

Humanistic Learning Theory in Counselor Education



The Professional Counselor
Volume 9, Issue 4, Pages 358–368
<http://tpcjournal.nbcc.org>
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doi:10.15241/kep.9.4.358

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The purpose of this paper is to explain how humanistic learning theory is applicable to current counselor education practices. A review of humanistic learning theory and the rationale for the application of the learning theory to counselor education provide a framework for application of these concepts to counselor education classrooms. Specifically, a person-centered framework is applied to the seeming incompatibility of external accreditation standards and humanistic learning theory. I propose suggestions for implementing humanistic, person-centered learning theory within counselor education programs and courses, focusing special attention on the attitudes and values of the counselor educator as these principles are applied.

Keywords: humanistic learning theory, person-centered theory, counselor education, accreditation, attitudes

With the philosophical shift in the mental health field from a meaning-making, holistic model of mental health toward a reductionistic, medical model of mental health, counselor preparation programs have adapted by increasing the emphasis on measuring outcomes, sometimes at the expense of focusing on aspects of counseling that are less easy to quantitatively assess (Hansen, 2009). Furthermore, external realities such as university policies and accreditation requirements have put pressure on programs and faculty members to focus more on measurable outcomes. In many counselor education programs, external requirements come in the form of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2015) standards. With the advent of the 2009 standards, the focus in counselor education changed from program-level evaluation to directly assessing student outcomes (Barrio Minton & Gibson, 2012), a trend consistent in higher education (Penn, 2011). Although the admirable intention of accountability measures is to ensure quality programs and competent counselors, these systems do not provide incentives for counselor educators employing pedagogy that emphasizes process and critical thinking over product and knowledge retention.

Many counseling faculty ascribe to a humanistic way of viewing people, including students, and the increasing focus on outcomes over process may create dissonance for these counselor educators. They can feel internal as well as external pressure to adopt a more didactic or reductionistic form of teaching that does not fit with their philosophy of education (Hansen, 2009). This paper is directed at person-centered counselor educators who wish to teach in a more humanistic way but feel constrained by the current system. This paper also may be helpful for other counselor educators who wish to explore humanistic teaching. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that counseling faculty can apply a person-centered learning philosophy to counselor preparation settings within the reality of external requirements intended to ensure quality in counselor preparation programs. Because the person-centered teaching literature is not sufficiently robust to accomplish this purpose, I will also draw from humanistic learning theory. First, I provide an overview and rationale for humanistic learning theory and then discuss the application of person-centered concepts, within the context of humanistic learning theory, to counselor preparation settings. When a view is specifically *person-centered*, I will use that term. Otherwise, I will refer to humanistic learning theory, which encompasses person-centered learning theory.

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Humanistic Learning Theory

Humanistic learning theory is grounded in the philosophy of humanistic theories of psychology, including person-centered theory (Gould, 2012). Primary contributors to humanistic learning theory include Arthur Combs, Carl Rogers, and Malcolm Knowles, all of whom believed the goal of education is to facilitate students' development and self-actualization (Combs, 1982; Gould, 2012; Rogers, 1951). Therefore, humanist educators have an unwavering trust in the individual's growth capacity and view self-directed learning as most facilitative of growth (Combs, 1982; Knowles, 1975; Rogers, 1951). Additionally, humanistic theorists hold a phenomenological view of humans in that they believe each person's view of the world is reality for that person and that learning is motivated by personal need based on one's internal frame of reference (Combs, 1986; Rogers, 1951). For example, a student with low self-efficacy might not attempt difficult projects because of a belief that "I am not capable," whereas a student with a high level of self-trust can go beyond the direct instructions of an assignment to tailor the assignment to fit their learning needs. Highly self-actualized individuals view themselves as dynamic beings who are constantly growing and changing (Knowles, 1975; Tolan, 2017).

In general, humanistic learning theorists define *learning* as the holistic growth of the person, including cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal domains (Combs, 1986; Dollarhide & Granello, 2012; Rogers, 1957, 1989). They tend to focus less on accumulation of knowledge and more on how the learner's way of being in the world impacts the integration of skills and knowledge (Combs, 1986; Kleiman, 2007). This view of knowing requires a paradigm shift for the person who tends to describe learning as the acquisition and application of knowledge. In particular, learners who have learned to approach assignments or classes with a grade-based mentality (e.g., "What do I need to do to get an 'A'?") may have difficulty changing, or even understanding the rationale for changing, their focus to a learning-based mentality (e.g., "What do I need to learn to positively impact my personal and professional development?").

Humanistic learning theorists avoid *teacher-directed learning*, defined as transmission of knowledge, because they believe the most important learning and growth cannot be transmitted directly from person to person (Knowles, 1975; Rogers, 1957, 1989). Rather, they believe knowledge integration is a natural process occurring in a facilitative environment (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Because learning requires this environment, humanistic educators focus first on themselves and their ability to provide that environment (Combs, 1982; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). In this article, the term *educator* is used in the broadest sense of the word to mean a facilitator of learning.

Rogers's Conditions in Humanistic Learning Theory

Most humanistic learning theorists base their view of the educator–learner relationship on Rogers's (1957) three therapist-provided conditions for personality change: congruence, empathic understanding, and unconditional positive regard (Combs, 1986; Mearns, 1997; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). In an educational setting, *empathic understanding*, which Rogers (1951) considered a sensitive understanding of a person's internal frame of reference, involves focusing on the person rather than only on course content (Mearns, 1997). For example, the educator also would value and empathize with learners' reactions to course content as well as other circumstances in learners' lives that might impact their experience in the class.

Unconditional positive regard is an experience of accepting and prizing another person regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with the person's behaviors or ideology (Rogers, 1957). Rogers and Freiberg (1994) described unconditional positive regard as "a basic trust—a belief that this other person

is somehow fundamentally trustworthy” (p. 156). This trust differentiates unconditional positive regard from the common use of the term *acceptance*. In a classroom setting, unconditional positive regard for students can mean valuing and respecting students wherever they are in their growth processes and trusting they are moving toward growth as they are ready or able (Kunze, 2013). For example, if a student struggles to accept feedback in supervision, the counselor educator will accept the student in that moment and trust that there are valid reasons for the student’s difficulty. This acceptance is an attitude and does not mean educators abandon their professional gatekeeping roles.

Congruence, also called *transparency* in a classroom setting, involves openness to one’s experience within a relationship, including an acceptance of one’s own feelings or desires at any moment, even if one chooses not to act upon those feelings (Mearns, 1997; Rogers, 1951; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Transparency is closely tied to a non-defensiveness that promotes openness rather than debate as well as the formation of respectful, trusting relationships between educators and learners (Mearns, 1997). These trusting relationships form the basis for open dialogue.

The result of the interaction between these conditions can be transformational for students in the classroom. When an educator makes a genuine effort to help a learner feel understood rather than evaluated, the learner is more free to stop judging or evaluating oneself and to creatively explore the learning environment with the security of knowing that any ideas, even those that conflict with the educator’s views, will be respectfully acknowledged and discussed (Combs, 1982; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Meaningful learning can occur in an environment in which the contributions and ideas of learners are valued just as much as those of the educator (Kleiman, 2007). Humanistic educators strive to provide some level of Rogers’s (1957) three conditions to all learners.

Rationale for Use of Person-Centered Learning Theory

The goal of facilitating relationships in a learning environment characterized by the person-centered conditions of congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy is to provide learners with the opportunity for the growth and development of the whole person (Dollarhide & Granello, 2012; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Some of the results of such a learning environment are a deeper understanding and acceptance of oneself, a strong connection and openness to the experiences of others, and the development of skills and knowledge to facilitate the growth of both the individual and society. Because of these outcomes, a person-centered approach to learning is an appropriate match for counseling faculty and supervisors who believe these growth processes are key purposes of training counselors (Combs, 1986; Dollarhide & Granello, 2012).

One of the primary goals of counseling faculty is to develop the counselor-in-training’s (CIT’s) belief system about counseling and about oneself as a counselor (Combs, 1986; Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010). From a phenomenological perspective, beliefs influence behavior; therefore, person-centered counseling faculty can focus on helping CITs develop their own beliefs about themselves in the context of counseling relationships (Combs, 1986; Dollarhide & Granello, 2012). When counseling faculty facilitate genuine, accepting, and empathic relationships between themselves and learners and among learners, they create an environment in which CITs are free to examine those beliefs that are both more and less accepted by society and then to modify those beliefs in ways that are more helpful (Mearns, 1997). For example, if a CIT holds stereotypical beliefs about a certain population, the CIT will be better able to express and challenge those beliefs in an open rather than judgmental environment.

Additionally, in a person-centered learning environment, CITs develop confidence in their abilities to find creative responses to difficult situations, such as client challenges and ethical dilemmas (Combs, 1986). Alternatively, when CITs feel they must act a certain way, they can learn to say the right words but fail to internalize a belief system that is meaningful to them. Therefore, when they are challenged or when the external evaluator is no longer present, they will quickly fall back into arguably less helpful ways of being with clients, such as giving advice. By offering a person-centered learning environment, counseling faculty help students meet CACREP standards related to facilitating a helping relationship (CACREP, 2015, 2.F.5.).

Relatedly, person-centered counseling faculty can utilize the learning environment as a microcosm of the helping relationship to allow CITs to experience the type of relationships counseling faculty hope they will provide their clients (Combs, 1986). Rogers (1957, 1989) argued that educators may foster the values and attitudes of a helping relationship by providing those same values and attitudes to learners. Although the professor–student relationship differs from the counselor–client relationship, the basic attitudes (care, warmth, prizing), values (worth of the person), and purpose of the relationship (growth) remain the same (Mearns, 1997). Most students in counselor education programs are intelligent and able to accomplish the academic work, but the relational skills necessary for an effective counselor cannot be memorized or studied for (McAuliffe, 2011; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). Therefore, it is critical that counseling faculty provide experiences that facilitate the development of relational abilities.

In addition to developing intrapersonally and interpersonally, CITs must develop good judgment and the ability to critically reflect on their counseling practice, including their work with clients and both current and future educational experiences (McAuliffe, 2011; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). Both the *ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014) and many state laws require new and experienced counselors to continue to seek professional development, and students need to be able to evaluate the training they are receiving. Additionally, in their analysis of extensive interviews with master therapists, Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992) found that those therapists considered continual reflection on their experiences and their growth process to be a key aspect of their professional growth. This finding supports King and Kitchner’s (2004) reflective judgment theory. They posited that as individuals progress in their development, they move on a continuum from viewing knowledge as truth that can readily be conferred by experts to seeing it as something that can be approximated based on what is known but can never be fully obtained because of the fallibility of human knowing. Counselors whose beliefs fall toward the reflective judgment end of this continuum will not assume that something must be true just because a professor or trainer told them it is the best way to do it. In addition, they will be more open to many views of the world and will also be able to critically yet nonjudgmentally evaluate those perspectives. Counselors are frequently required to tolerate ambiguous situations in which there is no clear right or wrong answer (McAuliffe, 2011; Skovholt, Jennings, & Mullenbach, 2004). Person-centered educators aim to foster a tolerance of ambiguity by encouraging learners and supervisees to examine the evidence themselves rather than implying that there is only one answer or one response to a given counseling concern or question (Rogers, 1951). The facilitation of open-mindedness in this way is relevant to CACREP standards related to diversity and advocacy.

CITs need to be able to address needs from clients with diverse backgrounds and expectations (CACREP, 2015, 2.F.2.; McAuliffe, 2011). One key aspect of multicultural competency is for counselors to be aware of their own attitudes, biases, and beliefs (Arredondo et al., 1996). Additionally, counselors must be able to think critically about the impact of their personal values on others (CACREP, 2015). A humanistic learning environment provides the opportunity for in-depth self-understanding and

critical thinking (Combs, 1986; Dollarhide & Granello, 2012). Rogers (1951) described people moving toward self-actualization as “necessarily more understanding of others and . . . more accepting of others as separate individuals” (p. 520). This attitude embodies that of a multiculturally competent counselor (Arredondo et al., 1996).

Objectives of a Humanistic Learning Environment

When educators provide the environment described above and students begin to take responsibility for their own learning, certain results related to this self-actualization process can be expected. One key outcome of the humanistic approach to learning is a deeper understanding of self (Dollarhide & Granello, 2012), an important characteristic of a counselor. Increased self-understanding can lead to deeper learning. Learning can be enhanced when adult learners are able to accept themselves as they are while continuing to work toward growth (Knowles, 1959; Kunze, 2013). Similarly, Combs (1982) indicated that highly self-actualized individuals tend to view themselves in a positive way while honestly accepting their areas for growth, an attitude that leads to freedom to take more risks in educational settings. For example, learners who do not base their self-worth on grades might feel more free to focus on the meaning class material has for their future careers rather than on retaining facts in order to make a high grade in the class. In clinical classes, supervisees who have both a sense of self-worth and an openness to growth are more likely to be authentic with their clients and supervisors as well as less concerned about finding the “right” thing to say, and can focus more on what is most helpful in the context of that specific counseling relationship rather than being self-focused on performing well. Further, when learners are given substantial control over their own learning, they are better able to regulate their own processes of thinking and learning, leading to greater integration of the material (McCombs, 2013).

A humanistic learning environment also promotes a sense of care, acceptance, and respect toward individuals in society as well as a connection to the human condition (Combs, 1982; Knowles, 1959; Rogers, 1951). Combs (1982) argued that when learners feel a sense of belonging with those around them, they naturally become curious about their peers’ interests, and thus their learning opportunities are expanded. Rogers (1951) believed that when a person can accept one’s own experience, the person is free to be more open to and accepting of the experiences of others. Similarly, Combs (1982) wrote that highly self-actualized people can “confront the world accurately, realistically, and with a minimum distortion” (pp. 106–107). This openness to their experiences impacts their problem-solving abilities because they have more perceptual information from which to make decisions. In a classroom setting, this connection or sense of belonging can result in positive, in-depth group discussions that facilitate the learning of all involved beyond what an individual instructor could accomplish by sharing only one perspective. Further, an openness to the experience of others can lead to challenging one’s implicit or explicit beliefs about groups of people who have previously been seen as “other.” In clinical settings, supervisees will undoubtedly be exposed to individuals who hold differing beliefs, and an openness to their own experiences can help supervisees work better with these clients.

Concrete knowledge and skills are an outcome in humanistic learning theory, though they are generally considered more of a byproduct than the primary focus of learning. Rogers (1951) stated that one of the goals of learning is to develop knowledge relevant to the specific problem of focus, as well as to develop strategies for acquiring knowledge for new problems. Knowles (1959) noted the importance of acquiring skills that will aid a person in reaching their full potential and allow that person to positively influence society. Furthermore, Combs (1986) emphasized that knowledge leading toward self-actualization does not have to be academic. These humanists believed that learners who experience a facilitative learning environment will better retain knowledge and skills because they will have critically examined, applied, and connected it to their lives (McCombs, 2013).

Other Considerations in a Humanistic Learning Environment

Because application of humanistic learning theory requires a paradigm shift for both educators and learners, some learners may struggle to feel comfortable with the idea that the educator's responsibility is to facilitate a learning environment and the learner's responsibility is to pursue growth (Mearns, 1997). Many learners have grown up in educational environments where acquisition of knowledge was almost exclusively the goal of learning, and an educator who presents them with a different way of learning may induce stress. However, person-centered and humanistic learning theorists have emphasized that empathically helping students in the process of gaining self-responsibility helps the whole person develop (Knowles, 1975; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Smith, 2002).

Providing a warm, transparent, empathic environment does not preclude counselor educators from giving students feedback that may challenge them. When students struggle, person-centered and humanistic educators try to develop an empathic understanding of the struggling student's view of oneself, to be accepting of that view, and to be transparently honest with the learner about his or her standing in the program. This conversation can involve counseling the student out of the program by communicating understanding that counseling may not be a good fit with the student's current development. The educator attempts to make such discussions a collaborative effort in promoting the learner's growth rather than a communication that the learner is failing (Dollarhide & Granello, 2012).

Application of Person-Centered Learning Theory in Counselor Education

Counseling faculty today are not only tasked with helping students develop their growth potential and learn the process of becoming effective counselors, but are also required to engage in assessment activities in addition to many other roles (CACREP, 2015). The purpose of the following section is to describe some specific ways in which a humanistic theory of learning can be applied to teaching and accountability measures.

Teaching

Given that the educator–student relationship is a model for the counselor–client relationship, and that students must feel accepted and understood in order to learn, the person of the educator is crucial in a humanistic classroom (Combs, 1982; Rogers, 1951). Of utmost importance is the counseling faculty member's belief in the growth tendency of the human being. The attitudes of congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding for the learner's perceptual world are predicated upon this foundation, and any practical intervention in the classroom must be firmly based in those attitudes rather than adherence to a specific technique. However, there are specific classroom practices that are more facilitative of a humanistic way of learning than others.

Lecturing and other forms of direct knowledge transmission are generally considered among the least person-centered methods for learning because they are typically based on a power differential in which the teacher is considered the expert (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Freire (2011) described this type of teaching as a banking system of education because it involves teachers "depositing" information in their students' heads, and he compared it to a system of education in which the students are active participants in deciding what is most important to learn and how. He believed students who were more active and took more responsibility for their own learning were better able to critically question their own and others' beliefs and thus promote growth. This assertion does not mean lecture is never used or valuable in a person-centered classroom (e.g., Cornelius-White, 2005), but the person-centered educator works to have an attitude of humility and collaborative exploration (Combs, 1982; Dollarhide & Granello, 2012; Freire, 2011; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). A person-centered theory of

learning requires the counseling faculty to give up much of their power and trust the learners' ability to contribute equally to the learning environment.

Person-centered counseling faculty might also relinquish power regarding learning objectives for individual learners (Knowles, 1975; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). The educator can have broad goals for the course, but counseling faculty can engage CITs in developing their own specific learning objectives and in deciding how those objectives will be met. Although it is clearly not possible to meet the needs of every individual in a course, counseling faculty can address the most common learning needs within the structure of the course and provide resources for individuals with unique learning interests (Cornelius-White, 2005; Knowles, 1975; Mearns, 1997). Projects proposed by students exemplify a humanistic-oriented way of helping students meet their learning objectives because self-chosen projects tend to be based on problems that are of relevance to the students (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Humanistic counseling faculty give students responsibility for the creation and implementation of projects and act as a resource when assistance or experience is needed. Projects that provide a resource or service to the community can help students reach learning objectives in an experiential way (Burnett, Long, & Horne, 2005; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011) and meet CACREP standards related to advocacy and diversity. In one classroom, student journal entries indicated that service learning increased the students' "awareness, knowledge, responsibility, and skills related to cultural, social . . . and civic concerns of diverse communities" (Burnett et al., 2005, p. 166). Educators also may encourage the self-direction of students by engaging students in posing a large-scale problem and giving the students the responsibility to investigate and propose possible reasons for the problem and ways to address the problem (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

One way that person-centered counseling faculty help CITs develop critical thinking is to place responsibility for learning upon the learners (Combs, 1986; Mearns, 1997). Knowles (1975) described self-directed learning as students taking "the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18). However, he realized that the typical student was not socialized to learn this way; therefore, he emphasized the importance of using small steps to facilitate self-direction. Although person-centered counseling faculty do not take responsibility for CITs' learning, they do feel much responsibility to students to provide a facilitative environment by developing meaningful relationships with CITs, serving as resources, providing needed supervision, and making necessary changes to the environment as learners pursue their growth process (Dollarhide & Granello, 2012; Mearns, 1997). Teaching CITs to think for themselves and helping them develop the basic attitudes toward people that are facilitative of change will give beginning counselors the tools to respond to difficult or unique counseling situations and to know how to find the type of supervision or support they need.

Ethical and legal issues are another important dimension for CITs (ACA, 2014, F.7.e., F.5.a.; CACREP, 2015, 2.F.1.), and one for which a humanistic approach to learning is particularly appropriate because of the focus on helping learners develop the ability to critically think through problems (Knowles, 1975). One way that person-centered counseling faculty can model ethical principles is by giving their students a full disclosure of what to expect from a humanistic-oriented learning environment. CITs need to be informed of expectations regarding their responsibility for learning, expectations for self-disclosure, and how grades will be assigned (ACA, 2014, F.9.a.; CACREP, 2015, 2.D.; Morrisett & Gadbois, 2006). Although these disclosures are necessary in any classroom, special clarification of the differences between a humanistic learning environment and a typical classroom may be necessary to

help decrease learners' anxiety about an unfamiliar learning environment (Knowles, 1975). Counseling faculty can emphasize that grades will not be reflective of learners' self-disclosure, but they also note the role of honesty about one's experience in facilitating growth (ACA, 2014, F.8.d.). Finally, counseling faculty can clarify appropriate faculty–student roles (ACA, 2014, F.10.; Morrisett & Gadbois, 2006). This may be particularly important in a humanistic classroom where the power differential between faculty member and student is decreased.

Teaching from a person-centered perspective is not an all-or-nothing endeavor. Just as each of the attitudes of a person-centered educator lie on a continuum, so do activities that may be utilized in the classroom (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). For example, self-assessment and student-directed inquiry are on the more purely humanistic side of the spectrum while lecture and questioning are on the teacher-focused extreme. Projects, portfolios, and role-plays fall somewhere in the middle. Additionally, person-centered counseling faculty may choose to assign one self-directed project and several teacher-directed assignments for practical reasons or because of their personal comfort level.

Accountability. One purpose of accountability measures, such as licensure and accreditation standards, is to confirm that individuals are qualified to provide the services they are offering, and institutions that make some statement to the public about the qualifications of an individual also have a responsibility to that public to graduate only those who meet such qualifications (Mearns, 1997). From a purely theoretical person-centered perspective, such external requirements as CACREP standards and the grades required by universities represent an external locus of control and could impede the process of learning by causing the learner to conform to external methods of evaluation (Gould, 2012; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Ideally, individuals would pursue learning solely out of an intrinsic desire for growth, and facilitators of learning would not have to worry with grades or formal assessments. Rogers disliked summative assessment because it implied that a person had reached an endpoint (Mearns, 1997), and person-centered educators believe growth is a dynamic process (Knowles, 1959; Rogers, 1957). However, from a practical perspective, accountability is necessary, both at the course level and the program level, to ensure CITs are adequately prepared and to protect students from programs that purport to train counselors but do not have sufficiently rigorous standards to adequately prepare their students for the work of effective counseling.

CACREP standards are aimed at ensuring that counseling programs produce competent counselors. Although many practices required to meet accreditation standards, such as the use of program-wide rubrics for specific classes, are not consistent with a person-centered and humanistic approach to learning (Hansen, 2009), person-centered educators can find ways to work within this context to maintain a facilitative learning environment. One possibility is for counseling faculty to give students the learning objectives for a certain course or rubric for a key assessment and allow students to create individual projects or products that will show their competency in the learning outcomes the standard or assessment is intended to address. Another option is the use of portfolios to measure some of the learning outcomes (Barrio Minton & Gibson, 2012). These alternate assignments are not intended to be viewed as ways of circumventing the CACREP standards, but as ways of meeting them via practices that are most meaningful for students and that best facilitate their learning.

Although person-centered counseling faculty have to operate in a learning environment that emphasizes external accountability requirements, they do not have to give up their approach to learning (Hansen, 2009; Mearns, 1997). Even if program policies require some specific assessments, counseling faculty have flexibility with other measures of learning outcomes. Furthermore, they can frame what they are already doing in terms that appeal to accreditation reviewers. Mearns (1997)

argued that person-centered teachers use a great deal of diagnostic and formative assessment as they help CITs develop learning objectives and assess whether those are being met. The type of assessment must fit the outcome desired (Cobia, Carney, & Shannon, 2011). If counseling faculty value process over the product, then they will focus on both formative and summative assessment throughout the process, such as the use of embedded assessments (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). Contracts are one form of assessment that encompasses aspects of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment and also rely on the self-direction of the individual (Knowles, 1975; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). With the use of contracts, each learner creates individual learning objectives and a plan for accomplishing the objectives. Once the educator and the learner agree on the terms of the contract, it is used to guide the learner throughout the course. At the end of the course, the learner completes a self-assessment on whether the contract has been completed sufficiently. The counseling faculty member typically has final authority over the grade the student assigns themselves (Mearns, 1997). Although contracts can be helpful in bridging the gap between student-directed learning and the need for accountability, their use evolves into a completely behavioral method without the attitudes that embody a humanistic learning environment (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). For example, if a faculty member engages students in creating learning contracts but does not simultaneously demonstrate respect and trust that the learners are capable of directing their own learning, the assignment is no longer humanistic. By including the students in all aspects of the assessment process, the counseling faculty member indicates a respect for the students' input and facilitates an internalized locus of control. By involving students in their own assessment, counseling faculty model ethical assessment procedures (CACREP, 2015, 2.F.7.) in that counselors also should seek client input before evaluating client functioning (ACA, 2014, A.1.c.).

Challenges. Regardless of how much an educator trusts the self-actualizing tendency in others, there are instances in which the timeline of the learning institution does not allow students sufficient time for their growth process (O'Leary, 1989). Person-centered counseling faculty do not see students as failing, but continuing their development in an environment that is more conducive to their current growth process. When a student needs to be counseled out of the program, counseling faculty are honest and empathic (Mearns, 1997). Maintaining an attitude of unconditional positive regard does not mean thinking everything a student does is fine. However, when dismissing a student from a program, counseling faculty work to maintain an empathic, caring relationship throughout the process in hopes that the student might continue to feel valued as a person by the counseling faculty.

Limitations. This approach may not be a good fit for all counselor educators, particularly those who do not identify with more humanistic modes of learning. In addition, this approach to learning is not always appreciated by all students. Some students prefer the teacher tell them what they need to know and how to demonstrate their knowledge. The idea of taking responsibility for their learning can be stressful for some students. Counselor educators utilizing this theory of learning need to assess whether such stress levels are facilitative or debilitating for learners.

Conclusion

Humanistic learning theory is a way of approaching counselor education that emphasizes the humanistic underpinnings of the profession rather than the current reductionist approach of diagnosis and skills development (Hansen, 2009). Person-centered counseling faculty can utilize humanistic learning theory to facilitate an open, accepting, and understanding environment in which they engage CITs in directing their own learning. Counseling faculty can focus on CITs' attitudes and beliefs about people in relation to knowledge and skills. Person-centered counseling faculty hope to foster CITs' self-understanding, caring and accepting attitudes toward people, and the acquisition

of concrete knowledge and skills needed in the counseling profession. Counseling faculty using humanistic learning theory engage learners in assessment of their learning as much as feasible, while honoring the realities of external evaluation through accreditation.

Conflict of Interest and Funding Disclosure

The authors reported no conflict of interest or funding contributions for the development of this manuscript.

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