How an RCT Lens Can Enhance Skovholt's Cycle of Caring for Counselor Educator Self-Care

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Abstract

Counselor educators engage in a variety of professional roles which prioritize supporting counselors-in-training's personal and professional development. In addition to their responsibilities to student development, counselor educators balance numerous responsibilities and roles as faculty members. These responsibilities can lead to stress and burnout amongst counselor educators if not prevented by using self-care. A model to support counselor educator self-care and their unique roles and responsibilities is needed. In order to center relationships in self-care and educational practice, the authors apply Relational Cultural theory to Skovholt's Cycle of Caring as a framework for traditional, in-person counselor education programs. The authors propose that this model may increase self-care among counselor educators and counselors in training. The authors also provide strategies counselor educators can use for their own self-care as well as classroom strategies to foster connection and community.

Keywords

Author's Notes

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While all faculty in higher education experience challenges of balancing the service, research, and teaching expectations and responsibilities, counselor educators may experience additional challenges due to their unique roles. Counselor educators serve as "counselor, educator, supervisor, researcher, advocate, and leader" (Harrichand et al., 2021b, p. 56) in their faculty roles. To successfully engage in these additional roles, counselor educators must establish and maintain professional relationships with students. Due to this relational work, it is imperative that counselor educators attend to their own self-care to prevent burnout and to model self-care strategies to their students (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014, Standard F.7.a.). Furthermore, it has been stated that "well counselor educators may be more likely to produce well counselors who are more likely to produce well clients" (Hill, 2004, p. 136). Despite the benefit of counselor educators maintaining wellness and the requirement of counselor educators to engage in self-care strategies, there is a dearth of literature on integrating self-care in the classroom setting.

In addition to the relational nature of the counselor educator role, there are additional factors impacting faculty in higher education. The ongoing mental health impact of the pandemic alongside the continued attention to addressing racial and cultural injustices within higher education and counselor preparation programs have heightened the call for increased focus on counselor educator and faculty self-care (Prasath et al., 2021).

Since the beginning of the pandemic counselor educators have had to: a) quickly develop skills in distance education, b) shift their curriculum to online learning platforms, c) and ensure that counselors-in-training were competent in providing counseling via telehealth. Counselor educators have completed these tasks while addressing their own personal illness and issues related to the pandemic and supporting their students through their unique experiences associated with the

pandemic. Navigating these stressors related to COVID-19 may have negatively impacted the counselor educator's ability to engage in self-care and wellness (Harrichand et al., 2021a).

In this article, we provide the rationale for the selection of Relational Cultural theory (RCT) (Jordan, 2010; Miller & Stiver, 1997) and Skovholt's Cycle of Caring (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016) that support the relational framework for self-care. We then discuss the unique challenges inherent for counselor educators which impact self-care and the ability to prevent burnout. Additionally, we discuss how RCT (Jordan, 2010; Miller & Stiver, 1997) can be applied to the Skovholt's Cycle of Caring (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016) to support counselor educator wellness and prevent burnout. Strategies for how the model can be applied in the counselor educator's role over the course of an academic term with attention to the role of faculty instructor and the classroom community. Finally, recommendations for future research are provided.

Rationale

In this article we discuss the application of RCT to Skovholt's Cycle of Caring as a model for counselor educator wellness. As counselor educators, we utilize RCT in our teaching, mentoring, and supervision practice. In addition, through ongoing attention to self-care, we have both developed teaching practices that emphasize the relational needs of students and supervisees. Conceptualizing the relationships with students and supervisees through the Cycle of Caring (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016) allows for each of us to engage in genuine, authentic relationships with students while maintaining the boundaries of our roles as counselor educators. These two models provide a framework to infuse and promote self-care and wellness into the existing higher education structure of academic terms with an emphasis on relational practice, an underpinning of counseling and counselor education.

Skovholt's Cycle of Caring is a model that is focused on the series of attachments and endings that occur within a professional's work (Skovholt, 2005). While Skovholt's model was initially applied in the therapeutic relationship, it could also be applied in the teaching relationship between counselor educator and students as cycles of beginnings and endings are inherent within an academic term. Each term has a beginning (empathic attachment), a working phase (active involvement), an end (felt separation), and a break between terms (re-creation) which parallels the stages in Skovholt's theory (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). When integrated with RCT, the model provides a foundation for how to engage in relationships with counselors-in-training in an educational setting.

In counseling and clinical work, RCT provides a relational framework for practice. Originally deviating from the psychological theories that focused solely on individualism and hierarchies of development, Jean Baker-Miller and Irene Stiver created the origins of the theory that centered relationship in understanding how optimal development occurs and how power-over structures create barriers to growth (Jean Baker-Miller Training Institute, n.d.). In RCT, the focus is on connection, mutual empathy, mutual engagement, authenticity, and growth fostering relationships (Jordan, 2010). It is through these connections that individuals grow and develop (Duffey & Somody, 2011) and experience the five good things. The five good things, which are a result of growth fostering relationships, include "zest, worth, productivity, clarity, and desire for more connection" (Miller, 1986, pp. 2-3).

Since the original development of the Cycle of Caring, Hou and Skovholt (2020) have further explored the characteristics that define highly resilient therapists. Central to their findings was the importance of having "a strong web of vibrant connections" (p. 392). Given the findings of the importance of connection, RCT constructs can be applied throughout the Cycle of Caring to

further support counselor educator wellness from a relational lens. Therefore, a unique model of faculty self-care which centers relationships is needed in order to foster faculty wellness, prevent burnout, and model wellness for students.

Faculty Roles and Responsibilities in Higher Education

Personal and professional stress in higher education can have an impact on faculty's productivity and satisfaction (Berebitsky, 2018). Faculty in higher education are charged with three primary roles and responsibilities including scholarship, service, and teaching (Hatchett, 2020; Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). The weight of each component within the workload can vary significantly across programs and universities (Hatchett, 2020) and faculty roles are expanding to include more responsibilities (Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008).

Eddy and Gaston-Gayles (2008) found that faculty identified work-life balance, new teaching expectations, unclear and expanding expectations, and issues related to gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation as the primary stressors that they experience within their faculty roles. Additionally, Elliot and Blithe (2021) found that women are more likely to experience microaggressions and issues with work-life balance when compared to men. Eddy and Gaston-Gayles (2008) also reported that participants shared that it was challenging to balance multiple roles and responsibilities and to learn how much time should be spent on numerous responsibilities. Furthermore, participants also shared that the lack of clarity and understanding of expectations led to feelings of isolation.

The teaching responsibilities and expectations in higher education exemplify the relational aspects of higher education. In the past five years there has been increased focus on relational pedagogy (Simel Pranjić, 2021). Within the teaching relationship, it is critical that the instructor understands and considers the process in which a power hierarchy influences the educator/student

experience (Karpouza & Emvalotix, 2019; Schwartz, 2019; Simel Pranjić, 2021). Simel Pranjić (2021) highlighted how educators can demonstrate a caring relationship from the onset of the relationship through the end of the course and beyond. Although it is important for the educator to foster an opportunity for a strong working relationship, the student also has a pivotal role in the relationship (Karpouza & Emvalotix, 2019; Simel Pranjić, 2021). There can be positive engagements and interactions between faculty and student; however, the relationship still requires work from both the educator and student and inevitably will at times lead to challenging situations that the educator must navigate. Challenging situations could include maintaining appropriate boundaries, failing to meet the other person's expectations, navigating obstacles regarding the faculty student match, as well as addressing situations on the part of the faculty or staff that impact the relationship (Karpuza & Emvalotix, 2019). As a result, educators must be prepared for these stressors and challenges as they navigate numerous student relationships with care.

Stressors and Burnout in Counselor Education

In addition to the three primary roles of faculty in higher education including scholarship, service, and teaching (Hatchett, 2020; Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013), counselor educators also serve as leaders in professional organizations, provide supervision and consultation, engage in community projects, and mentor both students as well as newer colleagues (Coaston, 2019). Furthermore, counselor educators have the responsibility to engage in gatekeeping. Counselor educators have the ethical responsibility to evaluate, remediate, and terminate students who are not demonstrating the necessary competencies expected (ACA, 2014, Standard F.9.a.). Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) also requires that "counselor education programs have and follow a policy for student retention, remediation,

and dismissal from the program consistent with institutional due process policies and with the counseling profession's ethical codes and standards of practice" (p. 7).

While some aspects of education and evaluation are objective, evaluating personal and professional competence in the gatekeeping process can be subjective which can create concern for counselor educators. During gatekeeping, counselor educators are expected to determine if a student is both academically prepared as well as interpersonally appropriate to work in a clinical capacity (Homrich, 2009). Many of the counselor educators' responsibilities including gatekeeping have a significant relational component (Kerl & Eichler, 2005) which can lead to profound emotional responses for counselor educators. Counselor educators shared that they have experienced sadness, exhaustion (DeCino et al., 2020; Kerl & Eichler, 2005), isolation (Gizara & Forrest, 2004; Kerl & Eichler, 2005), and apprehension, fear of conflict and/or retaliation as a result of engaging in gatekeeping (Kerl & Eichler, 2005). Kerl and Eichler highlighted that the relational investment in the gatekeeping process is reinforced when counselor educators lean into their counselor helping skills and focus more on helping rather than evaluation and dismissal when indicated. As a result of faculty leaning into the helping role, faculty can invest significant time working with the student to develop the needed skills. It is important that counselor educators maintain an awareness of these intense emotions associated with the gatekeeping process to protect faculty, peers, students, and themselves (DeCino et al., 2020).

When work stress, such as that related to the gatekeeping process, is not managed appropriately it can lead to burnout and can negatively impact counselor educators' well-being (Hill, 2004; Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). In addition, counselor educator burnout can negatively impact students and the university (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). As a result,

counselor educators are encouraged to model behaviors and practices to reduce the chance for burnout for counselors-in-training (Yager & Tovar-Blank, 2007).

Burnout is generally defined as emotional exhaustion due to work related stressors (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). Unfortunately, many counselors experience burnout (Skovholt, 2012) and if not addressed burnout could lead to client harm (Posluns & Gall, 2020). A counselor educator who experiences burnout could have decreased effectiveness in teaching which could potentially impact the care a counselor in training is providing to a client and harm that client (Hill, 2004). Additionally, faculty members experiencing burnout may not model wellness strategies, appropriate boundaries, and ethical practices. This could lead to the development of students who too are burned out and unable to engage in ethical practice (Harrichand et al., 2021b). Self-care may be one way to prevent burnout, to maintain wellness (Posluns & Gall, 2020), and to create a healthy work-life balance (Coaston, 2019).

Self-Care in Counselor Education

Self-care is an important component for both faculty and students in counselor education programs. The self is central in the counseling process and needs to be cared for in order to best serve clients (Skovholt, 2012). The counseling profession emphasizes a focus on prevention and wellness. Counselors need to practice self-care in order to best provide care for others (Skovholt, 2012). Unfortunately, despite the inclusion of the importance of self-care and impairment prevention for counselors in the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) and the CACREP Standards (2016), counselors often struggle with caring for themselves.

Counselor educators are required to model professional behaviors and practices expected by professional counselors (ACA, 2014, Standard F.7.a.). As a result, counselor educators have an inherent responsibility to engage in and demonstrate self-care for their students who are expected

to "engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities" (ACA, 2014, Introduction). Additionally, counselors, students, and supervisees are expected to monitor themselves for signs of impairment and reach out for support when indicated (ACA, 2014, Standard C.2.g; Standard F.5.b.).

Despite the significance of self-care being mentioned in the ethical codes, there is not a formal definition of self-care (Arcuri Sanders et al., 2020). Arcuri Sanders et al. further explained that a common theme present in self-care discussions is that self-care focuses on an individual's ability to care for themselves while simultaneously balancing multiple life roles and responsibilities. Additionally, self-care is idiosyncratic and evolving (Lin & Wilson, 2019) meaning that everyone will have their own self-care strategies that resonate with them, and these strategies will need to be revisited throughout one's professional work. For these reasons it is important that self-care is introduced early and infused throughout a student's education so that self-care becomes an integral part of the student's professional counselor identity. Thus, counselor educators are charged with fostering this development.

Counselor educators are in a unique position to teach about the importance of counselor self-care and wellness while modeling self-care for future counselors (Hill, 2004; Yagar & Tovar-Blank, 2007). It is of equal importance that counselor educators also engage in self-care to prevent their own burnout. Burnout prevention through self-care is important for counselors and counselor educators to ensure that they can engage effectively with their clients and/or students (Arcuri Sanders et al., 2020). As counselor educators engage in relationships with their students, a relational approach focused on relational growth and development, such as RCT, may support faculty wellness.

<center>**Relational Cultural Theory in Teaching**</center>

Counselor educators engage in teaching practices that support the development of knowledge, skills, and awareness of their students. Teaching approaches that are experiential and relational offer an opportunity for authentic and genuine engagement amongst faculty and students in which the classroom experience can be co-created and shared amongst the participants (Boyd et al., 2006). Relational Cultural theory is a theory of human development and growth originating from the work of Jean Baker-Miller (Miller, 1976) as well as Irene Stiver (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Relational Cultural theory scholarship has evolved from the sole initial focus of clinical and counseling work (Banks, 2006; Jordan, 2010) and cultural competence (Walker, 2008), to training, mentorship, and education across a range of fields (Schwartz, 2019). Relational Cultural theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding how relationships are central to healthy development. Growth occurs in relationship as a result of the presence of the five good things (Miller & Stiver, 1997) and through healthy relationship mutual growth and mutual empowerment can occur (Jordan, 2010).

The five good things include "zest, action, knowledge, worth, and a desire for more connection" (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 30). Zest is defined as experiencing an increase in energy and feeling alive when in connection. Action is when an individual experiences the motivation to make change through the experience of connection. Knowledge is when an individual understands themselves as well as others better. A sense of worth is defined as the individual understanding that they matter. Finally, when an individual experiences, zest, action, knowledge, and worth, they then experience a desire for more connection in the present and in the future. Consequently, when counselor educators place relationships at the center of their teaching practices, growth and connection can lead to enriching educational experiences for students and faculty (Schwartz,

2019). Integrating RCT while utilizing the Cycle of Caring framework (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016) provides counselor educators the opportunity to cultivate the five good things.

Skovholt's Cycle of Caring

As is the case with RCT, the Cycle of Caring (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016) has been applied to counseling, therapy, nursing, and other allied health professions. As a framework for understanding the experience of compassion fatigue, self-care, and burnout, Skovholt (2005) initially created the Cycle of Caring as a three-part process that detailed the relational experiences that occur within the helping professions. Upon further revisions, Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2016) added an additional stage and detailed these four stages of the Cycle of Caring as: 1) empathic attachment, 2) active involvement, 3) felt separation, and 4) re-creation . Each stage represents an active process in which the identified professional (e.g., counselor, teacher, nurse) participates in an experience of the work of that stage.

The first stage, empathic attachment, consists of the connection and bonding that must occur for a healthy therapeutic alliance to be created between the professional and the client. The second stage, active involvement can be referred to as the working stage of the cycle in which the "content expertise" of the professional is in active performance (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 31). This content will vary based upon the field of work and specialty as well as the scope of the goals of the client or student. The third stage of the Cycle of Caring is the felt separation stage which consists of active detachment and closure. Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison (2016) explained this stage can be experienced by some as a stage of grief and loss that must be "honored" and supported fully (p. 33). Finally, the fourth stage of the cycle of caring consists of the re-creation stage. This stage provides a full appreciation for the personal and collective process of regeneration that must occur for professionals in order to fully reengage in relationship again. Any professional

or student who has experienced burnout will be familiar with the feeling of wanting a break from the academic schedule; this stage speaks to the time away from one's professional life roles and responsibilities and the ability to utilize an "off-button" to one's responsibilities (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 35). In the classroom setting, utilizing the Cycle of Caring offers counselor educators a framework for the flow of connection and disconnection throughout the traditional academic term.

<h3 style="text-align:center">**Relational Cultural Theory Lens for the Cycle of Caring**</h3>

Centering relationships in teaching practices recognizes the importance of how we learn and develop through relationships (Schwartz, 2019) and counselor educators, specifically, engage in teaching and supervision practices which center relationships. Applying core RCT concepts (Miller & Stiver, 1997) to each stage of the Cycle of Caring (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016) provides further understanding of the mutual experience of relationships. Growth occurs in a bidirectional manner and taking care of oneself does not require isolation from relationships with others. Rather, the relational emphasis of RCT can provide counselor educators with further strategies for self-care which utilize relational growth in the prevention of burnout in academia.

Empathic Attachment and Mutual Engagement

The initial stage of the cycle of caring is the required step that the individual takes into empathy and engagement, referred to as "our caring side" (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 25). A willingness to create opportunities for connection with others requires vulnerability and openness. It is imperative for the counselor educator to model this opportunity for connection given the authority held by faculty members. This authority held by counselor educators is primarily seen in the role of evaluator and gatekeeper; however, students can also perceive this in higher education settings through a paradigm of false dichotomies (Walker, 2008), in which students may

assume there is only one correct answer in the classroom. Counselor educators can model a healthy relationship with power in which students are supported to engage authentically and share power with counselor educators through mutuality. This can occur when counselor educators present opportunity for collaborative work, not just amongst students but alongside faculty members. Maureen Walker (2020) explained this dynamic by stating that "the power-over culture renders false dichotomies, reducing and constricting the range of human potential. This paradigm offers the possibility to dominate or be dominated; to be successful or to be alone; to be mule or be queen" (p. 133). Within a power-over hierarchy in the classroom, interactions are built on faculty members providing the answers and students searching to find those answers. Students begin to focus on how to be correct and less on how to collaborate with one another for shared learning. The use of RCT offers a relationship centered understanding of engagement in which mutual engagement occurs. Rather than viewing engagement as a one-directional approach in which the instructor presents themselves to connect with the students in the context of the classroom, RCT provides the framework of mutual engagement which leads to mutual growth (Schwartz, 2019).

Mutual engagement requires attention to the power-over dynamics that are present in higher educational settings. Students will enter academic settings with past relational images of teachers that may not match the role of relationship-centered faculty (Schwartz, 2019). Counselor educators engage in gatekeeping and supervisory roles with counselors-in-training. Counselor educators can utilize power-with strategies to bridge the barriers that students hold for their willingness to engage in mutuality with faculty members. Miller & Stiver (1997) described "power with" as a "power that grows as it is used to empower others" (p. 16). Counselor educators must be willing to be known and empowered by their students in order to create a power-with relationship that centers mutual experience of growth appropriate to the role of student and

counselor educator. This beginning stage of the Cycle of Caring, when enhanced through an RCT emphasis on mutual engagement, creates a framework for the classroom environment in which all members have an opportunity to empathically attach with one another through mutual engagement.

Active Involvement and Mutual Empathy

Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison (2016) described the active involvement stage of the Cycle of Caring as the "work phase" of the cycle (p. 30). In a classroom setting, we might consider this stage as focusing on the learning outcomes and the specific content of the course. The strategies of teaching in this stage can be relationship-centered with the intention of creating opportunities for mutual empathy with counselor educators and students. Mutual empathy extends beyond the first stage of mutual engagement by clearly describing the relationship as a source of learning not just the means to new content knowledge. Miller and Stiver (1997) explained "In short, the goal is not for individuals to grow out of relationships but to grow into them. As relationships grow, so grows the individual. Participating in growth-fostering relationships is both the source and the goal of development" (p. 22).

Several RCT theorists have described the importance of understanding that mutuality does not mean "sameness" or "equality" but rather a dynamic process of a quality of relationship in which both participants are fully engaged and active (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 43). In a traditional classroom setting, the instructor may view their role in the active involvement stage as one of disseminating information or providing students with important content. In a classroom of mutual empathy and relationship-centered teaching, there is less of a need for one directional, top-down dynamics in which a faculty member provides content to their students. Utilizing mutuality in this stage of active involvement encourages instructors to view how they relate to their students and how students relate to their instructors as opportunities for growth, connection, and mutual

empathy. Creating projects or assignments in which students engage in creating new knowledge with one another alongside an instructor allows for new means of growth that are specific only to that classroom or supervision experience. Instructors can maintain appropriate boundaries within the scope of their role as evaluator while still engaging with students through a relationship-centered, mutually empathetic working stage.

Felt Separation and Mutual Empowerment

Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison (2016) described this stage of felt separation as an intentional ending of the relationship. Counselor educators can benefit from creating endings in their classroom experiences to model termination and closure that is supported through mutual empowerment. Mutual empowerment, according to RCT theorists, occurs as a result of mutual engagement and mutual empathy (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Providing an emphasis on an ending experience that is relationship centered will present students with dedicated time for reflection within the classroom space. Specifically, this means engaging in an ending with one another rather than an individual focused reflection of content and the individual learning outcomes. Students can engage with one another through shared feedback and describe to each other how empowerment has occurred within the classroom space. Similarly, the instructor can provide feedback about their experience of growth and empowerment through genuine feedback regarding what they learned and how they experienced student growth and development.

An ending experience that is focused on emphasizing how growth has occurred within and through a relationship consists of reflection on why students may move towards disconnection from one another rather than remain in connection during an ending. Strategies of disconnection are often used as means to protect oneself from anticipated loss or hurt (Jordan, 2010). Students or instructors may prefer traditional classroom environments which require less vulnerability and

openness of mutual engagement to prevent any of the risk of loss that occurs with connection and growth. However, focusing on the ending stage of the Cycle of Caring through an RCT lens requires faculty to remain engaged with students and participate fully in the ending experience. This may require acknowledging disconnections that have occurred as well as demonstrating a genuine openness to feedback from students regarding their experiences in the class. In educational settings which value power-over hierarchies, instructors may have genuine concerns regarding student evaluations and feedback as a reflection of their job security. Yet emphasizing the value in ending through connection allows for students and instructors to engage in feedback that is mutually empowering in preparation for the next Cycle of Caring to occur.

Strategies for Integrating Relational Cultural Theory and the Cycle of Caring in the Classroom

Counselor educators can use strategies in each phase of the cycle of caring which support the process of relational engagement and self-care amongst faculty as well as the classroom community. This process begins from the onset of the academic term, in which counselor educators can use the opportunity to communicate their teaching philosophy informed by RCT with attention to how the cycle of caring structure will be utilized throughout the term. When counselor educators intentionally spend time in the beginning of an academic term sharing their teaching philosophy with students this communicates to students the expectations the counselor educator has for how they will engage with students in the course as well as provides a framework for students to calibrate their own expectations of what they can anticipate in the learning environment. Additionally, the counselor educator's clear communication of their RCT approach fosters transparency in the power that is inherent in the roles of student and counselor educator (Schwartz, 2019) while also maintaining fidelity to the gatekeeping and evaluation components that are

critical to our professional role. Finally, when faculty demonstrate a commitment to self-care, students experience a model of care in their own development (Simel Pranjić, 2021).

The following strategies provide examples of how an RCT lens can enhance each stage of the Cycle of Caring. We propose that when faculty engage in these strategies, they may create opportunities for practicing self-care in their instructor roles and promote self-care within their students. Each stage is conceptualized from a classroom community perspective and a faculty instructor perspective.

Empathic Attachment

Students and faculty often enter classroom spaces busy, distracted, and rushing from one commitment to another. We can intentionally bring a focus on beginning rituals of mutual empathy and connection during each class meeting in order to support empathic attachment through relational engagement with the classroom community and faculty.

Classroom Community

Initial activities for the classroom community can include having students begin each class with a brief grounding technique to enter the room through three deep belly breaths. Grounding techniques, specifically through deep breathing, are effective in bringing attention to the present moment and limiting distraction in counseling experiences (Peace & Smith-Adcock, 2018) and can similarly be useful in educational settings. Once students are settled and free of distraction students can be provided with one or two prompts for discussion with a classmate that will produce opportunities for empathy and connection between them in the present moment (Harrichand et al., 2021a). Ideas such as sharing experiences of gratitude that students are aware of for themselves, areas of struggling with their self-care this week, or successes in their self-care can be shared. Faculty can encourage students to share culturally specific self-care strategies and communicate

with one another in a culturally congruent manner (Cholewa et al., 2014). The goal of this shared reflection is to create opportunities for authentic engagement with one another free of the need to produce content or reflection for the purpose of the class material instead students can learn about diverse world views and experiences from one another (Irvine et al., 2021). When students connect with one another in this manner they increase engagement with one another through collaboration and authenticity (Bruneau, & Reilly, 2021).

Faculty Instructor

In accordance with a framework for supporting faculty self-care, it is imperative for counselor educators to set intentions for their semester goals along with holding realistic expectations for additional academic responsibilities. The beginning of a term in academia often involves a rush of commitments. While attending to the importance of the empathic engagement stage of the cycle, faculty can use strategies to anticipate this time frame and limit unrealistic expectations. One strategy counselor educators can use is to say no to external or administrative commitments for the first two weeks of a term and say yes to collaborative and growth-fostering relationships that support faculty's overall goals and intentions for the term. When faculty engage in this type of intentional limit setting, they permit themselves an opportunity to create presence with themselves and their students (Booth & Schwartz, 2012) which is essential during the empathic attachment stage of the Cycle of Caring.

Active Involvement

Students appreciate routines, realistic expectations, and clear boundaries in which they experience the instructor as fully present in the shared learning community (Schwartz, 2019). Creating space for the work to be completed during class allows for mutual engagement and capitalizes on the time in which students and faculty spend together.

Classroom Community

The active involvement stage of the Cycle of Caring requires intentional action to invite participation of the designated work of the class period. Strategies to enhance this stage of the Cycle of Caring include creating routines for students in which they can focus their energy specifically on the task. Working in small groups, having a designated individual who will share the themes of the group work, and asking for collaborative input in the groups allows students to understand the shared expectation of workload. Given the inherent power dynamics in a classroom (Schwartz, 2019), faculty are responsible for clearly communicating the expectations for collaborative work, including how students will be evaluated in the group, what the expectations are for engagement during the shared working time, and ideas for ways in which students can remain accountable with one another. The faculty members can participate in this brainstorming within the small group discussion by providing suggestions of strategies that have led to success in the past and barriers that may be present (Moran & Milsom, 2015). Drawing on strategies which have previously been noted as beneficial in educational settings to support students of color in engaging authentically, faculty can utilize techniques such as recognizing success amongst students within the classroom setting, encouraging students to talk with each other about their own growth and progress, and maintain high expectations for group and academic work (Cholewa, et al, 2014).

During this stage of active involvement, faculty can also increase mutual empowerment by sharing with students how the counselor educator themselves best provides feedback. For example, if students want to submit first drafts but a faculty member knows they are unable to provide feedback within the designated time frame it is best to communicate this mismatch of expectation and determine how feedback can be provided during class time that supports student's

confidence and work product but also respects the faculty member's time and boundaries. When counselor educators communicate to students that they themselves are also busy and maintain full workloads, this level of transparency can support the experience of clarity and mutual empowerment (Booth & Schwartz, 2012).

Faculty Instructor

Relational Cultural theory provides guidance on how boundaries can be opportunities for connection and clarity (Walker, 2008). To engage in active involvement with students requires a faculty member to be clear in the scope of their role and create consistency with their students during the designated class. Counselor educators have many responsibilities outside of the class time, yet the class times with students can serve as working periods in which faculty have an opportunity to provide real-time feedback and engage fully. Utilizing asynchronous tools to provide content allows the use of the shared class time to be utilized as a collaborative working stage (Moran & Milsom, 2015). While in-class lecture experiences can be beneficial and support overall learning goals (Savickas, 2013), within the active involvement stage of the cycle of caring faculty can best utilize shared class time to sit with their students and work through the designated application of the content to their specific assignments. During this time, by engaging with students authentically, faculty members can focus on fostering an environment which encourages the development of the five good things (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Felt Separation

Students and faculty can utilize routines for ending while acknowledging the ending that is occurring as well as the empowerment students and faculty may experience as they complete the course with one another. While students will encounter each other in future classes or projects, each class experience provides an opportunity to practice ending in a healthy and complete way.

Classroom Community

As the end of class nears, faculty have an opportunity to ask students to actively end their experience with one another, which is what Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison (2016) referred to as felt separation. Strategies that can be used within the classroom to create this process include reconnecting with their initial partner from the empathic attachment stage regarding how they experienced the class, and how that experience will inform their ongoing development as counselors. Faculty can specifically ask students to spend time in reflective writing about their current awareness of their growth and development regarding the active involvement portion of the classwork and sharing that with each other (Sage & Sele, 2015). Lastly, faculty can create an opportunity in a small group setting to provide one another with feedback regarding their collaboration and connection (Lertora et al., 2020).

Faculty Instructor

During this ending stage, faculty members can share their own experience of the class, what they learned from students, and how they have grown as an instructor during this time frame (Schwartz, 2019). In addition, instructors can actively seek feedback from students about the structure of the class, the assignments, and the process of engagement. This can be done in small group discussion at the end of project or assignment time as well as in individual reflection writing by students to faculty. Faculty can then provide responses to each student based on their genuine experience of each student and share in dialogue regarding what went well and what could be improved.

Recommendations for Future Research

This model has focused on traditional, in-person counselor education programs. As programs emphasize online and hybrid learning, continued attention should be paid to models for

relational engagement and growth in an online educational environment. In addition, this model can benefit from outcome research. Counseling education programs can benefit from evaluating relational growth in the developmental process of counselors-in-training. This model also provides a theoretical framework for continued outcome research on faculty self-care, relational well-being, and job satisfaction in counselor education.

Conclusion

This article has provided a framework for integrating RCT concepts into the Cycle of Caring in the classroom setting. When the class experience is structured to model the cycle of caring, students and counselor educators can benefit from the emphasis on mutual engagement, mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment. Integrating RCT concepts into this cycle of caring provides counselor educators with a means authentically support their own self-care while also modeling self-care for their students. Due to the varied roles and responsibilities, counselor educators have unique relationship-centered self-care needs. RCT provides counselor educators with a theoretical framework for centering growth-fostering relationships in their teaching and supervision practices.

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