A social constructivist approach to preparing school counselors to work effectively in urban schools

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Abstract:

In this article a social construction framework is used to improve the capacity of school counselors and trainees to work effectively with African American and Latina/o students in urban schools. Three key theoretical tenets of the social construction worldview are presented as a new lens for thinking about the *meaning-making* process of students in an urban school setting and how school counselors can support it. We offer activities to operationalize this theoretical point of view and implications for school counselor training and practice.

Keywords: Social construction theory | School counseling | Urban schools | Counselor training

Article:

Introduction

School counselors are mental health professionals who are ready to support the academic, career, and personal/social goals of their students. In the last 20 years, there has been considerable scholarship regarding the need for school counselors to shift their practices to better address the unique opportunity gaps facing students in rapidly changing urban spaces (Bemak and Chung 2005; Green et al. 2005). Today, the expectation is that a school counselor regularly assesses and is knowledgeable of school and student issues, maintains and involves a collaborative network of stakeholders, and intervenes at various levels to promote justice, equity, and access (Ockerman and Mason 2012; Wilczenski et al. 2011). This perspective requires school counselors in urban settings to acknowledge the forces that shape student realities while also focusing on the aspects that can be influenced/changed.

Effective school counselors working in an urban setting have the personal and professional ability to view student development from a holistic lens. They are prepared not only to see test scores or discipline records, but to view a student in the context of his or her family, culture,

community, and identity (Williams et al. 2016). For a school counselor who has social privilege, working at an urban school would mean learning to enter a student's perspective with care and respect, honoring the strengths as well as needs present in the student's life (Moss and Singh 2015). However, it is unclear how well training programs are accomplishing that mission. Educational Trust (n.d.) proposed that university-based school counselor training programs should focus curriculum on attending to personal and social experiences, promoting wellness and development, solving problems at both the individual and systems level, and valuing culture and diversity in order to empower students, families, and communities.

Thus, the link between counselor training programs, school counselors-in-training (SCIT), and professional school counselors (PSCs) is of key importance for supporting students and improving student outcomes in urban public schools. Faculty that train school counselors have important gatekeeping responsibility in selecting and preparing students with knowledge, skills, and values necessary for practicing school counselors working in urban school settings (Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen 2010). Critical to this training is an understanding of what shapes human interaction in different social locations (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age) and within contexts of connected systems and structures of power (e.g., laws, policies, state governments and other political and economic unions, religious institutions, media). School counselors need to become skilled at analyzing social problems of any category through a lens of discovery and constructivism and to emphasize relationship building with diverse students and communities.

Traditional counseling training programs have not adequately prepared school counselors to meet this need for effective school counseling that infuses cultural, historical, and social meaning-making that promotes social justice and advocacy of those that live in urban settings (Bemak and Chung 2005). Counselor educators who train school counselors must have the awareness, knowledge, and skills to address systemic social injustices and the meaning behind the injustices experienced on a day-to-day basis by students from urban settings (Butler-Byrd et al. 2006). School counseling training programs that infuse *meaning making moments*, social justice and advocacy concepts, research-based findings, and practical counseling experiences throughout the program curriculum empower the work of SCIT in urban settings. *Meaning making moments* occur when we learn things in and from other people, while doing the things that we do with those people, and this all happens in a specific space and time (Engeström 1999; Piaget 1957; Vygotsky 1978).

The purpose of this conceptual article is to use a social construction and narrative framework to improve the training of school counselors and their ability to work effectively with students in urban schools. From a social construction worldview, all personal experiences are products of people's interactions with the social contexts; experience is co-constructed by the person and by the social context (Engeström 1999). All meaning is saturated in culture, history, place, and time. Humans are ineluctably shaped by the social forces of language and interaction. All thoughts are socially mediated. We situate future school counselors as interconnected curious investigators seeking to understand the first person perspectives of students who are frequently misunderstood. By using narrative and social construction as training tools (and later in professional work), school counselors in urban settings will enhance their ability to connect and form genuine relationships with students with a realistic understanding of their context. This article addresses a

gap in the literature in that it provides a strengths-based conceptual approach to training school counselors and supports culturally competent practice in segregated and poorly resourced urban schools.

Training Urban School Counselors

The urban school counseling literature has taken up the issue of preparation and training of school counselors to some extent. Some landmark contributions to the urban school counseling literature have been made by Holcomb-McCoy (1998, 2004), Holcomb-McCoy and Mitchell (2005), Holcomb-McCoy and Johnston (2008) and Holcomb-McCoy et al. (2011), who has provided key action steps and strategies for transforming school counselor preparation for urban settings by updating coursework, implementing practicum-based training, and using data effectively. Holcomb-McCoy (2004) was one of the first to propose that urban school counselors have special training needs and urban school counseling training programs must prepare counselors to be culturally competent. Citing the unique needs of students in urban schools, Lee (2005) noted that "urban school counselors must support young people as they explore options, make choices, and prepare for life after high school against a backdrop of the challenges that confront the school system in which counselor's work" (p. 185). Competencies suggested by Lee include (a) cultural competence, (b) skills for promoting empowerment, (c) systemic perspective, (d) advocacy, and (e) leadership.

Additionally, Holcomb-McCoy (1998) and Lee (2005) both noted that issues and problems relevant to urban educators are given insufficient and inaccurate coverage in school counselor preparation programs. In the qualitative study conducted by Holcomb-McCoy and Johnston (2008) with nine White American school counseling students who completed their practicum experience in urban schools, it was found that practicum students were often conflicted between what they were taught and what school counselors actually do in urban schools. For many of the participants, the development of productive and comfortable relationships with both students and personnel was difficult (Holcomb-McCoy and Johnston 2008) and cultural differences presented as an issue. Similarly, Savitz-Romer (2012) found that school counselors in training desired more preparation for issues facing students in urban settings and described feeling unprepared for the realities of working with the students.

For example, many graduate school counseling programs emphasize the ASCA National Model (ASCA 2012) when training SCIT. This model provides an ideal and a structure that aid school counselors in their efforts to help students reach their academic, personal, and social potential. Yet, many SCITs enter many urban schools where the ASCA National Model is not implemented. For instance, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the second largest school district in the country with 640,000 students, 79% qualifying for free or reduced-priced meals, 73.7% identifying as Hispanic/Latino, 34% as White, 8.8% African American, 3.8% as Asian, and 3.5% as Other—and not one of their schools is a Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP). Hence, what was learned in graduate school may not work in practice in urban schools.

Understanding Students in Urban Schools

Only a few scholars have turned to the students in urban schools themselves for perspective on the needs and experiences that may exist. In qualitative studies with small samples, students of color in urban schools were concerned about (a) differential treatment by school counselors; (b) school counselors visibility and accessibility for meetings; (c) school, parents, and community collaboration; and (d) school counselor, teacher, and administrator low expectations of students of color. Yet, students desired an environment where (a) targeted academic support such as study and test taking skills; (b) proactive outreach by school counselors; and (c) assistance with non-academic concerns (mental health services, referral services and psychoeducation) were available (Owens et al. 2011; Vela-Gude et al. 2009; Williams and Portman 2014; Williams et al. 2016). In other words, students welcome school counselors who are available, and are willing to reach out while conveying interest and positive expectations. The school should be focused on both academic and non-academic concerns, and able to serve an advocacy role. In order to do that, school counselors need a fuller understanding of the community cultural assets where the students live. They must also possess the flexibility to enter students' narratives from their point of view. The students themselves deserve the chance to construct their own narrative, demonstrate their strengths, make their own meaning, and define their pathways to success.

Social Construction Theory

Social construction theory assumes that learning is socially organized, culturally mediated, and historically bound (Engeström 1999; Roth and Lee 2007). Students, communities, and school counselors are not passive participants waiting for the environment to instigate meaning-making processes for them. Rather, individuals, groups, and communities make meaning of the world through their interactions while they also modify and transform the artifacts, tools, and people in their environment (Scribner 1997). This conceptual lens is a good match for reflecting on the meaning-making process that occurs between school counselors and students in urban school settings. Each individual brings his or her cultural norms and past experiences into the relationship, but the willingness to learn from each other with an open and respectful attitude could bridge some of the distance that diminishes effectiveness. Counselor educators can also draw upon this lens in preparing their trainees to set aside preconceptions and biases in order to approach their relationships with future clients or students from a social construction perspective.

Thus, we recommend utilizing a social construction framework as school counselor educators teach, train, and supervise postmodern twenty-first century SCITs. That is, rather than assuming that professionals have access to "objective truth" and that clients or students improve only when they concede to this knowledge, we assume that we learn and create meaning by being in genuine relationship with those clients or students (Buendía 2011). School counselor educators can position themselves as *meaning-making pedagogues*, *facilitators*, and *narrators* for SCITs, adopting a social constructionist worldview where conversations (verbal) and actions (non-verbal) are co-created. Constructing meaning within ordinary conversations about gender, culture, feelings, emotions, the self, and all other aspects of students' social worlds generates perspective. Hence, reality is not an invariable truth, but rather dependent on an interpretive framework (Freedman and Combs 1996; Gergen 1985; Monk and Gehart 2003).

Several key theoretical tenets of the social construction worldview (Besley 2002; Freedman and Combs 1996; Lambie and Milsom 2010) will be presented as a new way of thinking about school

counseling, about relationships, about how counselor educators work with SCITs, and about the way SCITs support the *meaning-making* process of students in an urban school setting. Those tenets are: (a) realities and knowledge are constructed through social process; (b) language creates a person's reality and knowledge in a way that is bound by history and culture; and (c) common languages exist between and within communities. Social constructivism centralizes the stories of students, particularly the ways in which their realities and knowledge are constructed. We will review each of the tenets and provide suggestions for how counselor educators and SCITs can effectively view students in urban schools from this vantage point. Accordingly, our contribution is to examine the beliefs that SCITs can cultivate to work most effectively in an urban school context, and to offer suggestions for training programs to incorporate a social constructivist perspective in school counselor education.

Realities and Knowledge are Constructed Through Social Process

Students in urban schools are forced to matriculate within a system that is shaped according to and organized symbolically around Whiteness (Johnson 2006). Specifically, most educational institutions are organized, shaped and function from the European/individualistic cultural perspective without acknowledging alternate socially constructed realities (Hipolito-Delgado and Lee 2007). These culturally-based assumptions have contributed to the misperception of the 'uncommitted' Black/Latino (urban) student and 'uninvolved' Black/Latino (urban) parent (Hale 2004; Kozol 2005; Ladson-Billings 2013). The culturally-based assumptions made by school personnel who do not consider that their reality comes from their own social location could be damaging to a student whose social location is different and generates its own sense of knowledge and meaning.

One example of this social process is the conversation around 'achievement/opportunity gaps' as a way to describe the scholastic disparities between students of color and their White, middle class counterparts (ASCA 2012). Specifically, the American School Counseling Association's Mindsets and Behavior standards for practice includes a direct pronouncement regarding 'achievement gaps' and a 'call to action' for school counselors' to promote student success and career and college readiness by closing the existing achievement gap for underserved students (ASCA 2012). The adoption and promotion of the term 'achievement gap' is an imprudent way to explain and recognize a persistent inequality that has always existed in all our nation's schools. Achievement gap language suggests that each student of color is responsible for his or her educational experience and in turn needs to 'catch up' to their White counterparts (Ladson-Billings 2013). This view of the achievement gap generates a version of reality that places blame on individual students of color, rather than focus on the many structural barriers that society has imposed on them (i.e., historical educational inequalities, adverse socioeconomic conditions, disparities in income). School-based racial discrimination is real (Moss and Singh 2015) and consistently linked to poorer educational outcomes for students of color (Butler-Barnes et al. 2013). However, by using social constructivism to set aside one's point of view and enter the narrative of the student, school counselors can correct any inaccurate perceptions or assumptions and acknowledge the historical, economic, socio-political, and moral components of inequality that shape students' experiences (Ladson-Billings 2013). Within this framework, school counselors must view each student from a first-person perspective and honor, cultivate, and work

on their behalf as thriving, promising and worthy learners who face a challenging context, as will be demonstrated in the following case study.

Case study of Jasmin.

> Jasmin is a 13 year-old Black and Latina female in the 7th grade referred to the school counselor because of truancy. Academically, Jasmin has been a strong student and is often praised and recommended for academic awards by her teachers. However, within the past three months, Jasmin has left school for 20 minutes a day on 22 occasions. Whenever Jasmin's school counselor questioned the absences, Jasmin would simply respond, 'I am sorry, I will try not to miss again'. After the school counselor made three unsuccessful attempts to contact Jasmin's parents by phone, he displayed frustration with Jasmin's case and reported Jasmin as truant to school administration.

From a European individualistic cultural perspective, the individual is responsible for self (Akbar 1985) and Jasmin's school absence is constructed as a poor individual decision, lack of responsibility, or parental neglect. Although the school counselor had no information or contextual knowledge regarding Jasmin's absences, from a dominant cultural perspective, this behavior was interpreted as deviant. Based on these socially-mediated assumptions, Jasmin was tagged as truant, which could potentially remain on her permanent school record. To be effective in an urban school, school counselors must recognize students' non-White/non-dominant culture and how it might differ from their own worldview, and then must learn how to engage with it in an accepting and inquiring way (Ladson-Billings 2009; Nieto 2004). SCITs can be asked to reflect on the appropriateness of using a set of definitions generated in their own cultural schema to define the problem, especially if the student's cultural schema might differ (Bailey and Bradbury-Bailey 2006).

In addition to changing our conceptualization of the case, social construction theory would encourage a different set of behaviors in response. The school counselor utilized a dominant cultural behavior in his authoritative communication style of 'questioning' Jasmin. He experienced Jasmin's short responses as avoidant/passive. The counselor displayed culture-bound characteristics (focus on cognition, individualism, control and future-orientation) typical of the European culture (Akbar 1985) in his approach to working with Jasmin. Jasmin's hesitation to share information with school personnel is supported by her awareness that often educators/administrators use an individualistic lens to determine what's appropriate or inappropriate for students, while students might view their lives in an interconnected or collectivistic manner.

Had the school counselor utilized a social construction framework to connect and create a trusted space with Jasmin in order to enter her narrative, rather than just a few encounters of 'questioning/policing'; he would have learned that Jasmin's social construction of family is a community where each individual shares responsibilities. The social construction of reality from Jasmin's point of view is family-centered, not individual or achievement centered. The case study continues from Jasmin's point of view in order to demonstrate this reality:

> Jasmin loves school and enjoys learning. Jasmin also enjoys being a part of her family unit where she is involved as a valuable contributor. Jasmin especially embraces the idea that her parents see her as 'lista' (ready) for such an honor/privilege of taking on more family responsibilities. Jasmin lives with both of her parents, three younger siblings and her 'Nana' (grandmother). Both of Jasmin's parents work full time jobs that don't allow for their participation in many tasks, however, Jasmin is proud to fill the opportunity gaps. Jasmin has recently been given the opportunity to assist her Nana daily with lunch and administration of her insulin. Jasmin does not perceive leaving school to help her grandmother as a problem because she continues with the hope that it is only temporary, as her grandmother recently had surgery. Jasmin is also responsible for her younger siblings, which influences the activities in which she participates. Like most 13 year-olds, Jasmin experiences her social time with her friends as a big part of her after school activities. However, Jasmin embraces the idea that her family responsibilities limit school based activities. Jasmin's academic performance has not been compromised by her daily responsibilities, however, her 'truancy tag' is an issue that stems from the counselor's inability to understand the healthy and culturally appropriate way Jasmin's family constructs community.

The school counselor can now use this information as a learning tool. Jasmin's school counselor might now create a classroom guidance lesson that allows students to explore and share their own constructs of community. The lesson can be explored from perspectives that align with the 3 ASCA Mindset and Behavior domains (academic, career, and social/emotional development). Specifically, students can highlight the way their communities positively support academic growth, career growth and social/emotional growth. In addition, school counselor educators could utilize case studies such as this one in the classroom to expand the perspectives of trainees.

Language Creates a Person's Reality/Knowledge and is Bound by History and Culture

Among many criteria that may determine a person's reality, knowledge, and membership in a cultural group, language is potentially the strongest cue to a person's historical, cultural, ethnic/racial, and community identity. In the school setting, students use the language varieties at their disposal to signal a number of ethnic identifications (Kanagala et al. 2016; Noguera 2012). Code choice, including dialects and distinct styles within one language, emphasizing or hiding an accent, variations in intonation, and even accompanying speech with select kinesthetic cues, may all be used to indicate or invoke ethnic identifications (Negron 2011). Linguistic flexibility among students offers control over ethnic self-presentation and a sense of belonging in urban settings. Training school counselors to respect the language/s that urban communities are bound by historically, socially, and culturally is another way to enhance school counselor/student relationships (Butler 2003).

Students in urban settings use multiple language varieties to signal a number of identifications and to embrace others within their communities. Codeswitching, the use of two or more linguistic varieties in an interaction, is key when it comes to being accepted and included within an urban setting (Kanagala et al. 2016; Bailey 2000; Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Access to different languages for school counselors means access to different vocabularies and frames of reference for describing and understanding diverse urban communities. Respect for these

linguistic choices also connotes respect for identity, experience, self-expression, and contextual reality. Thus, SCITs must be trained to attend to the ways that students present themselves linguistically with care, and be prepared to join them in constructing meaning.

There is much Spanglish, African American Language (AAL), and Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL) to analyze throughout our urban school counseling experiences with students and families (Ardila 2005; Findegan and Rickford 2004; Paris 2015). In encounters with students in urban school settings, emails, texts, and tweets are all part of new forms of communicating. In some instances, students may send emails and even include lyrics in their attempts to connect with adults in the schools. For example, a "Salvadoran American" student emailed a school counselor looking for needed resources, and at the end of the email he wrote a "freestyle," an unplanned flow displaying verbal (or written) ability and ingenuity in verse (LAUSD Student, personal communication, July 12, 2011).

> Yo Mr. M, this a bust…
> Busting and twisting for my big break…
> He'll take a Salvi that comes with mucho…
> He knows wat we go through – el salve!
> Pues, cause he's been in it…
> Inspiring me to just do it…

The essence of the freestyle was a message about the trust, respect, and love gained in working with the school counselor who "knows wat we go through," and who has "been in it." While making no claim to coming close to fully understanding the complex linguistic and cultural world of multiethnic urban youth communities, the freestyle indicated there was a connection—culturally and cognitively by the school counselor. By the school counselor matching the counseling with the student's cultural style, he was able to gain insider trust and grasp of the cultural meaning of the student's reality. Counselor educators must help SCITs understand the connection between language and identity construction. Social construction frameworks allow for empathy and perspective trading, even when those in communication do not share the same language or background initially, but are open to learning.

While code-switching and linguistic sharing hold major implications for how we build effective working alliances in multiethnic and multilingual contexts, it is important to avoid overstating what such practices can achieve in an unequal society. Although language is one primary marker of ethnicity and identity, other major markers of race, gender, economic status, and skin color play heavily into systems of discrimination, racism, and privilege. For this reason, linguistic dexterity, the ability to use a range of language practices in a multiethnic and multilingual society, and linguistic plurality, consciousness about why and how to use such dexterity in social interactions, are more favorable (Jorgenson 2008; Rampton 1998). Indeed, school counselors cannot change their physical appearance or racial/ethnic background, but they can learn about the community, languages spoken, and cultural customs surrounding the school and encourage students to generate their own meaning and future narratives. School counselor educators can encourage this constructivist approach in their trainees, to help future counselors be better prepared to bridge the gap and build effective relationships with students.

Common Languages Between and Within Communities

Urban Latina/o and African American students are separated at times by their language preferences, but connected by their circumstances. Latina/o and African American students have a propensity to be context interdependent (Berry 1991). In other words, they endorse contextualism, a preference to describe the self and others using more contextual references and fewer dispositional references (Choi et al. 1999). In contrast, individualistic schemas guide behavior by reference to their internal repertory of independent characteristics without connection to context (Nacoste 2015). For example, context independent persons may resonate with counseling that promotes individualistic values such as free will, personal agency, and mastery of environment. On the other hand, counseling that emphasizes holism, connection, and harmony may be more congruent with context interdependent individuals. While persons that value individualism may seek counseling that focuses on verbal processes, collectivistic persons frequently require a holistic developmental perspective that acknowledges nonverbal and indirect communication and affects change by internalizing and connecting (Crespo et al. 2010). In particular, interconnected and interdependent clients require counseling techniques that honor and address the mind–body connection (Priest and Woods 2015). As a result, applying individualistic and decontextualized counseling approaches to sociocentric Latina/o and African Americans is similar to receiving support in a foreign language: “No comprendo” (I don’t understand)/“Say What.”

Contextualism permeates collectivistic Latino/a and African American lives. For instance, Latina/o and African American students will engage in *platica* (talk), a period of social conversations before each personal and professional encounter. *Platica* is a collectivistic act of social lubrication, not necessarily a resistance to dealing with emotional topics. As a culturally competent SCIT, understanding the difference between avoidance and culture norms is important when working within an urban setting. Another similarity is that many Latina/o and African American students answer questions by telling a story (*cuento*), allowing the answer to emerge out of their narrative. The spoken transmission of knowledge helps to preserve collective memory by maintaining history and mythology (Azibo 1994). The rapper (*cantador/a*) or poet (*hablador/a*), for instance, are storyteller icons that enlighten and teach people (Comas-Diaz 2006). Likewise, *cuento* or storytelling helps Latina/o and African American students to become aware of the cultural influences in their lives by creating personal narratives that lead to healing and transformation (Anderson and Jack 1991). Interestingly, clinical case reports have reported that the use of folktales with ethnoculturally relevant stimuli such as *Cuento* Therapy or an Afrocentric Model of Being in a social learning environment can promote adaptive personality growth among Latina/os and African American students who live in two cultures (Akbar 1985; Bracero 1998). These are social constructivist models that can provide useful tools for training effective urban school counselors.

Discussion

Thus, the contribution of social constructivism to the training of school counselors is to create an opportunity for genuine *meaning making moments* to occur between individuals who occupy different social spaces. A non-Latina/o or African American school counselor from an upper-middle class background would need to engage in some important introspection and identify any

socially constructed beliefs or misconceptions that might be tied to his or her own privileged location. However, after bracketing his or her assumptions about self and other, the school counselor could be ready to meet a student in an urban school with an attitude of openness, respect, and appreciation. We have summarized the importance of context, language, community and the socially constructed nature of knowledge and reality as it pertains to the relationship between school counselors and students in urban schools. From this point of view, students are the capable authors of their life's narrative and the school counselor is there to hear the story, identify its strengths, and help guide students toward the desired ending (Hipolito-Delgado and Lee 2007; Ungar 2001).

Implications for School Counselor Training

School counselors should be able to create a delivery system with counseling approaches that are responsive to their students' life experiences (not the counselors or dominant culture's idea of 'normal' life experiences). School counselors from a dominant cultural background can often misunderstand or misinterpret the cultural norms of students in urban settings who may have a different world view. The key for school counselors to effectively work with the student of a 'different' social location is their own insight into the construction of the 'self' and their ability to respectfully enter the student's location. School counselor educators must take leadership to create learning experiences that require SCITs to become immersed in these unfamiliar spaces. This will involve deconstructing beliefs regarding Latina/o and African American students in urban settings while also reimagining their funds of knowledge in the school context (Esteban-Guitart and Moll 2014). School counselors in training should recognize how their conceptualization of urban settings impacts their treatment of students in those settings, particularly the Latina/o and African American communities. In order to start this journey, counselor educators who train SCITs could situate conversations, activities, and projects around the three tenets of social construction narratives in course syllabi.

Realities and Knowledge are Constructed Through Social Process

Personal Social Cultural Critique

Course assignments are an excellent way to foster increased insight into the construction of self and interpersonal development. To operationalize this point of view, one of the authors utilizes a social constructivist framework in a course assignment titled 'personal/social/cultural critique.' In this assignment, SCITs are expected to explore and integrate information related to their own cultural/community heritage on a powerpoint presentation. Once completed, students upload their presentations to the class discussion board to be reviewed by classmates. Classmate presentation review allows students to further explore the multiple ways realities are shaped through social processes as well as expand perspectives. Full details of this assignment are shared in the "Appendix".

Empathy Project

In order to ensure respect for the intellectual strengths and realities of students, SCITs need to adopt a philosophy of cultural democracy as well as strategies to approach culturally diverse

communities. Viewing the world through the eyes of someone whose cultural and/or narrative style is different from the SCIT develops a social constructivist lens—which is the ability to (a) identify and reduce barriers, prejudices, and process of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination and (b) to recognize the impact of SCITs heritage, attitudes, beliefs, and understandings, and acculturative experiences on an individual's views of others. The procedure that can be used in assignments and classroom discussions is an *empathy projection*—the effort to understand the point of view and the feelings of someone whose values and social narrative styles may differ from those of the SCIT (Paré and Sutherland 2012; Ramirez 1999). A good place to start is with loved ones, family members, friends, classmates, and colleagues whose values and meaning making approaches are different from the preferred styles of the SCIT. Another approach is to read the biographies and autobiographies of people whose cultures and values are different from the preferred styles of the SCIT. The counselor educator helps the SCIT to respect cultural, community, family, and individual differences in values and lifestyles through the exploration of SCITs values, belief, and traditions with differing points of views.

Language Creates a Person's Reality and Knowledge in a Way that is Bound by Culture

Modeling, Scriptwriting, and Role-Playing Conversations

SCITs can develop skills to critically examine the connections between historical, cultural, social, familial, emotional, and behavioral transitions through language with role-plays, scripts, and modeling (Shurts 2015). In the case of a non-urban training program or a culturally homogenous classroom, counselor educators can increase exposure by establishing "study in-broad (staying within the student's country of origin)" exchanges with other school counseling programs where classes have the opportunity to discuss foundational and systemic urban school issues. SCITs will be able to build relationships with peers who are also in training, learn about community cultural assets, linguistic patterns among students, and management and delivery styles that may not be learned in the classroom. By observing and then modeling the behaviors and values they observe and by attempting to communicate and relate effectively to their exchange partners, SCITs can learn unfamiliar social, cultural, and linguistic styles before embarking on internship experiences. SCITs could develop situational and linguistic scripts that attempt to draw from their knowledge of a new culture, role-play the script with classroom peers, and then try out the script with the exchange partner whom they are trying to match. This is also a place where effective supervision is key in helping trainees identify their "blind spots" and blockages, so supervisors must also be ready to broach these topics and guide learning in a constructive manner.

Common Languages Exist Between and Within Communities

Highlighting Individualism and Collectivism

Assumptions on several levels may need to be identified and questioned to effectively prepare SCITs for the students and families they may meet in an urban school. Most training programs have a fairly individualistic framework that encourages solo achievements or evaluates students/clients in isolation from their contexts. Thus, some very basic foundations may need to be problematized if counselor educators are sincere in their desire to deliver a training program

that is flexible, inclusive, and collectivistic. For example, college/career planning conversations from a traditional individualistic perspective (e.g., identify your strengths, find your passion, choose your path) sound very different than college/career planning conversations from a perspective that honors cultural values for collectivism (e.g., listen and talk to key figures in your life, try to balance what you need with what they need, explore many possible routes forward, not just one path). While it may not be simple or convenient to include families in these conversations (Whiting 2007), it sets the students up for failure if a school counselor does not.

There are many examples of how the ethical boundaries and guidelines espoused by a predominantly individualistic counseling profession become complicated to put into practice in a community that has a different set of culturally-generated norms and standards (Herlihy and Corey 2014). Counselors could truly cause damage by using assumptions that don't fit the student's context, so the constructivist perspective is important in order to honor the student's voice and not overstep with our own agendas. We must reexamine the way counseling programs prepare school counselors to connect with and counsel students from large diverse urban communities where ethnically diverse values, beliefs, traditions, and languages are spoken. For example, one of the authors supervised a counseling intern who was working in a predominantly Spanish-speaking setting. Not only did the intern have to adapt her vocabulary from the language of instruction to the language of bilingual practice, but she also found that the basic assumptions of her training (e.g., keep professional boundaries, don't accept gifts, don't give advice) needed to be adapted to fit the cultural world and assumptions of her Latino clients.

Conclusion

This article examined how the realities and stories of students in urban schools are shaped by their language, culture and communities. Students in urban settings have had to sustain their unique cultural and familial practices in an educational system that has often perceived them as a liability. These negative perceptions have infiltrated and become the 'norm' in all aspects of society, including media, law and education. The negative narrative that is often given to students in urban settings reflects a devaluation of the students' cultural knowledge and resources. However, their language, behaviors and familial practices are all socially constructed in a way that is congruent and reflects resilience, collectivism, community context, and cultural pride. The primary implication of this conceptual article is to improve the training of school counselors to work effectively in urban school settings by utilizing a social constructivist framework. Only after co-constructing a clearer picture of what the cultural, historical, and social contexts of working in an urban setting can mean and how school counselors can matter in a student's life will we be able to engage students effectively and respectfully for their personal, academic, and social good. This represents a potential paradigm shift in curriculum for counselor educators, and also for current and future school counselors in practice. To fail to prepare school counselors to work in urban schools is to fail to serve the millions of students who live and study there.

Appendix: Personal-Social-Cultural Critique Assignment

Each student is to develop a powerpoint that describes and critiques his/her cultural background. The purpose of this assignment is to explore and integrate information related to your cultural

heritage with issues related to becoming a competent school counselor. Questions are provided below to guide your thinking across a range of social- cultural factors. Respond to each of the questions as appropriate, except when there is no information available. Please be thorough in your analysis and exploration. You are welcome to include pics, quotes, media etc. Once completed, upload to the discussion board. You will then go on to review 6 of your classmates work with meaningful questions/comments/responses.

Include the following:

Part I:

- Describe **your internal and external dimensions:**
    - your age, gender, presence of any disability, ethnicity, race, community in which you grew up, religion, marital history, parental status, educational background, occupation/work experience, recreational and personal habits, socioeconomic status/social class (now and growing up, including observations through any changes), and past/current geographic location. You can include any other pertinent information regarding your internal and external dimensions.

Part II:

- Drawing from your **knowledge about yourself and experiences** in our diverse society, identify:
    - the social and cultural factors and events that influence your view of diversity (i.e., gender, race, social class, age, sexual identity, religion, ability, appearance, etc.).
    - the factors and events that influence your view on social belonging.
    - the factors that influence your interpretations of an individual's behavior, motivation, decision methods, and thoughts.

Part III:

- **Describe your foundation**.
    - Outline your definition of family. Who was included in your family growing up? Ancestry?
    - How has your family/ancestors impacted your current view of culture? How did you derive your fundamental cultural heritage and how do the significant beliefs and attitudes of your cultural heritage assimilate into your daily life?
    - Address family and community values which have been part of your personal experience. Family should be addressed in the context of your extended family and include persons who assumed a familiar role in your development. Family would include your current "family" as well as your family of origin.
    - What specific values did your family of origin and community hold e.g., religion, education, work, food, or family)? How were your family's values similar to and different from the community?
    - What types of rituals or ceremonies are/were important to your family?
    - What types of personalities and communication can you identify? How was conflict handled?
    - What views were held about diversity? How was your family impacted by diversity issues of gender, nationality, race, sexuality, disability, or religion?
    - Discuss gender roles and gender role expectations in your family of origin

- How did/do you define privilege? How has "privilege" eased or made life more difficult for your family?
- How is your current "family" culture similar to or different from your family of origin?
- How has change in the social and cultural nature of society at large influenced your cultural experience?
- You can also include any other facts you feel are relevant regarding your family (of origin, past and current) role in forming your foundation.

Part IV:

- How has your cultural background provided you with **both advantages and disadvantages** as well as how it continues to influence your personal perspective and counseling/helping style today?

Part V:

- Describe how your cultural self-understanding will enable you to be a culturally effective counselor.
    - What are some personal biases and limitations that may hinder you?
    - How will your communication values and skills impact your role as a competent multicultural counselor?
    - Considering the nature of your cultural experience, describe strengths you will bring to multicultural/diverse counseling/education?

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