Chapter 9
Trauma–Informed Gatekeeping Through a Social Justice Lens in Counselor Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gatekeeping roles and responsibilities are one of the most challenging obligations for supervisors and educators. Problems of professional competence (PPC) are often related to or caused by a lack of multicultural competence, and social justice advocacy. They may be impacted by counselors'-in-training (CIT) history of trauma. In this chapter, the authors provide a rationale and guidance in incorporating social justice and multicultural competencies (SJMCC) and trauma-informed care (TIC) principles in the gatekeeping process. The concepts will then be applied to two cases, one focused on a doctoral student and one on a master level student exhibiting PPC. Through case examples, readers will learn ways in which they may improve their gatekeeping and supervision processes.

INTRODUCTION

Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs require counselor educators, site supervisors, and doctoral supervisors to protect the public from Problems of Professional Competence (PPCs) in pre-professional counselors-in-training (CIT). PPCs include a broad range of concerns related to academic and non-academic traits, and can be assessed through students' knowledge, skills, and dispositions towards counseling. PPCs can be addressed with gatekeeping procedures, such as remediation and dismissal, as necessary (Dugger & Francis, 2014). These gatekeeping practices in CES are essential to address before CITs graduate and begin to practice, as counseling gatekeeping procedures post-graduation are difficult to capture. Data on licensure boards and candidacy supervisors enacting gatekeeping policies remain uncertain. Without adequate gatekeeping processes in CES programs, such as assessment and remediation of PPCs, CITs who exhibit deficiencies in professional practice have the potential to cause significant harm when they begin interacting with clients. However, despite this crucial responsibility, faculty members and doctoral students have consistently identified the gatekeeping role as one of the most challenging to develop and fulfill (Chang & Rubel, 2019; Charnley, 2021; DeCino et al., 2020; Shuermann et al., 2018; Smarinsky et al., 2023).

Gatekeeping concerns often involve non-academic issues that arise when CITs begin their clinical experience in practicum and internship courses as direct client contact often illuminates issues related to disposition and professionalism which may not arise in classroom settings (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Charnley, 2021; Smarinsky et al., 2023). As a result, many students who perform well academically may not experience remediation until a clinical course in the curriculum. Research has consistently demonstrated non-academic concerns related to receptivity to feedback, emotional regulation, professionalism, and issues related to multicultural competence as some of the most commonly identified PPCs by faculty and supervisors (Rose & Persutte-Manning, 2020; Salpietro et al., 2022; Smarinsky et al., 2023. Estimates of the percentage of CITs exhibiting a PPC vary within the research literature. Gaubatz and Vera (2006) found that master's-level students estimated 21% of their peers were exhibiting a PPC, while faculty estimated that only 9% of their students were exhibiting a PPC. Brown-Rice and Furr (2019) found that 68.1% of doctoral students reported identifying a peer within their program exhibiting a PPC. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2024) provides accreditation standards for counselor education programs. Of a sample of 370 counselor educators at CACREP accredited programs, Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) found 91% of faculty reported they observed a student with a PPC, with the most common issues identified as inadequacies in clinical and interpersonal skills, inability to regulate emotions, and unprofessional behavior.

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