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## Applying the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm in Counseling and Marriage and Family Therapy Practica

Jennifer Thal Cates

*Associate Professor, School of Education and Counseling, Regis University, jcates001@regis.edu*

Jody Huntington

*Assistant Professor, School of Education and Counseling, Regis University, jhunting@regis.edu*

John Arman

*Associate Professor, School of Education and Counseling, Regis University, Jarman@regis.edu*

Sondra Beres

*Associate Professor, School of Education and Counseling, Regis University, sberes@regis.edu*

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## Applying the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm in Counseling and Marriage and Family Therapy Practica

Jennifer Cates

Associate Professor, School of Education and Counseling  
Regis University  
([jcates001@regis.edu](mailto:jcates001@regis.edu))

Jody Huntington

Assistant Professor, School of Education and Counseling  
Regis University  
([jhunting@regis.edu](mailto:jhunting@regis.edu))

John Arman

Associate Professor, School of Education and Counseling  
Regis University  
([jarman@regis.edu](mailto:jarman@regis.edu))

Sondra Beres

Associate Professor, School of Education and Counseling  
Regis University  
([sberes@regis.edu](mailto:sberes@regis.edu))

### Abstract

Four faculty members from Regis University's Counseling Division share their application of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) in Counseling and Marriage and Family Therapy Practica. Using the IPP, they guide the learners in an intentional way to integrate values and action in service to others. Faculty use the IPP to support learners and invite them to thoughtfully engage with the elements of the paradigm. A discussion and review of how the faculty incorporates the five IPP elements in the practica setting is provided.

### Introduction

“Ignatian education strives to develop men and women of competence, conscience, and compassion.”<sup>1</sup> While we may be hard pressed to find an educator that does not wish to encourage these qualities in a learner, faculty may not have a framework by which to attend to and foster the development of these characteristics. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola were intended to promote actions and attitudes that are most conducive to discerning one's deepest purpose and ways to be in service of others.<sup>2</sup> The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) is a practical structure for teaching that was developed from the Spiritual Exercises to encourage learners to understand

their own values and act in accordance with them in service of others.<sup>3</sup> The IPP is a model of Jesuit education, which takes into consideration the dynamic relationship between teacher and learner and the process of education.<sup>4</sup> Using IPP as a framework, learners are guided through the learning process in a way that evokes exploration and growth. The five elements included in the IPP are: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation.<sup>5</sup>

In the Graduate Counseling Division at Regis University, learners in our counseling and marriage and family therapy (MFT) programs engage in applied clinical experience in a six credit hour practicum in the university counseling lab.

Learners enter practicum after they have completed a minimum of 42 credit hours in their master's degree program, preparing them with knowledge and skills to serve clients. During practicum, learners are therapists-in-training for 16 weeks, serving clients from the community and the student body while they are supervised by licensed clinicians, who are Regis faculty. A requirement of practicum is that learners engage in social justice through serving marginalized populations at their clinical sites and in our counseling lab that serves the community at no cost.

In the first practicum meeting, we distribute a short article to the learners entitled, "Precis of Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach,"<sup>6</sup> which briefly describes how faculty can address the elements of the IPP. We remind learners of the Jesuit Mission at Regis and review the five IPP elements, giving them an overview of how they are attended to in the instruction and structure of practicum. We give a brief description of the elements as follows: 1.) **Context** (e.g., sociopolitical, cultural, familial) of the learner, supervisor, and client must be understood to create an optimal learning environment and therapeutic relationship, and this will be a focus throughout practicum; 2.) **Experience** will consist of intellectual and affective learning opportunities, including working with clients and giving and receiving peer and supervisor feedback; 3.) **Reflection** opportunities include reviewing your recorded sessions of clients, hearing supervisor and peer feedback, and writing weekly journal assignments regarding thoughts and feelings about client sessions and feedback received from peers and supervisors; 4.) **Action** will include attending group and triadic supervision and discussing thoughts and feelings regarding work with your clients, as well as implementing new directions or interventions in working with clients based on learners' reflections and feedback from peers and supervisors; and 5.) **Evaluation** will consist of a formal case presentation, self-evaluation using a counseling/MFT skills rubric, and formal supervisor evaluations on the counseling/MFT rubric.

Regardless of the course content, faculty from across disciplines, who are using a variety of course formats, may find it useful to make the IPP

explicit to learners in order to provide a map for the learning environment that is holistic and attends to the process of faculty and learners embarking on a journey of intellectual, spiritual, and emotional development.<sup>7</sup> We have found that introducing the IPP and delineating how it will be applied in practicum broadens the expectations of faculty and learners to include personal attitudes, values, and beliefs, as well as cultural, spiritual, and sociopolitical contexts as an integral part of the process of learners discovering who they are and how they can act more justly. In the following, we will describe in more detail how we apply the IPP in practicum and how we discuss it with students.

### Context

*Cura Personalis*, person-centered, or personal care and concern for the individual in the learning process, is a characteristic of Jesuit education.<sup>8</sup> But why is individual attention paramount to Ignatian pedagogy and in what ways can faculty provide personal attention to learners that is consistent with the IPP?

Encouraging learners to observe and describe their experiences, through their senses and emotions, is central to facilitating their development of discernment about how to act justly in the world in a manner consistent with their values. However, IPP recognizes that an individual's life experiences cannot be separated from the context in which they occur. Therefore, education consistent with IPP requires teachers to understand the life experiences, beliefs, and sociopolitical context of learners, as well as of themselves, and how these contexts interact to impact the learning and teaching.<sup>9</sup>

In teaching and supervising masters' level learners during their practica, we use the RESPECTFUL Counseling Model<sup>10</sup> as a tool for learning about each other's contexts, as well as the contexts of our learners' clients. This model focuses on ten factors which can impact the practice of counseling and therapy, as well as the process of learning. They are a person's: (R) religious-spiritual identity, (E) ethnic-cultural-racial background, (S) sexual identity, (P) psychological maturity, (E) economic class background, (C) chronological-developmental challenges, (I) threats to one's personal well-being, (F) family history and dynamics, (U) unique physical characteristics, and

(L) location of residence.<sup>11</sup> This framework can be used to guide learners in thinking about and discussing elements of their own multidimensional background, as well as that of their clients and supervisors during practicum. In doing so, learners and supervisors may better understand how these contexts interact to impact relationships that are formed between learners and their clients, peers, and supervisors.

On the first night of class, we meet for our initial group supervision. The RESPECTFUL Counseling Model<sup>12</sup> is given to learners, as we introduce the idea that cultural context impacts learners', clients', and supervisors' abilities to form therapeutic and growth promoting relationships. After reviewing the ten factors, we talk about how at different points in all of our lives, aspects of our identity or context can become more or less important, depending on life stage or circumstances. Then, the supervisor guides the group in an experiential activity to explore context. We ask the learners and the supervisors to pick one factor from the RESPECTFUL Counseling Model<sup>13</sup> that is particularly salient for her or his cultural identity currently and to discuss this with the group. This discussion allows us to begin to learn about each other's worldviews and experiences that we are bringing to our work with the clients and each other.

We also introduce the idea of using the RESPECTFUL Counseling Model<sup>14</sup> as an assessment tool to gather important contextual information about our clients to understand how cultural context could be impacting the client's view of the presenting concern or expectations for the therapeutic process. We tell the learners that they will use this framework when presenting their formal case presentation to the group, so that they are expected to comment on each of the ten factors in order to have a holistic understanding of the client, and how the client's context may be impacting the therapeutic relationship and the process and outcome of therapy. Through the repeated use of the RESPECTFUL Counseling Model,<sup>15</sup> we intentionally attend to the learners', clients', and supervisors' contexts, consistent with the first step in the IPP. We discuss with the learners that the use of the RESPECTFUL Counseling Model<sup>16</sup> is a way for us to attend to

culture and context and that this is the first step of the IPP.

### Experience

Core to the practicum experience is providing learners the opportunity to work therapeutically with clients, in which the complex nature of human experience is explored. Learners experience relationships with clients, peers, supervisors, and themselves. They also experience the shock and responsibility of being in the role of counselor or therapist for the first time. They incorporate what they have learned throughout their previous life experience, their prior coursework and from the first night of practicum and find themselves completely immersed in the experience of being a counselor or therapist-in-training.

We structure our practica so that learners begin their first experience with clients in a supportive environment. Each practicum section has between six and eight learners and two faculty supervisors. Learners meet with faculty supervisors for individual and group clinical supervision. Supervisors and learners observe each client session, and they provide feedback to the counselor or therapist-in-training who is in the room with the client. Some feedback is given to the learner when he or she emerges from the session, some is dubbed onto the recording of the session, and some is called in to the session via telephones or earbuds. Initially, some learners experience this level of observation and feedback as intimidating, but after the first couple of sessions, most learners experience the practicum structure as immensely supportive. Our intention is to scaffold the learners' experiences so that they are in the room without a supervisor visible, but the supervisor is still supporting them during their sessions. By the end of the practicum semester, the counselor or therapist-in-training relies less on direction from the supervisor during the sessions and more on their own wisdom.

This model of practicum provides multiple experiences for learners. They experience for the first time being a counselor or therapist. This experience includes feeling fear that they may use their power inappropriately; excitement that they are finally doing the work that years of education has prepared them to do; and often fear of

inadequacy or incompetence because they have not transitioned from being a student to being a practitioner or because they may not sense that they have the life experience or maturity to be a practitioner.

Being in a group of peers who are having similar excitements and struggles, learners develop cohesion with their peers by experiencing this transition together. They are often vulnerable with each other in a way that most academic settings do not support. They challenge and support each other as they give and receive feedback and encouragement. In the MFT practicum, they work in co-therapy teams with their couple and family clients. This gives the learners an additional experience of navigating the relationship of the co-therapy team. The level of reliance and intimacy that is necessary to work together in such close proximity gives the learners more relational and therapeutic experiences to further develop as therapists.

Of course, the learners establish relationships with their clients as well. The experiences they have with clients challenge their worldviews and give them an opportunity to become men and women for others. As mentioned previously, they use the RESPECTFUL Model<sup>17</sup> to conceptualize their clients, which helps them grow beyond their prior experience, as they are present in relationship with their clients who may be very different from them. Through the experience of being in relationship with another in pain and confusion, learners grapple with how to allow the relational process to unfold, and not impose on clients how to act, think, or feel.

Throughout the experiences during practicum, learners are giving and receiving feedback on their clinical skills and professionalism. Counselors and therapists-in-training receive feedback from their peers, supervisors, and clients. For some learners, receiving feedback can feel intense and critical, and they may initially respond with defensiveness. It is only through a balance of compassion and structure that learners can be guided through their initial experience of defensiveness to a more receptive and open stance, which is necessary for their continued development after practicum.

Consistent with the IPP, learners are guided along this powerful experience with their clients by

having a safe, supportive, and honest relationship with their supervisors. Many learners have a belief that in order to be evaluated well by their supervisors, they must hide their faults and deficiencies. Instead, in the clinical supervision relationship, learners are encouraged to be vulnerable with their supervisors and peers and to be honest about their struggles and growth areas, as well as their strengths. This relational experience embodies the Ignatian practice of being valued as an individual involved in a developmental learning process. The experience of the supervision relationship can be just as powerful for the learner as the experience of the client relationship.

### Reflection

Reflection is defined as “a thoughtful reconsideration of some subject matter, experience, idea, purpose, or spontaneous reaction, in order to grasp its significance more fully.”<sup>18</sup> By asking students to partake in reflection, we are suggesting that reconsideration may lead to a deeper, more complex meaning than initially gleaned. Challenging one’s spontaneous assumptions, questioning the origins of one’s beliefs, and entertaining other possibilities, all contribute to a greater expansion of understanding of self and others.

Practicum learners are invited to reflect on their experiences, their work with clients, and their feedback from supervisors and peers. Learners are encouraged to discover internal thoughts, beliefs, feelings, values, and attitudes and the consequences and implications these factors may have on their interactions with others, especially their clients. They undergo reflection of meaning by journaling, supervision, reviewing session recordings, and intentional use of the IPP. As indicated previously, supervisors introduce the IPP in the early weeks of practicum by providing students with background information and facilitated discussion about the elements of the IPP. Throughout the semester, supervision discussions may refer back to the model at various points to integrate and synthesize students’ learning and experiences with reflection. Reflection is used as a modality to assist students to analyze and consciously review their experiences. At the end of the semester, students

are given an end of semester reflection exercise (Appendix A) and asked to respond to and summarize their effort toward reflection and what resulted from the process.

**Student Feedback Related to Reflection.** Our students report that this reflective structure has supported them in processing their experiences in practicum, preparing case notes, and considering alternative ideas for future sessions. They indicate that intentional reflection on their work has helped them to increase their awareness of their role in the relationship with clients and others and how their actions impact relationships. Students identify both journaling and supervision as important and helpful reflective activities to increase their ability to think critically and make meaning of their experiences.

**Supervisor Process Related to Reflection.** Faculty avoid being directive or dogmatic to facilitate learner reflection. Instead, we honor their process of reflection, by asking open ended and challenging questions to encourage further development. In situations where a learner is experiencing intense emotional reactions, we encourage them to discuss these reactions in group supervision or in individual meetings. Our role as supervisors is to provide supportive and flexible conditions and facilitate learners' reflective process to become more aware of themselves and how they relate with others.<sup>19</sup> We invite learners to reflect on their experiences and actions, to engage in the process of seeking clarity, truth and wisdom, while acknowledging and respecting these factors are multi-faceted and contextual.<sup>20</sup> We believe the reflection element of the IPP provides our students with an intentional layer of self-discovery and critical consciousness, which prepares her or him for greater service to others.<sup>21</sup>

### Action

In the IPP, the term "Action" refers to "internal growth based upon experience that has been reflected upon."<sup>22</sup> As described above, learners are asked to reflect upon the meaning of their experience as counselors and therapists-in-training through their participation in large group supervision, small group supervision, consultation with peers and faculty, clinical site supervision and journaling. All of these reflective modalities are

vehicles for learners to act and react with their clients in more humane and therapeutic ways.

The supervising faculty structure activities so learners are compelled to move toward experiencing and reflecting, resulting in thoughtful action with their clients. Faculty provide reflective exercises for learners through written assignments, journaling, watching recordings of client sessions, and requiring them to present case information on a client or family to their supervision groups to solicit feedback. Through these experiences that have been reflected on internally and externally, learners are encouraged to return to client sessions and try: a.) new ways of interacting with clients, such as more engaged body language; b.) different therapeutic techniques, such as reflecting primary emotion; and c.) additional interventions, such as a family sculpture or a communication exercise.

Using the IPP, faculty help learners to internalize their own experience as the counselor from a personal, human point of view while also remaining open to where their truth might lead them.<sup>23</sup> Their own truth reflects the work they do with clients and the reflection they do upon that work. Other aspects that contribute to discerning their truth may include: socio-cultural influences, spirituality, family of origin issues, and previous experiences in their lives. All of these aspects along with learner reflections and feedback from supervisors and peers culminate in what ultimately becomes their truth and their own action points. Learners return to session and experiment with different ways of being with their clients. They return each week to supervision and process their thoughts and feelings about their work and about their supervisory experiences.

One of the major Jesuit themes and a component of Regis University's mission is *Finding God in All Things*. This is an invitation to search for and find spirit in all life circumstances, not only in religious situations. We are invited to find our spirit or truth in all areas of study and learning and in every human circumstance. This theme is manifested in the concept we seek to answer at Regis: how ought we to live? Each individual defines their truth in their own sense of spirituality such as goodness, love, or social justice. As supervisors in counseling and therapy, we provide our learners

with opportunities to find God or Spirit in All Things. Ultimately, it is their responsibility to do the work to make these opportunities meaningful and take action on them during practicum and beyond. As part of this process, we encourage supervisors to create opportunities for their students to reflect on their work and to then take action in the community to give their work life and meaning.

Two examples of reflection leading to action follow. A marriage and family therapy practicum learner who reflected on her experiences as the therapist and her supervisors' feedback, took action by integrating her reactions with research. She designed a play therapy intervention to use with a mother and daughter who were at an impasse in therapy. The mother was a teen mom of a four-year-old girl. They both lived with the mother's mother. Grandfather had been deported to Mexico, and the 4-year-old girl's father had sporadic contact with the family. Due in part to the young mother living with her own mother and still living her life as a teenager, she had not begun to step into the role of being the mother to her little girl. As a result, there seemed to be a lack of engagement between mom and daughter, characterized by minimal play together, little communication, and much emotional distance. This type of relationship was not satisfactory to the mother or her daughter, and they seemed ready to develop a relationship that did not require the mediation of the grandmother. The practicum learner's intervention involved playing a game of Nerf basketball. The therapist in training created questions that the mother and daughter could ask each other each time one made a hoop that the other could not replicate. This play therapy intervention helped the mother and daughter begin to communicate more effectively about their emotions, as well as begin to increase their play and laughter. It also helped the learner feel more confident and accomplished as a therapist.

In another instance, a counseling practicum learner reflected on her journal assignment and triadic supervision and decided to try a Gestalt Therapy technique called The Empty Chair. This helped her client address unresolved issues of grief and loss that she had never confronted related to her father passing away when she was a child. In

this case, the learner had to integrate her own reflections, supervisory feedback, and scholarly research to effectively initiate this Empty Chair technique. The technique turned out to be very effective for the client and the counselor, both of whom took the risk to heal and find God in all things.

## Evaluation

"Ignatian pedagogy aims at formation...of students' well-rounded growth as persons for others."<sup>24</sup> Throughout practicum, learners and supervisors engage in both formal and informal evaluation of the learners as they provide services to the clients at our no-cost counseling clinic. As mentioned above, learners receive live feedback from supervisors and peers while they are conducting therapy sessions. This feedback is recorded onto the session tape, and the learners are then asked to watch the recorded session to listen to the feedback and to make their own evaluations of the session. As discussed above, the learners are asked to write weekly journals regarding their thoughts and emotions in response to their work with clients and their supervision experiences and are then asked to discuss their insights in group supervision. Supervisors read these journal entries weekly and provide comments and questions for learners to consider and discuss in group supervision with peers and faculty. Sometimes, the supervisor will suggest a particular client intervention to try. Other times, supervisors may encourage the learner to discuss her or his thoughts or feelings in response to a client, a peer, or a supervision suggestion.

At mid-term and again prior to the final meeting of the class, learners formally self-evaluate, using a counseling or therapy skills rubric. Two supervisors also evaluate the learners using the same rubric. This allows for a discussion to take place that honors the view of both the supervisors and the learner. The goal is to mutually agree upon areas of strength, as well as areas for further personal and professional growth.

Finally, learners present a case to peers and supervisors. They use the RESPECTFUL Counseling Model<sup>25</sup> to introduce the client in terms of demographic information and cultural background. They describe the theoretical

orientation that they have been using to conceptualize the case, the interventions they have tried, and the outcomes that have been observed. Then, they show a clip from a particular session that demonstrates their work, and they ask for feedback from peers and supervisors for new directions or ideas on what went well or could have been more effective.

During the final sessions of therapy, learners and sometimes supervisors meet with clients to ask for evaluative feedback on the counseling process. Clients are asked if they remember any particular moments in which they thought the therapist-in-training really understood them or connected with them. Then, clients are asked if there were any particular moments when they thought the learner did not understand what they were trying to communicate. Finally, learners receive direct formative feedback from client evaluations. This critical information may provide learners with a unique opportunity to evaluate their skills and interactions with clients in general.

Practicum is a pass or fail class, and there is a distinct sense that the academic portion of the learners' training is less of an emphasis than the actions that they are now taking in relationship with clients. As a result, the evaluation component of the class is designed to enhance the personal and professional growth of the learner and to improve service to the clients in our community.

## Conclusion

The IPP, like the Spiritual Exercises, was intended to support individuals in their process of becoming self-aware along with searching for and finding ways to live in community and attend to one another.<sup>26</sup> We believe incorporating the IPP in practicum provides our learners with an opportunity for deeper reflection and awareness of self and others. The intentional and explicit use of the elements of the IPP (context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation) accentuates the interpersonal processes of education and therapy, thereby fostering growth in learners' values and character formation-i.e., the realization that we are not simple observers or witnesses of individuals' suffering and joy, but active participants in individuals' experiences, including our own.

Constructed over the last 500 years, Jesuit education is the foundation for the IPP and its key concepts – context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. We infuse the IPP along with our formal education and training in an effort to prepare competent counselors and therapists, as well as encourage life-long learners who understand the importance of advocating for justice and know how to do so. It is our intent that this paper provides the reader with enough information and examples to employ the IPP in their own teaching practice. The IPP can be adapted to various educational disciplines that include experience, reflection, and action as part of the basis for learning. In our experience, the intentional incorporation and discussion of the IPP has helped us as faculty to foster increased competence, conscience, and compassion in our learners through increasingly authentic relationships with clients, peers, and supervisors. Additionally, we find that students and faculty develop a deeper and more complete understanding of their belief systems (values, spirituality, cultural beliefs, etc.) which, in turn, influence the work they do with clients. It is in this work that the spirit of Ignatian thought and action come forward to influence the lives of clients and learners alike. 

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sharon J. Korth, "Precis of Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach," in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed. George W. Traub, S.J. (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008), 280.

<sup>2</sup> Howard Gray, S.J. "The Experience of Ignatius Loyola: Background to Jesuit Education," in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed. George W. Traub, S.J. (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Marianne F. Gallagher and Peter A. Musso, "Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm Synopsis," Unpublished manuscript for JSEA, Washington, DC, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy: September 2005," Accessed December 7, 2012. <http://www.ajcunet.edu/jesuit-education-and-ignatian-pedagogy>

<sup>5</sup> Korth, "Precis of Ignatian Pedagogy."

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>8</sup> Kolvenbach, "Jesuit Education;" Robert A. Mitchell, "Five Traits of Jesuit Education," in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed. George W. Traub, S.J., (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Korth, "Precis of Ignatian Pedagogy."

<sup>10</sup> Michael D'Andrea and Judy Daniels, "Multicultural Counseling Supervision: Central Issues, Theoretical Considerations, and Practical Strategies," in *Multicultural Counseling Competencies: Assessment, Education and Training, and Supervision*, ed. D. B. Pope-Davis and H. L. Coleman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Korth, "Precis of Ignatian Pedagogy."

<sup>19</sup> Robert W. Newton, "Reflections on the Educational Principles of the Spiritual Exercises: Summary Conclusion and Questions for Teachers," in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed. George W. Traub, S.J. (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Korth, "Precis of Ignatian Pedagogy."

<sup>22</sup> Marquette University, *Finding God in All Things: A Marquette Prayer Book* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Korth, "Precis of Ignatian Pedagogy."

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>25</sup> D'Andrea and Daniels, "Multicultural Counseling Supervision."

<sup>26</sup> Gray, "The Experience of Ignatius Loyola."

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## Appendix A

### End of Semester Practicum Reflection Exercise

**Consider your entire practicum experience and respond to the following:**

**Context**-Using the RESPECTFUL Model (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1997), what aspects of your cultural identity were most salient to you in your counseling and supervisory relationships during practicum? What were your thoughts and emotions as you formed relationships with your clients, peers, and supervisors? What aspects of your clients', peers', and/or supervisors' cultural identities were the most different from your cultural identity, and how did these differences impact your relationship with that individual?

**Experience**-from this practicum experience, what specific activities did you learn the most from, and what did you learn? What challenges (include personal) did you experience? What support (include personal) did you experience?

**Reflection**-how much time and energy did you put toward reflection and discernment during this practicum? Please explain or give examples.

**Action**-what action(s) did you take both with clients and personally as a result of your reflections upon your experience and your reflections upon the feedback that you received.

**Evaluation**-as you leave this practicum experience, what new understanding do you have about yourself in the way that you work with clients, peers, supervisors, and the community?

How do you see this practicum experience impacting your future?

Did this practicum experience influence you in a way that you serve or will serve others? If so, please explain.