

Animating Research with Counseling Values: A Training Model to Address the Research-to- Practice Gap



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The persistent research-to-practice gap poses a problem for counselor education. The gap may be caused by conflicts between the humanistic values that guide much of counseling and the values that guide research training. In this article, the authors address historical concerns regarding research training for students and the conducting of research by faculty, and report on an effective research education model animated with values that guide clinical, supervisory and pedagogical identities within counselor education.

Keywords: research-to-practice gap, research training, counselor education, research education, master’s-doctoral collaborative research group

Research is a fundamental part of counseling and counselor education (Huber & Savage, 2009). The structure of the scientist-practitioner model embraced by counseling and other social science fields endeavors to create a useful dialogue between research producers and research consumers that leads to effective evidence-based practice (Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011). Unfortunately, there is evidence to suggest that this dialogue is not actually occurring (Murray, 2009). The breakdown in productive dialogue has roots both in the types of research being produced and in practitioners’ ability to utilize published research (Bangert & Baumberger, 2005; Murray, 2009). This disconnect has resulted in rising concern about the utility and efficacy of research conducted within counselor education for those in practice. Termed the *research-to-practice gap*, it is a conspicuous problem for the field of counseling at a time when demand for a research-informed evidence base to guide clinical practice is increasing (Moran, 2011).

Furthermore, research in counseling seems disconnected from the essential values that have guided the field (Sperry, 2009). This may be due to a fundamental divide between the values that shape counseling and those that shape research. Mariage, Paxton-Buursma, and Bouck (2004) have suggested that using values as a lens to approach research and practice will serve to “animate” (p. 534) these processes in new ways. Animating both the content and the process of research with counseling values may produce results that are more meaningful to both counselor educators and counseling practitioners. Ideally, the result will be coherent and systemic research designed to solve today’s complex problems.

The research-to-practice gap is acknowledged as a problem throughout the helping professions (Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). In counselor education, the gap appears to be amplified by the tenuous nature of the

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relationship that both practitioners and academics have with research. For practitioners, research is often seen as irrelevant to day-to-day practice and incapable of addressing the complexities of real-world work (Murray, 2009). This perspective is reflected in the conclusion of a methodological review of research articles published in the *Journal of Counseling & Development (JCD)* between 1990 and 2001, which states that “many ACA [American Counseling Association] members will most likely find it difficult to comprehend and evaluate the usefulness of much of the research published by *JCD*” (Bangert & Baumberger, 2005, p. 486). Murray (2009) has concluded that most practitioners view research and practice as two entirely unrelated arenas.

For counselor educators, the relationship with research also appears tenuous. Faculty members are charged with two primary tasks relating to research: (1) training practitioners who are capable of utilizing research, and (2) contributing to the counseling knowledge base through publishing original research. The effectiveness and productivity of counselor educators with both of these tasks is in question. A recent study highlighted that faculty do not appear to consistently demonstrate productive engagement with their own research. From 2004–2009, almost 50% (47.9%) of faculty in programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) published two or fewer articles in refereed journals, and almost 20% (18.5%) published none (Lambie, Ascher, Sivo, & Hays, 2014). The relationship that both counseling practitioners and counselor educators have with research appears to be unproductive. Given the current climate of increasing need for mental health care and dwindling resources, the research-to-practice gap must be addressed. A critical examination of the way research is woven into both the professional identity of counselor educators and counselors as well as the counselor-training environment is warranted.

Research and Academia

Research in counselor education is often conducted within academia where, historically, the dominant discourse values positivistic ways of knowing and prioritizes measurable academic products (McLeod & Machin, 1998; Moran, 2011). Central to this discourse is the perspective that value-neutral researchers can acquire knowledge through reducing complex human experiences to isolated variables that are discrete and measurable. Additionally, the last several decades have seen an intentional shift in academia away from emphasizing quality teaching and research toward basing tenure and promotion on the quantity of refereed articles published (Lambie et al., 2014). This shift is undergirded by administrators’ view that measurable academic products are necessary to enhance the field’s reputation, and as a result, the “publish or perish” mentality has become commonplace (McGrail, Rickard, & Jones, 2006). Working within this framework appears to position many counselor educators’ research selves in direct conflict with the values that have historically supported counseling, supervisory and pedagogical orientations.

Research and Counselor Educator Identity

The field of counseling has historically been a practitioner-oriented field focusing on “individuality and human potential” instead of reducing “clients to pathological entities” (Hansen, 2005, p. 406). As a result, training programs are primarily concerned with preparing counselors for practical work. In contrast, other fields stress positivistic research that relies upon reductionist discourses, controlled conditions and ways of knowing that are removed from the complexity of life (Mariage, Paxton-Buursma, & Bouck, 2004). This positivistic perspective is often seen as limited in its practical utility and often inherently alienates those in practice (Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). Indeed, according to Murray (2009), many practicing counselors view research in counseling and the practice of counseling as separate and unrelated areas. As counselors, counselor educators are likely to struggle with integrating their rich and complex clinical experiences with a way of knowing that prioritizes positivistic and reductionist discourses.

Working within a positivistic framework can pose problems for counselor educators serving as supervisors. For clinical supervisors, responding to the needs of those in practice and facilitating student counselor development are of central importance. Counselor educators and supervisors are called to help students learn evidence-based best practices detailed in research publications (Wester, 2007). However, according to Bangert and Baumberger (2005), research that increasingly values complex methodologies and statistical analyses is not likely to be easily understood by those in practice, thus rendering a majority of research largely unusable to practitioners. Counselor educators who supervise may find it difficult to reconcile how their research, which is required for tenure, does not appear to meet the needs of practicing counselors and students they supervise.

A positivistic framework also can conflict with counselor educators' pedagogical perspectives. This is particularly true for those who emphasize social justice, advocacy or multicultural approaches, as positivistic approaches tend to create and reinforce a rigid hierarchy between those who produce knowledge and those who consume it. For example, conducting or relating research that an educator knows might be incomprehensible to practitioners could be seen as an endorsement of practitioners' role as passive consumers of knowledge. This construction of producers and consumers of research may promote traditional models that fail to consider "broader social contexts, particularly where social injustices occur" (Brubaker, Puig, Reese, & Young, 2010, p. 89). Because the explicit aim of the counseling field is to incorporate pedagogies that reflect social justice and multicultural perspectives (CACREP, 2009), counselor educators may find their pedagogies and research expectations in conflict. This conflict has important implications for the research-to-practice gap, as it reifies rigid roles of knowledge producers and knowledge consumers, and impedes the dialogic process needed to successfully translate valuable research from academia to practitioners' work in the field.

The conflict between the research environment and the values and identity of counselor educators seems to be a substantial barrier to improving the field's engagement with research. With this in mind, the extreme variability in the quantity and quality of research being produced makes sense (Lambie et al., 2014; Paradise & Dufrene, 2010). In fact, the current research-training environment may force counselor educators to choose between a research identity and client/student-focused identity. Those attempting to fully embrace both identities may experience Bateson's classic double bind situation that leads to untenable and fragmented identities (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1956).

The Research-to-Practice Gap and Counselor Training

For many practitioners, the only engagement they have with statistics or research design occurs in mandated courses taken during graduate training. While the courses are required to cover basic research education (CACREP, 2009), time and practical limitations make it unlikely that students will emerge prepared to effectively utilize published research (Bangert & Baumberger, 2005). This situation all but ensures that students will enter the field unable to engage in a productive dialogue with researchers or produce their own research, a disconcerting fact for those concerned by the lack of evidence-based practice in the field.

Research and statistics courses also generally occupy an inconspicuous role within counselor education programs. If these topics are taught by noncounseling faculty, it may implicitly communicate to students that research and statistics are not within the scope of the counselor identity. At best, students learn to engage with research in a language that is separate from their emerging clinical selves. More often they find the language of research incomprehensible to their clinical selves. In either situation, students' counselor identities have a gap between research and practice at their inception (Reisetter et al., 2004).

Counselor educators may feel unprepared to teach classes in research and statistics, which may be due to the education they received in graduate school. The method by which doctoral students prepare to become counselor educators appears to contribute to the research-to-practice gap. Unlike master's-level students,

many doctoral students engage with faculty on research, hopefully benefitting from a productive mentoring relationship that is crucial for future scholarly productivity (Paradise & Dufrene, 2010). Unfortunately, emphasis is seldom placed on training doctoral students to supervise research. The research-training environment equates knowledge and skill in research with the ability to supervise others to conduct effective research. This process is akin to training students as clinicians and assuming that they are prepared to provide clinical supervision for others. Wester and Borders (2011) state that “the counseling profession has competencies for many other aspects of counseling” (p. 1), including supervision, but lacks these for research. Having a skill set in counseling practice does not automatically qualify one to supervise others in practice; this also is true for research and research supervision. This failure to prepare doctoral students in the skills of supervising research is an unfortunate missed educational opportunity that contributes to the maintenance of the research-to-practice gap.

With the limited content, knowledge and skills and fragmented identities in counselor training programs, the research-to-practice gap appears to naturally emerge from the research-training environment. Within this environment, a best-case scenario is for individual researchers to develop sufficient skills to produce high-quality research and hope that this research will trickle down to those in practice. Unfortunately, even in this best-case scenario there is reason to assume that the research-to-practice gap will persist. The field of counselor education has been called upon to improve the quality and quantity of published research, particularly research that practitioners can easily utilize (Murray, 2009). We, the authors, suggest that animating the research process with counseling-related values may serve to reduce the gap between research and practice.

Addressing the Research-to-Practice Gap

The literature has attempted to address the research-to-practice gap in several ways. Suggested interventions have focused on both practical means of addressing the gap and ways to shift the epistemological foundations of research in counselor education. Both of these directions seek to reduce the gap and unify research and practice professional identities. One notable practical suggestion in the literature involves increasing practitioner collaboration in research (Horsfall, Cleary, & Hunt, 2011). Building partnerships with community stakeholders has been identified as the most effective way to ensure that research is relevant and timely for counseling practitioners (Becker, Stice, Shaw, & Woda, 2009). Engaging stakeholders involves fostering relationships and useful dialogues between those in academia and those in practice, thus challenging the current construction of the relationship that limits the role of practitioners to passive consumers of research conducted by those in academia. In order to develop these relationships, counselor educators have been challenged to engage in a collaborative research process that builds relationships, addresses the felt needs of those in practice and disseminates research in a manner translatable to those in practice (Murray, 2009).

Solutions that build upon the strengths of the counseling field in developing relationships and working collaboratively toward felt needs are congruent with the values that undergird the roles of clinician, supervisor and educator. Unfortunately, such solutions also require a significant investment of time and energy on the part of the researcher—a notable problem in the *publish or perish* world. These practical suggestions also do not address the continued development of both researchers and practitioners who lack a congruent professional identity.

In addition to practical suggestions, the literature has proposed a shift toward post-positivistic epistemologies. Levers et al. (2008) suggested that qualitative inquiries are of particular utility for the counseling field, as they allow researchers to engage about lived experiences and do not unnecessarily reduce complex human experience to unrecognizable parts. Post-positivistic approaches have been suggested to be more consistent with the values of the counseling field and, as a result, more easily digestible by those in practice (Moran, 2011; Rennie, 1994).

While post-positivistic paradigms may provide an engagement in research that is more congruent with counseling identity and values, quantitative data is still more highly valued and expected by many universities. Counselor training does not always emphasize training in qualitative methods, making consistent production of quality qualitative research difficult for academics and practitioners alike. The utility of qualitative methodologies may therefore be limited in much the same way as quantitative research is limited. Without research as a congruent part of the professional identities of both practitioners and counselor educators, the research-to-practice gap will continue.

One potential remedy for cultivating this post-positivistic identity is to provide students with opportunities to engage in practical research experiences and to pursue their own research interests while in counseling training (Murray, 2009). Practical engagement in research can help students to develop and integrate research as one strand of the overall professional counselor identity (Sexton, 2000). This will prime a relationship in which students graduate ready to benefit from creating and collaborating on research.

Changing the counseling field's engagement with research is necessary if the field is to reduce the research-to-practice gap. Currently, counselor education's relationship with research appears to be unsettled, leaving the field with a fractured identity. This fractured identity is evident both in the lingering research-to-practice gap and in the way counselors engage with research in training programs. The field of counselor education must find a way to engage both academics and practitioners in research in a way that provides a unified and credible professional identity. The authors suggest that counselor educators need not look far for the solution to this problem. The field must act on counseling values, embrace research as an important component of counselor identity and create a coherent narrative around research. Animating research in counselor education with counseling values is warranted (Mariage et al., 2004). We, the authors, carried out a model that sought to create a new and effective method for engaging in research within counseling and counselor education. Known as the Master's–Doctoral Collaborative Research Group (MDCRG), this model may offer one avenue for changing the field's engagement with research.

Overview of the MDCRG

For many students, the current graduate research–training environment does not provide a sufficient structure to develop the skills and identity necessary for a productive engagement with research. This is particularly unfortunate, as the experience of these authors has shown that master's-level students are eager for opportunities to develop their research skills and to pursue topics of interest to them. This eagerness communicates an unmet need in counselor training; however, there appear to be few opportunities for master's-level students to participate in research in meaningful ways and develop this core component of their professional identity (Owenz & Hall, 2011). By providing a structured experience animated with the values of the counseling field, counselor educators can actively change the current paradigm of research training.

Animating Research with Counseling Values

The research process may be expanded and enhanced through the infusion of values that guide clinical, pedagogical and supervisory practices. The authors suggest that training future practitioners in a research model that is congruent with counselor professional identity may allow for increased research engagement. Developing new approaches and ideas about effective research training is necessary. While many foundational values undergird counselor education (Eaves, Erford, & Fallon, 2010; Gladding, 2013; Hackney & Cormier, 2013), four are particularly relevant for a research context. These values include the power of relationships (Sheperis & Ellis, 2010), empowerment (Eaves et al., 2010), a developmental perspective (Gladding, 2013; Hackney & Cormier, 2013), and experiential education (CACREP, 2009).

The power of relationships. The establishment of a collaborative, supportive relationship between participants is central to the success of counseling and counselor supervision (Blocher, 1983; Sheperis & Ellis, 2010). Green and Herget stated that the quality of the therapeutic alliance is one of the “most powerful predictors of client outcome” (as cited in Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010, p. 9) in counseling. Additionally, characteristics of the supervisory relationship, such as support and encouragement, contribute to the success of clinical supervision (Leddick & Dye, 1987). Research is often conducted in the isolated academic world and disseminated to a small group. This traditional construction ignores the power of relationships in creating successful outcomes and connections in the research process. Infusing relationships into the processes of research and research supervision is a central goal of the MDCRG.

Empowerment. Eaves et al. (2010) identified empowerment as a central element of counseling philosophy, stating that the goal of promoting empowerment is to help clients “gain the confidence to navigate their future lives and problems” (p. 7). Empowering future counselors with the skills and abilities to address challenges in the practice of counseling is also critical. Congruent with this value, master’s-level student researchers can be empowered to find their research voices through full collaboration in each step of the research process. Students present different needs and desires for engaging in the experience. For example, some want to develop a deeper understanding of the research process, some want to explore specific topics through research, and others want to reduce perceived gaps in the knowledge base. In the MDCRG, the doctoral-level supervisors provide a space where group members can share their research needs and advocate for their ideas. The group collectively determines research topics, direction and products, with each member having an equal voice in the process. This structure seeks to empower students and strengthen student research identity and professional voices.

Developmental perspective. The use of developmental theory to conceptualize and promote growth has undergirded the field of counseling for many years (Gladding, 2013), and it has been heavily utilized to frame clinical supervision (Blocher, 1983). Broadly speaking, the developmental perspective rests on the assumption that the correct balance of support and challenge promotes individual growth. While the use of developmental theory in research supervision has not yet been documented in the current counseling literature, it is a useful model in the research context as well. Taking a developmental pedagogical stance throughout the process, MDCRG doctoral research supervisors utilize the skills of teaching, supporting and challenging students to promote growth in their research abilities. In order to accomplish this, research supervisors adjust the amount of environmental support and structure as group members develop their ability to engage in the research process.

Experiential education. Counselor training has historically utilized active, experiential pedagogical strategies (Hackney & Cormier, 2013). A central component of counselor education is the clinical field work that occurs during counseling practicum and internship experiences (CACREP, 2009). Employing a similar model of experiential education, the MDCRG is designed to offer both master’s and doctoral students opportunities to engage in a practical experience of conducting research and research supervision. Master’s-level researchers actively participate in each step of the research process, including generating research topics, conducting literature reviews, formulating research designs, collecting and analyzing data, and writing for publication. Further, doctoral students gain practical experience in supervising and supporting others’ research. This type of practical engagement has been suggested as a way to reduce the research-to-practice gap (Murray, 2009). Utilizing experiential pedagogical strategies in research training will create a unified approach across different components of counselor education.

The counseling values of relationship, empowerment, developmental perspective and experiential education animate the research process in the MDCRG. The resulting model provides a possible new avenue for more effective research training in counselor education. The context, structure, stages and outcomes of this model are described and discussed in the following section.

Context for the MDCRG

The MDCRG was conceptualized and put into place when the first author, a third-year doctoral candidate at the time, was approached independently by several master's students expressing a desire to become involved in research. These students expressed interest in actively engaging in the research process in order to explore areas of interest in clinical practice. They were satisfied neither with the level of research training they had received in their graduate program, nor with the role of consumer of research that was implied in the research training.

The counselor education program that housed the MDCRG consisted of a CACREP-accredited master's program in Community Counseling and School Counseling, and a CACREP-accredited doctoral program in Counselor Education and Supervision. Each program traditionally required 2 and 3 years, respectively, to complete. Within the counselor education program there was little precedence for the collaboration of faculty with master's students on research, as doctoral students often filled these roles. Given the desire of these energetic and motivated master's students to experience the research process firsthand, this situation constituted an unfortunate gap in the counselor training experience. Graduating without meaningful engagement in research would likely result in a continuation of the research-to-practice gap for these students.

Overall Structure of the Group

Membership in each MDCRG included three types of roles: (1) doctoral student research supervisors, (2) a faculty advisor and (3) master's-level researchers. A third-year doctoral student served as the lead research supervisor and a second-year doctoral student partnered to supervise the group. This tiered leadership configuration created a developmental structure that prepared the less-advanced doctoral student with the skills needed to lead the next iteration of the MDCRG. Doctoral research supervisors recruited first- and second-year master's students via e-mail, and received support from a faculty advisor. In this developmental structure, second-year master's students mentored first-year students, and first-year students prepared to take on mentoring roles in the following academic year. Thus, the group was designed to be developmental and cyclical, so that over time all students continually advanced to greater levels of responsibility and skill. The MDCRG was an ongoing experience within the counselor education program, with each group working together for the duration of an academic year. The groups progressed through four stages, as described in the following section (summarized in Table 1).

Stage 1: Forming the group. The initial step in forming the MDCRG is the establishment of the leadership structure and support from program faculty. Once the research supervision leadership is established (two doctoral research supervisors and a faculty advisor), recruitment for master's-level researchers begins. All current master's students receive an e-mail describing the MDCRG as a fully collaborative and hands-on research experience and inviting the students to attend an information meeting. Potential participants learn that expectations for participation include attendance at weekly research meetings, as well as active contribution to research tasks including collection and analysis of data, writing and presenting. Groups typically have approximately nine members, including two doctoral research supervisors, a faculty advisor and six master's-level researchers.

Once the membership in the group is established, the group begins its work. Consistent with a developmental model of supervision (Hunt, Butler, Noy, & Rosser, 1978), throughout stage 1, supervisors adopt an active role and provide high levels of structure and support. Initial sessions focus on establishing the structure for weekly meetings, identifying goals and forming working relationships among the group. Master's-level researchers are encouraged to engage in the formation and direction of the group. In order to empower the master's-level researchers, the research supervisors facilitate conversations that focus on what each member of the group wants to achieve and experience.

Research supervisors seek to model open communication by providing an atmosphere in which the group can productively discuss potential pitfalls in collaborative research. For example, in a group that the authors conducted, the group members examined the challenge of establishing order of authorship on presentations or publications when working in a group. The research supervisors shared personal experiences of how this can arise as an issue and presented various options for deciding authorship. Together the group conferred and selected a method for resolving this situation.

Stage 2: Research preparation. In this stage, groups select research topics, apply for IRB approval (if necessary), write research grants and submit conference presentation proposals. Again, in order to empower master's-level researchers, all members of the group are invited to present topics of interest to the group for consideration. Research supervisors teach relevant research skills as needed, including how to turn a topic of interest into a researchable project with specific research questions and methodologies. The group discusses all potential research topics that members bring as possibilities. As a group, they select research topics, develop research questions and choose methodologies for conducting the research.

Once they have identified a specific project, group members elect to engage in various scholarly activities, including submitting research grant proposals and conference presentation proposals. For example, in the model the authors carried out, one group chose to research how CACREP-accredited programs engaged in program evaluations and used those evaluations to improve programs, while another group pursued its interest in training gaps in preparing students to work with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) clients. As needed, research supervisors teach master's-level researchers about preparing grant and conference proposals. All group members are responsible for drafting portions of proposals. Finally, all of the group members edit compiled proposals and then submit them for consideration.

Stage 3: Active research. All members are fully engaged during this stage, in which data are collected and analyzed. Research supervisors coach master's-level researchers on appropriate data collection procedures. Each member is responsible for segments of the data collection and analysis. When problems arise, group members work together to brainstorm solutions. At various points, members take the lead on pieces of the research process. For example, in one group, a master's researcher who was particularly skilled in spreadsheet software created the spreadsheet used in data tracking and analysis. At times, members are not able to attend weekly meetings in person because of illness or travel, but attend these meetings remotely using technology such as instant messaging or video chatting. Throughout the process, doctoral supervisors take the opportunity to teach research concepts, processes or procedures as needed.

During this stage, groups prepare conference presentations that disseminate their research. Because most of the master's researchers have never presented at a professional conference, doctoral supervisors share experiences of past conference presentations to order to teach master's-level researchers how to put on a professional, well-prepared and engaging conference presentation. The researchers identify important pieces of preliminary results and decide how to structure the presentations. Each member is responsible for preparing and presenting pieces of the research during the presentation. In the group meetings before the conference, group members practice their presentation together. Presentations at professional conferences are often peak moments for the groups.

Stage 4: Writing and closure. As data collection and analysis end, groups prepare to disseminate the results of their research through writing. Again, doctoral supervisors teach master's-level researchers the skills and process of scholarly writing. All members are responsible for drafting pieces of manuscripts. The group members discuss and edit drafts on a weekly basis. Once the groups have concluded their work, doctoral

supervisors finalize manuscripts to unify the voices of various authors, and then submit them for review with appropriate publishing venues.

The close of the academic year also brings the end of the research group experience. Consistent with clinical values, the doctoral supervisors believe that an important element of any group is to reflect on the experience to provide opportunities for celebration and closure. At the conclusion of the experience, research supervisors facilitate group reflection, encouraging master's-level researchers to consider and share what they learned about themselves, about research and about their roles as counselors. Closing celebratory dinners are held as final group sessions.

Table 1

MDCRG Timeline and Tasks by Stage

Stage	Timeline	Tasks
1: Forming	September	Select group leadership Recruit master's-level researchers Set up group structure
2: Research Preparation	October–November	Select research topic Apply for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval Apply for research grants Apply for conference presentations
3: Active Research	December–March	Collect data Analyze data Conference presentation
4: Writing and Closure	April–May	Manuscript preparation Reflection Celebration and closure

Outcome and Evaluation

Each iteration of the MDCRG has been successful in both content and process. The groups produced scholarly work including the following: one published article in a professional, refereed journal; a CACREP-funded student research grant; three professional presentation sessions at a state-level counseling conference; implementation of a training program on working with LGBT clients in a multicultural course; a professional presentation at a regional counseling conference; and two articles published in a regional counseling newsletter. These accomplishments have exceeded the expectations of all involved. In addition, of the master's-level researchers involved during the first 2 years, two researchers have now completed doctoral degrees in Counselor Education and Supervision, others are currently in doctoral programs, and others have advanced to clinical practice. All of the doctoral-level supervisors are now working as counselor educators in CACREP-accredited programs.

Beyond the scholarly accomplishments that the groups achieved, master's-level researchers gained new skills, knowledge and perspectives about research. After two iterations of the group, doctoral research supervisors conducted an informal survey with which to assess the learning outcomes of the MDCRG experience for master's-level researchers. Participants were asked to respond in writing to prompts on their

experiences within the group. Questions included but were not limited to the following: (1) What was the experience of being in the MDCRG like for you?; (2) What were the most important things you learned about the research process while you were in the group?; and (3) Did your participation in the group change how you see your role as a counselor?

Responding to the informal survey of their experiences in the MDCRG, several master's-level researchers reflected on how the group influenced their practical knowledge of research. They reported learning about the importance of maintaining focus on the research questions, the importance of persistence in finding peer-reviewed and current articles, and the importance of using a timeline to keep the research on track. One master's-level researcher reflected, "I feel I have the necessary tools in order to research articles, write an article that is tailored to the journal/newsletter, and submit it to a newsletter and conference."

One of the most valuable experiences that the master's-level researchers reported was engaging in a collaborative research process with peers. Researchers stated that they learned "the value of one's colleagues in the research process," the value of "decision making as a group" and the value of "being able to collaboratively decide on a topic," such as how to divide the work and how to decide authorship.

Master's-level researchers also reported that participation in the MDCRG positively affected their academic program. They reported translating their learning from the MDCRG into academic classes. One student stated, "I bring the knowledge I gained to the classroom." Another said that the group "enriched my academics," while others expressed that it "highlighted the lack of research done at the master's level in this program." Having an opportunity to explore their own interests in the research process led several master's-level researchers to take a more active role in their coursework. Additionally, the group gave researchers the opportunity to develop collaborative relationships with other students that they "otherwise would not have had." Students reported benefitting from the cross-cohort connections and mentoring.

Master's-level researchers also stated that they could clearly see a link between their experiences within the MDCRG and their counseling practice. One master's-level researcher reflected that "the subject matter of the research enhanced my ability to be a more culturally competent counselor for LGBTQ individuals and made me a resource for colleagues that were not in the research group." Another student stated that the group "solidified the importance of research in responsible, current practice." A third stated that her experience highlighted the need for additional research and advocacy.

The final theme that the students mentioned when responding to the informal survey is encouraging in light of the research-to-practice gap. Participant responses reflected a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the role of research in counseling. One student said that "[my] understanding of the importance of conducting research motivates me to be involved and . . . engage in the research already being conducted at my agency of employment." Other students suggested that their greatest growth came in understanding "how to communicate ideas and also how my ideas can be strengthened/further developed through collaboration." The research-to-practice gap may be reduced through producing students who emerge from training programs viewing research as part of their professional identity.

Implications and Conclusion

The research-to-practice gap has been a persistent problem in counselor education that may be attributed to incongruence between how the research process has historically been constructed and the values central to counseling. This gap is reflected in the low rates of publication by counselor educators and in graduating counselors' lack of readiness to engage in research (Bangert & Baumberger, 2005; Lambie et al., 2014). The

call for evidence-based practices will likely continue to increase and will result in greater demand for all types of research. For the field of counseling to grow and stay relevant in an era of increasing need and decreasing resources, a change in research training and practice will be necessary. Meaningful change necessitates a cultural shift that animates the research process with the values that guide clinical, supervisory and pedagogical perspectives. This type of change would facilitate a more productive and effective relationship between counseling practitioners, counselor educators and researchers. In order to reduce the research-to-practice gap, counselors must emerge from graduate programs prepared to utilize and to produce high-quality, relevant research. Until the counseling field engages in the research process in a way that is consistent with practitioners' values, the field's interactions with research will continue to be limited to a small handful of individuals, and the research-to-practice gap that inherently limits the potentiality of both practitioners and academics will continue. Counselor educators are uniquely suited to lead this charge and promote a congruent sense of professional identity that includes research. As a field, counseling can be a model for how the social sciences prepare themselves for the continued push toward evidence-based practice.

Research is a fixture of academic life. Counselor educators, in collaboration with counseling students and practitioners, could embark on new lines of inquiry that seek to better understand the relationship between research and the field of counseling. Several areas for future research are suggested. First, studies are needed that examine meaningful and productive ways to teach master's students how to engage with research. Second, models for research collaboration between researchers and practitioners should be studied and implemented. Third, understanding how practicing counselors utilize or do not utilize published research could inform a change in pedagogical practices. Finally, conducting empirical research on the model presented in this article would offer deeper understanding of the impact of the model on students as future practitioners.

The model outlined above offers a possible avenue for providing effective research training for counseling students, for creating a congruent identity as a field and for reducing the research-to-practice gap. The lived experience of using this model illustrates that it offers a realistic and sustainable approach for research training in counselor education. It shows that students are eager to change their relationship with research, and that by responding with professional values, counselors can make a meaningful difference in the research-to-practice gap.

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