TEACHING & MENTORSHIP

Teaching as a practice of presence.

Charisse Tay Mitchell, LPC

Colorado Christian University
CES-831 Instructional Theory and Practice · Dr. Crystal Brashear
May 17, 2026

Inhale

Receive new ideas, theories, and frameworks.

Pause

Let learning settle through reflection and integration.

Exhale

Carry understanding into relationship and practice.

“Teaching, to me, is like the act of breathing.”

My full teaching philosophy follows, including the original references.

01 / TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Teaching Philosophy

Teaching, to me, is like the act of breathing. There is the inhale, the moment of taking in, where a student receives new ideas, theories, and frameworks. Then there is the exhale, a moment of release, where understanding moves outward into relationship, into practice, and into the room with a client. Yet what makes the breath possible at all is the pause between the two, that liminal space where the learning settles and integrates. In this liminal space, the student accesses a new way of being, a deeper felt presence. I came to this conviction through a life that has rarely moved in straight lines, from the trading floors of Wall Street, to research labs, to seminary classrooms, to the addiction counseling spaces I now lead as a Clinical Executive Director. It is precisely that winding path that taught me the essence of presence. Drawing on neurobiology, attachment theory, and the Neuroaffective Relational Model, I view the counseling relationship as a co-regulated nervous system encounter.

I bring this same lens to education as I believe that a student cannot offer their clients a regulated presence they have never experienced themselves. My style as an educator is therefore less about information and more about transformation. I invite students to slow down, discover themselves in the material, and let their own growing self-awareness become the first instrument of their practice.

02 / THEORY OF LEARNING

Theory of Learning

As an educator, I provide a learning environment that not only supports the development of clinical knowledge but also promotes students' capacity for regulated and reflective presence. Neurobiology, attachment theory, and existentialism shape my teaching, and I understand learning as a process in which students experience growth through safety, attunement with others, honest self-awareness, and the courage to take responsibility for meaning, choice, and change. I also draw on my own history as a student, researcher, seminary student, research assistant, and clinic director in addiction recovery settings to support my belief that counselor education does not merely involve access to information but requires embodied practice, relational engagement, and personal integration. When supervising students, I utilize developmental and reflective models to provide support based on evolving learner needs, helping students develop awareness of their internal reactions and the freedom and responsibility they carry in their clinical responses.

To address students' learning needs, I toggle between the roles of teacher, counselor, and consultant. In master's-level counseling courses, this philosophy shapes how I attend to the whole person of the student, especially as students engage difficult clinical, ethical, spiritual, and cultural material. I guide students into

an ongoing process of formation as they learn to think critically, intervene skillfully, engage difference humbly, and become increasingly present to themselves, their clients, and God.

My approach to andragogy translates this formative philosophy into adult learning practices by designing courses that are relevant, experiential, collaborative, and immediately connected to clinical work. I design my courses in line with how adults learn best: they are self-directed, they bring a wealth of experience that is itself a resource for learning, they are readiness-driven by the real demands of their lives, and they are internally motivated (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015). Rather than treating these adult learner characteristics as abstract principles, I build them into the classroom structure through case-based discussions, role-plays, peer consultation, reflective dialogue, and applied assignments that require students to connect theory to counseling practice. I collaborate with students and build their autonomy by drawing out what they already know, anchoring new content to their lives and clinical experiences, and creating conditions in which their own insights become as instructive as the assigned readings.

At the same time, I stay available to learners through optional synchronous meetings and office hours, so that they feel supported and can seek help as needed. I also attend to what neuroscience suggests about adult learning: that stress can narrow cognition, that safety can expand it, and that emotional relevance can deepen encoding (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). In this sense, a co-regulated classroom does not only express my counseling philosophy, it also functions as an andragogical necessity. When adult learners are genuinely seen, appropriately challenged, and actively engaged, they learn at a depth that changes not only what they know but who they are becoming.

03 / ETHICAL, LEGAL, AND CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION

Ethical, Legal, and Cultural Considerations in Counselor Education

I believe that ethical competence is a developmental process. The 2024 CACREP Standards reflect this same understanding, designating ethics as a foundational commitment that must be integrated throughout the entire counselor training curriculum (CACREP, 2024, Section 3). For me, ethical competence is a professional and theological obligation, and ethical standards are protective frameworks that equip counselors to serve their clients with integrity. To consider ethics is to practice love for God and neighbor, expressed through humility, honesty, justice, wisdom, and attentiveness to those who are vulnerable. In class, I create space for students to examine their own ethical compasses, so that they can operate intentionally and with clarity. This means ensuring students are able to live and breathe the ACA Code of Ethics and state statutes. I integrate real-world case studies to help students practice engaging with moral complexity before they encounter it in a session.

My aim is to form counselors who embody the ethical perspective modeled by Christ, who held both truth and love together in tension.

Multicultural competence begins with me as an educator. I approach culture with curiosity and humility and I try to model that posture as much as I teach it. I infuse multicultural perspectives into every course (ACA, 2014, F.7.c, F.11.c). My own multicultural experiences have given me an embodied sense of how culture impacts us. I employ attachment theory and neurobiology to guide students in understanding that a client's cultural identity is central to how they experience safety, trust, shame, and healing. As a Christian, I base this belief on my theological conviction of the imago Dei: we are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of our Creator (Psalm 139:14). In practice, I diversify my teaching materials, encourage students to reflect on their own cultural perspectives, and create space in the classroom for the hard work of grappling with intersectional tensions. My greatest hope is that students will be truly transformed by their multicultural exploration as they enter the counseling field.

04 / PHILOSOPHY OF ASSESSMENT

Philosophy of Assessment

Assessment exists not to judge who a student is, but to illuminate who they are becoming. I believe every learner bears the imago Dei (Genesis 1:26–27) while simultaneously carrying the blind spots and limitations that mark our common humanity (Romans 3:23), so I design assessments that balance grace and growth: high standards while genuinely honoring where learners are at. Practically, I implement multiple means of assessment throughout each semester to assess competency in various ways, whether case conceptualizations, video skills demonstrations, reflective writing, or summative quizzes (CACREP, 2024; 2.C.1–2.C.3). Respecting adult learners emphasis on being self-directed and motivated by relevance to their professional lives (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015), I link every assessment to real-world application. I provide competency expectations and rubric criteria from the first day of class and provide ongoing feedback throughout the course (ACA, 2014, F.9.a). When a student is struggling, I initiate early supportive conversations and connect them with remediation resources (ACA, 2014, F.9.b).

Drawing on Hattie and Timperley's (2007) framework, I structure written feedback around three questions: where the student is going, how they are currently progressing, and what they should do next. I also include self-assessment throughout courses, inviting students to develop the reflective and self-evaluative capacity they will need for a lifetime of practice (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). My hope is that students leave my courses having developed competence, but more importantly, a deeper awareness of themselves as counselors and humans made in the image of God.

05 / GATEKEEPING

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is an ongoing process where students, faculty, and the institution walk together collaboratively to protect and honor the future clients that our students will one day serve. I believe that this process begins at the doorstep, with expectations and program policies made clear from the first day, along with thorough documentation (ACA, 2014, F.8.a; CACREP, 2024, Section 1). Most of this work is routine and supportive, such as via continuous feedback and check-ins, with remediation is offered as genuine support toward growth. On the rare occasion that it means recommending that a student not continue, I do so with due process that honors their dignity and right to respond (ACA, 2014, F.9.b; 6.B. 3.i). The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies remind me to examine my own cultural assumptions as I evaluate students (Ratts et al., 2015). Theologically, I view this responsibility as similar to a shepherd keeping watch over a flock, guarding and tending those entrusted to my care (Acts 20:28; John 10:11).

I gatekeep with humility, seeking to restore in a spirit of gentleness (Matthew 7:3–5; Galatians 6:1), and hope, trusting that God who begins a good work carries it on as He forms us (Philippians 1:6).

06 / MENTORING

Mentoring

I have been mentoring since high school, and I believe that one of the most consequential things we can do is pour deeply into another person's formation. Through mentoring, I offer my time, experience, and influence, ethically (ACA, 2014, F.7.a; F.8.b; F.10.d). The profession treats this as essential work, asking faculty to mentor students in coursework and advocacy and to accompany them through their program (CACREP, 2024, 6.B.3.m; 6.A.2.b; 6.A.2.d), but for me it is more than a requirement, it is a privilege. In mentorship, I begin by understanding a student's unique personality, history, goals, and life vision. I aim to connect with students on both a personal and professional level. Together, we chart a course for how I might support them. I am also prepared to advocate on their behalf to open doors (Ratts et al., 2016). Mentoring reminds me that I do not create growth in someone else.

I can plant and water, but God is the one who brings growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). Thus, I can be confident in my mentoring role, knowing that God is at work in the student's life to fulfill His plans (Philippians 2:12-13). I am a single link in a much larger chain of equipping others to do the work of the ministry, as I myself have been equipped (Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 2:2).

07 / LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Learning Environment

In every course I teach, whether students are gathering around a seminar table or logging into a shared video room from across several time zones, I work to create a space akin to a supportive clinical community. I open each class with an invitation to arrive and be present, whether through a brief self check-in, grounding meditation, or a reflective worship song. I am convinced that the nervous system learns best when the room feels relationally safe. As I establish relational warmth, I cultivate the three interdependent forms of presence that sustain meaningful learning: a teaching presence that structures and guides, a social presence that lets students feel known, and a cognitive presence that moves them toward genuine inquiry (Garrison, 2016). I treat the classroom as a community in which students are apprenticing into counseling alongside each another and me (Lave & Wenger, 1991). I scaffold challenges to meet each learner just past their current reach (Wood et al., 1976), offering more support where the material is unfamiliar and more autonomy where competence is emerging.

Since adult learners arrive with different histories, abilities, and ways of processing, I design with multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression in mind (Almeqdad et al., 2023). I incorporate co-created group norms, small-group case consultations, role-plays, and reflecting on the felt experience in the classroom as it unfolds, so that students can experience firsthand the attunement we ask them to offer their clients.

I ensure that my teaching remains consistent across in-seat, hybrid, and fully online formats. When I teach in-seat, I take advantage of physical presence, nonverbal communication, and realtime discussions. When I teach in a hybrid format, I guard against the indignity of remote learners becoming second-class participants, so I assign an in-room advocate to surface online voices, position cameras to include the whole room and frequently invite remote students to respond. When I am teaching fully online, I exploit the virtual environment as a pedagogical tool, structuring asynchronous discussions for deeper intellectual exchange, assigning recorded skills demonstrations, and meeting students in synchronous meetings. Across all three formats, I build community deliberately (Palloff & Pratt, 2007), trusting the evidence that well-designed online and blended learning can compare to and even exceed traditional formats (Means et al., 2013), and I keep office hours and optional synchronous meetings so that no student must walk alone.

08 / BIBLICAL INTEGRATION

Biblical Integration

Every course I teach is rooted in the conviction that all truth is ultimately God's truth. I believe that the empirical insights of the counseling profession can and must be examined through the lens of Scripture (Entwistle, 2015). From this perspective, I integrate both implicitly and explicitly. Implicitly, I model a Christlike presence in how I interact with students. Explicitly, I invite students to reflect on the theological dimensions of course content, illuminating relationships between the content and the gospel as appropriate (Tan, 2011). When we examine a theory of personality, a diagnosis, or an intervention, I encourage students to thoughtfully evaluate those ideas through a biblical understanding of persons, suffering, growth, and flourishing (2 Corinthians 10:5; Johnson, 2010). My aim is not simply to spiritualize counseling theory, but to help counselors-in-training develop an integrated faith that shapes how they understand themselves, relate to others, and counsel (Cheston, 2000).

In the classroom, I provide avenues for theological reflections and encourage students to consider how their beliefs, values, and professional identities inform their work. I support students in exploring both human dignity and human brokenness within counseling and create space for students to wrestle honestly with difficult questions. I hold fast to the belief that both professional growth and spiritual formation will unfold over time (Romans 12:2).

09 / CONCLUSION

Conclusion

I began with the image of teaching as breathing. There is the inhale of new learning, the exhale of application that moves outward, and the quiet pause of being where the two meet. Across my teaching philosophy, everything I do as an educator serves this process: I build safe environments for students to learn in, along with ethical and cultural frameworks to support them, and I provide assessments and mentorship that honor the pause where a person is in the process of transforming. Ultimately, God is the one who gives breath to every student who walks into my classroom, who will one day be a counselor (Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4). I am merely a sojourner who comes alongside my students in their process. My deepest hope is that students leave not merely knowing how to counsel, but breathing differently, more connected and present to themselves, to their clients, and to God.

REFERENCES

Sources that inform my teaching

Almeqdad, Q. I., Alodat, A. M., Alquraan, M. F., Mohaidat, M. A., & Al-Makhzoomy, A. K. (2023). The effectiveness of universal design for learning: A systematic review of the literature and meta-analysis. Cogent Education, 10(1), Article 2218191. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2023.2218191

Boud, D., & Falchikov, N. (2006). Aligning assessment with long-term learning. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 31(4), 399–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930600679050

Cheston, S. E. (2000). A new paradigm for teaching counseling theory and practice. Counselor Education and Supervision, 39(4), 254–269. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2000.tb01236.x

Entwistle, D. N. (2015). Integrative approaches to psychology and Christianity: An introduction to worldview issues, philosophical foundations, and models of integration (3rd ed.). Cascade Books.

Garrison, D. R. (2016). E-learning in the 21st century. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315667263

Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. Review of Educational Research, 77(1), 81–112. https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487

Immordino-Yang, M. H., & Damasio, A. (2007). We feel, therefore we learn: The relevance of affective and social neuroscience to education. Mind, Brain, and Education, 1(1), 3–10. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-228x.2007.00004.x

Johnson, E. L. (2010). Psychology and Christianity: Five views (Second ed.). InterVarsity Press.

Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2015). The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development (8th ed.). Routledge.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511815355

Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., & Baki, M. (2013). The effectiveness of online and blended learning: A meta-analysis of the empirical literature. Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education, 115(3), 1–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811311500307

Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (2007). Building online learning communities: Effective strategies for the virtual classroom (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Ratts, M. J., Singh, A. A., Nassar-McMillan, S., Butler, S., & McCullough, J. (2016). Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies: Guidelines for the counseling profession. Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 44(1), 28–48. https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12035

Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving *. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17(2), 89–100. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x