

Interview with Dr. Heath Willingham

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COUC747 Instruction in Counselor Education

Interview of Heath Willingham, October 23, 2023

When discussing the roles and responsibilities of counselor educators, Dr. Heath Willingham (Dr. W) (Counseling Department Chair at Faulkner University, Montgomery, Alabama) said the primary role is that of a gatekeeper. It is essential to stay on top of research. Counselor educators should continue to have clinical experience to be effective. Research and continuing education are good, but the human interaction sitting across from a client teaches you a lot. Four areas that are a part of Faulkner University's counselor educators' annual evaluation include community service (e.g., volunteer or pro-bone services), church service (e.g., premarital counseling), professional service (e.g., something for the profession—paper, presentations, etc.), professional development (e.g., further training like CEU's, books, seminars).

Our conversation led to Dr. W's preference between asynchronous and synchronous teaching methods. Dr. W said the key is to create a processing environment to ensure thinking and a back-and-forth exchange of ideas to clarify understanding. A balance of the two seems best. In a synchronous class, an instructor could lecture with little to show understanding by students. With an asynchronous discussion board, where each student must participate, an instructor can determine the overall comprehension of the class collectively and individually. If it does not address meta-cognition, it has missed the goal.

This section covers Dr. W's thoughts on teaching and learning and how this affects his assessment and evaluation. He used Lev Vygotsky's ideas about scaffolding to discuss the principles of teaching and learning he uses. As with building, you construct scaffolding around a structure to support the process. Similarly, this is done in counselor education. He discussed the arrangement of Faulkner's classes in their counseling program to follow this concept to build upon and support the learning process. Some assessments help indicate if a student has missed

some of the supporting ideas needed and may need help ranging from remediation or potentially considering changing to another career choice.

Dr. W shared that the counselor training program at Faulkner University uses clinical weeks, practicum, and internship as the primary program screening opportunities to observe students' demeanor and application of theory. With those needing remediation plans, we expect students to have mock sessions to receive feedback from the committee. Some have had to do case conceptualization plans to explain the justification for methods used in a session.

In a brief discussion of mentoring, Dr. W indicated I do not care for using the word mentor and do not believe anyone would see me as a mentor. Through our conversation, it came to light that he considers the role as I learn from you, and you learn from me in a reciprocal relationship versus an authoritative figure leading a subservient person.

When discussing multicultural considerations in curriculum development when preparing counselors, Dr. W pointed out that the most significant area this has come up is in analysis and diagnosis classes. The approach does not change because of the person's culture, but being aware of the cultural dynamics affects how you adapt the feedback. Cultural awareness requires being reasonable about the dynamics involved in various situations. Additionally, he mentioned that with Faulkner being a Christian school, many students have been exposed to other cultures through mission work and see some differences firsthand. This awareness helps future counselors be better prepared to be cognizant of cultural diversity—those who have not been exposed gain valuable insights from those who have.

When we discussed current and future concerns in counselor education, Dr. W said accrediting bodies seem to have become hyper-focused on a few things, which can hinder covering areas beyond the scope of those primary focus areas. Limited range hinders the faculty

from being able to teach beyond the focus areas of the governing bodies. One example of an unrealistic idea is expecting students to have developed theory-focused by the time they are in Practicum and Internship. Another area of concern is the concept of not imposing your values and the implication that a counselor should be a value-neutral practitioner.

We concluded our time with a brief thought on his Christian Worldview and how this affects his work. Dr. W said, "I have never counseled a mere mortal." He sees each client from the stance of eternity. Jesus used the concept of moving people from shame to honor. He gave several examples and sees this as a wise role to promote among future counselors and counselor educators. He said the Christian Worldview can help make it even more apparent that some students do not need to be counselors. Of course, every counselor should approach their clients with honor and respect, but this is especially applicable to a Christian counselor.

My Reactions to the Interview and Impact on my Role as a Counselor Educator

I enjoyed interviewing Dr. W about his role as a counselor educator. Dr. W displayed a firm grasp of the information and could answer as though he had prepared for the interview. This demonstration helped me be even more aware of the need for a knowledge base. Dr. W is an excellent representation of a person who lives by a Christian Worldview and can communicate well with people no matter their understanding of how the world works.

How does the interview align with my knowledge of the role of counselor educator?

The interview with Dr. W aligns well with my views and understanding of the roles of counselor educators. He clarified that students must think through the information (Haddock and Whitman, 2019, p. 88). As he pointed out, gatekeeping is a critical role. Part of this involves helping students excel through remediation and, potentially, through assisting them to see that another career path may be in their and the profession's best interest (CACREP, 2015). The strict

view the accrediting agencies and organizations have on pushing one's personal values can be distressing. I (Jeremy) have felt concerned about this, even when meeting with people who share my Christian Worldview. This uneasiness is Satan trying to use regulation to limit Godly ideals from flourishing.

Summary of the Experience and Growth Gained

This opportunity has helped me have a greater appreciation for a knowledge base that will assist me as I continue to counsel and grow into a counselor educator. The experience with Dr. W was a good one! He was gracious and kind to take his time to help me. Dr. W presented the information in a manner that displayed his heart as a counselor educator. Several things he shared led to some potential areas of personal growth. One of those reminded me of the need to continue practicing as a counselor to help me stay grounded and connected with the purpose of training future counselors.

How the Interview Interacts with the Christian Worldview

One of the reasons I appreciate Dr W so much is his consistent alignment with his Christian Worldview. He helped me to think about remembering all people have an eternity ahead of them, whether they know it or not. Dr. W had a very well-put thought about how Jesus worked to bring people from shame to honor and how we should desire to accomplish a similar outcome. A verse that speaks to these ideas is "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out (English Standard Version, 2009, Proverbs 20:5). Dr W's consideration of each person being eternal causes me to smile when considering the abilities of Christian Counselors to help draw out a person's purpose, especially when it has seemed to have gotten lost in the deep waters of life.

References

- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (2015) Gatekeeping. Retrieved from <https://www.cacrep.org/section-6-doctoral-standards-counselor-education-and-supervision-2/>
- ESV Study Bible : English Standard Version. (2008). Crossway Bibles.
- Haddock, & Whitman, J. S. (Eds.). (2019). Preparing the educator in counselor education : a comprehensive guide to building knowledge and developing skills. Routledge.

Appendix A

Email indicating Dr. Heath Willingham's agreement that my summary accurately represents him.

Jeremy,

I think this is an accurate representation of our interview.

Heath Willingham PhD, LPC-S
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On October 24, 2023, at 2:21 PM, Jeremy Gillentine <jeremygillentine@gmail.com> wrote:

Thank you for allowing me to interview you!

Would you please read through this summary (attachment below) and see if it represents you accurately?

If it looks good, please send me a reply email stating your approval. I have to submit your approval email with the paper.

Please let me know.

Thanks

Jeremy Gillentine

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Appendix B

Question asked during the interview with Dr. Heath Willingham on Monday, October 24, 2023.

1. What are the roles and responsibilities of counselor educators?
2. Do you prefer asynchronous or synchronous teaching methods, find one superior to the other, or see them as complementary?
3. What is your philosophy of teaching and learning, and how does that inform how you do assessments and evaluations?
4. What is your understanding of screening, remediation, and gatekeeping in counselor education?
5. How do you see your role as a mentor as a counselor educator?
6. What is your understanding of multicultural considerations in curriculum development, and how does this affect preparing counselors?
7. What are your current and future concerns regarding the field of counselor education?
8. How does your Christian Worldview affect your role as a counselor educator?