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Erratum

The original published version of this article contained an incorrect abstract and keywords that were input in error by the editorial staff. The article has been corrected to reflect the abstract and keywords provided by the authors.

Empathy-In-Teaching as a Multidimensional Disposition in Counselor Education

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Empathy is a disposition noted among established teaching competencies in counselor education. However, current descriptions of empathy are unidimensional and lack an operational definition for evaluating teaching dispositions. The term empathy-in-teaching is a multidimensional concept suitable for expanding our current understanding of empathy within the current teaching dispositions in counselor education. Implications for application of the concept of empathy-in-teaching within the current teaching dispositions and future research suggestions are offered.

Keywords: empathy, empathy-in-teaching, teaching dispositions, counselor education

Empathy, a term grounded in counseling practice, can be traced to the German word *Einfuhling*, which translates as *to feel oneself into* (Bohart & Greenberg, 1997). Empathy refers to one's capacity to accurately understand another person's emotional frame of reference, as if those meanings and emotions were experienced by the empathizer (Rogers, 1959). In addition to being a commonly understood concept in counseling, empathy applies to teaching in higher education (i.e., empathy-in-teaching; Meyers et al. 2019). Within teaching, Jordan (2010) expanded empathy to account for the ways individuals may affect each other via reciprocal exchange (i.e., mutual empathy). Scholars have incorporated the interpersonal aspects and cultural implications of mutual empathy across counselor education within humanistic learning theory in the counselor education classroom (Purswell, 2019), multicultural and social justice education (Irvine et al., 2021), master's and doctoral advising (Dipre & Luke, 2021; Purgason et al., 2016), and study abroad experiences (Avent Harris et al., 2019). Although Malott et al. (2014) also stressed the necessity of empathy in the development of culturally responsive and socially just teaching, they suggested that empathy alone is insufficient. Empathy is also noted (e.g., being empathic) among

the teaching competencies (Swank & Houseknecht, 2019) and teaching dispositions (e.g., is empathic; Hurt-Avila et al., 2020) currently used to assess teaching development in counselor education. Recognizing empathy-in-teaching as a disposition within teaching competencies is critical given that instructor empathy influences counseling students' views of their instructors and of their classroom experiences (Moate et al., 2017a). Despite recognitions of empathy in the counseling literature, existing descriptions of empathy are too brief and lack operational focus, which makes evaluating empathy within the established teaching competencies and dispositions difficult. This is concerning because counseling students' development is rooted in empathy and relationships, and it is similarly plausible that current and future counselor educators' teaching development shares similar grounding. The purpose of this paper is to address this gap in the counselor education literature (e.g., Hurt-Avila et al., 2020; Swank et al., 2020) by offering an expanded and operationalized definition of empathy-in-teaching. Accordingly, counselor educators can use the proposed definition to expand their teaching competency assessment vocabulary and thereby improve their teaching assessment practices. Researchers in counselor education and elsewhere can use an operationalized

definition of empathy to explore the phenomenon in more detail, including the relationships between empathy and other variables of interest.

The Importance of Empathy in Teaching

The importance of empathy-in-teaching is recognized across a continuum of teacher-centered and learner-centered approaches in counselor education (Moate et al., 2017a, 2017b). Counseling students are more likely to rate their instructors as effective based on their perceptions of instructors' content knowledge and delivery method (e.g., Swank & Houseknecht, 2019). Others have shown a demonstrable link between students' perceptions of professors' empathic or relational teaching style and students' perceptions of effective teaching (e.g., Moate et al., 2017a). Instructors' delivery methods are important, and those methods that embody empathy within relational-cultural approaches are thought to play a critical role in counseling students' multicultural competency development (Irvine et al., 2021), and counseling skill development within counseling techniques courses (Lertora et al., 2020). Instructional methods embodying empathy foster more authentic instructor presence and teacher–student connections based on instructors' recognition and acceptance of students' intersecting social identities and unique contexts (Jordan, 2010, 2018), which in turn contributes to a more culturally attentive and effective learning environment (Malott et al., 2014).

Counselor educators are poised to express empathy-in-teaching due to their training in counseling skills (Malott et al., 2014). These same counseling skills used for relationship building in counseling contexts can be adapted and transferred to teaching situations (Williams, 2015). With well-developed abilities to use empathy, counselor educators are arguably more adept at conveying understanding and acceptance (Cox 2013), as well as facilitating relational depth in the classroom (Meyers et al., 2019). This approach is important given that instructor empathy is perceived by counseling students as respectful and helpful for their learning (Moate et al., 2017a, 2017b), and is perceived as a characteristic of counselor educators who express care for their students and have a direct

role in creating emotional safety in the classroom (Hurt-Avila et al., 2020).

Several authors confirmed the importance of counselor educators' previous clinical training for expressing empathy-in-teaching (Cox, 2013; Malott et al., 2014; Williams, 2015). Many of the counseling students from two Q methodology studies conducted by Moate et al. (2017a, 2017b) preferred instructors who expressed themselves in a person-centered manner in the classroom and who used warmth-inducing behaviors such as empathy and compassion, which students deemed as authentic, *empathetic*, and compassionate instructor qualities. When discussing the application of teaching best practices in counselor education, Malott et al. (2014) noted counselor educators' advantages over instructors in other disciplines due to their previous counselor training, which focused on “counseling microskills and attunement in relationships” (p. 300). In general, instructors can embody and extend empathy-in-teaching to students by using existing clinical skills to engage students more fully (Cox, 2013). Specifically, Cox believed counselor educators are empathic instructors because their clinical training and practice taught them the necessary “rapport-building” and “attention to language” skills (pp. 14–15). Cox concluded that educators need to balance instructional tensions between conveying a warm caring tone and conveying the serious and evaluative nature of teaching and learning. We concur with the author's view and argue that balancing instructional tensions can best be achieved by instructors who foreground empathy as central to teaching practice.

Despite the importance and existing support for empathy-in-teaching, which is generally identified as part of a larger construct (e.g., teaching style, teaching effectiveness, or instructor qualities), the majority of counselor education teaching literature focuses on specific course content and techniques (Barrio Minton et al., 2018), and less on teaching dispositions (Hurt-Avila et al., 2020). However, recent research has identified specific teaching competencies and dispositions related to teaching (Hurt-Avila et al., 2020; Swank & Houseknecht, 2019; Swank et al., 2020). Although empathy is

listed among teaching dispositions in the aforementioned studies, elaboration on the construct of empathy is lacking. This disparity is concerning given the importance of using empathy to establish an effective learning environment (Malott et al., 2014).

Empathy and Teaching Dispositions in Counselor Education

Researchers recently examined teaching competencies (Swank & Houseknecht, 2019; Swank et al., 2020) and dispositions (Hurt-Avila et al., 2020) in counselor education. Swank and Houseknecht (2019) conducted a Delphi study of counselor education teaching experts, garnering 152 teaching competencies within four domains: knowledge, skills, professional behaviors, and dispositions. The term “being empathic” is included among the 38 items comprising the teaching dispositions domain and was categorized as “related to the traits of the teacher” (Swank & Houseknecht, 2019, p. 168). In a follow-up study, Swank et al. (2020) conducted an exploratory factor analysis of the 152 teaching competencies that resulted in the retention of 48 items across four factors. Among the four factors, the term “expressing empathy” was included among nine teaching dispositions that the authors indicated “focused on the personal characteristics of counselor educators” (p. 7). Conceptually speaking, the change in the categorization of empathy across these two studies (i.e., from Swank & Houseknecht, 2019, to Swank et al., 2020) from “being empathic” (e.g., affective) to “expressing empathy” (e.g., behavioral) aligns with our premise that empathy in teaching is a multidimensional disposition (Meyers et al., 2019) that can be learned and refined as part of teaching development (Williams, 2015) and not simply an innate characteristic that resides within individuals (the implication being some individuals have empathy and others do not). Although we acknowledge that the teaching competencies derived from the aforementioned studies are intended to assess a broad range of competencies, we maintain the need for giving salience to the disposition of empathy and for its expansion and operationalization as a multidimensional teaching disposition.

In the most direct examination of teaching dispositions in counselor education to date, Hurt-Avila et al. (2020) conducted a Q methodology study of master’s and doctoral counseling students’ views on preferred counselor educator teaching dispositions. These authors concluded in their thematic review of the literature that given the limited yet compelling number of articles in counselor education on teaching effectiveness, further exploration of how counselor educators’ dispositions “impact learners and the learning environment seems warranted” (Hurt-Avila et al., 2020, p. 7). These same authors suggested that students emphasized the importance of their relationships with educators as a source for feeling safe to grow in the classroom (e.g., Moate et al., 2017a). The authors constructed a Q sample containing 41 teaching disposition statements, one of which was labeled “is empathic” (Item 18, p. 11). Findings from Hurt-Avila support the need for a deeper examination of empathy as a teaching disposition. Specifically, students preferred instructors who were genuine, respectful, trustworthy, encouraging, and empathic. Hurt-Avila et al. (2020) included a participant quote emphasizing the connection between the dispositions of counselors and instructors (i.e., empathy), which has direct relevance here as well: “I believe being genuine and empathic is the foundation of a good counselor. Therefore, these qualities are most important to me in a counselor educator” (p. 16).

Interestingly, each of the three studies have a single item dedicated to empathy within the body of competencies (Hurt-Avila et al., 2020; Swank & Houseknecht, 2019; Swank et al., 2020). Acknowledging that competencies are intended to assess a broad range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, it is Swank and Houseknecht’s (2019) assertion that some individuals may “place greater value on some competencies (i.e., empathy) compared with others and therefore prioritize these specific items” (p. 173). We encourage counselor educators to consider a multidimensional conceptualization of empathy in the interest of prioritizing the single disposition of empathy within the many teaching competencies and dispositions

available in the current literature. Learning how to identify and transfer empathy from counseling to teaching is a good start to developing teaching competencies. We agree with Meyers et al. (2019) that expanding empathy using a multidimensional set of criteria can potentially increase instructors' capacity to be culturally affirming and understanding of their students and can contribute to a safe and stimulating space for learning based on mutual empathy (Jordan, 2010).

Empathy-in-Teaching as a Multidimensional Disposition

Empathy-in-teaching has been described as a teacher *trait* (see Williams, 2015). However, this conceptualization pertains only to internal or fixed teacher characteristics. Empathy-in-teaching has also been conceptualized as a teacher disposition that guides teachers' drive to relate to their students' experiences more deeply (Meyers et al., 2019), which is similar to a counselor conceptualization (e.g., Rogers, 1959). In counselor education, dispositions related to teaching also reflect the "personal characteristics of counselor educators" (Swank et al., 2020, p. 7). Others (Hurt-Avila et al., 2020) expanded on the personal characteristic conceptualization of teacher dispositions as beliefs and values demonstrated through verbal and nonverbal behaviors during teacher–student interactions — a contribution in the direction of improved operationalization of the construct. Adding a behavioral dimension to the conceptualization of empathy is critical because demonstrations of empathy play a central role in building rapport and guiding interactions between teachers and students and contribute to a balance of power, structure, and support during the teaching and learning process (Jordan & Schwartz, 2018).

Reflecting on their teaching experiences and the teaching literature, Meyers et al. (2019) recognized that empathy is not simply an internal state within individuals. Instead they conceptualized empathy as a multidimensional construct (e.g., Meyers et al., 2019) that includes cultural, affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. The authors further noted that all four dimensions can be learned by teachers, used to better understand students' social

contexts, and assessed as part of teaching competency development. A multidimensional conceptualization of empathy-in-teaching relates to existing student-centered teaching approaches with clear implications for teaching practice development, teaching preparation, and research in counselor education. Despite expansions from a trait-based conceptualization of empathy, we are still left with a limited operational framework for understanding and evaluating the construct in counselor education.

It is also critically important to acknowledge the cultural domain of empathy-in-teaching. Over the past decade, there has been an increased examination of the role of empathy as part of relational-cultural teaching approaches specific to the teaching of multicultural counseling and social justice (Hall et al., 2014; Irvine et al., 2021). More recently, scholars have examined the way mutual empathy occurs in the teaching of counseling techniques (Lertora et al., 2020) and frameworks (Irvine et al., 2021). Across this work, mutual empathy is understood as "an engaged and responsive way of listening and participating in the relationship" through cognitive-affective engagement (Jordan, 2010, pp. 97–98). Although the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2015) have been embraced by counselor education and are described as providing a developmentally sensitive framework for intervention, to date they have not been examined in relation to empathy or unpacked across intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, or international/global levels within a counselor education teaching context.

Defining Empathy-in-Teaching in Counselor Education

Defining empathy-in-teaching as a multidimensional disposition can assist counselor educators with (a) helping doctoral students new to teaching to transition from the role of counselor to the role of educator, (b) preparing doctoral students to expand their teaching competency repertoire grounded in empathy, (c) expanding current teaching competencies and dispositions by including criteria to assess the presence and

magnitude of empathy in doctoral students teaching, and (d) providing means for gatekeeping doctoral students who need to hone their empathy in teaching skills. Expanding on the term empathy in the current teaching dispositions (Swank et al., 2020), we offer four dimensions of empathy, guided by Meyers et al. (2019), in Table 1.

The *cultural* dimension can be conceptualized as an instructor's understanding of students' cultural backgrounds and social identities, and their influence on teaching and learning processes. Instructors employing the cultural dimension of empathy affirm student social identities and recognize that student learning cannot be understood without acknowledging the role of culture and social identities, and that these phenomenon and related power dynamics manifest in the classroom setting in within teacher–student relationships (Jordan, 2010). The *cognitive* dimension of empathy pertains to instructors who understand students' social contexts and the degree to which they impact student learning. Instructors embodying the cognitive dimension of empathy prioritize student learning by taking student perspectives whenever possible.

In addition to the cultural and cognitive dimensions, instructors embodying an *affective* dimension of empathy use their understanding of student social identities and social contexts as the basis for compassionate understanding of student learning needs, strengths, and challenges, instead of holding all students to a convenient monocultural standard for learning success. Finally, instructors who affirm student social identities and culture, who can use that understanding to take a student's perspective to the degree possible and use that understanding as the basis of a compassionate conceptualization of student needs, can in turn embody the *behavioral* dimension of empathy. Accordingly, instructors demonstrate empathy to students through active listening, intentional attempts to reconnect with students when there are miscommunications, through the verbal expression of compassion (e.g., tone, pace, and content), and through direct communication of the need for a safe learning environment.

Following the Meyers et al. (2019) criteria, we propose a definition of empathy-in-teaching include *the degree to which counselor educators culturally affirm, cognitively understand, affectively resonate with, emotionally respond to, and behaviorally communicate about students' personal, cultural, and social experiences in and out of the classroom.* This definition is grounded in instructors' compassionate acceptance of and response to the full range of students' thoughts, motivations, emotions, and behaviors while simultaneously attending to students' cultural background (Jordan, 2010). In a counselor education context, empathy as a teaching disposition can be seen in how the instructor plans, interacts with, and assesses students, as well as the ways that the counselor educator thinks about, intervenes, and cares about the students as people and learners. In other words, the multidimensional nature of teaching empathy is not only reflected through what the counselor educator says, feels, and does, but also in the educational policies, practices, structures, and systems that the instructor enacts.

Discussion

The means to measure empathy-in-teaching (Swank et al., 2020) and prior support for its association with positive educational processes (Malott et al., 2014) is evident, yet counselor education has only recently (i.e., formally) embraced empathy-in-teaching as a core teaching disposition in the literature (e.g., Hurt-Avila et al., 2020). We believe that through recognition of empathy-in-teaching as a multidimensional disposition (Meyers et al., 2019), the unique utility of empathy becomes more apparent, increasing opportunities to employ cultural, affective, cognitive, and behavioral empathy dimensions across a wide range of counselor education contexts (e.g., core and clinical coursework). Furthermore, we believe that all four empathy dimensions warrant further investigation as they theoretically and conceptually align with many interpersonal counseling competencies (Williams, 2015) and may be important in the systematic development of teaching competencies (e.g., Swank & Houseknecht, 2019). As such, the importance of empathy should no longer be relegated to only

Table 1*Empathy-in-Teaching Dimensions, Descriptions, and Disposition Examples*

Dimension	Description	Disposition Examples
Cultural	The instructor's understanding of cultural backgrounds and social identities and their influence on teaching and learning processes	Instructor understands that students' sociocultural situations and histories affect engagement Instructor recognizes and affirms students' cultural backgrounds, social identities, and intersections and their influence on the learning space
Cognitive	The instructor's understanding of students' personal and social contexts	Instructor takes students' perspectives Instructor prioritizes students' learning Instructor understands students' personal situations
Affective	The instructor's felt sense of compassion, concern, and connection with students' emotions	Instructor identifies and feels emotions similar but not identical to emotions of student Instructor internally reframes negative feelings when students are anxious, express negative emotions, or are upset Instructor feels compassion when students experience negative emotions or suffering Instructor feels positive feelings; happy and proud when students experience positive emotions, are pleased, exhilarated, or relieved
Behavioral	The instructor's ability to demonstrate cognitive and affective understandings of students' needs in relation to the goals of the course	Instructor uses active listening skills to assure students feel understood Instructor communicates compassion at the individual and group levels Instructor expresses need for students feel safe to grow and make mistakes Instructor notices, pauses, and attempts to reconnect with students when experiencing negative emotion

Source: Adapted from Jordan (2010) and Meyers et al. (2019)

clinical coursework, and instead should become part of counselor educators' practices in the development and implementation of all teaching activities and employed within all types and levels of coursework.

associative relationships using quantitative design (e.g., Wang et al., 2022). The development of formal measures of empathy-in-teaching in counselor education as a stand-alone measure or as part of the teaching competencies would advance

researchers' capacity to design and implement related outcome research with teaching interventions in counselor education.

The ability to display empathy-in-teaching accurately and consistently is endemic to counselor training (Malott et al., 2014) and this relational competency can be intentionally expanded in doctoral training to be parlayed into teaching contexts (Williams, 2015). Although counselor education research has elucidated empathy as a component of larger teaching dispositions and competencies (Swank & Houseknecht, 2019; Swank et al., 2020), there has been a dearth of attention given to the multidimensional nature of empathy or its implementation in teaching contexts. We suggest that counselor educators move beyond a state-like conceptualization of empathy and integrate cultural, cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions within their pedagogical repertoire. In doing so, we contend that multidimensional empathy will not only build relationships (Williams, 2015) and foster quality learning environments (Malott et al., 2014), but it will expand and improve the accuracy of counselor educators' pedagogical practice. Accordingly, we believe that empathy-in-teaching can now manifest in more measurable ways as a disposition of singular focus or within the current teaching competencies and dispositions in counselor education.

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