

Pedagogy in Counselor Education: 2011–2015 Update

By: Casey A. Barrio Minton, [Carrie A. Wachter Morris](#), and Sharon L. Bruner

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Abstract:

This research update includes a quantitative content analysis of 133 peer-reviewed articles regarding teaching and learning published in 21 journals of the American Counseling Association and its divisions between January 2011 and December 2015. The authors discuss the focus areas, pedagogical foundations, and methodologies of the articles in comparison with the findings of the original 2001–2010 study.

Keywords: counselor education | pedagogy | content analysis | teaching

Article:

The counseling profession is in a time of profound development as evidenced by large increases in the number of accredited counselor education programs and the number of students enrolled in those programs, the incorporation of educational accreditation into several state licensure requirements, and the inclusion of professional counselors as participating providers in the U.S. military's TRICARE health system (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2017; Lawson, 2016). Demand for mental health counselors is at an all-time high, with nearly triple the average growth anticipated in the next 10 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). The 2016 CACREP Standards have continued to develop with greater attention to workplace demands for entry-level counselors and doctoral-level counselor educators and supervisors (CACREP, 2015). These latest revisions include designation of teaching as one of five core curricular areas for doctoral programs.

In the midst of these developments, Barrio Minton, Wachter Morris, and Yaites (2014) conducted a content analysis of 230 peer-reviewed articles regarding teaching and learning in 20 journals published by the American Counseling Association (ACA) and its divisions from January 2001 through December 2010. The authors found clear trends toward publishing about specific content, extensive attention to social and cultural diversity, lack of attention to several core areas (e.g., human growth and development, career, assessment, and research), and

The authors thank Jennifer Cannon and Jaimie Stickl for their assistance with coding. This brief report is an extension of an article originally appearing in *Counselor Education and Supervision* and should be reviewed in context of the original report. Given the brevity and focus of this report, complete procedures are not included.

tendency for authors to ground rationale in clinical resources or competencies. Concerning findings included lack of attention to doctoral preparation, preponderance of conceptual articles, and empirical articles featuring indirect measures of learning.

Since the original content analysis was completed, leaders within the profession have made strides toward greater professionalization and marketplace recognition of counselors (Lawson, 2016). The 2009 and 2016 CACREP Standards were intended to “simply and clarify” requirements and “promote a unified counseling profession” (CACREP, 2015, p. 4) in which there is an emphasis on core knowledge and skills. From 2011 to 2015, demand for counselor preparation increased substantially; CACREP reported increases of 32.06% in institutions with accredited programs, 25.50% in specialty areas accredited within institutions, 16.70% in master’s student enrollment, and 31.56% in doctoral student enrollment (CACREP, 2013, 2017).

The purpose of this study was to compare trends in the 2011–2015 literature with those observed in the initial 2001–2010 study to determine the degree to which the counselor preparation literature is changing alongside a rapidly developing profession. With the exception of minor updates to the most recent CACREP language, research questions were identical to those used by Barrio Minton et al. (2014, p. 164):

1. To what degree does the literature focus on teaching and learning in general, teaching content, teaching techniques, and overall pedagogical practices?
2. To what degree does the literature focus on master’s- and doctoral-level students?
3. To what degree does the literature correspond with CACREP core curricular areas, CACREP specialty areas, and elective topics? Specifically, which CACREP core curricular and specialty areas are represented in the literature?
4. To what degree does the literature include foundations in learning theories and instructional research? Specifically, which learning theories and instructional research are represented in the literature?
5. To what degree does the literature represent empirical research? Specifically, what research approaches and foci are represented in the literature?

Method

To allow for comparison between studies, we used the quantitative, descriptive content analysis methodology and codebook developed by Barrio Minton et al. (2014, pp. 164–165); methodology was developed in accordance with Neuendorf’s (2002) recommendations. To be included in this study, journal articles must have been full length, published by the ACA or a division of ACA, and focused “on how people learn knowledge or skills, teaching for acquisition of knowledge or skills, or challenges related to teaching and learning in counselor education” (Barrio Minton et al., 2014, p. 164). Complete procedures and operationalization of variables are located in the original article.

Both the 2001–2010 study and the current study spanned multiple iterations of the CACREP Standards, including 2001, 2009, and 2016. Barrio Minton et al. (2014) compared the three sets and concluded that although the CACREP Standards were more clearly articulated over time, categories were consistent enough across iterations to allow ease of interpretation for coding. Although operational definitions did not change, we updated names of categories to be consistent

with the 2016 Standards (e.g., “group work” became “group counseling and group work”). Because clinical rehabilitation counseling had been added as a specialty area in the 2016 Standards, we added this category to the coding schema. We added a category of other to capture new content that may have emerged after the original study; however, close inspection of three articles initially coded as other indicated fit within the existing schema.

The research team for the current study was composed of two senior faculty members and three doctoral students affiliated with two CACREP-accredited programs. To ensure consistent coding, team members received quantitative content analysis training and engaged in a series of four iterative pilot coding exercises using random samples of 10 articles until they reached interrater agreement of no less than 90% on each item. Consistent with prior procedures, one senior author and one research assistant independently coded each article using a form on Qualtrics, an electronic data collection tool. Initial interrater agreement averaged 94.07% across categories. Coding pairs discussed discrepancies to agreement, consulting a third member as necessary.

Results

An initial review of tables of contents and abstracts for 21 ACA and division journals yielded 158 articles for potential inclusion; 133 articles met all inclusion criteria. This represented an average of 26.60 articles per year, a 15.65% increase from 2001–2010.

Articles were from the following journals: *Counselor Education and Supervision* ($n = 34$, 25.56%), *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* ($n = 27$, 20.30%), *Journal for Specialists in Group Work* ($n = 14$, 10.53%), *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling* ($n = 8$, 6.02%), *Counseling and Values* ($n = 7$, 5.26%), *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation* ($n = 7$, 5.26%), *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* ($n = 7$, 5.26%), *Journal of Counseling & Development* ($n = 6$, 4.51%), *The Family Journal* ($n = 6$, 4.51%), *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling* ($n = 4$, 3.01%), *Journal of Addictions & Offender Counseling* ($n = 3$, 2.26%), *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* ($n = 3$, 2.26%), *Adultspan Journal* ($n = 2$, 1.50%), *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin* ($n = 1$, 0.75%), *Journal of Military and Government Counseling* ($n = 1$, 0.75%), *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology* ($n = 1$, 0.75%), *Journal of College Counseling* ($n = 1$, 0.75%), and *The Career Development Quarterly* ($n = 1$, 0.75%). *Journal of Employment Counseling, Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, and *Professional School Counseling* did not publish any eligible articles during the review period. Most journals published a similar proportion of teaching and learning articles during the 2001–2010 and 2011–2015 study periods; however, *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* contributed 20.30% of all articles included in the 2011–2015 analysis compared with just 4.78% in the original study.

For ease of comparison, Tables 1 and 2 include both the 2011–2015 results and the 2001–2010 findings. Our discussion focuses on the themes we identified in the articles and the substantial changes that occurred over time.

Research Question 1: General Focus of Articles

Consistent with previous findings (Barrio Minton et al., 2014), the most common focus of articles was on specific teaching techniques (48.12%); trends included a focus on use of groups in counselor education ($n = 13$), experiential or service learning ($n = 11$), cultural immersion or multicultural outreach ($n = 10$), and introduction of training models ($n = 9$). The proportion of

pedagogical practice articles (21.80%) more than doubled during this review; trends included a focus on spirituality ($n = 6$), multicultural training ($n = 6$), and research and evaluation ($n = 4$). The proportion of articles focused on teaching specific content (20.30%) decreased by nearly half; specific trends are discussed in response to Research Question 3. Although articles regarding teaching and learning in general (9.77%) still composed the smallest proportion of articles, the proportion increased by more than half; trends included evaluation of dispositions ($n = 3$), assessment of learning ($n = 2$), and distance/online education ($n = 2$).

Research Question 2: Student Level

As shown in Table 1, the majority of articles written from 2011 to 2015 focused on master's-level students (61.65%), with most remaining articles applying across student levels (34.59%). This stands in contrast to 2001–2010 findings where over half of the articles did not specify student level. During the review period, there was a small increase in the percentage of articles specific to doctoral programs (3.01%); one article (0.75%) focused on undergraduate teaching and learning.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Articles by Category for 2001–2010 and 2011–2015

Category	2001–2010 ($N = 230$)		2011–2015 ($N = 133$)	
	n	%	n	%
General focus				
Specific teaching technique	99	43.04	64	48.12
Pedagogical practices	21	9.13	29	21.80
Teaching specific content	95	41.30	27	20.30
Teaching and learning in general	15	6.52	13	9.77
Student level				
Across student levels	126	54.78	46	34.59
Master's	95	41.30	82	61.65
Doctoral	5	2.17	4	3.01
Undergraduate	4	1.74	1	0.75
Pedagogical foundation				
Foundation clearly identified	34	14.78	29	21.80
Foundation minimally identified	28	12.17	10	7.52
Foundation not applicable to article	34	14.78	31	23.31
Other foundation identified	103	44.78	63	47.37
Research status				
Empirical total				
Data-based effectiveness/student learning outcomes	24	10.43	25	18.80
Data-based pedagogical practices	2	8.70	28	21.05
Data-based satisfaction/experiences	30	13.04	24	18.05
Not empirical total				
Not data-based with integration of experiences	86	37.39	32	24.06
Not data-based without integration of experiences	70	30.43	24	18.05
Research methods				
Quantitative	51	68.92	35	45.45
Qualitative	19	25.68	31	40.26
Mixed-method	4	5.40	11	14.29

Table 2. Number and Percentage of Articles by CACREP Core and Specialty Area for 2001–2010 and 2011–2015

	2001–2010	(N= 230)	2011–2015	(N = 133)
Category	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
CACREP master’s core curricular areas	147	63.91	75	62.50
Professional counseling orientation and ethical practice	11	4.78	3	2.50
Social and cultural diversity	73	31.74	36	30.00
Human growth and development	1	0.43	1	0.83
Career development	4	1.74	3	2.50
Counseling and helping relationships	28	12.17	13	10.83
Group counseling and group work	32	13.91	16	13.33
Assessment and testing	2	0.87	2	1.67
Research and program evaluation	4	1.74	1	0.83
CACREP master’s specialty areas	55	23.91	18	15.00
Addiction counseling	2	0.87	2	1.67
Career counseling	0	0.00	0	0.00
Clinical mental health counseling	9	3.91	7	5.83
Clinical rehabilitation counseling ^a			1	0.83
College counseling and student affairs	2	0.87	0	0.00
Marriage, couple, and family counseling	16	6.96	0	0.00
School counseling	29	12.61	9	7.50
Counselor education and supervision	5	2.17	4	3.33
Electives or noncore areas	57	24.78	28	23.33

Note. CACREP = Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs.

^aClinical rehabilitation counseling was not a specialty area during the 2001–2010 study period.

Research Question 3: Correspondence With CACREP Standards

We examined articles not focused on teaching and learning in general to determine whether the main focus of the article was on CACREP core areas, CACREP specialty areas, or elective areas. Because raters selected all applicable areas, areas may add to more than 100%.

As shown in Table 2, the proportion of articles focused on master’s-level core areas (62.50%) and within specific core areas was remarkably stable during this review period. As in 2001–2010, social and cultural diversity (30.00%) still had over twice the attention of any other core area; group counseling and group work (13.33%) and counseling and helping relationships (10.83%) remained well-represented in the literature. Articles regarding social and cultural diversity were overwhelmingly based in research ($n = 23$) and were mostly focused on specific teaching techniques ($n = 16$) and pedagogical practices ($n = 13$). Articles regarding counseling and helping relationships were also overwhelmingly data based ($n = 9$) and tended to be focused on specific techniques ($n = 8$). Articles regarding group counseling and group work were mostly data based ($n = 12$); with only two exceptions, they were focused on specific techniques (i.e., experiential groups for counseling students).

The proportion of articles focused on master’s specialty areas decreased from 23.91% to 15.00%; they were primarily accounted for by articles regarding clinical mental health counseling

(CMHC; 5.83%) and school counseling (7.50%). No clear trends emerged in focus areas. As in 2001–2010, other specialty areas had no or little representation in the literature.

As in 2001–2010, nearly one quarter of articles focused on electives or noncore areas (23.33%). Trends in this area included in-depth multicultural or social justice experiences such as international immersion ($n = 9$), interprofessional collaboration ($n = 4$), and addiction preparation for nonspecialists ($n = 3$).

Just 3.33% of articles focused on doctoral-level teaching and learning. These included three articles regarding research preparation and one article regarding oral examinations.

Research Question 4: Pedagogical Foundations

As noted in Table 1, the proportion of articles with clear grounding in learning theory or research increased by nearly one half to 21.80% of 2011–2015 articles. These articles were most often grounded in experiential learning theory (e.g., Kolb, 1984; $n = 8$), critical or transformative learning theories (e.g., Freire, 1993; Mezirow, 1991; $n = 6$), and reviews of research ($n = 7$).

The proportion of articles with minimally identified foundations decreased by over one third to 7.52%, and the portion of articles using other foundations, such as competency statements or standards, remained relatively stable at 47.37% of articles in 2011–2015. The greater percentage of articles with foundation not applicable (23.31%) may be attributed to the growth in pedagogical practice articles between the two study periods.

Research Question 5: Research Status

Articles published from 2011 to 2015 showed substantial shifts in empirical focus. In contrast to 2001–2010, when only a third of articles (32.17%) had an empirical foundation, in 2011–2015, well over half (57.89%) of articles were empirical. The largest growth was in articles focused on pedagogical practice (21.05% in 2011–2015) and effectiveness or student learning outcomes (18.80%). In contrast to the 2001–2010 finding that over two thirds of empirical articles were quantitative, empirical articles were nearly evenly split between quantitative (45.45%) and qualitative (40.26%) methodologies; 14.29% used mixed methodologies.

Discussion

Findings from this 5-year update indicate some areas of remarkable stability alongside some meaningful steps forward in scholarship of teaching and learning in counselor education. Consistent with 2001–2010 findings from Barrio Minton et al. (2014), articles in the current study showed the following characteristics:

- continued focus on specific teaching techniques;
- stable focus on social and cultural diversity, counseling and helping relationships, and group counseling and group work to the exclusion of other CACREP core areas;
- stable focus on CMHC and school counseling to the exclusion of other specialty areas; and
- relative lack of attention to doctoral-level preparation.

Several meaningful changes emerged in this update. Counselor educators are publishing more articles regarding teaching and learning, and they appear to be doing so with greater focus on training models and learning frameworks. The proportion of articles focused on teaching specific content decreased by over one half, indicating movement away from *what* counselor educators teach to *how* counselor educators teach. Articles reviewed in this update also indicate a subtle shift toward more general attention to critical, overarching issues in teaching and learning, including distance education, student dispositions, and assessment of learning. Although there was a relative lack of attention to doctoral preparation, our review found three articles on research preparation, which is an area noted to be particularly important to the development of the profession (Borders, Wester, Fickling, & Adamson, 2014).

The subtle shifts relate to growing dialogue in the profession as reflected in recent conference programs (e.g., Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, 2017). These are also consistent with the proliferation of distance education programs, particularly in counselor education (e.g., Carlisle, Hays, Pribesh, & Wood, 2017), and the requirement that doctoral students receive preparation regarding “effective approaches for online instruction” (CACREP, 2015, p. 35). At the time of this writing, CACREP had accredited 56 online programs, of which 35 had received initial accreditation since 2011; another six online programs were in late stages of the accreditation process (CACREP, n.d.). Although the literature reflected some shifts, the degree of attention to this area is not in proportion to the realities of practice.

Initially, Barrio Minton et al. (2014) expressed serious concerns regarding the lack of clear grounding of teaching and learning work observed in publications from 2001 to 2010. The proportion of articles for which there was a clearly identified theoretical or research foundation increased by nearly half; indicating substantial growth in intentionality and focus during this short period of time. In contrast to initial findings, wherein clearly grounded work drew almost exclusively from critical theories and minimally grounded work featured cursory mention of experiential education, foundations in these articles were balanced among critical theories, experiential learning, and research reviews. It is possible that CACREP’s designation of learning outcomes related to teaching (CACREP, 2009) and of teaching as a core area for doctoral programs (CACREP, 2015) has led to counselor educators becoming equipped to draw from deeper foundations.

Finally, 2011–2015 featured a clear shift to a focus on empirical investigation, with a total increase of 79.95% between studies. The proportion of articles designed to help educators understand current teaching practices more than doubled, as did the proportion of articles using direct measures of learning outcomes. This finding may be related to recent standards (CACREP, 2009, 2015) requiring programs to assess and report direct evidence of student learning. It is heartening to see that counselor educators are producing more empirical studies examining learning taking place in the classroom, as opposed to the previous focus on self-report and student satisfaction (Barrio Minton et al., 2014). This shift is particularly important given that the student perception of learning may not translate into actual skills developed or implemented in counseling and other helping professions (Calderon, 2013).

Limitations

Limitations of this study are consistent with those noted by Barrio Minton et al. (2014), including the exclusion of interdisciplinary journals, difficulty in discerning pedagogical foundations of articles, lags in article publication times, transition periods between sets of

accreditation standards, and the caveat that categorization of articles is not an evaluation of quality. In addition, members of this team were different from members of the original research team. Although the team took great care to train coders in methodology and rigorous application of the coding manual, it is possible that some changes noted in this study may be accounted for by subtle differences in interpretation.

Implications

Barrio Minton et al. (2014) raised a number of questions regarding meaning of trends in the teaching and learning literature, and many of these questions still stand. In particular, why is there near silence regarding core curricular areas such as professional orientation, human development, career development, assessment, and research and program evaluation? Are these areas no longer relevant or central to counselor preparation? If they are still relevant, do we have evidence that counselor education students have sufficient knowledge and skill in these areas? These questions warrant conversation and exploration in professional venues.

Similarly, the research literature features little attention to CACREP specialty areas in general and almost no attention to areas other than CMHC and school counseling. The most recent annual report by CACREP (2017) indicates that the number of CACREP-accredited CMHC and school counseling programs dwarfs the number of accredited programs in all other remaining areas. A total of 27,447 students were enrolled in CMHC, mental health, and community programs; 11,196 students in school counseling programs; 3,287 students in marriage, couple, and family programs; and just 896 students in all other programs combined. To what degree do literature and enrollment trends reflect realities of practice and marketplace demand for specialty areas? Has the profession arrived at a time when counselors will identify solely by work setting? These questions have resurfaced over time and warrant attention (Bobby, 2013).

Articles published over the last 5 years show a definitive shift toward clarity of foundations in manuscripts regarding teaching and learning. It is quite likely that this shift is due to more overt attention to teaching and learning in doctoral-level curricula and expansion of doctoral-level internships as required by the 2016 CACREP Standards. Future researchers may examine content addressed and processes used in preparing doctoral-level teachers, including links between preparation methods and effectiveness in the classroom.

As Barrio Minton et al. (2014) closed the 2001–2010 article, they urged attention to development of quality research regarding teaching and learning in counselor education. The manuscripts we examined indicate that researchers are indeed shifting beyond conceptual ponderings about what counselor educators should teach to exploring how counselor educators should teach, reporting current practice, and using direct evidence of student learning to support their findings. There is still much to be learned about the scholarship of teaching and learning in counselor education. Future researchers may investigate the rigor and methodology used to understand teaching and learning in counselor education. Reviews of research may also bring clarity to the collective body of knowledge and standard of practice regarding teaching and learning in counselor education. New studies may investigate the impact of instructional strategies on clinical skills obtained and implemented in the counseling room. Together, these advancements may help strengthen and realize the potential of the next generation of professional counselors.

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