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Ariel E. Mitchell
Xavier University of Louisiana

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Flipped Classroom Methodology Applied to Counselor Development

Ariel E. Mitchell, Ph.D., LPC-S, LMFT, RPT-S

Assistant Professor of Counseling, Xavier University of Louisiana

Incorporating the flipped classroom model has been suggested from scholars in various fields of study. More recently, this model has been linked to suggested advantages within counseling (Moran & Milsom, 2015). An overview of the implemented flipped classroom model along with the educational and personal benefits are presented.

Keywords: Counselor Education, Classroom model

The flipped classroom has emerged as an innovative method of teaching that emphasizes, “that which is done in class is now done at home, and that which is traditionally done as homework is now completed in class” (Bergmann & Sams, 2012, p.13). In a text devoted to teaching in counselor education, it was noted that effective lecturing should include taking “your counseling skills to the lecture” (West, Bubenzer, Cox, McGlothlin, 2013, p.25). West et al. (2013) embraced the idea along with the change in lecture purpose, by arguing the importance of lecture demonstrations and discussion that shifts focus from the information to its purpose and use. By utilizing the lecture time for demonstrations and discussions, students are able to gain depth in understanding and clarity to skill implementation. Utilizing demonstrations and discussions during class time in the counselor education classroom is a shift from the traditional lecture style and one step toward the flipped classroom model.

At the time of research, two articles were found addressing the flipped classroom in counselor education (Moran et al., 2015; Merlin, 2015). However, Merlin (2015) shared a conceptual pedagogical perspective of incorporating the flipped classroom method. Moran et al. (2015) presented a case study approach to implementing the flipped classroom method focused on the advantages and disadvantages of implementing the flipped classroom method in counselor education. As such, this article will expand the flipped counselor education classroom narrative from theoretical to logistical implementation by sharing the steps and outcomes of flipping the lifestyle and career development classroom of a graduate-level

counseling program. Moreover, the developmental benefits for students will be shared, as witnessed throughout the semester of the flipped counseling classroom.

CACREP Meets the Flipped Classroom

Traditional program structures tend to focus on content delivery at the onset, skill understanding in the middle, and skill implementation toward to end of the academic program (Plunket, 2014). This structure is also prevalent in counselor education programs with practicum and internship experiences lingering at the final semesters directly preceding graduation (CACREP, 2016). Thus, the opportunity to assess and aid in deeper skill development and self understanding is often a delicate balance between what is needed prior to graduation and what can be gained post graduation; therefore, the idea of students having sufficient skill development is not actualized until the end of their academic program.

Counselor education programs, accredited by CACREP, maintain practicum and internship courses that are designed to assess student’s readiness to provide clinical services to the general public (West et al., p.115; CACREP Standards, 2016). CACREP Standards also state that practicum and internship, by design, requires students to maintain a supervisor affiliated with their respective university as well as a site supervisor that will oversee the student’s day-to-day clinical functioning (2016, p.13). University supervisors are required to meet with students once per week; however, site supervisors are in contact with the graduate student daily and once per week in individual

supervision. Albeit site supervisors play an integral role in the clinical development of graduate counseling students, site supervision alone during the practicum and internship experience is not an adequate basis for assessing skill development.

Additional opportunities for student skill development are presented throughout the assignment of experiential assignments (West et al., 2013; Bell, Love, & Roberts, 2007). Typically, students are presented with a course syllabus at the beginning of the semester which outlines required assignments that the student is expected to complete throughout the semester (West et al., 2013). However, given the amount of time typically utilized for lecture in graduate classroom, in depth conversations regarding assignments and intermittent assignment checks are two unlikely phenomena. Thus, students typically present on experiential assignments with limited opportunity to process the skill and individual development that may have occurred by engaging in the respective assignment.

Service learning and outreach experiences have also been noted as ways to enhance skill development throughout clinical programs (West et al., 2013; Shallcross, 2009; CACREP, 2016). Also noted about service learning projects are the labor intensive hours required by faculty to organize and the advanced skills needed by students to navigate through potential ethical and legal issues that may arise while students are engaged in field (Billings & Halstead, 2012; West et al., 2012). Although student-learning projects boasts field experience for students, it also measures faculty agility in preparation and organization of community, an unfair measure for faculty members without community connections and an abundance of time to invest. Therefore, the flipped classroom method is being offered as a way to mitigate some of the obstacles noted though a lack of skill development opportunities throughout student academic tenure.

A Case of the Lifestyle and Career Development Flipped Course

The author of this article served as the instructor on record of a master's-level course taught in a CACREP-accredited program at a mid-sized, private university located in

southern United States. The flipped course was titled Lifestyle and Career Development and focused on career counseling, a subsection under the general counseling umbrella. There were 16 students enrolled in the course ranging from first to third year students. The course content covered career theories, developmental models, the origins of career counseling, career counseling assessments, ethics in career counseling, career counseling in school and clinical mental health settings, and advocacy as an embedded conceptual framework of the program.

The semester consisted of 16 weeks of scheduled classes, of which 6 were online hybrid days and 1 was a holiday week. One class was scheduled each week from 5:00 pm to 7:45 pm on the given class day. Thus, there were 1,485 in person instructional hours and 990 online instructional hours provided over the course of the semester. Instructional times were given at the onset of the course explaining the parameters and expectations for students enrolled in the form of a course syllabus. As such, students were expected to either have access at home or utilize computers on campus to engage in work that was assigned between classes. Tasks such as watching concept videos, discussion boards, annotated bibliographies, self-assessments, case studies, and exams were assigned during the hybrid weeks that required access to blackboard and other forms of technology (i.e. computer). Supports were offered to the students through the information technology center help desk and the professor of record, both of which were available via email or phone.

When class was in session, a structure was followed which allowed students to know what they were expected to do during every class meeting. First, a short discussion of the readings and videos took place where students could ask questions or share insight that they gained since the last class meeting. Second, an explanation of the class agenda took place so that students could be prepared for the next phase of class. Third, students were separated into groups (either small or large depending on the assignment) to work through the provided class work. Fourth, once the course assignments were completed,

a final closing discussion was facilitated to share new insights or learning gaps that were addressed throughout the class assignment.

Class assignments were in the form of implementing counseling sessions, conducting assessments, conceptualizing a case study, and/or investigating nuances of the career theories and developmental models, etc. All assignments were expected to be completed through one of the two theories or models that the reading and videos were focused on in the preceding week. In addition to the theories and models, assessments were a large focus of the homework, and as such was a large focus during the implementation phase. Students were expected to assign assessments based on case conceptualization and conduct “counseling sessions” with their peers based on the knowledge they had acquired. As such, students were expected to show a greater depth in conceptualization and skill implementation with each week that passed throughout the semester. The measure of student progress was done by a constant monitoring of experiential activities during class time and the provision of immediate feedback.

As the students engaged in experiential activities, the professor of record sat in each group at intervals as a participant observer. The role of the participant observer in this capacity functioned to provide immediate feedback to students as they engaged in the process of “being a counselor.” The immediacy of feedback provided allowed students to correct techniques before they became faulty habits. Students were also able to see the difference in the “client response” when appropriate skills were applied.

Rationale

The flipped classroom method, traditionally utilized in K-12 educational settings, was chosen for this course due to the high content volume and the need to engage students in the topic at hand. This method has emerged as an innovative method of teaching that can bolster the key elements needed to be an effective counselor through both skill development and individual self growth (Benner, 1984; Moore, 1994; West et al, 2012). In addition, the challenge of addressing learning differences to support the needs of every diverse learner is captured with

this model (Sams & Bergmann, 2013). Academic challenges have been addressed in K-12 settings (Merlin, 2016) and in one counselor education classroom (Moran & Milsom, 2015) through the use of the flipped classroom model; however, no research information shared focused on the internal growth of students. Thus, this article shares insight into the challenges and successes of flipping the counseling classroom, but focuses on the intrapersonal growth that occurred for the counselors-in-training enrolled in the flipped counseling course.

A New Framework for Understanding Graduate Student Growth

Through years of clinical practice and academic work, this author shares the belief that human learning is the new understandings gained through the exploration of existing values that determine behaviors and influence perspectives. Through challenging those existing values, an individual is free to examine old (maybe un-serving) values and develop new understandings that can intervene on a negative existing pattern. Then, and only then, is the individual free to implement changes and embed a new way of thinking and behavior that is more self fulfilling and serving to the human state of being. Albeit, in accordance with previous literature cited, academic gains seem inevitable when incorporating the flipped classroom method; however, aside from the obvious academic gains that were evident through implementing the flipped classroom model, personal development was noticed in several students throughout the semester.

A shift from the dichotomous thinking of trying to find the right or wrong way of “being a counselor” to a multiplistic view of what is “right and effective” is based on individual circumstances. Over the course of the semester, experiential activities began to occupy more class time as students asked more focused questions and toggled with meaning from the “client's” perspective while also internalizing the topic at hand. Toward the second half of the semester, discussions following the experiential activity shifted to a focus on individual development likening the intersectionality of clinical interventions and self-development. For example, one student

contemplated the existence of career clusters as a form of societal oppression by comparing to the caste system present in other parts of the world. As a result of that discussion, the class was able to internalize what career clusters meant to them as they individually matriculated through a graduate counseling program.

The academic development that occurred as a result of flipping the counseling classroom included increased student engagement, increased responsibility to retain content, and an increase in the reflective nature of class discussion. Student engagement was a requirement upon attending the flipped counseling class. Once students understood that it was their responsibility to learn the content that was provided to them through the text, videos, and other conduits, they began to autonomously seek out additional information to ascertain the presented content. Class discussions focused on the process of becoming a counselor through the content lens rather than being focused on the memory recall of information. Moreover, student feedback included referring to the course as awesome with the use of practical application and being able to develop a better understanding of the course topic. Students also responded positively to the diverse teaching methods, citing that diversity in the content delivery accommodated all learning styles and provided multiple opportunities for success.

Student responses of the course included a positive review of the hybrid format as a way to engage with the nontraditional graduate level student. It was also reported that the practical application of techniques and theories assisted in a better understanding of counseling through career lens. In addition, the diversity in the learning was noted and praised for the ability to meet the needs of all learners through multiple opportunities to excel and display knowledge. One review of the course simply stated that the course was “awesome!”

Recommendations for Implementation

First, thoroughly explaining the flipped classroom structure to students at the onset of class will help the student and faculty member throughout the semester. Although noted that most faculty may incorporate

several elements of the flipped classroom, implementing the full strategic model can take practice. Thoroughly explaining the model to students at the onset of the course set forth expectations for the students and for the faculty member. Stating those expectations clearly presents a level of accountability that the student and faculty member would need to uphold.

Second, as students are growing academically, through this method of teaching, they will also grow personally and faculty must make time to process the personal growth. During this semester of implementing the flipped classroom model, more students would visit during office hours or send emails discussing their concerns about becoming a counselor. During the shift from content to implementation, students began to question their effectiveness or worthiness to join the profession. Student's self doubt typically led to moments of process followed by times of inquiry and the resurrection of confidence based in intellectual merit.

Lastly, given that the flipped classroom method utilizes cutting edge technology, it is fair to state that the flipped classroom facilitator must evolve with the ever-changing trends in technology. Thus, the flipped classroom method of teaching is as fluid as the changes in technology and faculty must be prepared to utilize and incorporate up to date technology.

Discussion

As the changes in graduate studies become more evident (i.e. online course, millennial, Gen Z expectations, etc.), faculty must investigate the effectiveness of current teaching strategies. The ability to appeal to the modern day learner may not be a concern for all faculty in academe; however, counseling faculty especially should also concern themselves with helping individuals develop holistically, to impact more students with lasting, meaningful tools. As such, incorporating the flipped classroom is being offered as a method to strengthen student development and professional gate keeping. While implementing the flipped classroom model, researchers noticed the student's ability to analyze self-development and clinical

development. This experience, although self-actualizing for the student, contains an inherent reward for the faculty member that by trade is a clinician impressed by the complexities of the human development and psychology.

Brene Brown (2010) presented the idea that individuals should let go of who they think they are supposed to be and instead embrace who they actually are. In an interview conducted by Howes (2013), Irvin Yalom, a pioneer in psychotherapy, noted that clinical training programs seem to be missing the relational teachings focused on helping students learn how to examine their own inner world and the inner world of others (Howes, personal communication, March, 2013). As such, the transition of becoming a professional counselor must be considered not just on the basis of academic growth, but also the development of the individual as a professional being.

Graduate counseling faculty, as clinicians by trade, are in a unique place to recognize the correlation between being an effective helper and being an effectively functioning individual. The ability to experience students toggle with the idea of who they are supposed to be versus who they are becoming can be actualized through consistent in-class implementation opportunities where students are pushed into displaying what they are becoming in front of peers and faculty. At the same time that students are dealing with the internal dissonance of growth, they can also deal with any fears of professional vulnerabilities in a safe space guided by compassionate, challenging counseling faculty.

Limitations

It is critical to note that flipped learning is not appropriate for all courses. Inquiry based classes or those without heavy content are not ideal for the approach (Sams & Bergmann, 2013). Research states, in counselor education for example, clinical courses such as practicum and internship are not well suited for flipped learning. Similarly, flipped learning may not be well suited to all topics within a course, as some topics may be more appropriate for an in-class lecture format. These topics include those that are especially complex or sensitive, which benefit from more

in-class explanation and interactive discussion with students during lecture.

Recommendations for Future Research and Conclusion

Minimal information has been published about the potential of flipping the counselor education classroom (i.e. Merlin, 2015), though one article was located that focused on the logistics of implementation of the flipped classroom method in a counselor education classroom (i.e. Moran and Milsom, 2015). However, additional research is needed to validate academic and personal gains that are beneficial to the counseling student and the well being of counseling programs. Additional research into the academic benefits of incorporating the flipped classroom model may assist in informing curriculum and pedagogical approaches of counseling programs nationally. Aside from academics, the personal socio-emotional growth is also a major component of producing highly qualified professionals. Continued research on the outcomes of personal growth for counseling graduate students should be a focus of future exploration.

Observations based on this case study suggest that students believed that they achieved both academic and personal gains as a result of the implementation of the flipped method. Specifically, students verbalized that the practical application of skills that were engaged in throughout the semester assisted them in case conceptualization and skill development. Moreover, the intrapersonal growth that was noticed may serve as a developmental breakthrough that will help students arrive at greater understanding when addressing professional and personal concepts.

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