have received less attention. Most of the literature dealing with boundary issues in counselor education has focused on one of two areas: Counseling supervision and teaching group counseling courses. This article discusses the boundary issues in student/professor relationship within counselor education programs. It describes the guidance that is found regarding these issues in the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics, as well as other current literature. The discussion is developed in the context of counseling students personal characteristics, counselors personal issues, professional effectiveness, and professional identity acquisition.

Key words: Boundaries issues, counselor education programs, student/professor relationship, ethics.

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**Conflictos de límites en las relaciones
Profesor/alumno en los Programas de Formación de Orientadores: perspectivas**

Resumen

A pesar que los conflictos relacionados con los límites en las relaciones profesionales que se establecen en el ejercicio de la Orientación han sido tópicos de considerable debate por muchos años, los relacionados con los conflictos de límites en la relación profesor/alumno han recibido poca atención. La mayoría de la literatura sobre esta temática enfoca dos áreas: la supervisión de los orientadores y la enseñanza de la orientación grupal. Este artículo discute sobre los límites éticos en la relación profesor / alumno en los programas que forman orientadores. Se describe la normativa ética que aporta la Sociedad Americana de Orientadores (ACA, siglas en Inglés) y la aportada por la literatura especializada reciente. La discusión se desarrolla en el contexto de las características de personalidad de los estudiantes de Orientación, problemas relacionados con la personalidad de los orientadores, la efectividad profesional y la adquisición de la identidad profesional.

Palabras clave: Conflictos de límites, Programa de Formación de Orientadores, relaciones estudiante-profesor, ética.

Introduction

This paper is divided into four major connected topics related to boundary issues in the counseling student/professor relationship: (1) Guidance standards in student/professor relationship & personal issues, (2) Counseling students' personal characteristics, (3) Counselors' personality & effectiveness, and (4) Counselors' personality & professional identity. Because counselors' personalities appear to be a critical ethics aspect in the literature, it is discussed in detail.

Guidance standards in student/professor & personal issues

In addressing ethics issues related to the student/professor relationship, the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (1995) has established a set of standards. One of these standards is as follows:

Counselors clearly define and maintain ethical, professional, and social relationship boundaries with their students and supervisees. They are aware of the differential in power that exists and the student or supervisee's possible incomprehension of that power differential. Counselors explain to students and supervisees the potential for the relationship to become exploitive (Standard F. 1 .b.).

This basic standard enforces the ethical quality of multiple relationships that may exist in academic counseling programs: teacher/ student, trainer/trainee, mentor/mentoree, adviser/advisee, and supervisor/supervisee. In addition, counselor educators must assure that students are aware of the importance and implications that their self-disclosure may have on their professors who play these multiple roles.

This ACA guideline is especially helpful in guiding the counselor educators' work in addressing students' personal issues. The implication in this standard is that counselor educators should engage students in non- academic, growth, and selfexploration of personal issues because students need to develop a strong sense of self-awareness along with an understanding of their interpersonal dynamics if they are to become successful counselors (Glossoff & Herlihy, 1995, cited by Herlihy & Corey, 1997). The aforementioned authors further suggest that counseling programs should provide opportunities for students to examine their personal lives, emphasizing their issues, needs, motivations, and experiences that compromise their abilities to function effectively as helpers. In fact, the literature states that students need to know themselves very well, reach high level of personal, mental, and emotional health, ah for the purposes of developing personal strengths which assures the maintenance of ethical, Guidance standards in student/professor professional, arid social boundaries within the program, and later within the profession.

Counselor educators must use their professional judgment to conduct experiences leading to students' self-disclosures and self-growth while providing safe space to ensure that students are not exploited and if any dual relationship were to emerge in the process, the professor would have keep it within ethical parameters.

Yet when supervisees are encouraged to explore and share some of their personal issues, the students' disclosure processes are potentially conflictive because the following dilemmas emerge: (1) how much interaction and personal maternal should be fostered for display in the context of supervision? (2) How much attention should the supervisor pay to the supervisees issues that might compromise their work as counselors? (3) Qn which student's personal issues should the supervision process focus? In facing some of those dilemmas, the Amencan Counsel

ing Education and Supervision (ACES) Ethical. Guidelines for Counseling Supervisors (1993), in Section 3.18, states that.

A supervisor may recommend participation in activities such as personal growth groups and personal counseling when it has been determined that supervisee has deficits in the areas of self-understanding and problems resolutions that impede his/her professional functioning. The supervisor should not be direct provider of these activities for supervisee. According to the above guideline, it is unethical for the supervisor to provide any form of counseling to the supervisee or use the material emerged from the supervisory relationship to that end, even with "training purposes" as established by the ACES Ethical Guidelines, standard 2.11. However how does one delineate personal material? What does the word "deficit" imply and what is the best way to determine "how much deficit" is necessary in order to suggest that students seek counseling?

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Other boundary issue within the student/professor relationship relates to professors evaluations of students. Counselor educators must prepare highly competent counselors; promote their personal growth, and acts gatekeepers to the profession. But, in doing so, they have to face some students personal issues. In this regard, the ACA Code of Ethics (1995), standard F.3.a, establishes that counselor educators are responsible for ongoing evaluation of their students and must be aware of any personal limitations that might impede adequate

professional performance. When students are unable to provide competent counseling services due to personal limitations, counselor educators must refer them for assistance. Moreover, the standard F. 1 .h. specifies that students who are not successful in overcoming their limitations should be dismissed from the program or counselor educators may refuse to endorse them upon completion of the Program. Consequently, when students display serious professional weakness as counselors and personal limitations, such as, unresolved issues, rigidity, dogmatic attitudes, unclear values or prejudices, counselor educators have an ethical duty to encourage and even challenge students to face and deal with these issues (Herlihy & Corey, 1997). As it can be seen, the student/professor relationship faces many ethical dilemmas during the training program.

Another important aspect in this discussion on boundaries in student/professor relationship is the evaluation in supervision. For example, The ACES Ethical Guidelines for Counseling Supervision (1993) further states in Section 2.12, Supervisors, through ongoing supervisee assessment and evaluation, should be aware of any personal and professional limitations of supervisees that are likely to impede future professional performance. Supervisors have the responsibility of recommending remedial assistance to the supervisee and of screening from the training program, applied counseling setting, or state licensure (to) those supervisees who are unable to provide competent professional services. These recommendations should be clearly and professionally explained in writing to the supervisees who are so evaluated.

In spite of the guidelines, questions still remain. Is the evaluation based on the input obtained from the student/professor relationship? or from an impartial evaluation and assessment in supervision? It is well known that during the counseling program, students can reach high levels of comfort and maturity; consequently, they are likely to expose themselves more openly.

Then, where is the parameter? If the student's disclosure which emerged from supervision or teaching situation should not be used for counseling, experiential activities, even for training objectives, then how fair is it to use the same material for evaluation purposes?

Both ACA and ACES attempt to provide ethical boundaries and guidelines for counselor educators in regard to their students' personal issues that emerge within the training. But, both standards leave many unanswered questions. These standards need more specific guidance in how to most effectively teach counseling students and maintain appropriate boundaries.

Counseling students' personal characteristics

Although Council For Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) does not delineate or suggest a desirable "counseling student's core personal characteristics" to be fostered within the context of the student/professor relationship, CACREP Guidelines state that from an ethical point of view, training programs have an obligation to address the characteristics of students' personalities as well as the professional competencies that are likely to interfere with a counseling student's efficacy with clients (Corey, Corey & Callahan, 1993).

Likewise, growing discussion in literature sees counselors' personalities and professional competencies as vital ingredients in the effectiveness of their counseling interventions in the use of counseling strategies for teaching and supervising counseling students (Gladding, 1996).

In fact, taking into account these personal characteristics is professionally very important since counselors' personal characteristics influence therapeutic outcomes; assumption of influence is widely accepted among professional counselors (Herlihy & Corey, 1997). Other authors, such as Carkhuff & Berenson (1967), Kottler (1986), and Rogers (1961), agree that

concerning dice personal characteristics of counselors, the personhood is more important than their counseling techniques.

This assumption makes it incumbent on counselor training programs to focus on counselors-in-training as persons as well as on their academic performance. Therefore, counselor educators should deal with the students' personal characteristics and their positive or negative influence on the students' role as counselors.

Since the students are the center of the learning process, it is important to know what these candidates for counselors might bring into the Counseling Program. Information that might help to better understand how to approach their education as counselors in an ethical manner and how to adequately preserve the student/professor relationship is needed as well.

Counseling students have many reasons for becoming counselors. In this sense, the literature states that there are two clusters of motivators for being a counselor: dysfunctional motivations (DM) and healthy or functional motivations (FM) (Guy, 1987). This author states the following as DM: (a) Emotional distress, (b) Vicarious coping, (c) Loneliness and isolation, (d) Desire for power, (e) Need for love (1), Vicarious rebellion. These characteristics influence students' awareness of themselves and their potential for becoming effective counselors. These characteristics increase the possibility that counselors could potentially harm their clients as well as the profession. In fact, DM can interfere with students' learning process during their training.

Conversely, the healthy or functional motivators (FM) help students to become effective counselors. According to Guy, FM include (a) Curiosity, (b) Ability to listen, (c) Comfort with conversation, (d) Empathic and understanding (e) Emotional insightfulness (f) Introspection, (g) Tolerance of intimacy (h) Comfort with power, (i) Ability to laugh. FM is useful for selecting teaching strategies within ethical boundaries. Therefore, the clusters of motivators can help counselor educators to guide and to prepare counselors while paying attention to personalized academic training, personal characteristics, and selves-exploration.

There is an agreement among the cited authors that teaching counseling and "doing" supervision should facilitate the students learning in how to use their own self as instruments for enhancing the lives of others, ethics and effectiveness, and professional competency. However, diverse opinion exists among authors regarding the relationship between counselors' personality and counseling effectiveness in the arena of supervision and teaching counseling. For example, some authors express the notion that education cannot change the persons' basic characteristics. Yet, counselor educators should consider those characteristics in the counseling education and training programs (Summerel & Borders, 1996).

There are questions which lie between these divergent positions on personality and counseling skills. Where are the boundaries? Could counselor educators teach counseling and do supervision utilizing the students' personalities instead of the students' capacity of mastering knowledge and skills? If so, how is this achieved? In addition, what is the impact of these teaching procedures on the student/professor relationships? Finally, what types of multiple relationships can emerge in the implementation of this view? These boundary issues are not established in the consulted literature.

Counselor's personality & effectiveness

Other boundary issues connected to the dynamic of the student/professor relationship are related to the counselor educators' tasks of fostering the students' development of effectiveness

as counseling practitioner. How is effectiveness connected to counselor's personality? According to the cited literature above, effectiveness depends on the counselor's personality.

Yalom (1995) indicates that the counselor's personality is the therapeutic agent. Thus, counseling outcomes depend more on the counselor's personality functioning therapeutically than on the level of the counselor's expertise. Likewise, Cormier & Cormier (1985), state that effective counselors are capable of integrating scientific knowledge and skills into their personhood. They are persons first, then professionals. They have achieved a balance of interpersonal and technical skill. These authors also indicate that effective counselors have (a) Intellectual Competence, (b) Energy, (c) Flexibility, (d) Support, (e) Goodwill, (F) Self-awareness, (G) Cultural Experience, among others. Consequently, it is clear that becoming an effective helper is a process that combines personal exploration with the mastery of knowledge and skills training (George & Cristiani, 1995).

In addition, Gladding (1996) identifies counselors' effective personal characteristics as (a) spontaneity, (b) emotional maturity, (c) patience, (d) outgoingness, (e) friendliness, (f) practicality, (g) sensitivity, (h) creativity, (i) objectivity, (j) empathy, (k) altruism. These growth-enhancing personal qualities of the helpers facilitate their positive ethical and professional performance and allow counselors to use fulfilling lives, facilitating the counselors' willingness to learn from their mistakes and to grow therapeutically. Thus, individuals possessing the mentioned characteristics are sensitive and can fully concentrate on their clients' problems and situations; thus, they can be more effective (Cormier & Cormier, 1985). The professional counselors' willingness to live in accordance with what they teach and to be positive models for their clients is what makes those counselors "therapeutic" persons and effective (Corey, Corey, & Callahan, 1993). The ways these counselors present themselves to clients are what make them "models" that have a positive impact on their clients. Similarly, counselors' beliefs, personal attributes, and qualities have considerable influence on how they function ethically as professional helpers.

Because the counseling field depends so much from the personhood of the counselor, counselor educators and counseling programs should foster students' self-exploration and support the students in their academic journey.

Yet, more exploration is needed in order to: (a) develop skills that foster ethical and therapeutic personality; (b) identify teaching strategies and environmental factors that can help in the development of those skills; (c) develop assessment instruments that might measure the effectiveness of a therapeutic personality; (d) identify the types of personalities that are more conducive to therapy; and (e) determine the ethical implications and their impact on the student/professor relationship. Finally, what are the boundary issues implied in the preparation of counselors from to view that counseling effectiveness depends of counselor' personality and how might it influence the student/professor relationship? Moreover, how "much of model," of those personal characteristics, should counselor educators become? The cited authors do not address these implications.

Counselors' personality & professional identity

Another boundary issues in the student/professor relationship within counseling academic programs are related to the achievement of counselors' professional identity. Counselors are educated to offer helping services. Then, the personal and professional development of counselors is related to their professional identity as helpers. In this sense, Auvenshine &

Noffsinger (1984), states that counselors as a group generally share strong interest in social service, scientific, literary, and persuasive activities. They are more interested in working with people than with data or things. This genuine interest, which is personality based, is the cornerstone of the counselors' professional identity. Counselors are professionals providing interpersonally oriented service to people to achieve or preserve well-being. Because they are educated to provide preventative or remedial assistance to people in need, helpers should be educated to develop healthy personally. To do that, counselor educators should be models for students in this matter. However, a question arises again, what boundaries should be set to adequately preserve the student/professor relationship in this didactic "modeling." In any case, the students' well-being and their healthy development as counselors should be fostered. It is also clear that counselor's personal characteristics and their professional identity are intrinsically linked in creating effectiveness as professional helpers.

Final Remarks

Despite the fact that there are many unanswered questions about the boundary issues of the student/professor relationship in the context of the students' personal characteristics, effectiveness, professional identity, and competencies, there are some initial points that illuminate this matter. For example, the ACA Code of Ethics (1995), CACREP guidelines (1994), and the American Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (1993) have established some helpful standards and procedures that in effect make clear some boundary issues in the dynamic relationship between student/professor. In fact, those associations have defined and shaped counselors' professional and personal characteristics and asserted the importance of providing opportunities for students to develop self-understanding and acquire high levels of skill competence. Still, more research is necessary for establishing clear boundaries in the student/professor relationship by exploring, assessing, and defining methods and procedures that might contribute to better deal with issues of students' personal growth and disclosure that occur in the student/professor relationship within counseling programs. This is a major challenge for the counseling profession in this new millennium.

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