

## Chapter 4

# Challenges With Sensitivity and Boundaries in an Imperfect, Ever-Changing World: Online Counselor Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter provides an overview of the online educational environment and its context and outlines two realistic examples with suggested responses for counselor educators. The reflect, prepare, and respond approach was explained in detail for both examples. The historical context of societal changes was briefly explained within the chapter to further highlight how quickly the world may change as opposed to written resources for students. Schlossberg's research on coping with transitions enhances the chapter to provide counselor educators with an evidence-based framework to better address the challenges and inquiries that arise within an imperfect, ever-changing world in online education.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teaching graduate students can present overwhelming challenges for educators. Counselor educators employ knowledge, skills, and strategies to ensure that student learning is evidence-based and relevant (Malott et al., 2014). They engage with diverse student groups who bring their own complex backgrounds, lived experiences and perspectives which can lead to moments of disagreement within the classroom. Consequently, how can counselor educators ensure sensitivity and awareness regarding controversial topics in the online classroom in an ever-changing society? The dynamic societal and global transfor-

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mations can create stress for educators. Counselor educators grapple with maintaining currency with theoretical concepts and practice strategies. Additionally, counselor educators struggle to increase connections within the classroom to empower and build online learning communities (Tackie, 2022). How should counselor educators respond when students are challenged by the course material and concepts?

The concept for this chapter evolved from current research examining the challenges within the online learning environment for counselor educators as well as the authors' own experiences, including mentoring other faculty. It presents the potential challenges educators face within an online graduate educational environment promoting a realistic application of current skills using two examples developed by the authors. The chapter covers evidence-based practices to address student inquiries regarding foundational literature which may not reflect changes in knowledge and awareness of issues in current society. The following chapter provides a thorough analysis of two examples of students' reactions to their learning process within the online setting. Consequently, counselor educators will learn how to ensure they are aware and informed in an imperfect world. They will also understand how to acknowledge and address their own reactions when challenged by students.

To assist with these questions, this chapter offers guidance and the initial integration of social justice related to counselor education. The authors outline and explain two examples of case scenarios to assist counselor educators who teach in an online environment adapt to the academic world that is continuously in flux while textbooks are unable to maintain currency as quickly. To conclude readers will learn strategies that promote professionalism, sensitivity, and awareness – all key skills of a counselor educator.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY**

The history of social justice within higher education, and education in general, is complex (Francis et al., 2017). Davis et al. (2021) noted that “we are living in the most culturally diverse but perhaps least interculturally civil time in modern history, and the field of psychology is not immune. Over recent decades, our field has often engaged in divisive and uncivil dialogue...” (p. 79). Our world continues to shift. Research shows that social work education rapidly changed from the 1990s and forward (Payne, 2020). Similarly, counselor educators and students are currently in a different place than the original scholars within the field (Singh et al., 2020). The initial theories of Eurocentric perspectives and standards within counselor education programs have changed (Williams et al., 2021). This present place is constantly evolving and is a place where what is developed today may not be the same tomorrow (McAuliffe, 2019).

*Counselor educators may also consider their understanding of social justice, how their conceptualizations do or do not include the social determinants of health, and how such beliefs affect their work. This is highlighted as a best practice approach for integrating and teaching multicultural and social justice topics in counselor education (Ratts et al., 2016; Waters et al., 2022, p.19).*

Changes within society related to education and awareness regarding historical events, as well as social justice implications such as understanding injustice, privilege, and systemic issues are generally implicitly or explicitly discussed within the online classroom (Waters et al., 2022). For future counselors, these concepts are key to understanding a client's context, and the counselor's own positioning within the session, as well as understanding the role of advocacy which may be applicable in certain situations (Davis et al., 2021; Pace, 2022).

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