Blurred Lines: Developing My Professional and Personal Self as a CES Doc Student

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CACREP Program Requirements

Doctoral Professional Identity – The 5 core competencies that are required of doctoral students in the field of CES.

- Counseling

- Supervision

- Teaching

- Research and Scholarship

- Leadership and Advocacy

CACREP, 2015

Professional Journey of Change for CES Doc Students

- PhD students go through *Transformational Tasks*
  - Integration of multiple identities
  - Evolving legitimacy
  - Acceptance of responsibility

- These tasks are undertaken in conjunction with the formational progression of their professional identity as marked by
  - External validation
  - Experience
  - Self-validation

(Dollarhide et al., 2013)

Personal Journey of Change for CES Doc Students

- Show or demonstrate knowledge of the counseling profession.

- Discuss the philosophy of the counseling profession.

- Create and establish the required expertise in the counseling field of members of the profession and understand member roles.

- Validate attitudes, mindsets, towards the profession and self.

- Engage in professional behavior.

(Woo et al., 2017)

Case Study

As a counselor, determining what professional development and identity would look like was challenging and wrought with numerous, viable options. There are continuously evolving subspecialty areas in which a licensed professional counselor can study. There are other practicing mental health occupations a counselor can transition into. A difficult decision was determining what areas to not explore while availing myself to opportunities in the field and within my present reach and scope of practice. Once determination was made that doctoral level coursework would be necessary to achieve the personal and professional goals I had, it narrowed options and helped focus my efforts but did not eliminate some of the ambiguity.

This ambiguity manifested in questions splintering into various areas and paths for progression. In the realm of coursework and expanded knowledge, how does one develop the character of a counselor educator and what does that look like? Will I solely be an educator; working in a traditional classroom on a college campus? Is the role of a researcher and working with local industry or clinical practices the exclusive path forward? Will I be a leader and advocate for the profession? How and where is this best conducted, is this at the local or national level, do I have to choose? Is there room for any and all of these with my personal proclivities? In exasperation the question arose of, where to begin and how do I find where my interests and desires intersect with what benefits the profession and helps current and future counselors? Each time a decision was to be made there were flare ups of uncertainty concerning legitimacy of the current course of study and development.

Initially, I sought to broach these topics through engaging professionals in the counseling profession and in other mental health and medical professions. I did not fully appreciate much of the feedback that I received at the time as it centered on two areas – that I am already a competent professional in my area of expertise, and that I should adopt a disposition where the area of focus would come to me. Unbeknownst to me, the idea that the process of completing coursework would develop professional identity was accurate, even if not fully appreciated in the early stages of degree seeking. Furthermore, the notion of focusing on areas of interest that need further development was practical without attending to the unhelpful desire of being overly specific. A balance of guiding insightful methods while encouraging and validating sentiment have proven to propel growth and development without providing prescribed solutions for a process that is unique to each student engaged in a counseling program of study. This has also had the added benefit of developing self-efficacy birthed out of confidence having completed several experiential engagements and professional accomplishments required in coursework.

Case Study

As a doctoral student, my experiences and life lessons have shaped my professional and personal self as a counselor educator and supervision doctoral student. Before I started this program, I prayed that it would be the right fit. I hoped God would be an integral part of this journey that I decided to explore. As an African American middle-aged student, I had several reservations. What was my purpose for pursuing a doctoral degree at this age, and how would the CES degree benefit me in the future, so close to retirement? I knew that it was going to be a boatload of work, not to mention the cost. My personal family time with my husband and young adult children is important. Although I am an empty nester, I knew that my family time would be interrupted. All of these things were surfacing, and I had to decide if the journey was worth it. The answer to myself was YES and God gave me the green light to continue.

As I was studying the research, I experienced some of the same barriers and patterns as other doctoral students. I felt inadequate, I was not sure if I belonged, and wondered if this was really what God wanted for me. Was I prepared for this long journey of academics? One of the things I had to remember was that if God gave me the green light, then he would give me the tools to be successful. Isaiah 26:3, Philippians 4:6-8, and Joshua 1:8 are my anchor scriptures. These scriptures have helped me to develop my professional and personal self as a CES doctoral student.

My Christian worldview as a professional and personal development is grounded deeply in my spiritual beliefs. My counselor role is a direct assignment from God, and I believe his approval to pursue a CES Ph.D. degree is showing there is still work to be done. Such calling involves striving to embody Jesus' characteristics in loving people just as he did during his time on earth. This calling is a symbolic crossroad where personal and professional identities meet to form a solid union of service to God. Faith in the professional duty to follow the American Counseling Association's ethical code of conduct. Additionally maintaining good self-care practices is vital to ensure personal and professional growth along with the best possible outcome for counselors and the individuals they serve.

Implications for CES PhD Stakeholders

- Review of currently established protocols to support professional identity development in CES PhD students across the five competency CACREP areas in effort to further tangible learning experiences.

- Consideration for ways to foster professional growth opportunities within the CES PhD program via:
  - Advising
  - Mentorship
  - Professional organization involvement

- Efforts to help PhD CES students identify areas of improvement across the five competencies during early stages of the doctoral program.

References

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Questions/Comments