Discussion Board 1: Professional Identity

In Chapter 1, one of the activities asked you to imagine entering an occupation that had no accepted standards for preparation (accreditation), no state or national credentials (licensure), no ethical standards for practice (ACA / Division Codes of Ethics), no foundation for serving a pluralistic and culturally rich and diverse population, and as a consequence, no defined areas of competence or scope of practice. In reality, these areas describe is the identity of a profession. Yet at the same time, these areas are shaped by this identity. If you look at the history of the counseling profession, perhaps the reason that counseling does not have the same stature in the mental health field as some of the other helping professions (e.g., Licensed Clinical Social Worker) is because what we were asked to imagine in the activity was, in some measure, the state of our profession in the not-so-ancient past. We lacked a cohesive counselor identity which impeded the development of these areas, which then impedes the changes needed to further develop a cohesive counselor identity. See the cycle?

One arena where we recently experienced this ongoing battle was during the CACREP-only discussions as a future requirement for licensure by some states. If you look at the arguments, it appears that much of this centers on fact that we still struggle with developing a cohesive "counselor identity" in regards to these very areas. Because there has been a vaguely defined counselor identity, the licensed professionals and educators hold a wide range of academic experiences and professional identities. Thus, attempts to bring the same uniformity seen in LCSW etc. brings a firestorm of controversy as these identities have different perspectives and can feel threatened. This then hinders the development of a cohesive counselor identity in training requirements (i.e., accreditation) that we need to advance the field of counseling. Thus, in spite of the fact that our training is more extensive, we continue to lack parity in various professional settings with LCSW and others who do have common accreditation. As leaders in the field, you are the ones who are going to address how to break this cycle and move the profession of counseling forward in a cohesive manner.

In this discussion, you are going to discuss the impact of having or not having a cohesive counselor identity in the areas of accepted standards for preparation (accreditation), no state or national credentials (inconsistent licensure requirements), and ethical standards for practice as defined by a counseling-specific (ACA) professional affiliation. As you discuss this, think about the issues created by not having clearly defined counselor identity, and how we as leaders can break the cycle?

Please reflect on the following:

- What is our counselor identity?
- Does counselor identity even matter? If so, why? If not, why?
- How is counselor identity reflected in our training (accreditation) and licensure requirements, and/or code of ethics?
- Do we really need a principle professional organization (ACA)?
- Do we really need standardization of requirements in these arenas?

Not having a cohesive counselor identity greatly impacts the areas of accepted standards for preparation, no state or national credentials, and ethical standards for practice, as stated by counseling-specific professional affiliations. Our counselor identity is built upon the perception of our roles as professional counselors, along with the duties and expectations that accompany those roles. A cohesive counselor identity is important in helping to establish what is done and what is expected as counselors. It is also important in helping to establish what is needed to become effective as counselors. A healthy and cohesive counselor identity helps to promote a standardized and ethical way of working in the counseling field that is most effective and promotes best practices. Without a cohesive counselor identity, there would be no way to establish, teach, and hold people accountable to what is really needed in working within the community. ACA and other professional affiliations, as well as standardization of requirements, are important in helping to regulate and maintain professionalism and expectations. Without this, people would be lost, and the counseling community would lose its effectiveness.

Discussion Board #2: Professional Advocacy

Too often in the training and practice in the counseling profession, "non-clinical" constructs such as advocacy can appear as an afterthought, an optional aspect of counseling. This may, in some measure reflect the limited view of advocacy. For example, there too often is little discussion about advocacy to the profession. If there were not counselors advocating for the profession, in spite of the fact that our training and licensure meets or exceeds those of other health care professionals, we would continue to be excluded from certain arenas of practice. Change only came about (and continues to do so) because there were counselors who were willing to educate policymakers about the importance of including the unique and valuable services we bring to the table and advocated for inclusion. As counselor educators, it is our job to ensure that advocacy becomes as integral to the development of our students' professional identity as is ethics and multicultural competencies.

In this discussion, you are going to examine advocacy as an essential component of counselor identity. In Chapter 5, the authors propose that professional advocacy is a responsibility of all counselors. Furthermore, in Chapter 6 the author asserts that "professional advocacy and professional identity are interrelated and mutually enhancing constructs" (p 106).

You do not need to specifically answer each of the below questions. Rather, you will present a synthesis or end result of your processing of the questions as all of these are interrelated when discussing the topic. Consider the following:

- How do you see (or do not see) the two constructs interacting with one another?
- How important is knowing your professional identity in order to advocate for the profession?
- What are possible consequences of ignoring advocacy with respect to counselors and those who they serve?

After reading this week's readings, I have come to embrace the authors' notion that advocacy is an important and essential element of counselor identity. It is also important to recognize that counselor advocacy is founded upon the counselor professional identity (Chang & Barrio Minton, 2022). So, the two constructs interact with each other and are important in the furthering of the counseling field.

We cannot be as effective in the counseling field if we do not understand the rights and responsibilities, which accompany the role of a counselor. Something to keep in mind is that the counselor is not defined merely by who he or she is but also by what he or she does. As in other areas of our lives, we must understand what specific roles and titles truly entail. How we view ourselves as counselors affect the type and level of work that we will produce in our community and in the lives of those we work with, as well as our own welfare and advancement. This is why it is important to know our professional identity and to have a clear picture of what that professional identity looks like. We cannot advocate for the profession if we do not have a clear picture and understanding of our professional identity. We cannot advocate for anything or anyone if we do not truly understand who we are and why we are doing so. Knowing our professional identity is so important because we can then properly and more effectively advocate and fight for the profession, for the people we serve, and for ourselves.

Advocacy is not just a choice but is a necessity; something that cannot be ignored. I did not fully understand the importance of advocacy; however, I have had the innate sense to stand up for what I believe to be just and right. This was not consistent though. I thought that advocacy was mainly for social workers, who fought for social change, but what I have come to realize is that advocacy is also part of the regular duties of a counselor. If advocacy is ignored, who will stand up and explain the importance of what we do and how specific laws and decisions can affect the lives of those we serve?

Several possible consequences can occur if advocacy is ignored. First, the counseling field will not advance or progress if nothing is said, done, or explained. Next, challenges or roadblocks to the advancement of the counseling field will not be confronted, and those, who do not see or understand our purpose as counselors, can possibly help to reverse the progress we have made so far in this field. Third, we will not teach the people we work with to stand up for their rights and to become advocates for their own situations and problems. Last, but not least, we will not be as effective and will deny the power to stand up for our beliefs and to protect the welfare of those we serve, as well as our profession and ourselves. Advocacy never stops, and to ignore it is to ultimately fail ourselves, the people we counsel, and the profession.

Reference

Chang, C. Y., & Barrio Minton, C. A. (2022). *Professional counseling excellence through leadership and advocacy,* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Discussion Board #3: Leadership in Counselor Education Programs

As noted in Chapter 10 and 12 of your **Read** item, counselor educators are responsible to ensure that leadership and advocacy is promoted in Counselor Education programs. As a side note, one of the issues created by a non-cohesive professional identity (plus the lack of an undergraduate major) is a misunderstanding or confusion over the term: Counselor Education. Counselor Education is an academic discipline responsible for the professional training of counselors at the master's level in several program areas (CMHC, MAFC, School, Addiction, etc.) and doctoral level. It is not just specific to doctoral CES or master's CMHC. Therefore, while programs may have a variety of specializations, they all fall under Counselor Education. Therefore, leadership and advocacy must be integrated throughout all programs offered by your department

In this discussion, you will discuss creative ways that you as faculty can promote a culture of leadership among students. You will take the perspective that you faculty members in a program that is in the process of seeking CACREP accreditation. During a faculty meeting, the CACREP liaison noted that the program does not focus enough on the development of leadership and advocacy. Your group has been tasked with developing some creative ways that can be implemented to help create a culture of leadership in the department. Your department has a master's (CMHC) and a doctoral (CES) program.

Please discuss the following:

- What are some potential creative ways to promote this?
- What are potential problems or barriers with these?
- What would be longer term and shorter term action items?

Several potential thoughts come to mind concerning developing some creative ways to assist in creating a culture of leadership in the department. I believe that creating rallies or forums to educate and discuss about the importance of leadership and what it looks like could be a creative way to promote this. Next, using the arts to model and to encourage people to "buy" into the idea and implementation of effective leadership could be effective. Developing and implementing incentives that could increase participation and the embracing of effective leadership could prove to be beneficial. This could help to promote a collaborative, empowering, strength-based approach (Chang & Barrio Minton, 2022). Visually having a compare/contrast graph to show the level of the present culture versus the desired culture could be a creative way to promote this. Having the department members brainstorm CACREP standards, work together, and develop ideas to help create a culture of leadership could always prove to be effective.

Finally, encouraging leadership to become an active member of a professional association would be most effective in promoting a culture of leadership (Chang & Barrio Minton, 2022).

Some potential problems or barriers might hinder this progress. First, everyone one does not lead in the same capacity. There must be respect and recognition for the differing leadership styles (Chang & Barrio Minton, 2022). Prejudices can hinder the progress as well. The welfare of each person must be in the forefront, and leadership and advocacy must be present for everyone, even if someone does not accept or like specific issues about other people. Laziness can become an issue or problem. Sometimes, people fight change and having to learn and do something new. Last, fear can become a potential problem or barrier. Fear of change can create a resistance to the efforts of moving forward with creating a culture of leadership in the department.

Shorter-term action items could include the rallies or forums to educate and discuss about the importance of leadership and advocacy and what they look like. While using the arts to model and to encourage people to "buy" into the idea and implementation of leadership and advocacy could be a shorter-term action item, this could also be an ongoing action item used to educate, remind, and encourage the culture of leadership. The development and implementation of incentives could be shorter term but ongoing also. The use of the visual compare/contrast graph could be a shorter term but ongoing action item. The longer-term action items could include the department working together to develop ideas and joining/becoming an active member of a professional association. These are also ongoing and should be expected of leadership.

Reference

Chang, C. Y., & Barrio Minton, C. A. (2022). *Professional counseling excellence through*

leadership and advocacy, (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Discussion Board #4: Leadership in Supervision

Counseling uses a mentoring model in training, relying on the guidance of an experienced clinician to guide the development of new counselors. This is why we are not only required to receive supervision during the field experiences (practicum and internship) in our training program but also post graduate supervision for licensure. As noted in Chapter 11, one responsibility that we have in supervision in to train counselors to be effective leaders and advocates. Yet, given that leadership and advocacy have historically not been stressed in training programs and given the wide range of professional identities held by those supervising counselors, it is easy to see how this is too often not a focus of supervision. This is where we can be the agents of change as we move forward. This is an area that could be a place for you to exercise leadership and advocacy. For this discussion:

- Reflect and discuss the role that supervisors have in training professional counselors.
- Does the present state OR your experiences of supervision actually develop leadership and advocacy skills?
- As a leader, how can you provide support and advocate for the integration of these skills in supervision?

Supervisors serve an ethical, important, and crucial role in training professional counselors. According to Chang & Barrio Minton (2022), supervisors should teach, encourage, and promote cultural appropriateness, self-awareness, and effectiveness as advocates and leaders, along with CACREP (2016) standards. It is a collaborative effort, where the supervisors help to challenge the supervisee's worldview, encourage them to identify their own biases, and model how to effectively become ethical professional counselors and how to empathetically work with the clients. In addition to this, supervisors have the ethical responsibility in teaching and promoting advocacy and leadership to professional counselors, who must be taught that advocacy and leadership is an important role that must be fulfilled to help propel this field.

At a former job, my experiences of supervision helped me to develop a level of

leadership and advocacy. My supervisor modeled leadership and advocacy. While I was not as

aware or used the term advocacy, I did hear the terminology from my supervisor and a few other

counselors. We were encouraged to lead, to learn our clients, and to create ways to reach our

client population. I witnessed my supervisor stand up and advocate for her clients' rights, and we

were taught and encouraged to do the same. I advocated when I needed to advocate, and we had

individual and group supervision, where we learned, discussed, and shared/received feedback.

As a leader, I can provide support and advocate for the integration of these skills in

supervision in several ways. First, I must model and practice what I am trying to achieve. We

learn from what we experience and see. Next, I can provide this support by working

collaboratively with the supervisees and asking questions when asked. Also, I can stress the

importance of this integration and teach about the importance of this integration. Finally, I can

provide this support by showing data that supports the need for this integration. Overall, we learn

by example and exposure.

Reference

Chang, C. Y., & Barrio Minton, C. A. (2022). *Professional counseling excellence through*

leadership and advocacy, (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Discussion Board #5: Best Practices through Advocacy and Leadership

As counselor educators, it is our responsibility (and a CACREP competency) to advance the knowledge base of the profession. Important aspects of this directly involves client care as well as the training of those who will be providing client care. As noted in Chapter 15 of your **Read** item, best practices for the counseling profession "involve the integration of research

and practice with an ultimate goal of accountability to clients and the general public. Through intervention and programmatic research, professional counselors and counselor educators demonstrate an integration of advocacy and leadership as they identify effective and ineffective–or even harmful–interventions and dialogue with scholars to advance the knowledge base of the profession".

To facilitate this, CACREP requires that those faculty designated as core faculty not only have the educational (doctoral degree in CES) and professional (licensure, certification) credentials needed to teach in a counselor educator program; they must demonstrate that they are scholars, leaders, and advocates to the profession. While educational and professional credentials are easy to document, often faculty at institutions that focus on teaching or clinical skills versus research skills can neglect the ongoing engagement in scholarship, leadership, and advocacy activities. However, it is important to note that scholarship, leadership, and advocacy activities actively influence our ability to be effective educators and supervisors to our students. As such, if you are in a teaching institution, we need to find a middle ground between "publish or perish" and "teaching only" perspectives. Otherwise, we not only will grow stagnant professionally; we also will not be able to provide our students with the knowledge and skills needed in order for them to develop competencies that reflect the current best practices of the field.

Because these activities require proactive planning, it is easy to neglect this essential aspect of our roles as counselor educators. Therefore, it is important that you develop strategies to ensure that you are fulfilling this important responsibility to the profession. For this discussion, you should first reflect on the similarities and differences between best practices in counseling and best practices in research. Based on this exploration, identify three strategies for increasing your knowledge of research regarding best practices.

You will provide a synopsis of three well-thought-out strategies. Then interact with your group members to get and give feedback on these strategies. You do not need to specifically answer the reflection question. Rather, you will be drawing on it as you consider strategies that would reflect important aspects of best practices.

Best practices in counseling and best practices in research are similar and different in several ways. First, they both encourage ethical practices. One fundamental responsibility is that of beneficence (Chang & Barrio Minton, 2022). Next, they both encourage using practices and theories that are evidence-based, rigorous, valid, and reliable. Also, they both encourage a connection between research and evidence- based practices and encourage research and advocacy. (Chang & Barrio Minton, 2022). Finally, they both encourage research, as well as

program evaluation, which can include some of the following: ability to self-evaluate one's effectiveness and how to create counseling outcomes (Chang & Barrio Minton, 2022).

Best practices in counseling are different in that the counselor is encouraged to create a collaborative relationship with the client, in order to create a treatment plan that can produce some level of success. These best practices also involve discussing and reviewing informed consent. Even though I believe that best practices in research are mostly like best practices in counseling, they are set apart in the expectation of holding counselors primarily responsible for sharing and discussing the counseling field in a scholarly way, which can prove to be beneficial to the counseling profession and field (Chang & Barrio Minton, 2022). They are also different in the endorsement of leadership, advocacy, and research on a different level.

I believe that the following three strategies can be used to increase my knowledge of research regarding best practices: joining a research team working on a publication, becoming active in regional CACREP, ACA, or other professional affiliations, and using needs assessments to evaluate existing programs for effectiveness. Joining a research team working on a publication would give me hands on experience in research concerning best practices. Receiving mentorship in this area could be most beneficial in my development and knowledge of research. Becoming active in regional CACREP, ACA, or other professional affiliations would always prove to be effective. An example is attending seminars about research and the best practices used in that research. Using needs assessments to evaluate existing programs for effectiveness could be effective. Under the direction of a mentor, this would give me the opportunity to use the best practices that I have been learning and could give me a greater appreciation for research, as well as information about the program researched.

Reference

Chang, C. Y., & Barrio Minton, C. A. (2022). *Professional counseling excellence through*

    leadership and advocacy, (2nd ed.). Routledge.