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# **One Dance, Different Moves: A Qualitative Study on Filipino Counselor Educators' Pedagogy**

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study was conducted to describe the pedagogy used by Filipino counselor educators through the views and experiences of a select group of Filipino counseling education students. Adopting a phenomenological design, qualitative data from a select group of counseling education students were collected through individual interviews. Cool and warm analyses were performed to examine the qualitative responses of the participants. From the findings emerged five broad themes describing the different pedagogical moves employed by Filipino counselor educators: (1) modelling positive behaviour and competence; (2) mentoring by scaffolding; (3) designing out-of-class learning experiences; (4) teaching through research; and (5) developing reflective practice through experiential learning. The findings of this study highlight the need for counselor educators to be trained on the ways and means of facilitating learning for the optimal development of prospective counselors.

## **Keywords:**

ASEAN Counseling, Counselor education, Counselor Educators, Pedagogy

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## **Introduction**

Counselor education is imperative in producing quality guidance counselors (Aman & Ahmad, 2010). Ascertaining that graduates of counselor education programs develop the required and expected competencies in the practice of counseling is vital in counseling playing a central role in addressing the society's mental health issues. Counselors are expected to develop personal (e.g., genuineness, empathy, caring, flexibility, self-awareness) and

professional (e.g., assessing clients, multicultural competencies, effective treatment) qualities (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquet, 2016) from the beginning of their academic training until they mature in actual practice. In the school setting, guidance counselors are considered as agents of change and are expected to be instrumental in facilitating adaptive behaviors among students. Providing interventions for people's mental health issues using underdeveloped counseling skills can be as dangerous as (or even more dangerous than)

lack of intervention. In evidence-based framework, one of the critical elements in selecting treatments is the sufficient training and competency of the counselor. The usage of any counseling intervention may be futile, or even harmful to certain extent, if the counselor lacks sufficient training and skills (Kazdin, 2008). Therefore, it is imperative that counseling practitioners are trained well in their educational preparation for the profession—the reason why counselor educators have a pivotal role in the advancement of the counseling profession. Central to this role is the quality of teaching that counselor educators provide to facilitate the knowledge and understanding of counseling education students.

There are two ways in which counselors can become trainers for counselors-in-training. First, a more experienced counselor can provide formal supervision to a counselor-in-training during the internship phase of their academic training. Secondly, counselors may choose to be a counselor educator and teach graduate level courses in counseling. The present study focused on the latter setting and aimed to explore the pedagogical strategies of counselor educators. Course work had been observed to substantially account for the self-efficacy of counseling students (Larson & Daniels, 1998). Additionally, Dollarhide, Smith, and Lemberger (2007) pointed out that effective pedagogy facilitates counseling students' meaning construction of learning experiences, which leads to effective counseling practice. Hence, exposing counseling students to realistic counseling environment can prepare them more effectively for actual counseling practice. Given that students in counseling education must learn both theoretical knowledge and practical skills required in the practice of counseling, it is imperative to explore the pedagogical strategies that counselor educators employ in the classroom.

Counselors and counselor educators have advocated the use of specific pedagogical strategies to facilitate the training of counseling education students. For instance, *role play* has always been one of the most common strategies used in teaching counseling subjects (Smith, 2009). Dollarhide and colleagues (2007) observed the limitations of traditional demonstrations in teaching counseling

theories subjects and proposed a strategy they termed *transparent counseling pedagogy* (TCP). This strategy is an innovation in the use of counseling demonstration through the facilitation of critical thinking using monologue and dialogue during role-plays conducted in the classroom. Similarly, Clarke, Binkley, and Andrews (2017) proposed the dramatic pedagogy model (DPM) as a comprehensive model of learning through role-playing with the use of professional actors to play the role of counselees. Involvement in realistic counseling-related tasks increases confidence in performing actual counseling tasks (Tang, Addison, LaSure-Bryant, Norman, O'Connell, & Stewart-Sicking, 2004). In addition, experiential pedagogy using actors and vignettes enhances counseling students' ability to build therapeutic alliance and case conceptualization (Grant, 2006). Practicing students in the classroom by giving them hypothetical cases to manage in order to develop clinical skills directly translates to actual practice (Cummings, 2000).

Meanwhile, many counselors emphasized the need to teach counseling education students on how to be more reflective in their practice. For instance, Schmidt and Adkins (2012) viewed the development of students' capacity for reflection as essential to their future success as counselors. To this end, counselor educators recommended the use of letter writing (Hoffman, 2008), reflective writing (Ziomek-Dagle, 2017) and dialogue (Moir-Bussy, 2010) in counselor education to promote reflective counseling practice. There are also those who advocated teaching counseling education students to become creative (Lawrence, Foster, & Tieso, 2015). Needless to say, counselor education is a complex and dynamic process that requires counselor educators to think and reflect on the approaches and strategies they used to facilitate the learning of prospective counselors.

In spite of the emerging trends on pedagogy in counselor education, there is a dearth of literature pertaining to the pedagogy that Filipino professors use in counselor education. While some researchers have given emphasis on the need for reforms in counselor education in the Philippines, (e.g. Garcia, 2012; Wong-Fernandez, 2000; 2001), little have been said about pedagogy in counselor education. While

Garcia (2012) argued the need for counselor educators to rethink the teaching approaches they used in the classroom, not much have been said about the current teaching practices of Filipino counselor educators. Nevertheless, Garcia (2012) advocated that a forum on best teaching practices among counselor educators is important to address the demands of the Philippine basic education curriculum. It is therefore important to examine the pedagogy that Filipino counselor educators utilize. This is even more important in the graduate level as Republic Act 9258 or the Guidance and Counseling Act (2004) prescribes a master's degree in guidance and counseling as the minimum requirement for eligibility in taking the licensure examination for guidance counselors in the Philippines. This means that prospective guidance counselors or school counselors need to study beyond their undergraduate training and enroll in a master's program in guidance and counseling or in a related discipline (e.g., counseling psychology).

## **Purposes of the Research**

The main purpose of this study is to describe the pedagogy used by Filipino counselor educators through the views and experiences of a select group of Filipino counseling education students. Examining the counseling students' views and experiences on the pedagogy of their professors can provide knowledge on how Filipino counselor educators teach counseling education subjects. Such knowledge may have significant implications to counselor education and the development of counselor educators. Thus, this study aimed to address the central question: What are the pedagogical strategies that Filipino counselor educators used in teaching counseling education subjects?

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design, Study Site and Participants**

The present study employed a qualitative research methodology. This design was adopted as it provides opportunities for a more in-depth description of the experience (i.e. pedagogical

moves) under investigation. Specifically, the study used phenomenological design to explicate the meaning of a phenomenon (counselor educators' pedagogy) through the lived experience of counseling education students.

This study was conducted in a state university in Manila, Philippines. The said university is considered to be one of the pioneers of the master's program in guidance and counselling. During the time of the study, the master's program in guidance and counselling is one of the more popular graduate programs in the aforementioned university in terms of students enrolled. The curriculum of the said program includes the six counseling subjects that are assessed by the licensure examination for guidance and counseling.

This study involved ten (10) counseling education students (i.e. enrolled in the master's program in guidance and counseling) from the aforementioned state university. According to Polkinghorne (1989), a phenomenological research may involve 5 to 25 participants. The 10 students were selected with purposive sampling. The sole criteria for selection is the completion of at least twelve units or the equivalent of four subjects out of the six subjects required in the licensure examination for guidance and counseling (e.g. counselling theories, career guidance). It is believed that the number of counselor education subjects completed by the participants have given them substantial experience to effectively described their counselor educators' pedagogical approaches and strategies. Majority of the participants were female (n = 7) with ages ranging from 24 to 36 years old. During the time of the study, six of the participants were working as school counselors, whereas the others were basic education teachers.

### **Data Collection**

The purpose of the study was explained to the selected participants. They were assured of the privacy and confidentiality of all data that will be collected from the study. After obtaining informed consent from the participants, profile information were assessed and a series of semi-structured individual interviews was conducted using an interview guide containing the following principal questions: (1) How would

you describe the way your guidance and counseling professors teach in your classes? (2) What specific strategies and/or tools do your professors use in your classes? (3) What do you like about the teaching approaches of your professors? The interviews were audio-recorded. Interviews ranged from 40 to 90 minutes and all individual interviews were completed in one session.

### **Data Analysis**

Verbatim responses from the interviews were transcribed by the researchers. For accuracy of transcription, corrective listening was performed (Flick, von Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004). Statements given in Filipino were provided with English translation. Cool and warm analyses (de Guzman & Tan, 2007) were then performed to make sense of the transcribed data. In the cool analysis, the transcribed data were read and reread repeatedly to extract significant statements that provide descriptions of the counselor educators' pedagogy from the reported views and experiences of the participants. The significant statements were further analyzed by identifying statements that may be clustered together to identify categories that reflect the participants' common and typical experiences. In the warm analysis, these initial categories were subjected to thematic analysis by examining similarities and relationships among them in order to extract themes that provide a collective description of the participants' views and experiences of their professor's pedagogical strategies in counselor education. To ensure validity and trustworthiness of findings, the extracted themes were then subjected to external validation using the critical friend technique.

### **Findings**

From the qualitative analysis of the responses of a select group of counselor education students emerged five themes that represent the pedagogical moves employed by counselor educators in teaching counseling education subjects. This includes: (1) *modelling positive behaviour and competence*, (2) *mentoring by scaffolding*, (3) *designing out-of-class learning experiences*, (4) *teaching through research*, and (5) *developing reflective practice through experiential learning*. As shared by the participants

themselves, these pedagogical moves facilitated their learning experiences as they transition from novice to expert practitioners of counseling. Central to the experiences of the counseling education students is the assumption that their professors are experts in the field of counseling who assist them in being and becoming more competent and effective school counselors.

### ***Modelling of Positive Behaviour and Competence***

Counselor educators employ modelling of positive behaviour and competence in order for students to learn the ways and means of counselling, especially in the conduct of individual counselling and group facilitation sessions. This pedagogical move refers to counselor educators' use of modelling to allow students to learn a specific skill or procedure in counseling. This move is mainly conducted through personal modelling (i.e. counselor educator as the model) or through other-person modelling (e.g. use of a video). This is typically done through simulation of the counseling process and demonstration of a counseling procedure (e.g. intake interview, counselling) or counseling skill (e.g. probing and reflecting during counseling). As narrated by one participant, *"I learned a lot from one of my professors because she provided us with videos where we can see how counselling is really done. We learned from the videos the right way of doing counseling and the learning is reinforced as we have discussion after the film viewing."* As verbalized by another student, *"Our professor acted the role of the therapist and we watched how she developed rapport with the counselee which was played by our classmate."* Another student shared, *"Before we did the empty-chair technique, our professor did a demonstration first."*

Interestingly, it seems that the use of modelling as a pedagogical move may go beyond teaching counseling skills. As observed in another student's narration, *"I also teach in college so I intend to copy the style of my professor in teaching. I like the way he facilitates counseling demonstrations in our class."*

### ***Mentoring by Scaffolding***

Consistent with the participants' positive view on the expertise of their professors, counselor educators are seen as mentors who facilitate student learning through scaffolding. Mentoring by scaffolding is a pedagogical move that refers to the use of scaffolding as a strategy to assist students in their learning and task performance. This pedagogical move is generally implemented during hands-on exercises and demonstrations in counselling, group facilitation, and case analysis. As verbalized by the participants:

*"It was difficult for me to do a group session. Good thing, my professor helped me in facilitating the group. I became more confident because of the experience."*

*"My professor asks me questions that allowed me to understand what I need to focus on my case analysis"*

*"At first, we really did not understand the procedure. But through trial-and-error and with our professor's guidance, we were able to perform the procedure and got the results we were looking for."*

Mentoring through scaffolding is also evident even when students are tasked to do the reporting or presentation of lessons. In such cases, the counselor educators act as experts who guide the students as they discuss the assigned lessons or topics. As shared by a participant: *"I really did not understand the question of my classmate but my teacher paraphrased it for me and I was able to answer my classmate."* Another participant narrated: *"Our professor helped the reporters in explaining difficult topics. She corrects us if we explained something wrong or if we forget to discuss something important."*

### ***Designing Out-of-Class Learning Experiences***

This pedagogical move refers to counselor educators designing learning activities outside of the classroom. This pedagogical move is typically reflected in homeworks, flexible learning activities, and other class requirements that require counselor education students to individually or collaboratively

perform learning tasks. For example, some counselor educators require students to watch clips of counseling sessions in the internet as part of their homework. As narrated by a participant: *"Our 'prof' required us to watch YouTube. I started to understand Gestalt therapy better after watching sample sessions."*

This pedagogical move is also evident in the use of community engagement activities where students are tasked to visit specific communities to provide lectures, seminars, and socialization services. For instance, one participant narrated: *"We brought foods for the children. We also conducted games for them after we conducted our lessons."* Another one commented: *"Being given the chance to interview guidance counsellors as part of our requirements allowed me to learn more about the profession."*

The use of out-of-class learning experiences is also typical in group process and program development where students are tasked to develop and implement guidance modules in settings outside of their classrooms. As narrated: *"I learned a lot from developing a module, especially when we use the module to teach high school students...Even the principal was impressed."*

### ***Teaching through Research***

While the focus of counselling education is on the practice of guidance and counselling, the development of research competence is an important outcome that counsellor education programs should have. Thus, teaching through research as a pedagogical move is important in the holistic development of future counsellors. This pedagogical move refers to the integration of research activities in the teaching of counselor education subjects. This is move is performed by providing students with opportunities for direct involvement in research (e.g. action research, literature review). This is evident in the following verbalizations:

*"We were also required to do mini-research in our practicum class. We did a report on the needs analysis of college students."*

*“We did a research report on our project.”*

Teaching through research is also done through the use of research reports as resource materials in the classroom (e.g. journal articles as reference). As commented by the participants:

*“Before, I only learned about counselling theories in the books. Now, I know that we need to also consult research articles that provide support to what counselling practice is most effective.”*

*“I learned a lot from the readings that were provided by our professors...I actually have a thesis proposal in mind because of one of the readings I encountered.”*

*“Everytime we were given a journal article, it means we need to read it and do a paper on it.”*

### ***Developing Reflective Practice through Experiential Learning***

This pedagogical move refers to the counselor educators’ teaching students to be reflective practitioners by providing experiential learning activities where students are stimulated to do reflective and insightful thinking. This is typically done during case analysis or case study. As narrated by a participant, *“You really need to think deeply before you can finalize your case analysis. Our professor told us to go beyond the raw data and learn how to theoretically explain the case... We need to use a theory.”* Another participant shared: *“After reading the sample case analysis, we were required to give our personal reflections on the case and the action taken by the counselor.”* This pedagogical move is also evident in the varied practicum activities that students undergo. As remarked by the participants: *“We need to report what we learned from our practicum. We were also required to report what insights have we gained from our practicum experience.”*; *“I think I became a critical thinker because of the various tasks we experienced in our practicum.”*

Demonstration of a counselling skill or procedure is another experiential learning activity

that facilitates reflection. As verbalized by the participants:

*“After our classmates have demonstrated the counseling approach that they have reported, our professor asked what have we learned, what insights have we gained.”*

*“I remember playing the role of a counselor in the empty-chair technique. It was fun although I was also nervous because I was afraid that I will say something wrong. But I learned a lot from the experience. After the demo, I realized the right and wrong things that I said.”*

Being reflective is also facilitated by teaching students on how to design and implement counseling intervention programs. As shared by one participant, *“I like the time when our class learned how to conceptualize counselling cases... But determining the factors that influenced the maladaptive behaviours of the case was not enough. We were made to reflect on what we learned about the problem and develop an intervention to address the problem.”* Another student shared, *“In our class, our main requirement was the development of a counselling plan. To do that, we needed to study the results of the assessment of our counselee and reflect on the best possible approach for intervention.”*

### **Discussion**

Through the lens of counseling education students, this study surfaced the different pedagogical moves employed by Filipino counselor educators in their counseling education classes. These pedagogical moves facilitate the learning experiences of the students as they transition from novice to expert practitioners of counseling. As observed in the findings of this study, the five pedagogical moves indicate the use of dynamic and varied strategies for teaching knowledge and skills that counselors need in the practice of their profession. Indeed, the pedagogical moves of the Filipino counselor educators can be described as practice-oriented strategies as they seem to focus on facilitating students’ competence in actual counseling

practices (e.g. individual counseling, case analysis, program implementation). This is evident in the use of case study, simulation, demonstration, module development, and conduct of seminars as pedagogical tools. This finding is important as it suggests that counselor educators give more weight on teaching applied and procedural knowledge more than teaching factual and cognitive knowledge.

The use of modeling in general, and modeling through simulations and demonstrations in particular, is consistent with the widely-accepted use of role play and demonstration in teaching counselor education subjects (Clarke, Binkley, & Andrews, 2017; Dollarhide et al., 2007; Smith, 2009). The findings of the present study supported previous empirical findings. For example, involvement of students in counseling-related tasks helps boost their efficacy in performing actual counseling tasks (Tang et al., 2004). Pedagogical approach that involves utilizing actors and vignettes enhances ability to build therapeutic alliance and case conceptualization among counseling students (Grant, 2006) and helps them develop clinical skills directly translates to actual practice (Cummings, 2000). In fact, role-plays in counseling courses has turned into a fundamental components of counseling programs (Burnett, Ilamel, & Long, 2004; Fall & Livitov, 2002; Levitov, Fall, & Jennings, 2009; Osborn, Dean, & Petrucci, 2004). Counseling simulations are useful tools in emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and decision making during actual counseling sessions. It also highlights the need for accountability for problems that usually arise during sessions. Overtime, trainees become more efficacious, critical and reflective on how they run counseling sessions (Larson, Clarke, Wesely, Koraleski, Daniels, & Smith, 1999; Rabinowitz, 1997).

The findings seem to suggest that the Filipino counselor educators understand the need to provide prospective counselors with closer and more realistic depictions of the various counseling processes and procedures. This involve “learning by doing” as seen in simulations where the student plays the role of a counselor or counselee, as well as “learning by observing” as in the case where students observe demonstrations and simulations involving their

professors and classmates. Meanwhile, the use of experiential learning to develop reflective practice is in consonance with the call for counselor educators to develop the reflective capacities of counseling education students (Hoffman, 2008; Moir-Bussy, 2010; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012; Ziomek-Dagle, 2017). The counselor educators’ emphasis on reflective learning seems to indicate that the Filipino counselor educators understand the value of teaching prospective counselors become more reflective in their practice. While the use of mentoring through scaffolding, teaching through research, and designing out-of-class learning experiences were not explicitly discussed in the literature on counselor education, the use of these pedagogical strategies is indicative of the Filipino professors’ use of varied and dynamic instructional approaches in counselor education. These approaches contribute to the growth of counseling profession by providing opportunities for counselor students in creating new knowledge (McLeod, 2001).

By and large, the counseling education students seem to understand that their education and development will progress well if they learn through the expertise of their professors. This premise is congruent with the counselor educators’ use of modelling and scaffolding as pedagogical strategies. Nevertheless, the counselor educators’ use of out-of-class learning experiences, teaching through research, and experiential learning for reflection as pedagogical strategies indicates that the counselor educators also aims for their students to learn independently. Indeed, the pedagogical moves employed by the Filipino counselor educators seem to reflect an eclectic approach to teaching and learning. While this study did not inquire on the pedagogical beliefs or philosophies of the counselor educators, the pedagogical experiences of the counselor education students in this study provide support to the notion that elements of behaviourist, cognitivist, and constructivists approaches are present in the pedagogical moves of the Filipino counselor educators.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The main purpose of this study is to describe the pedagogy used by Filipino counselor educators through the views and experiences of a select group of Filipino counseling education students. While previous literature show that counselor educators use specific pedagogical strategies to facilitate the learning of counselor education students, not much is written on the pedagogy of Filipino counselor educators. Hence, identifying and describing the pedagogical strategies used by Filipino counselor educators is important in contributing to our knowledge on counselor education and development.

In summary, the findings of the study provide evidence that Filipino professors use different strategies and tools in the teaching of counselor education subjects. Through the different pedagogical moves employed by counselor educators, the counseling education students acquire the competencies that are necessary in the practice of their profession. This may have allowed the students to have a stronger sense of competence in being and becoming counseling practitioners. Hence, the findings of this study confirm the pivotal role of counselor educators in the training and development of current and future counselors.

Given that counselor education programs in most universities do not explicitly train prospective counselors to become counselor educator, it is imperative that curriculum development and revision of such counsellor education programs consider introducing a course on pedagogy for counsellor education. Such pre-service course in pedagogy can provide prospective counselors the basic competencies that would allow them to become effective counselor educators. In-service training on pedagogy for counselor educators should also be made available to allow current counsellors to acquire the pedagogical skills needed to become effective and innovative counselor educators.

Despite the seemingly compelling evidence on pedagogical strategies in counseling education, readers should take the findings with caution for two reasons. First, the participants in the study were

recruited from one university alone. It is plausible that a particular institution possesses a certain inclination for specific set of teaching approaches that are peculiar or not representative of the overall population from various educational institutions. Second, since the study is qualitative in nature, insights gained from the limited number of participants cannot be generalized as true for all counseling students in the country. Nevertheless, in spite of these limitations, the findings advance the literature on counselor education by providing a preliminary description of the pedagogy used by Filipino counselor educators. Hence, our understanding of Filipino counselor educators' pedagogy may further expand through the conduct of similar studies on counselor educators' pedagogy. For example, a qualitative study on counselor education pedagogy viewed from the lens of the counselor educators themselves seems to be important. Investigating counselor educators' pedagogy in a specific subject may also provide a deeper and richer understanding on how learning is facilitated within a specific context and environment.

This study concludes with the idea that the quality of Filipino counselors depends largely on the quality of their counselor education. Therefore, emphasis must be given in making it certain that counselor educators have the right ways and means to facilitate learning for the optimal development of prospective counselors.

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