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The purpose of this study is to examine the issues surrounding why and how children and students are experiencing levels of disservice through school counseling programs within formal educational settings. The goal of this examination is to transform the school counseling profession to better serve children and students in a socially and educationally responsible manner. This aspect of the educational process is critiqued as having the potential to positively or negatively impact the present and future lives of everyone involved in the education of children and students, hence fostering productive growth or perpetuating oppression and the status quo.

An examination of the author's lived experiences and literature pertaining to school counseling, counseling theories, education, race, and empowerment are utilized to illustrate why this issue needs to be addressed, why a philosophical and conceptual approach is needed, and what core factors influence the status of school counseling from historical inception to present-day theory and practice. The result of this examination is a recommendation to shift away from the traditional school counseling paradigm to an empowerment philosophy for both school counselors and their practice. This shift will require critical reflection of self, actions/practice, and world view, including one's life purpose, social responsibility, and concept of others. Everyone involved in the lives of children and students must be invested in this empowerment process. Factors that impact the operational framework of an empowerment school counseling philosophy are also discussed as critical to the overall implementation and perceived effectiveness.

COUNSELING TO EMPOWER: A PHILOSOPHICAL SHIFT IN THE
WAY WE SERVE OUR CHILDREN AND STUDENTS

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
I. A SPARK OF OUTRAGE.....	1
My Story: The Lived Experience.....	3
Methodology: From Outrage to Action.....	7
Why the Need for Examination and Change?.....	16
<i>School-based Needs vs. Counselor Training</i>	21
<i>Consideration for the Student as Child</i>	26
Where Do Counselors Fit?.....	32
Where Do We Go From Here?.....	35
Voices of Empowerment.....	43
<i>Paulo Freire</i>	44
<i>Patricia Hill Collins</i>	55
<i>bell hooks</i>	63
<i>The Influence of Additional Voices and Dimensions</i>	70
Summary.....	73
II. HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF SCHOOL COUNSELING: HOW WE REACHED THIS POINT.....	76
The Evolution of School Counseling.....	78
<i>Standardization and Professionalization</i>	82
Current Focus of Counselors' Time and Energy.....	84
<i>Is a Philosophical Stance the Missing Piece?</i>	85
<i>Tasks vs. Responsibilities</i>	88
Counseling Theories and Philosophies.....	90
<i>Behavioral Counseling</i>	92
Strengths and Limitations.....	94
<i>Reality Therapy</i>	97
Strengths and Limitations.....	100
Additional Empowerment and Counseling Approaches.....	102
Summary.....	109
III. <i>LIFT AS WE CLIMB</i> : RACE MAKES THE CASE FOR EMPOWERMENT.....	110
Establishing Positive Identity.....	112

Impact of Perspectives on Race.....	114
Are the Reasons Justified?.....	115
Does Race Determine Quality of Educational Service?.....	122
<i>When the Village is Not Allowed to Raise the Child</i>	127
<i>Continuing the Mis-Education of the Negro</i>	130
Race and Educational Justice.....	131
Summary.....	136
IV. THE SHIFT TO EMPOWER: A CONCEPTUAL ARGUMENT FOR AN EMPOWERMENT COUNSELING PHILOSOPHY AND FRAMEWORK.....	138
Looking Through a Lens of Empowerment.....	139
Empowerment as School Counseling Practice:	
What Might It Look Like?.....	143
Implications When We Are All Responsible.....	153
<i>School Counselors</i>	153
<i>Counselor Educators and Training Programs</i>	155
<i>Other Educators (Teachers, Administrators, Community)</i>	158
Conclusion: The Significance of the Study and the Danger of Continuing “As Is”.....	161
REFERENCES.....	166

CHAPTER I

A SPARK OF OUTRAGE

Each one of us must look clearly and closely at the genuine particulars (conditions) of his or her life and decide where actions and energy is needed and where it can be effective. Change is the immediate responsibility of each of us, wherever and however we are standing, in whatever arena we choose. (Audre Lorde, 1984, p. 83)

The quality of service received by students in educational institutions is directly affected by educators' views of their purpose for providing those services. How we view our responsibility determines how we will act on that responsibility. In seeking to better serve students in the educational setting, there must be an examination of the purpose behind what we do. The "why" should determine the "how." From a school counseling perspective, in particular, an examination of the "why" means looking at one's philosophical and practical framework, including our perspective of social responsibility. This study suggests a transformative shift to a philosophy of empowerment for school counselors and their practice. In order to better serve children and students in the formal educational setting, we cannot simply alter methods. Gaining a greater understanding of our role in human relationships with children, students, parents, and society is not likely to occur in any meaningful way unless we engage in the work of critical assessment of our responsibility to one another.

...[I]f and when public school educators commit themselves to the task of participating in the continuing responsibility to create a just and loving

world, the nature of [our] work would change dramatically and profoundly even within the context of severe restrictions. (Purpel, 1999, p. 204)

Any type of restriction would obviously be an obstacle to be addressed during the transformation process. Even though such restrictions make change harder, they may also be very revealing as to why change needs to occur. Restrictions and certain ways of thought and practice developed for a reason, whether to maintain the status quo or out of fear of what change may bring, the unknown. Restrictions, obstacles, and refusal to change can also prevent growth and improved ways of life for everyone involved, including the very people who are standing in the way of change.

The current study is an examination of how an empowerment philosophy for school counseling can improve the way we serve children and students. The suggested transformation is not being presented as the only means of improvement but as an alternative to current frameworks of belief regarding the purpose of counseling in the formal educational setting. Empowerment, as both a process and a goal, would provide an experiential opportunity to prepare children/students for “real life.” And is that not what education is truly about—to prepare us to productively participate in society? As a part of the overall educational program, school counseling should be playing an integral role in this process. Being in a position to create a program of services that can address needs of students from both educational and personal perspectives, school counselors would need to start with what we believe is our purpose in the educational process. The transformation that I am proposing takes into consideration the National Association of College Admission Counseling’s (1990) belief that “education is an investment in the

future, the future of each individual student, and society at large. A strong democracy requires an educated citizenry....[I]t is incumbent upon this nation to educate each child to his/her potential for self-fulfillment” (p. 1). Future goals cannot be achieved, however, unless preparation starts in the present. The present is just as important and needs to be acknowledged, which is why we must start with children/students.

My Story: The Lived Experience

Having worked for almost nine years in the school counseling profession following two years of graduate-level training, I have witnessed enough disservice to children, students and parents that my level of outrage has sparked the need to look closer at the “why” behind what we do. Though some of these accounts may seem to some like simple oversights, minor mistakes, fluke occurrences or even a few expected casualties of the trade, I saw them, though at times not immediately, as moral and educational disservice to those we are charged with educating—children and students. Some of my experiences in the counseling profession have left me searching for answers. Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) believe that “the story form is a dominant sense-making tool for school administrators” (p. 96), and I believe sharing these experiences will shed light on why such outrage has emerged and on some of the problem areas in school counseling. I had one such experience while trying to register eighth grade students for their first year of high school coursework. The middle school’s population was predominantly African American with a high percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch. What was so disheartening for me about the process was that

some teachers justified low academic expectations for students by labeling them as “crazy,” “lazy,” “slow,” being in gangs or “needing medication.” There was not any way I was going to share this rationale for course recommendations with students and parents: “Your student was recommended to take our least challenging English course because he is crazy.” They deserved educationally sound and relevant explanations for teachers’ course recommendations. I was personally and professionally dismayed by the lack of effort some of the teachers put into this process. I shared my dismay with my principal and my assistant principal for curriculum and instruction, but my push for the issue to be addressed stopped there. I was not sure at the time how to actively respond to such educational and moral disservice and injustice. It was painful to witness this state of education.

Another experience that showed me educational injustice at the hands of a school counselor was when the school’s principal reassigned several students from a colleague’s caseload to mine. One reassigned student had been ill-advised to drop an academic course and enroll in Weight Training (an elective), which would make him ineligible to enroll and play sports at a Division I college and would change the course of his future. When a second student was added to my caseload, I discussed both situations with my mentor counselor. I learned that several students had been reassigned from one of the counselors to the other five counselors’ caseloads. Over the course of my service at this school, six students were reassigned to my caseload. When I found out that the principal’s corrective action only included reassigning students to other counselors’ caseloads without discussion with the former counselor I felt that we, as counselors, were

being held to different standards and there was no systematic method of accountability in place to ensure effective service.

A separate instance of disservice that I witnessed involved a counselor denying students and parents vital academic information which was needed in order to make informed, short-term and long-term educational decisions. A teacher had recommended several students take a more challenging course during the upcoming school year. After the teacher found out that none of the students registered based on her recommendations, she learned from the students that they were never informed of those recommendations. As a part of the registration process, we (the counselors) were to share teachers' recommendations and PSAT scores with students and parents *prior to* their registration conference. This would allow time for them to consider all of the information, the rationale for teachers' recommendations, their future goals and options, the academic load they want to undertake and any questions or concerns they want to address with the counselor during the conference. Receiving all of this information and being required to make all of your academic decisions during your thirty-minute registration conference is not an educationally sound format. This situation had the potential to impact upwards of 350 students within a two month period.

Another unfortunate situation in which I was involved where counselors contributed to the disservice to students and the school community surrounded a decision to lower the grade-level promotion standards for all ninth graders at the school. The rationale for the change was to improve students' self-esteem by avoiding retention and to decrease the school's drop-out rate. Students at other high schools in the school

system were held to higher standards. These lower standards existed at the district's only predominantly African American high school. I was not the only person at the school or in the school system who was unaware of this difference as promotion standards are supposed to be set and approved by the local school system, not by individual schools. I worked with the principal to help notify effected students and their parents and devise a plan to rectify the situation. Many of the parents and students questioned why this happened, however, I had no reasonable explanation because for many of the students, it set them up for potential retention in later grades.

Something in each of the aforementioned situations was fundamentally wrong and needed to be addressed. Describing a child as "crazy," "lazy," or "slow" should not be acceptable educationally or personally. Would any of the educators involved allow their own children to suffer through such treatment? In addressing these issues, one must decide where to start when their colleagues are a part of the problem and when these beliefs and practices are ingrained in the institution. "If our history has taught us anything, it is that action for change directed only against the external conditions of our oppressions is not enough. In order to be whole, we must recognize the despair oppression plants within each of us" (Cecelski, 1994, p. 142). For instance, if race is a deciding factor in the school counseling profession, particularly in the quality of service provided, some consideration needs to be given to how it informs a counselor's philosophical approach to their role in the educational process and in society. In addition, we need to examine the internal belief system that supports providing a different quality of service based on a person's race. In an attempt to address such issues, the current state

of school counseling must be examined based on the needs of the school community, especially children, counseling goals within the school and the educational process, and the critical aspects of the counseling profession that need to be transformed.

Methodology: From Outrage to Action

“Philosophy is roughly the critically, normally systematic study of an unlimited range of ideas and issues” (Audi, 1999, p. xxix) in order “to provide...a deeper understanding of the theoretical or conceptual underpinnings [of] practical activities” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy>). This range of ideas and issues can include topics such as knowledge, justice, morality, truth, freedom and reality, and I have placed school counseling and education in this list. In order to address the problems of school counseling and the disservice suffered by children and students, I conducted a philosophical study to gain a deeper understanding of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings that have traditionally driven the counseling profession and practice, and to expose the key concepts and assumptions that need to be taken into consideration in a recommendation for change. The critically systematic aspects of this study are found in the methodological strategies utilized that include five essential inquiry approaches: (1) critical doubt/skepticism; (2) problem formulation; (3) solution proposal; (4) solution justification or argument; and (5) philosophical criticism. The work of philosophers Paulo Freire and Patricia Hill Collins, whose empowerment philosophies are examined in the literature review, also influenced the strategies of this study.

For instance, it is important that we do not continue making technical changes that are not fully justified or understood by the counselors and other educators or the children/students being served. This is similar to Paulo Freire's (1973) notion that "the goal of...reform, as of all developmental change, is to transform people, not merely to change structures" (p. xiii). The aforementioned philosophical methodology is the journey that resulted in a recommendation to shift away from the traditional school counseling paradigm toward a counseling framework based on a philosophy of empowerment.

Critical doubt and skepticism about the purpose of school counseling and my role in the educational process arose when I witnessed acts on the part of other school counselors and educators that did not match what I was taught or believed about the purpose of counseling and education. Earlier I shared personal anecdotes of my school counseling experiences in order to illustrate some of the disservice to students/children and school communities. These experiences motivated this study. Similar to the methods incorporated by Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins (1991), I reflected on my experiences in school counseling to determine some of the important themes and issues for this study.

In choosing the core themes in Black feminist thought that merited investigation, I [also] consulted established bodies of academic research. But I also searched my own experiences...for themes [I] thought were important...I often use the pronoun "our" instead of "their"... a choice that embeds me in the group I am studying instead of distancing me from it. (p. 202)

I was concerned that my experiences were not isolated incidents and the disservice and inequity I have observed were more widespread and systematic. I became skeptical of different techniques that were employed as a part of school counseling practice, even though they seemed quite acceptable by my colleagues. I had doubts that things *had* to be this way, but being new to the profession did not provide any obvious avenues by which to raise questions or address concerns. I agree with Freire (1973) that “if the people were to become critical, enter reality, increase their capacity to make choice (and therefore their capacity to reject the prescriptions of others), the threat to privilege would increase as well” (p. 20). This directly impacts the actions taken by everyone involved.

To obtain a better understanding of the implications of my professional experiences and what options there were for improvement, the problem and questions related to inequitable counseling practices needed to be structured in a manner that could be addressed through research. This process needed to account for not only *why* the problems needed to be addressed, but *how*. Paulo Freire (1973) acknowledges that “action without critical reflection and even without gratuitous contemplation is disastrous activism.” Conversely, he insists that “theory or introspection in the absence of collective social action is escapist idealism or wishful thinking” (p. ix).

For the most part, counselors simply perpetuate the status quo. So I asked myself, “Is there a better way to serve children and students through school counseling within the formal educational setting? Did a problem truly exist or did I need to adjust my perspectives of school counseling, our role in the educational process, and our responsibility to those we are charged with serving? Was this real-life implementation of

what I was taught in my counselor education program? What drives school counselors and other educators to engage in certain practices? Is inequitable service based on personal beliefs about other human beings or is it simply learned behavior based on one's training? Were my experiences acceptable behavior among school counselors and educators?" These questions guided this study.

In addition, the answers to these questions above could mean that some traditional practices that result in disservice to students are institutional, systematic, and unquestioningly accepted by practitioners and possibly by the school community at large. So I further considered: How widespread is the disservice, and if it *is* widespread, by what means could it be addressed? What aspects of the school counseling profession need to be examined in order to adequately address the problem and make an appropriate recommendation for change/transformation? The proposed solution—an empowerment counseling framework—accounts for what was revealed through my philosophical study and analysis.

The solution I propose to this problem of disservice at the hands of school counselors and other educators is to shift to an empowerment philosophy of school counseling. Even though my personal experiences motivated the study, this solution is derived by taking into consideration the historical evolution of school counseling, the strengths and limitations of popular school counseling traditions and practices, critical factors such as race that my experiences reveal as influential to educational and counseling practices, and existing philosophies of liberation and change. Though the proposed solution would require some degree of work on the part of everyone involved in

the lives of children and students, school counselors are named as the primary change agents. The transformation would need to start with school counselors and be sustained through the counseling programs and practices in schools.

Education in the [Paulo] Freire mode is the practice of liberty because it frees the educator no less than the educatees from the twin thralldrom of silence and monologue. Both partners are liberated as they begin to learn, the [child/student] to know self as a being of worth...and the other as capable of dialogue in spite of the strait jacket imposed by the role of educator as one who knows. (Freire, 1973, p. ix)

Both counselors and students must have “voice” in this transformation process, and the process of devising the proposed transformation was influenced by methods incorporated by philosophers such as Freire. By comparing and contrasting the key elements of the proposed empowerment counseling paradigm with those of traditional school counseling paradigms, I established a conceptual framework that can inform school counselors, counselor educators, and other education professionals.

EMPOWERMENT PARADIGM

- Development/ongoing
- Collective responsibility for growth
- Problem belongs to everyone (global)
- Educative
- Growth-focused
- Proactive/preventative

TRADITIONAL PARADIGM

- “Quick fix”
- Individual responsibility for growth (isolation)
- Problem belongs to the student (individual; alienated)
- Remedial
- Problem-focused
- Reactive

- Change requires self-examination by everyone
- Change focuses on routines/ techniques of practitioners
- Disruption gets attention

To justify this solution or recommendation for transformation, I conducted a review of literature covering the aforementioned relevant topics and issues. The literature review had the potential to either substantiate the need for reexamination of school counseling and a shift toward an empowerment school counseling philosophy or to dispel what I believed was an extensive problem area in the educational system. Based on my personal experiences in the school counseling profession from counselor education programs to practice, the topics above have always been prevalent in some manner, even when not actively reflected upon or examined. I also chose to review literature on behavioral counseling and reality therapy because of their historical relevance and significant influence on present-day school counseling practice. I considered whether practice guided by these frameworks may be contributing to the counseling disservice in schools.

As I explored the literature, I also considered where school counselors might fit in educational reform movements and how to prepare them for transformative work. And in order to determine an appropriate avenue or direction for such transformation, I specifically examined the empowerment philosophies of Paulo Freire, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks. These scholars' focus on class, race, gender, literacy, oppression, liberation, and education cover a gamut of problems that exist in today's formal educational settings. Their core concepts and methods were used as guides

because they each philosophize an aspect of education or the educational process while focusing on oppression, inequity and liberation.

For instance, a version of some of the basic components of Freire's literacy method was utilized to conduct the research for this study. My experiences in school counseling served as "participant observation of educators 'tuning in' to the vocabular universe of the people" (Freire, 1973, p. viii), which provided the opportunity to dialogue with children/students and other educators. I was able to conceptualize the type of transformation for school counseling that would address the types of disservice witnessed in my personal school counseling experiences and the limitations of traditional counseling paradigms.

In addition to analyzing the influential work of Freire, Collins, and hooks, I conducted a separate review of literature on race in education, which was critical due to inequity that has existed in formal education based on one's race. Race is a key factor that needs to be taken into consideration as a part of any recommendation for progressive change. And as Freire (1973) explains, "genuine theory can only be derived from some *praxis* rooted in historical struggles" (p. ix), which influenced my choice to give critical consideration to race and the experiences of African Americans within the formal educational arena as I developed my empowerment framework.

Based on the literature review described above, I believe empowerment as a school counseling approach can not only be utilized to rectify inequities in school counseling and educational services, but can be used to meaningfully reframe the purpose

of the counseling profession. In addition, I have identified the following core concepts as being essential to the proposed philosophical shift:

- Responsibility (socially, morally, ethically)
- Uplift
- Power
- Race and identity
- Proactive vs. Reactive
- Ongoing growth and self-examination
- Advocacy
- Self-efficacy
- Equity and access
- Justice
- Care

I identified these concepts based on my analysis of the limitations of traditional school counseling theories and practices, the strengths of Freire's, Collins' and hooks' philosophies of empowerment, and what I believe to be the root of inequitable school counseling services. These concepts relate to the core assumptions that inform this study and its recommendations for change.

In order for improvement goals to be achieved, we must be willing to seek out, acknowledge, and address the shortcomings of any theory or practice. This study placed school counseling at the center of such critique. Based on the philosophical purpose and structure of this study, other educators have the opportunity to critique what has been

presented and possibly come up with better solutions. The proposed solution is not being presented as the *only* solution, but as a better way to serve children and students as opposed to traditional beliefs and practices. The literature that I reviewed, the initial motivation behind the study, and the elements and assumptions that I am presenting as core to the proposed solution can all be approached from different perspectives, possibly yielding a different solution. And though my study did not begin immediately upon my realization that a problem might exist, my consciousness of issues in school counseling was raised.

Some philosophers and ordinary people dive right in and start trying to solve the problem. They immediately start giving arguments, pro and con, on different sides of the issue. Doing philosophy is different from this. It is about questioning assumptions, digging deeper for understanding. Doing philosophy is about the journey, the process, as much as it is about the destination, the conclusion. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy>)

The research process that I utilized, in which I attempted to incorporate Paulo Freire's (1973) dialogic, reciprocal, and equity-oriented methodological emphasis, guided a journey that resulted in the recommendation that an empowerment philosophy for school counseling be considered.

The remainder of Chapter One will cover my lived experiences in school counseling, document of some problem areas in the school counseling profession, including some oftentimes overlooked factors, and explore of some perspectives on empowerment. Chapter Two will focus on the history and evolution of school counseling, the typical constraints within which a school counselor must operate, along with the examination of two popular school counseling frameworks (behavioral

counseling and reality therapy), which will help illustrate some deficits in school counseling practice. In Chapter Three, attention will be given to the role of race, particularly in the general education arena, both historically and presently. Race is held as a key factor to be acknowledged in the process of transforming school counseling. Chapter Four is the culminating aspect of the conceptual argument for the empowerment school counseling philosophy and what this framework entails, reiterating and summarizing the points made throughout the study and citing the main implications.

Why the Need for Examination and Change?

In addition to my personal experiences with problems in the school counseling profession and how children/students are being served, there are several other factors that influence the need to closely examine the current state of school counseling and seek out possible solutions. The school counselor's role encompasses a variety of different responsibilities, from academic advising and consultation, goal setting, conflict resolution and mediation (involving students as well as teachers), scheduling, and program planning for an array of events to career advising, personal and family counseling, crisis intervention, recordkeeping, etc. A school counselor's philosophy of her responsibility to others influences her personal and professional approach to counseling services, which typically takes the form of guidance (dispensing information and offering basic advice on how to handle certain general matters; teaching lessons about certain topics that all students are likely to encounter). House and Martin (2002) offer an assessment of the

present focus of the school counselors' position and how time and energy are being spent as it relates to students in the educational setting:

individual students' concerns/issues; mental health providers; clinical model focused on student deficits; service provider, one-to-one and small groups; primary focus on personal/social; ancillary support personnel; loosely defined role and responsibility; sorters, selectors in course placement process; work in isolation or with other counselors; gatekeepers; guardians of the status quo; involvement primarily with students; dependence on use of system's resources for helping students and families; post-secondary planners with interested students. (pp. 290-291)

Though this list may seem quite encompassing of what school counselors can do, it is not as encompassing as what children/students need and want or what counselors *could* contribute. This problem is further illustrated by the fact that the America 2000 National Education Goals do not mention school counseling in any of the goals (Perry, 1992). These Goals include readiness to learn, dropout prevention, academic proficiency, responsible citizenship, productive employment, competitive math and science achievement, adult literacy and drug- and violence-free school settings. As such goals are pursued by educators, one might think that all possible resources are searched out and utilized. However, utilizing a potential contributor may not seem inviting if their role and skills are ambiguous. Though there is no explanation as to why a role for school counselors was not addressed in the America 2000 National Education Goals, it does not mean that counselors and other educators cannot lead the way in initiating productive participation.

In 2001, "all of the members of the National School Counseling Research Collaborative (NSCRC) indicated there is a vital need for research that examines the

effectiveness of school counseling programs and interventions” (p. 8). “This collaborative was developed to address the need for additional school counseling research” (NCSRC, 2001, p. 2), and included representatives of the leading counseling entities—the American Counseling Association, the American School Counselor Association, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, the Education Trust, and the National Association for College Admissions Counseling. With school counseling research lacking in such a manner, it is quite understandable why the need for transformative change to the profession has gone without serious consideration. Research could serve to justify the need for this profession in the formal educational setting and for school counselors to be an integral part of the educational process. One question the Collaborative suggested for future research is, “Is school counseling effective?” Another suggested research question, which also ties into the current study, is “What factors in school counseling programs affect outcomes?” As I am suggesting empowerment as a school counseling philosophy, the effective aspects of school counseling programs are key. And though those aspects may be different from one school community to another, one must be aware of what works and what doesn’t before making any drastic theoretical and/or practical changes. The changes I am suggesting would require school counselors to be aware of the needs of their students/children and school community so that the transformed counseling program is designed around the skills needed to live an empowered life. For instance, the cultural enrichment experiences needed by the students of one school community may be quite different from those needed by other students. A counseling framework based on a philosophy of

empowerment requires an explicit knowledge of those being served, their needs, available resources and typical obstacles.

Of the factors that need to be examined in the transformation process, I consider the following variables to be some of the key ones that I've noticed while practicing as a school counselor:

- Description of counselor's role and responsibilities (basic job description as approved by state and/or local educational boards)
- Non-counseling related duties assigned at the building level (“...and other duties as assigned by the Principal”)
- Goals and objectives of graduate-level counselor training programs
- Traditional counselor roles in schools
- Teacher and administrator views of the counselor's role, contribution to the educational program, level of effectiveness, and assessment of skill level
- Non-educators' views of the counselor's role
- Counselor's own understanding of and ability to articulate his or her role
- The various counseling models/frameworks/philosophies that are taught and/or examined in the graduate level training programs
- Method of evaluating a counselor's level of effectiveness
- Needs of the school community (children, students, parents, teachers, etc.)
- Role of school counseling in school reform movements
- Screening and hiring practices of school counseling applicants

How these variables are interpreted may be quite different from one person to the next and from one school community to the next. These factors would inevitably raise additional questions and concerns about the school counseling profession, but more importantly, what type of *action*, if any, would it spark by counselors, principals, teachers, counselor educators, students, parents, school community members, boards of education, policymakers, etc? If the concerns are articulated and made evident, continued inaction is an even greater injustice and disservice to children and society because the perpetrators would be making conscience decisions not to serve as needed.

School counselors have a job description adopted by State Departments of Public Instruction and state- and local-level Boards of Education, in addition to the specific duties assigned by the building-level administrator. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's website, for instance, the purpose of the school counselor's position is "to help all students develop skills in the areas of personal-social growth, educational planning, and career and vocational development" (www.dpi.state.nc.us). Duties and responsibilities focus on six major areas: program planning, counseling, consulting, coordinating, student appraisal, and professional practices and development. These are the areas on which a school counselor's level of effectiveness is based. In North Carolina, the counselor's direct supervisor, which is oftentimes the building-level administrator, determines what type of evidence satisfies each area of competence. Thus, the expectations of counselor competence may look very different from school to school and from counselor to counselor.

The stakeholders in [many] local school districts fail to agree on the appropriate role of the school counselor due, in part, to a lack of an articulate, clear job description at the district level. This results in multiple and variable interpretations of the counselors' responsibilities to students in the schools by principals, district administrators, students, and parents. (Louis, Jones, & Barajas, p. 3)

Thus, this ambiguity surrounding the job description for school counselors can also prove to be a problem within the profession. According to the state-approved job description for school counselors in North Carolina, the building-level principal oftentimes makes the final decision about specific duties and responsibilities. This does allow for some needed professional autonomy, but without a clearly defined focus, counselors would need to individually develop and explain the philosophy and objectives of their practice or program. This also allows them to base their work on the specific needs of the school community being served. Unfortunately, this autonomy can also contribute to a degree of inconsistency in services. The competence to perform the duties and responsibilities of a school counselor to meet the needs of the school community are supposed to be ensured by the counselor education program. What is their place in all of this, particularly when weighing it against the demands of school-based service?

School-based Needs vs. Counselor Training

School communities and the needed services are ever-evolving, but are the educators and educational services keeping pace? Counselors have at their disposal many different counseling frameworks or models to subscribe to; however, their other assigned duties can impact that decision. The amount of time needed to devote to counseling work

with an individual student for a chronic issue is impossible to obtain in the school setting. The typical student/counselor ratio and other responsibilities must be taken into account. A counselor is likely to adopt a brief therapy approach as opposed to an approach that is not as time sensitive, such as Carl Rogers' person-centered counseling method (Rogers & Stevens, 1968). Considering the variety and importance of many of the responsibilities placed on the school counseling position, from assisting students with personal issues to assisting students and parents in making course selections each year, one is likely to believe that the school counseling profession is well-respected and an integral part of the educational process. I am not saying there is no respect for counselors, but due to *some* of the numerous duties and responsibilities relegated to the counseling position, many children and school communities are not able to experience the benefits of what should be a vital part of a school's educational program. There is no guarantee that all students will be exposed to the same types of experiences while in school, which may prove to be unfair to some while advantageous for others. However, simply comparing one school's program to another will not necessarily expose what may be wrong. It may or may not be immediately evident in the actual services being provided, in the goals those particular services are meant to achieve or in the counselors' adopted job descriptions. This makes it difficult to determine if a school counselor will be effective, what their exact role will be or how their practice will contribute to the school's educational program. This can be very problematic in a school with several counselors who all have very different beliefs about the purpose of their position in the school. "Without a designed program, clear mission, identified role or vision, counselors function at the direction of others rather than

from a well-conceived effort that addresses the needs of all students” (House & Martin, 1998, p. 286). With that in mind, how do they ensure effective service to the school community?

In researching the websites of some of North Carolina’s graduate school programs for counselor education, the similarities in requirements were immediately evident, with lots of time spent on traditional counseling theories and frameworks and stages of human development (www.unc.edu/depts/ed/med_sch_counseling/; www.uncg.edu.edu/grs/bulletin/Counseling_and_Ed_Development.html; www.wfu.edu/academics/counseling/dept/missionobjectives.html). This is problematic when the children, students, and school communities being served do not fit neatly within the counseling frameworks or human developmental stages that have been studied. The National Evaluation of the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (2002) found

...a substantial disconnect between what counselors are being trained to do and what counselors need to know how to do to help students achieve in an era of education reform and accountability. This disconnect between school counselor training and practice is further complicated by counselor educators conducting their work in isolation and not relating the work to real schools and school-age students. (p. 2)

The issue of which methodology is most effective when working with children and students who are not developing according to “normal” stages due to growing up in a highly illiterate or extremely impoverished home or being reared by a drug-addicted parent needs to be addressed. What is the practicing school counselor to do in these situations when no such training has been received? It is not being suggested that one counseling philosophy or framework alone will perfectly address all of the issues brought

to the educational setting, but if the existing ones are not effective, there is a definite need to look in a different direction for possible solutions.

Counselor education programs generally have very similar programs of study in which graduate students must demonstrate competence in order to achieve certification to practice. These programs of study typically culminate in school site-based practicums and internships designed to allow trainees opportunities to utilize some of their acquired skills, witness veteran school counselors in action, and get a better sense of how theory becomes actual practice. Some prominent counselor training programs such as The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Wake Forest University, the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville share some key elements. All of these programs are CACREP accredited (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs).

CACREP accreditation provides recognition that the content and quality of the education offered by the accredited program has been evaluated extensively and meets standards set by and for the profession. The student can be assured that appropriate knowledge and skills areas will be included that are necessary for entry into the counseling field (www.cacrep.org/index.html)

The commonalities of the programs named above include, but are not limited to, the focus of courses offered, minimum credit hours to be earned, required field experiences and standardized certification assessments (www.utk.edu; www.unc.edu; www.uncg.edu; www.wfu.edu; www.virginia.edu). All of these programs require coursework in such areas as multicultural counseling, human growth and development, helping skills/helping

relationships, counseling theory and career development. However, there are some major differences as well. For example, UNC-Greensboro, University of Virginia, UNC-Chapel Hill, and the University of Tennessee require students to demonstrate competency on school-designed comprehensive examinations, while Wake Forest University does not. The University of Tennessee also requires additional coursework for students who do not hold teacher certification upon entering the program, while the other programs do not have such a requirement. All of these programs, regardless of their differences, are supposed to prepare students to practice as counselors in school settings.

The Wallace-Readers Digest Fund's Transforming School Counseling Initiative (Seppanen, 2002) is a longitudinal study that has gathered information from both school districts and counselor education programs. Their suggested methods for improving school counseling programs concentrate mainly on counselor education programs and how candidates are selected and trained. It is believed that this will help clarify the school counselor's role, and more importantly, "to improve counselor education and school counseling practices focusing on the enhancement of academic achievement" (Louis, Jones, & Barajas, p. 3). However, there is no mention of how to meet the other needs of students and children or how to transform the practice of counselors who are already licensed and practicing in school settings. This is critical because most professional development activities for licensed school counselors do not go so far as to *re-train* or *re-educate*.

Counselors who have been in the field for many years must continue to update their professional skills. Participation in in-service training (designed for counselors, not teachers), attendance at professional meetings,

and regular review of professional journals are necessary for counselor survival. Administrators should encourage—in fact, demand—that their school counselors participate in professional development opportunities. (Sears, 1992, p. 388)

The Wallace-Readers Digest Fund's Transforming School Counseling Initiative also points out that school counseling is rarely a part of school reform efforts, similar to the point made earlier about the America 2000 National Education Goals.. "The Initiative's goals seek to improve student performance, but counselors are largely ignored in the state accountability reforms. One informant suggested that it is critical for counselors to become players in academic performance if state goals are to be met" (Louis, Jones, & Barajas, p. 13). Lindahl's (2000) article, like the Transforming School Counseling Initiative, notes that school counselors are often a "missing link" in educational reform. Counselors can be key players in helping to devise an educational program that focuses on academic achievement while not losing sight of students' other areas of development—personal, social, psychological, emotional. According to Lindahl (2000) "the provision of high-quality, readily accessible counseling must be at the heart of a culture that is committed to enabling each individual to realize his or her full potential" (p. 41). A transformation of school counseling would have to address what high-quality counseling looks like and how to introduce it into the school setting.

Consideration for the Student as Child

One of the main issues of the overall educational process is its lack of consideration for non-academic issues that students must cope with as a part of life.

The essential task of educating young people and preparing them to be productive citizens of the future takes on new meaning. A reexamination of the challenges of the modern city-state-nation exposes the need for more sophisticated approaches to preparing young people to thrive and contribute to their society in meaningful ways. The failure of traditional educational and school counseling approaches to address [these] needs... demonstrates this principle. (Green & Keys, 2001, p 88)

As students are expected to focus on their academic performance and achievement for approximately 7.5 hours per day, that can be very difficult or nearly impossible when their other issues are not acknowledged or addressed. These issues should not be allowed to serve as an excuse or “crutch” for not achieving in school, but children have to be taught how to cope with or survive despite these challenges. Students who must work to help support their families, or who are not native English speakers and whose parents are non-English speakers, or who are homeless or who live in abusive households are examples of living with such issues. These are aspects of students’ lives beyond the school setting; these are their lives as “children.” The amount of time schools spend focusing on them as students is greatly disproportionate to the time spent focusing on them as children. Hale (2004) criticized schools for focusing solely on academic success to the exclusion of social factors that affect minority student success, particularly family and community support. I believe all students, not just minority students, suffer from this imbalance.

If counselors and other educators simply buy into a school’s predetermined academic focus, we are doing an educational and moral disservice to those being served by ignoring their overall well-being. All educators need to be able to acknowledge their

dichotomous and simultaneous existence as children and students, but the counselors are the ones who should be expected to draw attention to this issue. “More than anyone in the school, the counselor is in a position to interpret the student to educational decision-makers and to emphasize the importance of understanding and working with students” (Walz, 1984). Counselors’ training, particularly in human growth and development and the social and personal issues children face in educational settings, should equip them to offer viable strategies to help the collaborative educational team to more effectively address such issues.

Even though this type of focus may seem to actually create conflict between the counselor’s professional responsibility to do what’s best for the child as a student and their moral responsibility to do what’s best for the child as a human being, what kind of academic experience is the child realistically expected to have if he/she is struggling with other aspects of life? Which is more important? Which should be addressed first or most aggressively? This is not simply a question of practice, but more importantly, a question of the counselor’s philosophy behind the practice. Young people need both challenging content and emotionally and socially supportive school environments in order to achieve academically. They do not have to be competing priorities, but complementary aspects of total student development. The School Counselor Ethical Standards state that the counselor “is concerned with the total needs of the student (education, vocational, personal, and social) and encourages the maximum growth and development of each counselee” (p. 2), which speaks directly to the need to acknowledge the full gamut of student needs.

Dr. Jay Casbon (2001) “knows of no other group who can contribute more wisdom to the school reform discussion than school counselors. That is why graduate programs that prepare school counselors must take seriously the critical role of school counselors in all things related to schooling” (p. 54). Counselor education programs as well as professional development programs and requirements must keep pace with the ever-evolving needs of a school community. Merely obtaining continuing education units (CEU’s) in technology or attending random workshops is not sufficient. Take for example the counselor trainees who attend a predominantly white college, intern at an affluent, suburban neighborhood school, yet obtain a job and begin practice at an economically disadvantaged, predominantly minority-populated school for children in a highly-illiterate, low-wealth neighborhood. “[M]any graduate programs do not infuse the multicultural counseling competencies throughout the curriculum nor require multicultural experiences in the practicum or internship classes. Rather, the requirement for one multicultural course becomes sufficient” (p. 401-402). Such a situation can prove to be problematic. Bernak (2005) noted “the confusion and uncertainty about how to work cross-culturally” that he has witnessed with school counselors (p. 401).

First, the school’s key resource for post-secondary planning has no experience with the life picture most of these students possess. “How can anyone be expected to provide services in a setting in which they are not familiar? This lack of specific setting training is counter to the 1994 Standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)” (House & Martin, 1998, p. 287). Secondly, there would need to be intensive professional development that may help this

particular counselor become better equipped to serve this community. “To be more effective, school counselors need to shake the tree of established counseling practice” (House & Martin, 1998, p. 287), and “counselors trained or re-trained...must be proactive advocates for system change, knowledgeable about schools, and equipped to assist students in meeting their educational and personal goals” (House & Martin, 1998, p. 290). Thirdly, the counselor would potentially need to adopt a different philosophy and method of practice than the previously accepted methods of reactionary counseling and paper-work oriented administrivia that consumes the time which should be dedicated to the needs of children, students, teachers, parents, etc. Educators, including school counselors, are in prime positions and should possess the skill-sets to help aid in addressing the needs of the school community. The children/students in a community like the one described above, in which they may feel educationally, vocationally, and socially locked due to a lack of the skills needed to break that cycle, are the ones who will suffer. Without proper preparation, a school counselor in this situation will be ineffective. The specialized helping skills that the school counselor mastered cannot be considered effective unless they appropriately help meet the needs of this particular school community. Reese House and Patricia Martin (1994) proposed a social advocacy role for school counselors focused on “working to help all students gain access to rigorous academic preparation and support for success in these programs” (p. 284). For this to occur, counselors would need to assume the role of leader, change agent, and risk-taker. The overall implications for counselors and counselor education programs are addressed later in this study.

If counselors are trained to take into consideration the “whole child” in the educational process, but the school’s mission focuses on the child only as a “student,” both the child *and* the student will suffer a great disservice at the hands of educators, including school counselors. The impact of their lives outside of the school setting is not acknowledged. We cannot afford to intentionally or unintentionally overlook students’ simultaneous existence as children, because for the child and the student, this acknowledgement is critical. For instance,

communities and neighborhoods within urban areas have long been adversely affected by numerous social ills in the form of unemployment, high crime, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and illiteracy.... Young people who grow up in this context come to school with numerous critical developmental needs that are far different from the needs of students who grow up in less stressful environments. For some students, personal characteristics, conditions of life, and situational circumstances, and the interaction of these qualities have with each other, make it more likely that development and education will be less than optimal. (Green & Keys, 2001, p. 86)

This cannot be assessed through a state-mandated standardized test. And though this picture may appear grim and hopeless, that is only the case if no one (counselor, principal, counselor educator, etc.) is willing to assess and act upon the need for change. “To most effectively build assets for all students in a school community, assets must be integrated into the major areas of school life, including curriculum and instruction, organizations, and community partnerships” (Davis, 1999, p. 7), which requires a collective, concerted effort by the entire educational team. Since both the “what” *and* the “why” are important, any suggested transformative actions would need to address both areas.

Where Do Counselors Fit?

There are some key areas of concern within the school counseling profession that would need to be acknowledged and examined as part of the transformative process. The needs and demands of students and parents, principals' awareness and utilization of counselors' training, teachers' willingness to collaborate with counselors to enhance teaching and learning, and counselors' own views of their role in the educational process will shed some light on the current plight of the profession. These issues do not cover everything that is problematic with school counseling, but anytime there are questions or uncertainty surrounding such key variables, problems will exist. "And [d]espite the recent emphasis upon a radical transformation of schooling,...practicing counselors and the educators who prepare them have been largely absent from school reform efforts" (Paisley & Hayes, 2003, p. 199). With school counseling not being considered during the overall transformative action for education, this may explain why there has been little direct transformative action to the profession. "A national assessment of school counselor preparation and practice conducted by The Education Trust found little substantive change under consideration that was reflective of the dominant reform movement underway in education" (Paisley & Hayes, 2003, p. 199). There are numerous school reform movements in existence, but the specific role of school counselors in these movements often falls between nonexistent and inexplicable, as with the America 2000 National Education Goals mentioned earlier. "To date, major school reform efforts have focused on setting more rigorous academic standards, building new assessment strategies and restructuring pre-service and in-service experiences for teachers and administrators.

But, reform leaders have paid little or no attention to school counselors' role in these initiatives" (House & Martin, 1998, p. 285). Where and how do counselors fit in to academic reform? Are there other aspects to educational reform in addition to academics that need to be taken into consideration, which makes the inclusion of school counselors absolutely necessary?

Even though school counselors may not be named as "official" key participants in the reform movement that their school has bought into, that does not mean there is not a critical role for them to play. Neibuhr and Neibuhr (1999) believe that

[a]ll members of the educational team must unite in order to overcome and succeed....[A]ll professional educators must...work together to increase the strength of services for students. In many ways, principals and counselors are perceived as the school leaders; it is critical that they collaborate for the benefit of the entire school community. (p. 678)

Nancy Perry (1992), a guidance consultant, holds that there is great value in having school counselors serve on school site-based management teams or committees because of their negotiating and processing skills, as well as their "unique perspective on the total educational process in a school because, not being in the hierarchy of authority, they hear the real issues of teachers, students, parents, and administrators" (p. 2). Not everyone holds these beliefs, but that could be based on experiences with school counselors, counseling services, and the educational process in general, which in turn, determines the value and effectiveness they associate with school counseling. Jackie Allen (1994) believes that "school counselors have often been perceived as being apart from or separate from the mainstream of education....In the current education reform literature a

specific role for the school counselor has not yet been defined. School counselors themselves must define their part in educational reform” (p. 2), which is in agreement with the current study focused on transforming school counseling.

School counselors are not always excluded when it comes to collaborative teams that are designed to assist students in the educational process, however, the teams on which they are included are oftentimes based on skills-deficit circumstances. Collaborative teams such as SSST (Student-Staff Support Teams) or IEP Teams (Individualized Education Plan Teams) are designed to create strategies to help students be successful in the school setting in spite of determined skill deficiencies (learning disability; physical handicap; chemical imbalance; etc.). If a school counselor’s input is valuable in these circumstances, why not utilize those same skills or talents in the overall educational program with all students? Collaborative teams that involve the right mix of educators or concerned persons have the ability to address the concerns of the “whole child.” Granted, a student’s academic teachers are likely to be driven at least partially by the student’s level of performance in their respective courses. The school’s counselor as a part of this team can “consult, advise, and act as a resource” (Perry, 1992 p. 2) considering academic as well as social/personal factors of the student’s life. This would require a level of understanding and value of the counselor’s role by other educators. If counselors are viewed solely as resources for social or mental health problems or administrative-related tasks, their potential contribution to the academic achievement process will go untapped.

Where Do We Go From Here?

As all of the aforementioned issues are taken into consideration, a decision regarding the course of action must be made. Transformation cannot occur unless a direction is determined. In making the decision, why not incorporate some of the human resources already present in the process—the school counselors? “Administrators, teachers, and staff have to be *intentional* about focusing on assets[/*skills*] in schools and making them a part of everyday life” (Davis, 1999, p. 7). From my counseling experiences at four very different high schools, I believe some principals see the value of utilizing existing school resources to improve the educational program. I developed a deep interest in how counselors fit into the overall equation of a school community and how we can better serve children/students. As a counselor, I was treated as having the skill-set to be a key decision-maker in the educational process. I was given responsibilities outside of those of a traditional “guidance counselor” (based on what I was taught in my counselor training program and what I learned and observed during my counseling internships). In my schools, I served on committees with administrators that took part in every major school decision, except regarding specific personnel. In such situations, how counselors utilize their training and expertise, knowledge of school programs and curriculum and access to staff and students is critical in determining the direction and focus of not only the counseling program, but also the overall educational process. The result could be a brand new way of “doing school.” This is congruent with Chan, Brophy and Fisher’s (1981) belief that counselors should work to help individuals

become more active “so that the institutions become more alert and responsive to the needs of those persons whom they were established to serve” (p. 195).

In determining the next steps in the school counseling transformation process, the proposal of a philosophy of empowerment would address some key issues:

- 1) What is it that educators, particularly school counselors, can educate children and students about that can have an overarching, positive impact on their lives, in both the present and the future?
- 2) Instead of reactive, piecemeal remedies, what can school counselors bring to the educational process that can help facilitate students’ development through the various phases of growth?
- 3) Are educators (including school counselors) and institutions of education doing children and society a moral disservice by not better equipping them to face their current and future life challenges in the educational, vocational, and personal arenas?

The purpose of the proposed transformation is to change the school counseling profession in order to provide students/children the opportunity to obtain the skills necessary to live productive and successful lives, both in and out of the school setting. Currently, school counselors subscribe to a variety of approaches and methods, but without belief in and commitment to an educationally, morally, and socially just counseling philosophy, changing methods would be nothing more than a new routine, changing *how* a task is completed. The more transformative aspect of the process, the “*why*,” must be

addressed. This study focuses on how counselors can be agents of this needed change and why their practice needs to be philosophically grounded.

Deciding on a philosophical framework requires school counselors to assess their role(s) in the overall educational process, the methods they believe to be effective and efficient, and their goals and missions as educators. This requires counselors to move beyond the current state of school counseling.

To do this will demand that they look at what they truly believe about the children they serve. If they believe that all children can achieve, they will have to become more assertive and focused about creating conditions that help all students define, nurture and accomplish high aspirations. The future of our society depends on this being the primary focus of all counselors. (House & Martin, 1998, p. 288)

By illustrating such philosophical and practical deficits in the current state of the school counseling profession, the need for transformative action will become evident. The suggested direction of that change must be broad enough to address the general needs of the collective group, as well as encompassing enough to be effective with individual student issues. A transformation towards empowerment in school counseling will challenge some of the more prevalent school counseling philosophies and practices, such as those based on the work of Skinner's behavioral therapy (1971) and Glasser's reality therapy (1981), which are discussed later in this study. It will also increase understanding and focus of the counselor's role and practice in the school, with the intention of helping to improve the overall affect of the educational process on today's youth as well as on society.

The suggested transformation of school counseling is to garner more focus for students' overall well-being and to equip them with skills to experience and continue positive ways of living in various aspects of life. Almost a decade after *A Nation At Risk* (1983), Thomas Ellis (1991) held that “a new school of thought [had] emerged among educators and counselors,...which takes full account of students' personal needs in formulating educational goals,...and recognizes the close relationship between students' academic development and their personal growth” (p. 1). However, that belief did not shift in-school practices or training on a widespread scale. The temporary quick-fix methods that endured still did not address the heart of the issues that students/children encounter and typically set them up to need additional assistance later. Without some degree of agreement and consistency regarding our goals/objectives, children's level of preparation for societal participation and our role in the process, we risk contributing to the inequity and inequality that already exists. If all practicing school counselors worked toward common goals for the same basic reasons, the opportunities children have could increase based on their preparedness to handle what life presents. The recommendation for this particular direction of change is partly influenced by the Search Institute's developmental assets framework. This framework consists of forty developmental assets that they believe are important to young people's internal and external growth. The external assets “are about supporting and empowering young people, about setting boundaries and expectations, and about positive and constructive use of young people's time” (Davis, 1999, p. 1). These assets address a major issue that I raised as a concern within the counseling and overall education profession—how to simultaneously address

the oftentimes dichotomous needs of children and students. What the Search Institute refers to as “asset-building” is similar to how I am used the concept of “empowerment” in this study. To purposefully help youth experience more assets in their lives so they are better prepared to face the challenges that life in the real world will place before them is the work of empowerment as a school counseling philosophy and practice. A critical factor in asset-building is “a shift in thinking—a shift toward promoting the positive, a shift away from a problem-solving approach in education” (Davis, 1999, p. 4), which is key to the suggested school counseling transformation.

Another major influence of the suggestion for a move toward an empowerment school counseling philosophy is House and Martin’s (1998) recommendation that school counselors must make social advocacy a primary component of their role.

The primary role of school counselors who serve as assertive advocates is to create opportunities for all students to define, nurture and accomplish high aspirations. Thus, school counselors become catalysts and leaders focused on removing the institutional barriers that continue to result in an achievement gap between poor and minority youth and their more advantaged peers....This means working to help all students gain access to rigorous academic preparation and support for success in these programs. (House & Martin, 1998, p. 284)

A social advocacy approach is based on the belief that individual and/or collective action must be taken to right injustices or to improve conditions for the benefit of an individual or group. This kind of social action means that counselors have to actively intervene in the decision making process of the students and in the social context affecting them. For school counselors, social advocacy is based on the belief that virtually all students can achieve at high levels, and that counselors must be proactive leaders in closing the existing achievement gap in schools. We propose a model of activism where counselors function as leaders, change agents, and as people willing to take risks. We believe that if counselors adopt an advocacy role they help students become prepared to work in today’s world and move toward becoming active, involved

citizens. School counselors working from this model stand for social, economic, and political justice and advocate for students not being served well by school systems. (House & Martin, 1998, p. 285).

The importance placed on collective social action and justice is directly aligned with the core concepts and elements of my proposed transformation. Lee and Sirch (1994) also believe that a part of school counselors' philosophy should be a commitment to the idea of social change and that they "must be willing to adopt the role of societal change agents and work toward systemic intervention on behalf of their clients (p. 94).

Details of what House and Martin (1998) believe school counselors must do in order to become advocates for students are listed below.

When working with students:

- Behave as if you expect all students to achieve at high levels
- Actively work to remove barriers to learning
- Teach students how to help themselves (e.g., organizational skills, study skills, test-taking skills)
- Teach students and their families how to successfully manage the bureaucracy of the system (e.g., teach parents how to enroll their children in academic courses that will lead to college)
- Teach students and their families how to access support systems for academic success

When working with the school system:

- Use local, regional and national data to promote system change
- Work collaboratively with all school personnel
- Offer staff development training for school personnel promoting high expectations and high standards for all students
- Challenge the existence of low-level and unchallenging courses
- Highlight information that negates myths about who can and cannot achieve success in rigorous courses

When working with the community:

- Organize community activities to promote supportive structures for high standards for all students
- Help students and the community to organize efforts to work with schools to institute higher standards for their children
- Work as a resource broker within the community to identify all

available resources to help all students achieve
(pp. 290-291)

To advocate for students along these guidelines is part of what is required to operate from an empowerment framework. The other critical aspect is ensuring that the best interests of children and students are at the heart of the school counseling and overall educational processes. And because empowerment cannot occur in isolation, school counselors must take on integral, active roles in the design and management of the educational programs of schools. Counselors can “significantly help clients by focusing on empowerment strategies and by fostering self-advocacy skills to help clients identify and respond effectively to environmental and institutional barriers to success” (Astramovich & Harris, 2007, p. 269). According to Hipolito-Delgado and Lee (2007), personal empowerment is a process and must be “approached as praxis: not a theoretical construct, but action toward the liberation of oppressed communities, [and] entails several important constructs” (p. 328) which will be further discussed in the next section.

For counselors who actually possess the level of competence that their graduate level training was supposed to provide, closing the service gap in their operating framework hinges on a question of philosophy. This goes beyond the basic reading, writing, arithmetic, history and scientific facts that the state measures to determine mastery and success. We must just as diligently and actively focus on basic coping skills: how one handles real-life situations that the world judges and evaluates. These are the very skills that can help a student break out of their family’s cycle of poverty, violence, illiteracy, joblessness, homelessness, hopelessness, low expectations, etc. For example,

poor communication skills that were never addressed during those thirteen years of formal education may keep a person from being gainfully employed, which will contribute to their continuing a life of poverty or relying on public assistance for survival. Few employers will be concerned about whether a person scored a Level III on your 8th Grade End-of-Grade Tests six years ago, but they will be concerned about whether or not that person can effectively contribute to their company. In other words, these are aspects of children's/students' lives that should concern us *along with* their academic achievement. Their empowerment process must include attention to both.

If more aspects of the educational process are examined using some of the basic techniques of school counselors (gather as much information as possible, consider all affected parties from both academic and personal perspectives, examine possible strategies, assess the experiential potential of the plan for those involved, devise the most effective and efficient method of implementation), combined with a belief in and commitment to empowerment, the direction of the counseling and educational processes should better meet the needs of children, students, and the school community. Black and English (1986) hypothesized that it is the school administrator's "primary responsibility...to insure that every situation in that building becomes a learning situation to the greatest extent possible" (p. 95). I believe, however, that the school counselor is in a key position to lead this process, but their philosophical and operational frameworks must focus on this goal. What is needed to help bring some clarity to the school counseling profession and provide a solid, beneficial foundation on which to base

counseling and educational practice is a philosophy that is educationally as well as socially responsible.

Voices of Empowerment

To further introduce the concept of empowerment and to help bring clarity to the conceptual argument for an empowerment school counseling philosophy, this section will focus on defining empowerment through its key components and examining the work of empowerment proponents Paulo Freire, Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks. Though they do not represent every perspective of empowerment, their work is of such a diverse and extensive nature, it allows for a sound connection to the diverse and extensive needs of the educational and school counseling fields. Their multifaceted approaches match soundly with the multifaceted needs of school counselors and education programs. The school counseling program would be the avenue through which an empowerment philosophy could impact the educational process and improve the overall benefit for children and students. Empowerment philosophers Freire, Collins, and hooks, along with other contributors that will be examined later, have been avid proponents of how the educational process can be used to lift self and others out of oppressive situations. An examination of their beliefs will be used to shed light on the kind of transformation that is being recommended for the school counseling profession.

Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire's work to spread the message of the oppressed as well as offer direction as to how the oppressors can play the most effective role in the struggle against oppression is very critical to the formal educational process. Freire believes we all play a part, knowing or unknowing, when it comes to the state of oppression, as the oppressed or the oppressors. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), the discussion focuses on why such pedagogy is necessary, the positions of the oppressed and the oppressors, the various aspects of education in the study of the oppressive state, and methodologies focused on liberation. In looking at the central points of Freire's philosophy about oppression, freedom/liberation, and education, we can begin to see the benefit various aspects can have for the professional state and goals of school counseling. An examination of such concepts as "false generosity," "internalization," "self-examination," "self-depreciation," and "co-intentional" education from Freire's perspective will help illustrate the importance of empowerment. Richard Shaull states in the Foreword to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "people educate each other through mediation of the world" (Freire, 1970, p. 32), which describes how Freire recommends the oppressed change their situation and how the oppressors participate in the liberation process. One of Freire's descriptions of the empowerment process illustrates several dimensions of the liberation process:

[T]he educator's role is fundamentally to enter into dialogue with the illiterate about concrete situations and simply to offer him the instruments with which he can teach himself to read and write. This teaching cannot be done from the top down, but only from the inside out, by the illiterate himself, with the collaboration of the educator. That is why [one must]

search for a method which would be the instrument of the learner as well as of the educator, and which...“would identify learning *content* with the learning *process*.” (Freire, 1973, pp. 48-49)

The goal is not to switch places with the oppressors or join forces with them to oppress others but to reflect and act in such a way that both parties share in a more “human relationship” with one another. If the oppressors assume the task of liberating the oppressed or being less oppressive towards them, they are acting upon the oppressed as they have always acted upon them, as if they are objects.

Liberation requires much more than the oppressors (those who are in control and dominating others) being less oppressive. If the oppressors realize that there are negative differences, then they would need to see their role in that state as well as be willing to learn how they are needed to participate in the liberation process. Oppressors who become less oppressive are offering what Freire refers to as “false generosity” (Freire, 1970). It’s false because what is being offered is not real—the freedom is not real because in order to maintain it, the oppressors and the oppressed must maintain their positions, which means that oppression must continue to exist. Some of the oppressed may believe they have something that they do not truly have.

Any attempt to “soften” the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity....In order to have the continued opportunity to express their “generosity,” the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this “generosity,” which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty. That is why the dispensers of false generosity become desperate at the slightest threat to its source. (Freire, 1970, p. 44)

This type of relief from oppression is under the control of the oppressors, which still leaves each party in the unequal roles in which they started. Freire does not believe this is an effective methodology for combating oppression because the oppressed are not involved on the active end of the solution. “Freire’s concern for people is so central that it rules out any policy, program, or project which does not become truly *theirs*. The mark of a successful educator is not skill in persuasion...but the ability to dialogue with the educatees in a mode of reciprocity” (Freire, 1973, p. xiii). This is an aspect of his philosophy that will need to be critically assessed from the practical perspective when working with children because of children’s potential inability to act in their own best interest. “The pedagogy of the oppressed is the pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation” (Freire, 1970, p. 53). Obviously, children/students are a delicate group, not necessarily being aware of the existence of oppression or understanding what this means for their lives individually and collectively. But what happens when the oppressed are made aware and have an understanding of their state and believe they have the power to help change it by participating in the development of this pedagogy?

According to Freire (1970), “the pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed or practiced by the oppressors. It would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defended, but actually implemented a liberating education” (p. 54), unless the oppressors decide to acknowledge their status and participate *in conjunction with* the oppressed. Thus, from a practical perspective in a school setting, children/students would need to be taught the skills that would assist them in the “fight for their liberation,” but this would need to be handled in a manner that does not continue to oppress.

It so happens that to every understanding, sooner or later an action corresponds. Once man perceives a challenge, understands it, and recognizes the possibilities of response, he acts. The nature of that action corresponds to the nature of his understanding. Critical understanding leads to critical action. (Freire, 1973, p. 44)

For instance, students need to learn to recognize oppressive acts, policies, and situations so they can act on their own behalf. “The important thing is to help [them] help themselves, to place them in consciously critical confrontation with their problems, to make them agents of their own recuperation” (Freire, 1973, p. 16).

So how does Freire’s philosophy fit into a study of how to effectively transform the school counseling profession for the benefit of children and students? Action and theory must both be present because the outcome will depend on both. However, we need to spend time examining the philosophical aspect of this transformation that may pose great obstacles for many because it requires self-reflection, self-examination, and possible self-change—“a deep transformation of [one’s] own situation and ...personality....for it is too much to ask one’s own end, even if it be in order to be reborn another” (Memmi in Freire, 1998, p. xxx). A change in philosophy would require school counselors to do more than implement different strategies and techniques. It would require, for many, a change in self, a change in their relationships with others to be more fully human.

Discovering [oneself] to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish. Rationalizing [your] guilt through paternalistic treatment of the oppressed, all the while holding them fast in a position of dependence, will not do. Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation with those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture. If what characterizes the oppressed

is their subordination to the consciousness of the master, . . . true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these “beings for another.” The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice—when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love. True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis. To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce. (Freire, 1970, pp. 49-50)

Actually realizing and believing that prior actions and ways of being have oppressed others, whether intentionally or unintentionally, would be a “challenge to break with the rigidity of a technicist approach to education in order to embrace those fundamental knowledges that will prevent us from deceiving our conscience” (Macedo in Freire, 1998, p. xxxii). We would then have to come to terms with the true affects/effects of our daily actions towards and beliefs about others.

By acknowledging that we are complicit in maintaining an oppressive state, then a lack of action toward change is a direct act of violence on those we oppress. The oppression is now intentional, which is why many would prefer to continue wearing blinders by not analyzing the personal philosophy or belief system that dictates their practice. Action without thought allows one to hide. If I never have to honestly confront myself about “why” I engage in a particular form of practice, I do not have to critically self-reflect.

The education [this] situation demand[s] would enable men to discuss courageously the problems of their context—and to intervene in that context; it would warn men of the dangers of the time and offer them the confidence and the strength to confront those dangers instead of surrendering their sense

of self through submission to the decisions of others. By predisposing men to reevaluate constantly, to analyze “findings,” to adopt scientific methods and processes, and to perceive themselves in dialectical relationships with their social reality, that education could help men to assume an increasingly critical attitude toward the world and so to transform it. (Freire, 1973, p. 34)

School counselors would have to have the courage to reflect and act, to share in the change process, knowing what this could mean for them personally and professionally. Asking yourself, “Am I the right person for this type of liberating work” could prove to be a very difficult question to answer. A school counselor has to *want* to make the personal and professional changes that are necessary to be that right person. The motivation to change would need to come from a place of moral and social responsibility, from a desire not to oppress but to liberate, to provide the opportunity to pursue a humane existence.

In working with children and students, the struggle for empowerment for and with them has the potential to rest mainly on the shoulders of the adults with whom they are “partnered.” The children may not have the background knowledge and/or foresight to fully understand the ramifications if the situation does not change. This by no means, however, excludes them from participating in the theoretical and the practical aspects of the process. It does, on the other hand, determine how the educators must act within this struggle. “Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly. This conversion is so radical as not to allow ambiguous behavior” (Freire, 1970, p. 60). Self-examination requires one to reflect on their actions from an empathic perspective. How do one’s professional and personal actions directly and indirectly affect others? Not everyone may want to engage in the self-examination

process because it is on-going, oftentimes revealing things we do not want to admit or face about ourselves, and quite pointless if not followed by what might prove to be the most difficult work of our lives. Is every action in the best interest of those with whom we are working, living, and partnering, and is this evident? According to Freire (1970), “an act is oppressive only when it prevents people from being more fully human” (p. 57), which we can begin to use as our measuring stick. If it is not evident to those being served, does it really exist in any productive, lasting manner?

Such ambiguity surrounding the school counselor’s role is one of the reasons there is a need for transformation, and according to Freire, this is a hindrance to liberation of the oppressed as well as the oppressors. When counselors do not act in the best interests of those being served, that is an oppressive act. But since most of the involved parties would not look upon an ineffective counselor as oppressive, few, if any, would realize the need to “fight” against that situation, which can be directly related to Freire’s concept of *self-depreciation*, which

is another characteristic of the oppressed; [it] derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing, and are incapable of learning anything—that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive—that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. (Freire, 1970, p. 63)

If the oppressed, in this case the children/students being served, buy into the opinions held of them by oppressive educators, they have internalized the oppression, and any actions students take that can be described by an oppressor as sick, lazy or unproductive only makes the oppressor believe they were right all along. Once you believe these

things are true about yourself, there is not likely to be any degree of motivation to do anything differently to change others' beliefs or your own. "As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically 'accept' their exploitation" (Freire, 1970, p. 64). The oppressors can continue their mistreatment of the oppressed, unquestioned. What, then, would need to be the course of action? According to Freire (1970),

the only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership established a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed. In a humanizing pedagogy, the method ceases to be an instrument by which the teachers...can manipulate the students...(the oppressed), because it expresses the consciousness of the students themselves.

A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice *co-intentional* education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement. (pp. 68-69)

This paints a very radical picture of what educators would be called to do in the liberation process. There would be movement from one-sided relationships with students to more balanced ones, where students play a more active role in the educational process, as opposed to their traditional passive recipient role. Empowering students with the knowledge of different forms of oppression (what to look for), assisting them in gaining the skills to fight against the oppression (what can be done), and engaging them in the continuous, proactive dialogue that is necessary to prevent fatalistic acceptance of one's

condition is what it means to be co-intentional. All parties are aware and acting in ways congruent with the goal to be achieved. Educators would need to truly assess as well as understand what the children/students need and want to gain from the process, and work *with* them toward achieving that end. With both parties (educators and students) concentrating on these goals, which should be evident in their ideas, actions, and ethics, the *intent* that Freire referred to would exist.

Counselors, in particular, have the potential to occupy a position in the school setting and in the educational process that would facilitate the relationships, the dialogue, and the pedagogy that co-intentional education requires. If the educational process, for example, has the overall goal of empowering children/students to actively and effectively participate on this co-intentional level from early years throughout their lives, the counselor's role would need to be clearly defined, accurately articulated, and solidly grounded in this philosophy or framework. Counselors and students working to "unveil..reality and thereby coming to know it critically" (Freire, 1970, p. 68) requires a relationship of honesty between the two groups, not one in which counselors gatekeep vital information. Counselors would need to utilize their specialized training in accepting the charge of making sure other educators are aware of how to engage in such relationships with students. Student empowerment would require that counselors and other educators place students in situations where they can participate in transforming the world in general and their own worlds in particular. Instead of an educational process that reveals only the aspects of the world and society that those in power want revealed, increased student consciousness, particularly critical consciousness, and actions help

reveal the “real” world and how it can be changed. The hopes and dreams of practically any student would require the opportunity to be fully human, otherwise this opportunity does not truly exist. Counselors operating from an empowerment philosophy would see it as their place to join students in the struggle to

discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human. They may perceive through their relations with reality that reality is really a *process*, undergoing constant transformation....The humanist, revolutionary educator cannot wait for this possibility to materialize. From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them. (Freire, 1970, p. 75)

The call is for the counselor to be that “humanist revolutionary educator.” In this process, particularly because there are children involved, the most influential and malleable people of our society, the counselors’ move from oppressor to Subject-partners is quite delicate.

Children/students, not necessarily being aware of their oppressive state, the need to struggle for liberation, and the need to partner with the oppressors (counselors/educators), still to a large degree are at the mercy of the oppressors with whom they must work toward the transformation. It is critical that the children/students are allowed to participate in the fight against oppression because they cannot be kept as objects to be acted on in this process. According to Freire (1970), we should not “prevent...others from engaging in the process of inquiry....The means used are not important; [because] to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to

change them into objects” (p. 85). This is what oppression is. All parties, especially the oppressed must have the chance to participate in the process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the transformation.

In mirroring Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed with an empowerment philosophy of counseling, the counselors can no longer treat children, students, and parents as inferior participants in the educational process. “The humanist, revolutionary educator cannot wait for this possibility to materialize. From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization” (Freire, 1970, p. 75). Ideally, counselors possess valuable skills, knowledge, and ways of acting that, when imparted effectively, can facilitate a more “human” way of being in the world for those with whom they work and supposedly serve—children, students, parents, school community. And since the issue being examined in this study involves counselors’ relationships with children/students (ways of being with one another in the world) and the educational process, it is imperative that they engage in both action and reflection and realize that “critical reflection is action” (Freire, 1970, p. 128). It is pointless to implement a new routine or strategy if there is a lack of understanding as to why the change is necessary, which is why critical reflection is a key act in and of itself. The transformation of the school counseling process does not stand a chance of success if those directly involved do not fully grasp the need for and intent of the transformation. The importance of this premise, along with Paulo Freire’s other aforementioned empowerment concepts, will be reiterated as they relate to other

philosophers/educators' perspectives of empowerment and the proposed school counseling philosophy and transformation.

Patricia Hill Collins

We have always been the best actors in the world...I think that we are much more clever than they are because we know that we have to play the game. We've always had to live two lives—one for them and one for ourselves. (Gwaltney, 1980, pp. 238 & 240)

To further explore how a philosophy of empowerment can be linked to the school counseling profession and how we can benefit from its use in the formal educational setting, Patricia Hill Collins' notions of responsibility, "dual consciousness," "culture of resistance," "community othermother," and the potential threat that accompanies self-examination will be discussed. Like Paulo Freire, Patricia Hill Collins (1991) believes we as human beings have a certain degree of responsibility for one another. Collins, who is probably most well-known as a proponent of black feminist thought, through which she analyzes how gender, class and race intersect, elaborated on a concept that was coined by civil rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune: "Lift as we climb" (Collins, 1991). This social belief was widely used to get African Americans to see the value in helping others of the same race overcome obstacles in practically all aspects of life—economic, educational, social, political, etc. As a few move up the various ladders, they are expected to lend a helping hand so that others have the same opportunity for success and the means to struggle against oppressive situations.

One core theme of Black feminist thought consists of analyzing Black women's work, especially Black women's labor market victimization as 'mules.' As dehumanized objects, mules are living machines and can be treated as part of the scenery. Fully human women are less easily exploited. (Collins, 1991, p. 43).

Being fully human (acting in socially and morally responsible ways in all interactions with others) is a key concept in this study. The existence of "haves" and "have nots" maintains the state of oppression. It is also very important that everyone be conscious of this dichotomy. For the sake of survival, some of us who are oppressed "have always had to be watchers.' This 'watching' generates a dual consciousness in African-American women, one in which Black women 'become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection'" (Audre Lorde in Collins, 1991, p. 91). To illustrate how critical it is for Black women to change their consciousness because it empowers them to change the conditions of their lives, Collins quoted Lorde again (Collins, 1991): "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (p. 110). Collins sees people as rarely being powerless, regardless of the limits placed on them by any type of oppression.

In education, for instance, Collins believes there is a way to rise above the institutionalized inequities that students and children have suffered. This begs certain questions: Where does Collins see the oppressors in the struggle for liberation, in the struggle to be more fully human? Is it only the oppressed who are trying to be more fully human, and if so, can this actually be accomplished if the oppressors do not also change?

What would this mean for children/students at a time in their lives when they may or may not be aware of their state of oppression and are left without the partnership of the oppressive school counselor to help “mediate” the world? The role of oppressors in the struggle for liberation, levels of social responsibility, and institutionalized inequity are issues that change agents must reflect upon in deciding appropriate courses of action, levels of involvement, and why change is needed. Oppression is a part of learned life for many. As if no other way existed, it is how life must be for them. In an ideal world, in order to survive, being a “watcher” would take on a whole new meaning as everyone would be a “watcher” over everyone else, taking on the responsibility to always be human with and towards one another. Nikki Giovanni says that “we’ve got to live in the real world. If we don’t like the world we’re living in, change it. And if we can’t change it, we change ourselves. We can do something” (Collins, 1991, p. 110).

In her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991), Collins discusses the need for Black women to have places where they can have safe discourse, places such as churches, extended families, and African American community organizations—institutions that are not “controlled by the dominant groups, such as schools, the media, literature, and popular culture, [which] are the initial source of externally defined controlling images” (p. 95). Such safe places are needed for Black women to develop a culture of resistance. This development of resistance is in isolation from the dominant or oppressive groups. There is nothing wrong with developing self in order to be better prepared to engage in the necessary action when

the time arises and when one is ready. Consider how Black mothers are believed to instill in their daughters the need to learn skills to survive in the world.

On the one hand, to ensure their daughters' physical survival, mothers teach them to fit into systems of oppression...[On the other,] daughters learn to expect to work, to strive for an education so they can support themselves, and to anticipate carrying heavy responsibilities in their families and communities because these skills are essential to their own survival and those for whom they will eventually be responsible.
(Collins, 1991, p. 123)

Because physical survival was always in jeopardy when one challenged the system, the strong self-definitions and self-valuations that were discussed earlier would put one in a conscious position to want and to see the need for change against oppressive situations. While stressing the importance and the need to possess effective survival skills, Black mothers knew their daughters needed to learn to operate within the system of the dominant class or group. The skills these women learned while working as domestics in the homes of dominant whites were imparted to their daughters in the hope of giving them more opportunities to live fuller lives.

Along those same lines of responsibility, Collins uses the concept of "community othermother" to describe the relationships that many Black women had with the children of their community, treating them as if they were members of their own families. The popular African saying, "It takes a village to raise a child," carries a very similar meaning. For some, this was the beginning of their political activism, as they learned to create avenues of survival for one another and to teach those skills to the youth.

Community othermothers work on behalf of the Black community by expressing ethics of caring and personal accountability which embrace conceptions of transformative power and mutuality. Such power is transformative in that Black women's relationships with children and other vulnerable community members is not intended to dominate or control. Rather, its purpose is to bring people along, to— in the words of late-nineteenth-century Black feminists—“uplift the race” so that vulnerable members of the community will be able to attain the self-reliance and independence essential for resistance. (Collins, 1991, p. 132)

What I am proposing in this study, however, would not just be *for* the African American community *by* the African American community. I propose this type of responsibility and foresight (consciousness) for everyone because everyone has the right to be aware, and this degree of awareness requires each one of us to accept social responsibility for self and others. This level of care, personal and community responsibility, and personal and community accountability would serve everyone well.

If we look closer at the individual and group activism of Black women that Collins describes (1991), social change was attempted through struggles for both group survival as well as for institutional transformation. Group struggle involved establishing ways to indirectly resist oppressive structures by undermining them in various ways. Self-expression, self-definitions, community expression, and an increased level of consciousness of one's situation are some of the spheres of influence used to resist oppression from within those structures. Because there was the need to be able to continue operating (surviving) within those structures, some actions needed to be covert. For instance, not everyone would view receiving a formal education as an overt act against an oppressive structure. “Formally educated Black women teachers in early 20th century Washington, D.C.,...believed they had a special responsibility to their respective

communities which they alone could fulfill....Educating the children of poor unlettered blacks was considered part of their moral and social obligations as educated women” (Collins, 1991, p. 151). Institutional transformation of the early 20th century involved efforts to try to change existing structures of oppression by “directly challeng[ing] the legal and customary rules governing African-American women’s subordination.... Participating in civil rights organizations, labor unions, feminist groups, boycotts, and revolts exemplify this dimension of Black women’s activist tradition” (Collins, 1991, p. 142). Though the current study does not specifically address the issue of Blacks being solely responsible for Blacks or women being solely responsible for women, the focus such action places on moral and social obligations is key, as well as the level of leadership these teachers assumed in order to pursue their work with such commitment and devotion. The themes of duty and uplift transcend the limits of a single racial or gender group when the issues to be overcome can be blind to such differences. Here we are looking at more than a state of oppression affecting one group but a state of oppression that affects children and students of various backgrounds.

Self-examination is a point on which Collins and Freire agree may cause people to feel personally threatened if they truly engage in the self-reflection and action processes required in order to change one’s personal and professional philosophy to one that admits past wrongs that dehumanized others. Audre Lorde wrote: “Of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger” (Collins, 1991, p. 98). Those who decide to participate must be willing to undergo constant self-examination. This requires

a level of complete honesty and the need not only to change one's actions, but to evaluate one's beliefs by putting theory to those actions, which is where the increased consciousness of the oppressor is critical. "Empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of knowledge, whether personal, cultural, or institutional, that perpetuate objectification and dehumanization" (Collins, 1991, p. 230). No one can do this for another person. We must engage in our own processes of self-definition and self-valuations, regardless of the strategies we borrow and use in this journey.

Collins agrees with Freire's connection between action and theory and the fact that everyone needs to be aware that reality is a *process*, meaning that it is made to change.

Actions to bring about change, whether the struggle for an Afrocentric feminist consciousness or the persistence needed for institutional transformation, empower African-American women. Because our actions change the world from one in which we merely exist to one over which we have some control, they enable us to see everyday life as being in process and therefore amendable to change. By persisting in the journey toward self-definition we are changed, and this change empowers us. (Collins, 1991, p. 113)

And though Collins' and Freire's views may diverge regarding the role of the dominant groups, it does not mean they disagree on the fundamental call for increased consciousness of self and world, as well as the requirement for both theory and action in order to affect change. Freire spoke of the need for increased levels of consciousness and the fact that "in the process of liberation, the dominated can and must critically incorporate some of the dimensions of the dominant culture to serve as the very instruments of their struggle" (Freire, 1970, p. 193).

Collins's "adopting for illusion of protection" and Freire's "critical incorporation" and are speaking to the same type of consciousness that the oppressed must possess in order to participate in the struggle for their liberation. However, Collins believes that it is critical and necessary for the oppressed to have their own definitions of self, even if the oppressors are unaware of them. Freire, on the other hand, believes both parties, the oppressed and the oppressors, need to be fully aware of one another's place in oppression in order to know how to participate in the struggle. "The pedagogy of the oppressed is the pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation" (Freire, 1970, p. 53). Being conscious of one's current position or situation, possessing knowledge of various forms of individual and institutional oppression, and understanding the politics of this dichotomy are key factors in the empowerment process. People cannot completely overcome their oppressive state if their oppressors are determined to maintain the status quo. This is critical as we look at how children and students engage in empowerment work, because despite how hard students might struggle, the school counselors as some of the power-holders must be just as committed to the transformation.

This examination of Collins' take on the empowerment process gave a better idea of how this philosophy can be incorporated when working with students in a formal educational setting. Granted, most of what Collins shares in her work deals specifically with uplift from oppression based on race, class, and gender. However, the foundation on which she built her beliefs and her arguments are very applicable to this study's focus on the empowerment of children/students through a transformed school counseling profession. This foundation is further explored in Chapter Three through an examination

of some of the works and teachings of the civil rights activists, educators, authors, and feminists who influenced Collins' work. And while Collins maintains the importance of acknowledging the interconnection of race, class, and gender in fighting against oppression, the current study delves into race as a critical factor in the transformation of school counseling.

bell hooks

School was the place where I could forget that self and, through ideas, reinvent myself. (hooks, 1994, p. 3)

I understand from the teachers in those segregated schools that the work of any teacher committed to the full self-realization of students was necessarily and fundamentally radical, that ideas were not neutral, that to teach in a way that liberates, that expands consciousness, that awakens, is to challenge domination at its very core. (hooks, 1989, p. 50)

The shift from beloved, all-black schools to white schools where black students were always seen as interlopers, as not really belonging, taught me the difference between education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination. The rare white teacher who dared to resist, who would not allow racist biases to determine how we were taught, sustained the belief that learning at its most powerful could indeed liberate. (hooks, 1994, p. 4)

bell hooks' focus on the notions of hope, "praxis," "self-recovery," and "collective liberation" will help to further explain the concept of empowerment and its need in the helping profession of school counseling. hooks speaks very highly of the influence that Paulo Freire had on her liberatory learning and work. According to hooks (1994), understanding Freire's teachings caused her to realize the value of her early years in formal educational institutions and to think critically as she also challenged some of

his beliefs. She used *what* she had been taught at various educational levels as well as *how* she had been taught to influence her beliefs and actions when she was finally in a position to teach. My evolution as a school counselor was similarly influenced. I longed to affect a different educational experience from the counseling perspective that I endured as a high school student and from what I have witnessed during my professional career. Even though bell hooks focuses on the act of teaching, the meaning behind it, and the power of how it is performed, the value to this study is the general connection to the worlds of education and helping professions. Just as hooks calls for “renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices” (hooks, 1994, p. 12), I am calling for the same in our school counseling practices. It is not only the act, but the philosophical foundation, that is critical to the direction of this transformation.

hooks agrees on many levels with Freire and Collins’ recommendations for change. hooks (1994) believes that “teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (p. 15). She generalized this need to all people in helping professions, as it is impossible as a “helper” to genuinely help someone fully achieve a point that we are unable, unwilling, or have yet to attain. In her work *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), hooks notes her agreement with Paulo “Freire’s emphasis on ‘praxis’ – action and reflection upon the world in order to change it” (p. 14). As discussed earlier in the sections on Freire and Collins, the idea of change, in which self-examination is required, can be a frightening or threatening prospect for some. If we have to explore our inner selves in order to help others do the

same in the process of self-improvement, we would have to join them in stepping out of comfort zones. And though hooks would like to see a society in which teachers have a responsibility to be self-actualized individuals, how can that become reality? Since teaching has been, for many, the imparting of information or knowledge, “part of the luxury and privilege of the role of teacher/professor today is the absence of any requirement that [they] be self-actualized” (hooks, 1994, p. 17). This possibly reveals that we have people working in institutions of formal education who see no value in empowerment, are unaware of its potential value and impact, or are not willing to do the internal and external assessment required to engage in empowerment work.

[L]earning to live as a [person] of conscience is a matter of learning how to recognize those dynamics and deciding to keep the effects of these dynamics out of the way of your life....Learning to live as a [person] of conscience means deciding that your loyalty to the people whom you love is always more important than whatever lingering loyalty you may sometimes feel to other men’s judgment of you....
(hooks, 1995, p. 75)

hooks, Freire and Collins all agree that such refusal to engage in this critical examination by those in power is one of the main reasons that the struggles for liberation either stall and die or never gain enough momentum for success. Those in power, the oppressors, typically do not want to admit what they are, what they are doing, and how inhumane they cause their lives and the lives of others to be. But in order for everyone to live in more human ways, the commitment to the struggle must be mutual.

hooks (1995), Freire (1970), and Collins (1990) also agree that “solidarity” and “critical consciousness” are key to overcoming oppressive states, and there is no need for the oppressed and their oppressors to exchange places.

[W]e must be willing to acknowledge that individuals of great privilege who are in no way victimized are capable, via their political choices, of working on behalf of the oppressed. Such solidarity does not need to be rooted in shared experience. It can be based on one’s political and ethical understanding of racism and one’s rejection of domination. Therefore we can use the necessity for critical consciousness that can enable those with power and privilege rooted in structures of domination to divest without having to see themselves as victims. (hooks, 1995, pp. 152-153)

The dominant must realize the wrongs of oppression, and the dominated must realize and be willing to acknowledge their identity as the oppressed and fight against the wrongs oppressors commit against them. hooks (1995) stated that her “own repudiation of the victim identity emerged out of [her] awareness of the way in which thinking of oneself as a victim could be disempowering and disabling” (p. 51).

Similar to the lines of the “victim identity,” students must realize their position in the schools compared to that of the teachers, administrators, and counselors. Those possessing the knowledge, skills, and experiences are in a position that allows them to dominate and maintain the status quo *or* work in a manner that contributes to the struggle for freedom. Since educators are working with children/students who are likely to be unaware of their oppressed state, they would need to see the moral and ethical responsibility of providing an “appropriate” educational experience. hooks speaks from the perspective of classroom teachers and college professors mainly, but the educational

experience is or can be impacted by several people in the school setting. The educators, working on behalf of children, students, and society, need to provide an education that is “healing to the informed, unknowing spirit...; knowledge that is meaningful...; information [that] addresses the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences” (hooks, 1994, p. 19). hooks’ support of and agreement with Paulo Freire’s work and position is most clearly evident in her use of this excerpt in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994):

Authentic help means that all who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in the common effort to understand the reality which they seek to transform. Only through such praxis—in which those who help and those who are being helped help each other simultaneously—can the act of helping become free from the distortion in which the helper dominates the helped. (p. 54)

The dominant, which are the educators/counselors in this study, must be willing to become more vulnerable. Everyone in the transformation process must be willing to alter their current state themselves, not have it altered for them. Otherwise it is not a mutual, authentic transformation process that they are engaging in, but a forced, unintentional change. If one’s responsibility to fully participate in the process is not recognized and accepted, they will, in some manner, try to maintain the status quo. Some form of resistance will surface, whether in theory or in practice. We must function authentically in this process if it is to be effective.

When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two—that ultimately reciprocal

process wherein one enables the other. (hooks, 1994, p 61)

In this study, there is a great focus on transforming the school counseling profession through a philosophical shift, which is the theoretical side of the process as discussed by hooks and Freire. School counselors are steadily being encouraged, directed, expected, or mandated to change something about their practice, from adding another task or duty to completely changing some aspect of their routine. Many would not give changes in practice a second thought because it rarely, if ever, requires a change in belief or a critical analysis of the theoretical or philosophical foundation of one's practice. The philosophical foundation that I believe would have extensive positive impact on school counseling specifically and education in general is that of empowerment. It can be of benefit, if approached appropriately, to those on both sides of oppression. But unlike the overly broad philosophies of most institutions of formal education, as well as most counseling theories that are never revealed or discussed with those being served, a philosophy of empowerment should be more easily and widely understandable and explicable. There is nothing about it that would need to be kept secret by those in power.

It seems "evident that one of the many uses of theory in academic locations is in the production of an intellectual class hierarchy where the only work deemed truly theoretical is work that is highly abstract, jargonistic, difficult to read, and containing obscure references" (hooks, 1994, p. 64). Such political and intellectual power games are unnecessary with an empowerment philosophy. hooks (1995) contends that "we must show the way. There must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change that

includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures” (p. 193). As it is tied to praxis, theory has a place outside of the academic world, as it must be accessible by those outside of academia. Transformation cannot occur if one side is harboring vital information or if one side doesn’t understand the language and specific details of the change. “Any theory that cannot be shared in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public” (hooks, p. 1994, p. 64). And in working with children and students, the educators possessing the philosophical and practical knowledge bear the moral and ethical responsibility of leveling that playing field.

In another work by bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003), she discusses the motivation of teachers and how the basis of that motivation keeps them working to transform themselves and the world around them. “Hope” is what allows educators to believe that all children can learn, what drives them “to study and learn new ways of thinking and teaching so...[as] not to reinforce systems of domination” (hooks, 2003, p. xiv), and what keeps alive the possibility of self-change. hooks sheds light on the practical aspects of how education is a practice of freedom. Goals include building and sustaining community in the classroom, strengthening the learning process and creating a learning partnership between teacher and students. Many school philosophies today mention something to the effect of creating life-long learners, self-motivated learners, and/or critical thinkers. But what does this truly mean? Unless educators are willing to be completely honest with themselves about their own beliefs and goals regarding children, students, parents, school communities, or society in general,

then no recommendation for or degree of change will make the type of difference needed for us to live in more human ways with one another, more empowered ways.

The Influence of Additional Voices and Dimensions

Additional elements of empowerment that influenced and are incorporated into the suggested school counseling transformation are those developed by Bolton and Brookings (1996) and McWhirter (1991). Whereas Bolton and Brookings (1996) developed a framework of empowerment consisting of twenty different dimensions, McWhirter (1991) has proposed “a definition of empowerment in the context of counseling” (p. 222).

Empowerment is the process by which people, organizations, or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others, and (d) support the empowerment of others in their community. (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224)

The following are Bolton and Brookings’ (1996) facets of empowerment and Thomsen’s (2002) resiliency factor, which will help school counselors and other educators with both the intrinsic and extrinsic goal-setting dimensions of an empowerment counseling framework:

<u>Facet</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Assertive:	To stand up for one's convictions, values, and feelings
Autonomous:	To be self-sufficient, unconstrained, and self-

	regulating
Collaborative:	To work cooperatively with others to solve problems or to achieve a common goal
Committed:	To be completely engaged in whatever one is doing
Competent:	To be well-qualified, capable, and fully adequate
Community-oriented:	To engage in directed interaction with a unified group of individuals
Creative:	To think originally, ingeniously, or inventively
Goal-directed:	To strive to meet one's own standards or expectations
Independent:	To be free from the influence or domination of others
Interdependent:	To acknowledge one's dependence on others and the reciprocal responsibility for others
Internally controlled:	To perceive that one has authority or power over self and over environment
Personally responsible:	To be accountable for one's actions and their consequences
Proud:	To feel delight or elation as a result of some act, possession, or relationship
Self-advocating:	To stand up for one's rights and draw on internal strength and support for actions
Self-efficacious:	To believe that one is able, through one's own efforts, to bring about desired outcomes
Self-discovering:	To analyze and understand one's own feelings, values, and aspirations
Self-reliant:	To generate one's own opportunities and resources
Self-mastering:	To develop and maintain an intrinsic link between

feelings of worth and positive outcomes

Socially responsible: To understand and be committed to the collective well-being of the larger group to which one belongs
(Bolton & Brookings, 1996, pp. 255-256)

Resilient: To have the ability to remain steady or to bounce back in spite of adversity; draw on strengths, both internal and environmental, to overcome challenges
(Thomsen, 2002, p. 9)

These facets provide details to support the definition of empowerment as well as serve as a guide on what to look for in practice and further illustrate the overall philosophical focus of the approach. Both the definition of empowerment, as well as its many key facets, inform us that being empowered cannot be achieved in isolation from others or in isolation of critical factors. Race is one such factor and is discussed later in this study. Other people involved in children/student's lives must join the school counselor in helping them become empowered.

Educators and authors, such as Hipolito-Delgado and Lee (2007), Lee (1991), McWhirter (1991), Bolton and Brookings (1996), Bernak (2005), Astramovich and Harris (2007), and Bernak, Chung and Siroskey-Sabdo (2005) have discussed the concept of empowerment in relation to age, race, and gender. While each one has a slightly different take on empowerment, none defined it as a one-time step to be achieved. "Empowerment has been referred to as a theory, a framework, a plan of action, a goal, an ideology, and a process" (McWhirter, 1991, p. 222). The empowerment process typically involves a push for organized, systematic efforts to improve current conditions. For children, however, what are the practical recommendations and methods of becoming

empowered? The approach would need to be different in some regards than those used with adults because the skill sets, previous experiences and life goals are not likely to be as developed as those of adults. When one thinks about an improved situation for the oppressed, in this case children and students, one must not only consider what such freedom looks like, but also what it will take to reach that goal. Any process that “affects not just the individual but the individual in relation to others, to the community, and to society” (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224) must definitely give special consideration to *the individual*-in this case, the child/student. It defeats the purpose of implementing methods that have little likelihood of accomplishing the set goals. “In the process of liberation, the dominated can and must critically incorporate some of the dimensions of the dominant culture to serve as the very instruments of their struggle” (Freire, 1970, p. 193). Since the formal educational process has played quite a role in the process of establishing and maintaining an oppressor-oppressed state, at least educationally, change in that arena is warranted and must be engaged by the educators.

Summary

This chapter focused on both problems and possibilities within the school counseling profession. As Dr. Jay Casbon (2001) stated, counselors are key to school reform discussions and their graduate training programs need to prepare them in that manner. It was critical to include the perspectives of those who believe in the power one group can have in transforming ineffective, detrimental, and/or oppressive situations. The voices of Paulo Freire, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks spoke to a variety of

different relationships among people, focusing mainly on situations of oppression and domination and how different groups have or can respond to forms of oppression. Some of the key elements and concepts of empowerment expressed by Freire, Collins, and hooks are directly related to the proposed empowerment school counseling framework. Self-examination, racial uplift, liberation, power, class, oppression, critical consciousness, and the roles of the oppressors and the oppressed in changing the current state are a few of their critical points that are discussed later in this study as a part of the proposed transformation.

Through the use of my personal anecdotes and literature focusing specifically on the school counseling profession, I drew attention to problematic aspects of school counseling, specifically the disservice to children and students. My goal was to illustrate why there is a need for change and what factors might influence the direction of this change. Some key areas of focus were currently perceived roles of school counselors, counselors' role in the transformation process, the place of counselor education programs in transforming the profession and service, and the importance of recognizing the "whole child." In addition to the impact of particular school counseling practices, there is a need to understand *why* counselors engage in such practices. What is one's philosophy of counseling? What a person believes about their responsibility to others will influence their actions towards others. As noted in this chapter, there are some areas that need to receive more attention in the training of school counselors. Including counselor education programs in the transformation process dispels any thoughts that the change need only occur at the school level among practicing counselors. Not addressing the

ambiguity within and surrounding the profession is likely to continue detracting from the potential contributions that school counselors can make to the educational process. Counselors are likely to continue to be left out of educational reform or transformation proposals. Having discussed what sparked the need for this study and some factors that influenced the proposed transformation, the next chapter focuses on how school counseling reached its current state and continues exploring how it can be improved upon by the proposed transformation.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF SCHOOL COUNSELING: HOW WE REACHED THIS POINT

Having discussed experiences that lead to the desire to pursue a better way to serve children/students through school counseling, as well as having examined some of the more well-known proponents of empowerment, this chapter will explore the history and evolution of school counseling to contribute to an understanding of why change is necessary. Paulo Freire, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks, along with McWhirter (1991), Bolton and Brookings (1996), and Thomsen (2002) provided some philosophical and practical perspectives of empowerment needed to support the argument for transformative change proposed in this study. Tracing the historical evolution of school counseling in this chapter will allow the opportunity to compare and contrast the past and present states of the profession with the proposed transformation. Consideration was given to purpose, goals and potential benefits, strengths and limitations, and any shortcomings. An in-depth look at the key elements and assumptions of behavioral counseling and reality therapy will help illustrate current school counseling practice and allow for a connection between the past and potential future of the school counseling profession. I believe it is critical that there is an understanding of why the services provided to children/students cannot remain as they were initially theorized and practiced. We must ensure that children and students, as well as others in the school community, are being effectively served by the educational and counseling processes.

Children and students are entitled to survival and growth in both their personal and their academic worlds. However, these worlds sometimes conflict with one another because they do not take one another into consideration. Working to help support one's family, or serving as primary caregiver to younger siblings due to parental neglect, or being homeless will impact every other aspect of a child's life, especially school, which requires hours of daily commitment, energy, and focus. When children are thinking about whether or not their mother will be too intoxicated to cook dinner, learning algebraic equations, doing a science project, or memorizing a poem to recite in English class is not the priority. And if the child feels or knows that his teacher, counselor, or principal is unaware or unconcerned about the other critical aspects of his life, how meaningful will his formal educational experience be? How much is this child likely to instantly contribute to or take away from this experience? This does not at all imply that schools should not have high expectations or conduct rigorous lessons because of the outside "baggage" that some children bring into the educational setting. It does, however, support the notion that we need to critically reflect upon what we do within the school and consider what aspects need to be transformed in order to better serve the students, children, and school community. We must look at what changes need to occur in the school counseling profession to both voice awareness of the issue of serving the whole child as well as to create effective educational and counseling programs. This journey will help determine if counseling can continue to evolve to achieve these goals.

The Evolution of School Counseling

In order to better understand the current trends and needs of the school counseling profession, we must first look at its initial development. Counseling has not always existed in its present form (purpose, methodology, standards, etc.) Long before schools hosted school counseling programs, *guidance* was the focus. In the late 1800's, the social reform movement sparked the development of school guidance and counseling activities, which focused mostly on finding the right people for the right jobs outside of the home. Considering the social and political state at that time, the "right people" were mostly men. An early distinction between guidance and counseling was that *guidance* focused on helping individuals make important decisions, while *counseling* focused on helping individuals make changes (American Psychological Association's Division of Counseling Psychology, Committee on Definitions, 1956). The guidance movement evolved into the profession of counseling, with guidance being only one part of the overall service provided by professional counselors. Prior to the 1930's, there was "no mention of counseling in the professional literature" (Aubrey, 1983). There was, however, mention of the guidance movement, which focused on teaching children and young adults about themselves, others and the world of work (Patterson, 1967). Classroom teachers and administrators were the main practitioners, which included disseminating specific information and conducting lessons on morality and interpersonal relations. Restructuring the helping profession in formal educational settings led to additional recognition of the school counseling discipline.

Jesse B. Davis, Frank Parsons, and E. G. Williamson were some of the most documented proponents of the guidance and counseling movements. Davis was the first to set up a systematized guidance program in the public schools. Aubrey (1977) noted Davis' program of once a week guidance lessons taught by English teachers. The goal of these activities was to build character and prevent problems. These same goals are considered a part of most classroom guidance lessons today. Frank Parsons was known as the "Father of Guidance" and, much like Davis, concentrated on growth and prevention. He helped institutionalize vocational guidance around 1908, which allowed schools and other organizations to work with young people who were in the process of making career decisions (Patterson, 1967). Character development and problem prevention were believed to be necessary in making appropriate career decisions.

After 1910, the impact of two other events was felt—the founding of the National Vocational Guidance Association in 1913 and the onset of World War I. The U.S. Army commissioned the development of numerous psychological instruments to screen its personnel to help determine who was best suited for various war-related tasks. These were the Army Alpha and Army Beta intelligence tests. They served much the same purpose as today's Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) that is administered to many high school students. The ASVAB today is used by the armed services to help direct students into certain areas of military training, specialization, and particular branches. The devised Alpha and Beta screenings were administered to civilians after the war, which sparked another popular movement called psychometrics (testing and appraisal). Psychometrics gained quick popularity because it gave vocational

guidance somewhat of a “scientific” identity, and science was already accepted as a reputable field of study. However, the focus on psychometrics required those specializing in vocational guidance to be pulled away from further developments in the behavioral sciences. Since the vocational guidance movement developed without an explicit philosophy (Aubrey, 1977), its quick attachment to psychometrics seemed to be the only way to gain legitimacy at the time. This lack of clear professional identity persisted throughout the 1920s as education courses for counselors almost exclusively emphasized vocational guidance. Even the federal government utilized guidance services after World War I with veterans to help place them back in society and capitalize on their talents and abilities.

The 1930s, however, saw new developments. E. G. Williamson and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota developed the first theory of counseling. Their theory emphasized a directive, counseling-centered approach. Williamson (1965) felt that the counselor should engage in social action: “Counselors, in addition to counseling individual clients, should commit themselves professionally to organized efforts to extend and complete (the) struggle for freedom of choice for all youth” (p. 15). During this time there was also movement away from the narrow focus on occupational concerns of the previous few decades.

John Brewer proposed that every teacher be a counselor and that guidance be incorporated into the school curriculum as a subject; advocated that all of education should focus on preparing students to live outside of the school environment. His emphasis made counselors see vocational decisions as just one part of their guidance responsibilities. (Gladding, 1992, p. 12)

The extent of the guidance and counseling literature of the 1930s and prior was of a practical nature and dealt with such topics as testing, cumulative records, orientation procedures, vocations, and placement functions. There was still no mention of catering the services of the program to the needs of the clientele, particularly in the school setting. Carl Rogers helped shift the focus away from occupational decision-making in the 1940s, which further shaped the practice of counseling (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996). Rogers placed great emphasis on the client and advocated what was described as a “nondirective” approach to working with clients. Clients were responsible for their own growth. Much of the literature that Rogers published (1942, 1951, 1965, 1967; Rogers & Stevens, 1968) focused on techniques and methods of counseling, research, and refinement of counseling techniques, selection, and training of future counselors, and the goals and objectives of counseling. This literary focus also signaled a major turn away from guidance toward a concentration on counseling.

Though the U.S. government used counselors and psychologists to help in the selection and training of specialists for the military and for industry during World War II, an emphasis on personal freedom simultaneously arose. The War required resorting to the occupational focus of the guidance movement, while the issue of personal freedom and a questioning of traditional sex roles with women working outside the home required an emphasis on personal counseling. This was a difficult shift for most institutions. Again in the 1950s, the National Defense Education Act was enacted following the Soviet Union’s launching of *Sputnik I*. The Act’s primary purpose was to identify and promote the development of scientifically and academically talented students. It also

provided funds to upgrade school counseling programs, establish counseling and guidance institutes, and train counselors. In the 1960s, the Act was extended to include elementary school counseling programs, which greatly increased the number of practicing counselors (Nugent, 1990). This decade also saw growth in the number and complexity of counseling theories, including an increase in the use of small group counseling as opposed to one-on-one encounters. There were numerous counseling methodologies being taught to counseling trainees, bringing additional focus to counseling as a profession.

Standardization and Professionalization

The next couple of decades brought about key changes for school counselors. The 1970s saw the beginning of a degree of standardization of the counseling role. An American Personnel and Guidance Association report summarized role definitions and training standards for school counselors, while the Association of Counselor Educators and Supervisors (ACES) outlined the standards for a master's degree in counseling (1973) and approved guidelines for doctoral preparation in counseling (1977). "Among the most noteworthy events of the [1980s] were those that standardized the training and certification of counselors, those that recognized counseling as a distinct profession, those that increased the diversification of counselor specialties, and those that emphasized human growth and development" (Gladding, 1992, p. 15). Beginning in 1981, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standardized counselor education programs for masters' and doctoral

programs in the areas of school, community/agency, mental health, marriage and family counseling/therapy, and personnel services for college students. Specific course focus, number of credit hours, and specific exit requirements were a part of the CACREP criteria. Just two years later, the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) began to certify counselors on a national level, developed a standardized test and defined eight major subject areas in which counselors should be knowledgeable: (1) human growth and development; (2) social and cultural foundation; (3) helping relationships; (4) groups; (5) lifestyle and career development; (6) appraisal; (7) research and evaluation; and (8) professional orientation (Gladding, 1992, p. 18). This increase in the level of standardization also helped to create a level of professionalism around counseling. A profession is characterized by its “role statements, codes of ethics, accreditation guidelines, competency standards, licensure, certification and other standards of excellence” (VanZandt, 1990, p. 243), such as honor societies and recognition by other reputable professions.

However, along with such recognition there were and are still hindrances to further improvements in the profession. For example, the large amount of paperwork and administrative duties that consume a counselor’s day, in addition to the large student caseloads, the amount of time spent in direct contact with students is minimal. According to the American School Counseling website, the average counseling caseload in public high schools is 250-350:1, while it ranges from 400-500:1 in elementary schools (www.schoolcounselor.org). Some states, on the other hand, do not mandate any form of school counseling programs or do not mandate that school counseling programs be

implemented by professional school counselors. In schools with large counselor caseloads, it is extremely difficult to form one-on-one relationships with students and their parents or support systems. In addition to the student-counselor ratio issues, most school districts allow the building-level administrators to determine the specific responsibilities of their counselors, many of which are not counseling-related. These duties are typically based on some general guidelines that have been approved by central office personnel, the local school board, and/or the state department of public instruction. Of all of the responsibilities that counselors are assigned in the school setting, which of them are they actually trained to handle? Or maybe a better question would be, how do they actually use their counselor training? Standardization of the profession only went so far, which may explain part of the problem with the services being provided in the school setting. With time and focus being spread so thin, the potential contribution of school counselors is limited and those being served are likely to suffer.

Current Focus of Counselors' Time and Energy

In the school counseling profession, a lot of time is spent on various duties and tasks; those for which counselors are specifically trained and those outside of the scope of counselor training. What drives any one counselor to spend their time as they do is key to what actually gets accomplished. Even though the job description is written and adopted by others, it takes focus, time, and energy on the part of the actual counselor to determine why and how counseling is approached. Children and educators spend many hours daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly in the formal school setting. It is such a large

amount of time that many people who are not closely affiliated with today's educational process may wonder why children do not emerge as well-adjusted, academically and socially prepared young adults. From kindergarten through twelfth grade, there is a set curriculum that teachers are "mandated" to cover with students, which in some subjects is followed by an assessment of minimum skills and knowledge that was to be gained from exposure to the subject area material. Like classroom teachers, school counselors have guidelines regarding services they are supposed to provide to students, teachers, and parents. Overall it involves facilitating the school-home relationship, but there are also specific informational and guidance (advising) areas required to be included. When it comes to students' personal adjustment and growth, everyone is treated as if development occurs at the same rate unless a crisis arises. Counseling methods typically take on a reactive mode based on the issues presented by students and teachers. And with caseloads that average between 300-350 students, how counseling has landed itself in this reactive mode is almost understandable. How does a counselor provide a program of services that can take each child in a school from where he/she is and reach a goal that has him/her prepared to handle the present and future challenges of life? From that, the key question becomes, where does the counselor need to start?

Is a Philosophical Stance the Missing Piece?

There are many aspects to a school counseling framework. The specifics are determined by the particular counseling theory that the practitioner buys into, as well as what they believe their true role is in the school community. As most other educators are

expected to have a teaching or educational philosophy, school counselors fall in that category, too. According to Hart and Jacobi (1992), “school counselors who are guided by an underlying philosophy that emphasize(s) the pivotal role of counseling in enabling students to achieve at the highest possible levels” (p. 29) would engage in activities that directly impact a school’s overall academic program. Their argument that counselors should move from their original role as “gatekeepers to advocates” focuses mainly on their duties relating to academic achievement and equitable access. Hart and Jacobi (1992) recognize the lack of basic philosophy as a major problem in school counseling.

Few counselors are guided by a well-developed philosophy of their role and goals...or by a belief system that clearly spells out their goals and values. Without such background, they cannot independently establish priorities, advocate effectively for change, or approach their work in a proactive manner...Because many counselors lack a philosophical base of their own, they more easily accept the prevailing philosophy of the school....

Counselors also need to believe in their ability to be effective agents for change....This requires the willingness and confidence to be out in front of the change process. All too often, counselors (and others) feel unwilling and unable to effect meaningful change until someone else (e.g., the state, school board, principal, or students themselves) takes action. Although such actions may be highly desirable, they should not be a prerequisite for effective action on the counselor’s part. (pp. 39-40)

And even though philosophers Paulo Freire (1970, 1973), bell hooks (1994, 1995, 2003), and Patricia Hill Collins (1991) do not specifically examine the role of school counselors in their pedagogies or frameworks of empowerment, there is a focus on the educators’ “lived experiences” and their role in the overall educational process. Empowerment philosophers demand that we examine the place of power, politics, and freedom in both

education and in society. Such examination is to guide our human interactions, which for school counselors will directly impact what is believed to be important not only personally, but professionally.

With a solid philosophical framework on which to base our beliefs about children and students, our professional actions as counselors can have more direction and purpose. It determines why and how we approach this responsibility; with the hope being that less and less time is spent on tasks that are not benefiting children and students. For example, if all children from a very early age were taught conflict resolution skills and closely monitored in the event of initial actual occurrences of conflict, would a counselor need to spend two hours of his day trying to get two young girls to “hash out” their disagreement?

At some point in life, everyone will experience some form of conflict. Children who are empowered with the skills to cope with this challenge when it does arrive are less likely to unwittingly put themselves in a situation that would require an outside adult to mediate. Granted, that is idealistic, but will we ever know if it can be *realistic* if we never change how we “prepare” children for those inevitable aspects of growth and living in society? At school we can allow them safe trial-and-error opportunities that life in the outside world may not. Plus, if home life exposes them to a less civil, more dangerous method of handling conflict as children, they will likely model what they see. What option does one have, particularly if no one models anything different until they get involved in a fight at school? Then, the principal is likely to lecture that “fighting doesn’t solve anything” before suspending the students. Would the students have handled the

situation differently had they been exposed to acceptable alternatives starting in kindergarten? No one can say for sure, but at least they would have had the option, the choice to talk it out, fight, or seek assistance. If the lesson is attempted to be taught *after* the fact, that is a reactive methodology on the part of all involved adults. This type of reactive versus proactive approach can be derived from many different sources, however, the counselor's philosophical approach to their responsibility to students/children can directly impact how such situations are handled. As stated earlier, this is most likely determined by the counseling theory, approach, or tradition that the counselor has bought into, and over time and among all practicing counselors, these are the decisions that created the history and evolution of school counseling.

Tasks vs. Responsibilities

Using the aforementioned example, we now must ask: What was the school counselor doing instead of working with the students on coping strategies that might be useful in their time of need? She was probably multi-tasking one of the numerous responsibilities or spending several hours of the day correcting students' schedules or reacting to another crisis. In a given day, a counselor may spend two hours in an SSST meeting, two hours registering new students (which may include scheduling classes, assisting with lunch applications, tracking down records from the previous schools to ensure appropriate course placement, assuring the English teacher that two more students in her class of 32 won't kill her, finding the right bus number or method of public transportation, etc.), an hour in the principal's office helping parents understand why

their child didn't get accepted to another college, an hour helping a student complete a last-minute college essay, two hours counting test booklets and answer sheets and explaining the administration instructions to two separate groups of teachers, and now that school is out and the kids are supposedly gone for the day, facilitating a parent-teacher conference, trying to eat your lunch of crackers and a soda, and answering the 20 phone messages and 30 emails that have arrived since you last checked at 7:00 am. These are just some of the things a counselor might be doing instead of empowering children/students. Granted, these are responsibilities that typically fall within the realm of the duties assigned to the counselor by the principal and/or the central office administration. That, however, does not make it the most effective use of a faculty member with the level of training required to be a school counselor. In the principal's defense, the ambiguity surrounding the school counseling profession and role in the school probably makes it appear to be a near-perfect fit. Tasks without a clear or designated place are likely to be assigned to someone without a clear role. That hurts both those being served as well as the overall educational program that is supposed to be serving them.

Counselors are not the only professionals in the school setting who possess the skills to provide an environment of empowerment for students. Every experience needs to fall under the umbrella of providing such a learning opportunity, "focusing on preparing students to live outside of the school environment" (Gladding, 1992, p. 12). Everyone in the school would need to play a part. Teachers spend more total hours with students than anyone else on campus. Coaches typically have a unique connection with

their student-athletes, which allows for opportunities for “teachable moments” in practically every encounter, both on and off the field or court. Principals have the option of having balanced or one-sided relationships with students. They can have an enforcer vs. rule-breaker relationship or an experience provider vs. learner relationship. Students probably don’t even lump principals and counselors in the “educator” group with the teachers, but they should both be major players in that group. With the influential and positional authority and knowledge/skill base that should come with that territory, they can impact the learning environment of teachers, students, parents, and community members. Understandably, the principal is the counselor’s direct supervisor. With the principal’s trust in and support of the counselor’s ability, knowledge, and leadership, a counselor should be able to influence the direction of the school’s educational program and mission. This leads us back to the original point of this study—to find a direction that is more beneficial for the transformation of the school counseling profession and the children/students being served.

Counseling Theories and Philosophies

Having taken a brief look at the history of school counseling and what types of factors may have helped create that path, we must now examine actual counseling theories and philosophies that are utilized in school settings in order to illustrate why and how services are provided. The experiences children and students have in formal educational settings can directly impact their ability to positively contribute to society throughout life. However, if the services and programs offered in the school setting are not effectively meeting the needs of those being served, educators are hindering

children's chances of achieving success academically, personally/socially, and vocationally. A school counseling program that reacts when students present issues is quite different from a proactive approach that is pre-designed to address the presenting factors that children/students may possess or bring with them upon coming into the school setting, such as home life, past academic issues, short-term and long-term goals, etc. The goal of a reactionary approach is typically to find a quick-fix for whatever is wrong. This could be stifling to students' development because a quick-fix does not necessarily teach them the coping skills needed to handle future issues without having to seek assistance each time. An effective counseling program acknowledges obstacles when teaching students to cope.

The investigation of empowerment as a school counseling philosophy is for the ultimate goal of better serving children, students, and parents who have too long been under-served by the existing school counseling frameworks. The services we provide should address what is needed. To help support the argument for the shift to an empowerment school counseling philosophy, we need to examine some of the more popular school counseling philosophies and methodologies. Examining each counseling framework—key elements, concepts, assumptions, and primary purpose—is critical to this study, because even though the proposed counseling philosophy is only a concept at this point, it illustrates the service gaps that need to be addressed. To address these issues, I will examine behavioral counseling and reality therapy.

Behavioral Counseling

There are a few different behavioral approaches to which counselors can subscribe, and they oftentimes utilize a variety of shared techniques. To grasp the philosophical foundation of the behavioral counseling approach, the view of people and human nature is key. This counseling approach is mainly based on the work of B. F. Skinner's "belief that things that happen to children influence and change them as biological entities....Behaviorists view human beings as neither good nor bad but merely as products of their environment;...born as blank slates" (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996, pp. 193-194). Behavior as it is related to biology is key to behavioral counseling and its primary purpose. B. F. Skinner (1971) believed that

a person is a member of a species shaped by evolutionary contingencies of survival, displaying behavioral processes which bring him under the control of a social environment which he and millions of others like him have constructed and maintained during the evolution of a culture. The direction of the controlling relation is reversed: a person does not act upon the world, the world acts upon him. (p. 211)

A major element of this counseling theory is the focus on overt behavior and the processes and factors that cause it. The present is more important than the past and all behavior is learned, both adaptive and maladaptive (good and bad). "Because human behavior is learned, any or all behavior can be unlearned and new behavior learned in its place. The behaviorist is concerned with observable events that, when they become unacceptable behaviors, can be unlearned" (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996, p. 194). The unlearning and learning processes are the focus of the behavioral counselor. Tried and true approaches are extremely important, so there is little to no spontaneity or room to

simply try an eclectic technique that “feels right” at the time for a particular client. Assumptions behind these beliefs and techniques range from respondent learning (which is basically the Pavlov dog experiment of conditioned and unconditioned stimuli and response) to operant conditioning (how one operates in their environment based on rewards and punishments) to social modeling (acquiring new knowledge and behavior by observing others).

Within this particular counseling approach, a counselor may take one of several roles, which is widely determined by the client’s goals and the counselor’s specific beliefs about behavior. The counselor takes on a very active role in this type of counseling relationship.

Basically, the counselor wants to help clients make good adjustments to life circumstances and achieve personal and professional objectives. Thus, the focus is on modifying or eliminating the maladaptive behavior the client displays while, at the same time, helping the client acquire healthy, constructive ways of acting. Just to eliminate a behavior is not enough; unproductive actions must be replaced with productive ways of responding. (Gladding, 1992, pp. 145-146)

If a main goal is to determine the best methods for change, someone has obviously had to determine what qualifies as “best.” There are numerous techniques utilized by behavioral counselors, but they are specific as to what they are designed to address. The goals of altering maladaptive behavior, teaching the decision-making process, preventing problems, and teaching new behaviors and skills are what Krumboltz and Hosford (1967) hold at the heart of this counseling approach. Perhaps learning from a very early age to

reflect upon behaviors and actions, and being guided through the process of learning coping skills, would decrease the occurrence or development of maladaptive behaviors.

Strengths and Limitations

In looking at the pros and cons of the behavioral approach to school counseling, we can get a clearer picture of what we would need an alternative approach to address as well as try to determine whether or not an empowerment approach could address those deficits. According to Gladding (1992), the positive aspects include:

The approach deals directly with symptoms. Since most clients seek help because of specific problems, counselors who work directly with symptoms are often able to assist clients immediately....The approach focuses on the here and now. A client does not have to examine the past to obtain help in the present....The approach has an abundance of available techniques that counselors can use....(p. 151). The approach is based on learning theory, which is a well-formulated way of documenting how new behaviors are acquired....(p. 152) [Published and adopted ethical guidelines] promote the practice and edification of behavioral counseling methods, while simultaneously trying to protect the public from unscrupulous practitioners....A common denominator among all behavioral approaches is a commitment to objectivity and evaluation....in defining and dealing with problems, [which] demystifies the process of counseling and makes it possible for clients and outside evaluators to assess in a measurable way its level of accountability. (p. 153)

A close examination of the positives of a behavioral approach also reveals some of the negatives or disadvantages. First, the focus on specific behaviors (symptoms) overrides any focus on the “whole” person. If the whole person is not addressed, then are the isolated behaviors truly of benefit to the person changing and those around him? Thompson and Rudolph (1996) point out that “behavioral counselors are committed to

defining problems precisely by breaking them down into observable and countable components of behavior. Behavioral goals are set in advance and systematically evaluated throughout the treatment process and follow-up period” (p. 222). If a counselor works with a child on changing a specific behavior, which is believed to be caused by a specific environment or stimulus, the benefit of the new behavior only comes when all circumstances (environment, stimulus) match the problematic state. If, according to Skinner’s belief that “a person does not act upon the world, but the world acts upon him” (1971, p. 211), the child is not in a position to control the environment. The child would have to learn how to adapt their new, learned behaviors to the actions of the world. Krumboltz and Hosford (1967) listed one of the goals of behavioral counseling as “preventing problems.” Does the child have that kind of control?

Secondly, if the behavior is what initiates the counseling relationship or attention to specific behaviors, then it is not necessarily important to improve human relationships and human interaction, but just a mechanical, routine reaction to something that has caused or is causing a problem. “Reinforcement methods may serve to extinguish desired behavior when the reward or token replaces any intrinsic reward a person might receive from engaging in the desired behavior” (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996, p. p. 221), meaning that token rewards can lead to token learning.

Third, environments are not always controllable, and if the behavioral changes that children/students have been working on are tied to their environmental surroundings, the changes are not generalizable or applicable to other situations. It would be difficult enough to make such strides with adults, but for most young children, oftentimes only the

concrete is real. It would require abstract, critical thinking skills for the changes to benefit them in other human interactions. “Behavioral counseling is focused more on present than past concerns and more on actions than on personality” (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996, p. 222).

Fourth, since the behavioral counseling approach focuses on the here and now, it does not take into account any past experiences that may be influencing current behavioral choices. Children are highly influenced by what they see others do, particularly parents and other family members. These issues oftentimes need to be brought to light and examined in order for children to understand that various behavioral choices do exist, that there is more than one way to react to a situation. Children’s relationships with one another must also be taken into consideration, as many children learn different habits of behavior through social interactions with their peers. “Children usually imitate the behaviors of people they like” (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996, p. 204), and past observations of behavior need to be taken into account. If the child does not understand and resolve something that occurred in the past that is now affecting their behavior, will they ever understand what is maladaptive about a specific behavior? Overall, Gladding (1992) holds that the behavioral counseling “approach programs the client toward minimum or tolerable levels of behaving, reinforces conformity, stifles creativity, and ignores client needs for self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and feelings of self-worth” (Gladding, 1992, p. 154).

A few variables that need to be considered when examining behavioral counseling is the role that other educators would need to play in the process. Teachers, parents, and

administrators are key in the behavioral change process because of their contact with the students/children. This would require a certain degree of knowledge of behavioral counseling techniques. Is this realistic outside of a laboratory setting? School is very fluid, as students encounter numerous people and have numerous experiences over the span of one school day. Everyone they encounter, even if you just focus on the adults, can have an influence over the actions the student decides to portray. And depending on the goals of the person with whom the student has an encounter, the result of the encounter may not be in the student's best interest. The academic, social/personal, vocational goals are all aspects of one's well-being and need to be at the heart of what educators focus on with students and children, but are all educators effectively skilled to achieve those goals? If behavior is the main focus of this particular counseling philosophy, what happens to the other needs of children and students that must be addressed—the aspects of their lives that are not a direct result of a specific behavior?

Reality Therapy

The origination of reality therapy is attributed to the work of William Glasser. Glasser (1961, 1965) used his reality approach to counseling as a way to reduce the amount of time it would take to diagnose the needs of psychiatric patients, as well as to reduce repeat offenses among juvenile delinquents. In applying his beliefs and methodology to school settings, Glasser (1969) focused on the development of positive addictive behaviors as a way of making people stronger. For example, jogging would be a positive addictive behavior, as opposed to illegal drug use. Glasser linked his beliefs

with those of control theory to arrive at the notion that “all a person obtains from the outside world is information” (Gladding, 1992, p. 155), which is used to inform physical actions or behaviors. Even though reality therapy does not adhere to a comprehensive developmental model of human development, Glasser does hold certain notions about human nature and the stages of development. At certain ages, children gain socialization skills, knowledge and self-concept. How they deal with any difficulties they face during these stages affects their future behaviors and thoughts.

We all have survival needs for food, water, and shelter, and we typically take action to meet those needs. We also have the need to gain a sense of self, including people’s desires to have successful and meaningful lives. Glasser believed that “problems arrive when people are either not taught to take responsibility for their behavior or refuse to accept that responsibility” (Gladding, 1992, p. 155); “despite varying manifestations, psychological problems are the result of one factor: the inability to fulfill one’s basic needs” (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996, p. 93). Unlike the basic assumption of behavioral therapy that the world acts upon the human being, reality therapy assumes that “human beings operate on a conscious level; they are not driven by unconscious forces or instincts” (Gladding, 1992, p. 156). What a person wants to change and ways to achieve positive, constructive change are the focus of reality therapy. The counselor works to keep the client focused on how to control the thoughts and actions he is displaying. William Glasser (1981) holds “that to help people we must help them gain strength to do worthwhile things with their lives and at the same time become warmly involved with the people they need” (p. 48). Responsible behavior for self and

towards others is key to the needs of a society in which we act in more human ways of being toward one another.

Other goals of reality therapy that can be linked to the proposed counseling philosophy include: “to help the client clarify what he or she wants in life. It is vital for a person to be aware of life goals if the person is to act responsibly, which requires one to choose behaviors that are in line with achieving those goals” (Gladding, 1992, p. 157). In order for a person to choose the appropriate behaviors to achieve his or her goals, a realistic plan must be formulated. It is understood, however, that no one plan will work for all goals to be achieved or obstacles to be tackled, so one will need to also gain the skills to adapt and improvise as new encounters arise. Glasser contends that “reality therapy...is a teaching process, not a healing process. Counselors are in the business of teaching children better ways to meet their needs. From the reality therapy point of view, counseling is a matter of learning how to solve problems” (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996, p. 95).

Another goal of reality therapy is for the counselor and client to form a meaningful relationship (Glasser, 1969). In the school setting, this type of relationship is critical with all students and all educators. If the entire educational process is working from the same philosophical foundation, then everyone involved needs to be focused on the same goals as they pertain to individual and collective needs. More than just the school counselor would need to be involved and be able to guide the students through this learning process. In *The Quality School Teacher* (1993), Glasser notes that teachers’ results with students depend on how people are treated. Reality therapy’s focus on the

here and now does overlook one issue: true, people can only control their present behaviors, but it is also true that there is usually something to be learned from past actions and how situations were handled. Gladding (1992) believes “the entire procedure is one that empowers the client and enables the client to be more productive” (p. 158). But for this philosophy or approach to be effective in a school setting with children/students, teachers, parents, and the school community, there are missing areas that need to be addressed.

Strengths and Limitations

Some of the strengths of the reality therapy approach, as assessed by Samuel Gladding (1992), include:

It can be employed in individual counseling with children, adolescents, adults and the aged....The approach has such versatility that it is helpful in almost any setting [including] schools.... The approach is concrete. Both counselor and client are able to assess how much progress is being made and in what areas....The approach emphasizes the short term. Reality therapy is usually limited to a relatively few sessions that focus on behavior in the present and future. Clients work with conscious and verifiable objectives that can be achieved quickly. The approach has a national training center, [that] promotes a uniform educational experience among practitioners who employ this theory and also publishes professional literature. The approach promotes responsibility and freedom within individuals without blame or criticism or an attempt to restructure the entire personality. Many individuals simply need help with certain behaviors, and reality therapy takes care of this need. (pp. 160-161)

Quite similar to behavioral counseling, some limitations are also revealed. Since reality therapy allows for little or no focus on the past or unconscious influences, there is no

accounting for dealing with any obstacles posed by those factors, even though the child/student may be exhibiting behaviors stemming directly from such an experience. It is designed as a short-term counseling method focused on goal setting and behavior change (Bruce, 1995). Secondly, mental illness is viewed as a chosen method to deal with one's environment. Reality therapy does not account for how to address such issues with children. If most people are not aware of how or why they chose to respond in a certain way, how can children have the capacity to grasp that? "Reality therapy is oriented toward action rather than insight" (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996, p. 96). Another limitation of reality therapy is the fact that it does not focus on the "whole" person, much like behavioral counseling.

Reality therapy focuses on working with observable content, including behavior, plans, and goals. 'What' questions are preferred to 'why' questions, which [are believed to] encourage people to find excuses for irresponsible behavior. ...Reality therapists do not dwell on rationalizing 'whys.' (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996, p. 98).

Any school counseling approach that does not allow for focus on understanding the "why" is not doing much more than providing a simplistic (less complicated) approach for counselors to follow; it is overlooking the learning processes and capacities of children. One last limitation that could greatly affect the usefulness of reality therapy in the school setting is the requirement for verbal communication between the counselor and the student. According to the eight steps of Glasser's reality therapy (1965), clients must be able to describe their present behavior and evaluate what is going on in their lives and how they are helping themselves. The student must have the ability to

communicate their needs, options, and plans, but what happens if they do not yet possess the mental capacity to accurately reflect upon and express these variables?

There are some skills that we as educators and adults with many lived experiences have a responsibility to share with children and students. Is it rational to expect children to already know what plans they need to set in order to live productive, meaningful lives? How we engage in that teaching and learning process is critical if we expect children to be able to obtain skills that empower them to make decisions necessary to live that type of life and to live in human ways with others. Taking into consideration both the strengths and limitations of the reality therapy approach, we need to turn to how we can address the needs of the school community members, especially children and students, in a manner more attentive to both their presenting and future life-success needs.

Additional Empowerment and Counseling Approaches

Having examined the evolution of the school counseling profession and accompanying services, two popular counseling theories/approaches (including their assumptions, goals, key elements, and strengths and limitations), and the established empowerment philosophies of Paulo Freire, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks, there is a need to consider some additional perspectives of empowerment and counseling, particularly within a school setting. Carolyn Tucker (1999) proposed a self-empowerment approach to modifying behavioral problems and preventing academic failure with African American children. This approach focuses on interventions that require children be taught how to *teach* themselves while taking into consideration their

cultural and socioeconomic status. The adults with whom these children are supposed to be engaged in “a partnership educational effort” (Tucker, 1999, p. 33) would need to believe in and operate from a framework of empowerment. The self-empowerment process that Tucker proposes cannot occur in isolation. This goal cannot be accomplished unless the counselors—the eventual teachers of the students—are first transformed. Otherwise, this simply becomes another mandate to change practice without understanding or believing in the underlying theory or justification behind the change. Tucker (1999) states that children/students need to be taught:

(1) to teach themselves through self-instruction-based learning, (2) to motivate themselves through establishing short-term and long-term goals and engaging in activities and behaviors for achieving these goals, (3) to self-manage their behaviors and constructively express their feelings through cognitive-behavioral strategies, and (4) to praise themselves for learning adaptive skills and for engaging in success behaviors—behaviors required for classroom success, getting and keeping a job, and future economic and social success for themselves and for their families and communities. (p. 33)

Tucker’s approach supports the argument of the current study that the involved educators, specifically the school counselors, need to be at the heart of this transformation process. One difference, however, is that the focus of the suggested empowerment school counseling philosophy is broader than the behavior change and academic achievement of Tucker’s approach. Also, many of the skills that I believe need to be an integral part of the overall educational process and that school counselors have the skills to spearhead, Tucker proposes as after-school enrichment activities. Tucker (1999) states that

[a]fter-school activities for African American children can occur at school in the evening, at the girls' and boys' clubs, and at neighborhood churches and community centers. These activities should ideally focus on (1) development of communication skills (e.g., how to make complete sentences, how to use body language effectively, and negotiation skills); (2) public speaking skills (e.g., how to manage speaking-related anxiety, how to organize a speech, how to project confidence when speaking, and use of standard English); (3) socialization skills (e.g., anger management skills, how to chair a meeting, how to make introductions, proper etiquette, how to order from a menu and calculate gratuity, how to select and keep good friends, how to say not to negative peer pressure, and how to effectively manage interpersonal anxiety); and (4) age-appropriate daily living skills (e.g., how to interview for a job, prepare a resumé, balance a checkbook, set a table, and use a computer). (p. 179)

These are skills that we need to ensure that *all* children/students acquire, not just African Americans, in order to be productive citizens in society.

Another point of contention I have with this intervention strategy is that I believe these skills are so critical to children/students living more productive, humane lives that they should be a part of the daily educational process, not intermittently incorporated. Children/students are exposed to professional adults who should collectively possess the skill-sets to teach the aforementioned skills. When students learn skills in context with the opportunity for practice and constructive feedback from people with whom they have sustained relationships, the likelihood of retention and appropriate generalization of those skills is greatly increased. If children/students reside in a community that does not have enough adults who possess these skills, then how do educators secure enough volunteers to staff after-school sessions? The school holds a captive audience during the regular school day where these activities can take place, as opposed to only accessing the children/students who choose to take part in an after-school activity. Even though

partnerships with community organizations are key, it is not recommended that such empowering skills be relegated only to settings that are not likely to be attended by all who actually need the services. Those community resources can still be utilized for reinforcement as well as guest “teachers” in the school setting.

Another recommended change in school counseling that has influenced my suggested school counseling transformation is promoted by Susan Jones Sears, Associate Professor of Counseling Education at The Ohio State University. Instead of the current service-oriented approach that dominates many school counseling programs, Sears (1993) believes skills-based counseling would be more effective. Instead of focusing on “orientation, information, assessment, counseling, placement, and follow-through” (Sears, 1993, p. 385),

...a skills-based school counseling program focuses on student outcomes and includes activities designed to assist students in developing the skills necessary to function effectively in today’s complex schools and society. The long-range outcomes of school counseling are to help students become effective learners, responsible persons, and productive workers....(p. 385)

This approach allows all students in the school to benefit from the knowledge and expertise that counselors bring to the educational process, as well as focus on critical life skills. As an integral part of this process, school counselors’ contribution to student success is no longer isolated to just those who are experiencing problems or those who are already motivated to pursue higher education. This all-inclusive aspect is critical when a school is attempting to address the needs of the entire school population. However, the components of the service-oriented school counseling program cannot

become extinct just because of a philosophical change. Any proposed shift must still take into consideration that there are many needs and areas of service that still need to be accounted for by the school, whether by the counseling department or another school department or agency.

Jackie Allen (1994) proposed a collaborative role of the school counselor in educational reform, which focused on “the counselor...as facilitator and change agent in the local school community” (p. 4). This perspective of the counselor’s role is critical to an empowerment philosophy of school counseling because it recognizes the counselor as a key member of the school’s decision-making team.

A paradigm shift is needed in both school counselor role and school counselor function. To demonstrate their role change, school counselors must move out of the counseling offices into the community. The school counselor is the most appropriate educator to facilitate “a culture of collaboration” in the local school community. As a human relations specialist, a facilitator of positive student outcomes, the school counselor as change agent develops and nurtures collaborative relationships by facilitating change through programs of prevention and intervention for all students. Developing a culture of collaboration at the local school will unite students, faculty, staff, and the community in a common vision and mission to prepare each student to be successful in school and to acquire the essential skills for successful employment, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. (Allen, 1994, p. 4)

The development of such collaborative relationships gives students access to numerous community resources that can aid in their awareness and growth (student outcomes). However, the school counselor must take on the role of managing this process and ensuring that it is serving the best interests of children/students. Believing in the “why”

behind the establishment of a “culture of collaboration” is critical; otherwise, we end up simply changing the practice, *how* we are doing the job.

An empowerment school counseling philosophy has the goal of being liberating for all involved. If we follow the logic of Paulo Freire, Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks regarding the process of liberation as discussed in Chapter One, school counselors would need to acknowledge their current role as power-holders in the educational process and in society in order to understand the kind of transformation they would need to engage in to fight against oppressive ways of life. Sears (1993), Allen (1994), and Tucker (1999) also point out that there are certain skills, life lessons and levels of awareness that are critical to students achieving an improved way of life. Many of these same skills are key to becoming empowered, but counselors must be aware of what is required of them, as well as of other educators. To a degree, the suggestions of Sears, Allen and Tucker help place the philosophies of Freire, Collins, and hooks directly into the methodological workings of school counselors. However, there must be an understanding that this cannot be done alone. There is a partnership that must form so that “false generosity” is not at the heart of the process, which would only maintain the status quo of dominant and dominated, powerful and powerless. All educators, including counselors, must seek ways to participate in this struggle without alienating the oppressed and continuing in their dominant role. We as educators must understand how critical our role is in this liberation and empowerment process, otherwise the process would be ineffective and without purpose. Working as educators of children/students is very different than working with adults who are more likely to understand the plight of their

current state. Children/students are not likely to possess that level of awareness, which heightens the need for us to act responsibly as an educator, a school community member, and as a human being.

One of the goals of this study is to illustrate to counselors and other educators that the concept of an empowerment philosophy of school counseling has the potential to transform the profession in a direction that better serves children/students and the school community. To achieve such an end, everyone must be willing to accept the level of social responsibility, self-examination, and personal growth that is required, which may be quite different from how we have approached life in the past. Part of this responsibility, examination, and growth includes the need to become educated about the impact of our historical and present-day beliefs about people and relationships. The effectiveness of any suggested transformation hinges on the acknowledgement and inclusion of such key factors. For instance, part of becoming empowered includes positive identity establishment, and key to identity is race, whether it has served as an advantage or disadvantage, whether consciously acknowledged or not. In the next chapter, the conceptual argument for empowerment as a school counseling philosophy and framework places race as a central issue that will need to be accounted for in the transformation process. The dilemmas generally experienced by African Americans in the educational and counseling arenas, historically and presently, will be analyzed.

Summary

The examination of the history and evolution of school counseling in this chapter has shown some of the more concrete aspects that contributed to bringing us to this point. By discussing how school counseling evolved and the justifications that were used to support certain decisions, we get a better understanding of how the profession evolved as it did, and in some instances, how it has *not* evolve enough to keep up with the needs of those being served. An understanding does not mean acceptance, but we needed this examination in the course of considering what type of transformation is needed. Otherwise, we run the risk of repeating past actions and not making needed progress. It was also critical for us to look at how school counselors actually spend their time, what they are doing and why they are doing it. Discussing that much of school counseling addresses problems or issues in a reactive manner (after the crisis has occurred or presented itself) was to provide insight into why certain techniques are used and why certain issues might persist. If the school counseling framework is not designed to address certain issues with students, children, parents, and the school community, then they are likely to persist and, at times, manifest themselves in ways that disrupt the learning environment or hinder the growth process. By exploring two of the more popular counseling philosophies (behavioral counseling and reality therapy), along with other empowerment and counseling perspectives (Tucker, Allen, Sears, etc.), I illustrated the traditional side of school counseling and methods of addressing issues within the school setting, which aides in seeing how the proposed empowerment framework is different, with the potential to improve the way we serve our children and students.

CHAPTER III

***LIFT AS WE CLIMB:* RACE MAKES THE CASE FOR EMPOWERMENT**

We must strive to “lift as we climb.”... We must climb in such a way as to guarantee that all our sisters, regardless of social class, and indeed all of our brothers climb with us. This must be the essential dynamic of our quest for power. (Angela Davis, 1989, p. 158)

Based on the examination of the evolution of counseling, along with a discussion of two popular counseling frameworks, a closer look must now be taken at what may have been, but should not be, overlooked—the issue of race. Race would need to be integrated into the philosophical and practical/methodological framework in a socially responsible manner. Not that every aspect of the framework would need to be altered based on race, but there is likely to be a void in the quality of service if it is not taken into account.

This chapter further illustrates the connection between empowerment and race. Very similar to the importance Paulo Freire, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Carolyn Tucker place on class, race, and/or gender in their works on liberation/empowerment processes, race and age have that type of profound influence on the recommendation for transformation in the current study. Since the issue of age is accounted for by the sheer context of the study (school counseling), historical and contemporary literature and beliefs will be used to position race within the proper context to be educationally and socially considered.

As people we oftentimes use what we believe about human characteristics or traits to base initial interactions and impressions. Race is typically such a characteristic and one's ideologies of race can drive decisions and actions. A discussion of the prevalence of race in the educational arena is critical—it has been and still needs to be acknowledged in educational transformation. Any suggested framework cannot be effective if it consistently denies the influential importance of factors that are key to the people being served, which I believe is why Freire, Collins, hooks, and Tucker took the approaches they did: liberation with consideration for the class state of those being oppressed; feminist thought and political and social action with consideration for the females who are Black; teaching and educating with consideration for the race and gender of those being taught/educated; self-empowerment for behavior modification and prevention of academic success with consideration for racial and cultural influences. And while I agree with Patricia Hill Collins that race, class and gender are very important in how their interconnectedness impacts one's lived experience, I disagree that one factor's extraction from the triad will hinder one's fight against oppression. I hold that race can and oftentimes needs to be extracted and addressed on its own merits, which is the reason for this chapter of the study.

The issue of race has always been prevalent in the educational arena, from complete denial of education for slaves to segregated, formal educational institutions to the current "achievement gap." Race, on some level, has also been a critical factor in practically every educational *transition* in America, whether it was a key issue being addressed or it was overlooked and resulted in ineffectiveness. Whether or not race is a

science-based, biological fact or if it was socially constructed to justify one group of people's need to feel superior over others, its impact in the formal educational process makes addressing the issue a necessity. If, for example, man fabricated differences to justify the oppression of a certain group of people, then the transformative changes are needed for an objective far more extensive than simply improving the formal educational process, but to attempt to "heal" needs created by man-made deficits. "If the misery of our poor be not caused by nature, but by our social institutions, then great is our sin" (Charles Darwin in Graves, 2004, p. 20). To that end, school counseling would need to partake in non-academic "healing" in order for the academic issues of school to be adequately addressed. This would require an acknowledgement of the needs of the "whole" child, with racial identity being a part of who they are. This chapter will include discussion of any additional components that will make the proposed empowerment framework more effective in working with those of a racial minority, particularly African American children/students.

Establishing Positive Identity

In considering the perspectives of empowerment and race mentioned in Chapter One, there is one more element that needs direct attention for the empowerment framework to be suitable for use with African American children/students: *positive identity establishment*. This element is by no means exclusive of non-African American students, but it is critical for minority students whose identities have been solely based on their racial background and/or their race has not been adequately taken into consideration

in the educational process. “Oppressed people [need to] seek to develop an empowering identity that gives validity to their existence and inspires work to improve their sociopolitical circumstances” (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007, p. 329). Establishing a positive identity that is inclusive of one’s permanent qualities or characteristics, such as race, is critical to the other aspects of the empowerment process. Without acknowledgement and understanding of one’s identity due to previous marginalization, experiencing success with some of the other empowerment elements may be near impossible. “The stress of living through oppression has very real negative psychological effects on the members of marginalized communities....Individuals from communities of color often suffer from low self-esteem brought on by negative societal messages” (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007, p. 327). For instance, how one approaches becoming “community-oriented,” working “collaboratively,” and becoming “self-efficacious” could all be effected by one’s race, because race oftentimes influences one’s comfort level with their identity and how they approach self-examination and change. Not only does one have to be comfortable with their own racial identity and its establishment, those in power and/or facilitating the empowerment process must also understand the historical and present importance of establishing positive identity. “Today’s...schools face significant challenges in being culturally responsive and providing quality education for culturally diverse...youth” (Bernak, Chung & Siroskey-Saddo, 2005, p. 377). A present-day empowerment philosophy must take into consideration that

African American children continue to experience chronic school failure in disproportionately high numbers, arguably a continuation of historical discrepancies in equal educational opportunities that result

in low expectations for future success and internalized self-perceptions that are reinforced by the educational system. Research has shown that... African American children may internalize feelings of powerlessness associated with racial identity and the depreciation of African American culture. (Bernak, Chung & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005, pp. 378-379)

The proposed transformation for school counseling towards a philosophy of empowerment must take these factors into consideration on both an individual and collective level to achieve any degree of success.

Impact of Perspectives on Race

One's perspective on the concept of race is critical because it may greatly determine a person's view of any suggested transformation that needs to take race into consideration. Anything that has been an obstacle or part of the problem absolutely must be addressed when attempting to develop a more appropriate philosophy and a more effective course of action. For instance, empowerment as a school counseling philosophy could be viewed as a form of affirmative action for groups of students/children that are inherently inferior, as a method of leveling a socially-constructed, uneven playing field or an educational approach to creating a more human way of experiencing society and the world. Negative perspectives of race can carry over to school counseling programs and services in the form of inequitable access because many school counseling departments generate or filter the educational and enrichment opportunities and offerings to be delivered to students. A school's counselors handle course offerings, enrichment programs, scholarships and information needed to make informed educational decisions.

If this department is operating from a framework of bias on any level, it will not effectively serve the school community.

School counselors possess a great deal of power when it comes to educational access, which makes the role of race in school counselors' theoretical and practical frameworks extremely critical. To provide a sound case for why change is needed, to determine a direction for that change, and to avoid repeating past unsuccessful efforts, a deeper look at race as a key contributing factor is necessary. Even though African Americans have faced grand obstacles in the arenas of formal and informal education, which have spanned hundreds of years, the goal here is not to recap all of those specific issues. "Through examining the combination of our triumphs and errors, we can examine the dangers of an incomplete vision. Not to condemn that vision but to alter it, construct templates for possible futures" (Cecelski, 1994, p. 135).

Are the Reasons Justified?

A discussion of race-related issues that some key educators, activists, authors, and philosophers have documented as having plagued the educational process and experience for many African American children/students would help illustrate why an empowerment school counseling philosophy would be appropriate for the transformation that needs to occur. Any transformation that does not account for these factors will yield ineffective results for African American students/children and society in general. If those who are being denied access are unaware of the type and level of oppression they are being subjected to, the cycle of individual and collective societal problems will be perpetuated.

This which only worsens the conditions for African American children/students in the educational system. As Patricia Hill Collins (1990) quoted Mary McLeod Bethune as saying, “if our people are to fight their way up and out of bondage we must arm them with the sword and shield...of pride—believe in themselves and their possibilities, based on sure knowledge of the achievements of the past” (p. 150). There must be knowledge and understanding of what has occurred and worked (and *why*) before we proceed. Without a philosophical transformation in the way all children are viewed and served in the formal educational process, routine changes will not address the real issues.

Ingrained in many African Americans is the belief that we are somehow inferior because we do not fit the norm that society or the media portrays, or we do not see others like ourselves experiencing a wide range of success, except in isolated arenas (professional athletics, musical entertainment, acting, etc.).

In America, [the] norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing. (Lorde, 1984, p. 116)

Unfortunately many African American children are having this same type of experience in formal educational settings. Who do they see experiencing academic success and taking advantage of enrichment opportunities? Today’s well-documented and highly-publicized “achievement gap” between majority and minority students is associated with fewer educational opportunities, a poor quality of education, high dropout rates as a result

of cultural misunderstandings, negative stereotypes, and fewer resources” (Bernak, Chung & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005, p. 377; Education Trust, 1998; House & Martin, 1998; Jackson, 1999). And if these very different educational experiences and outcomes are attributed to the aforementioned factors, any suggested transformation must take that into consideration.

The empowerment philosophy acknowledges such differences with the intent of finding ways to still achieve a state of empowerment. Children/students may not always be aware that they are being treated differently, *why* they are being treated differently, and/or *who* is treating them differently, nor should they have to consider these acts of mistreatment on the part of others. After all, they are only children deserving of an education. Educators are expected to care about students, not judge who is more or less deserving of a better quality of education or who will value it more.

A number of studies indicate that regardless of the family’s economic situation, Black parents, and Black mothers in particular, are at least likely as, and often more likely than, White mothers to expect their children to achieve good grades, attend college, and graduate from college. Many Black mothers see educational achievement and success as the only defense against racism and sexism. (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 250)

So if an educator is practicing based on distortions around difference, then s/he can be part of the problem in the educational process for African American children and students. When it comes to school counseling, many acts of unfairness or inequity are difficult to discern due to the ambiguity of the counselor’s role in the educational process. A student/child may think “this is just the way things are,” when in actuality, it does not

have to be this way—change is possible. In order to determine the appropriate change(s) to make, we need to examine some of the issues that have persisted as a part of the problem.

While biased practice lies on one side of the issue of student performance, on the other side are arguments such as Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve* (1994), which

assert[s]...that much social dysfunction is directly attributable to lower intelligence. They demonstrate a consistent racial difference in IQ and assert that this difference is genetic and highly heritable. According to them, the genetic character of intelligence means that inequities cannot be fundamentally altered by environmental interventions such as social programs (for example, affirmative action). They further argue that this documented difference in intelligence between groups predicts disproportionate achievement for individuals within those groups. Thus, the underrepresentation of African Americans (and other lower IQ populations) on the higher rungs of the social ladder is not the result of historical discrimination but the natural result of free competition. In such competition, the most-qualified individuals supposedly succeed. Finally, Herrnstein and Murray argue that our present social system encourages lower IQ individuals to reproduce faster than higher IQ individuals. This, they predict, will cause the overall decline in intelligence in Western society as more low IQ genes are passed on to future generations. None of this can be considered racist because it is based on sound scientific reasoning. (Graves, 2002, p. 9)

Granted, one must decide on which side of the argument he or she stands; however, action still needs to be taken. If Herrnstein and Murray are correct, then the laws of segregation and “separate but equal” were and still are justified. Why waste time integrating the learning environments of groups of people who are obviously on very different learning curves? This is critical to the proposed empowerment philosophy because in its current format, it is not conceptualized to have one group or race to achieve one form of empowerment while another group achieves on another level. Herrnstein

and Murray (1994) also hold that social programs will not be able to overcome the inherent intellectual inferiority of African Americans in order to make any fundamental positive difference. Basically, there is nothing we can do about our state. However, if “Black people were...incapable of intellectual advancement,...if they really were biologically inferior, they would have manifested neither the desire nor the capability to acquire knowledge. Ergo, no prohibition of learning would have been necessary” (Davis, A., 1981, p. 101). So if the Bell Curve argument is not scientifically substantiated, then there must be socially-based reasons for wanting to educationally oppress one group of people.

“By eliminating the refuge that racists have in biology, we reveal their true program, which is, and has always been, a social one. Racists design and utilize their ideology to help maintain their privilege against other social groups” (Graves, 2004, p. 193). One might agree with Audre Lorde (1984) that all of the years that African Americans suffered under the laws of “separate but equal” and complete segregation were justified based on not knowing how to relate to one another despite our differences. Fear of the unknown caused irrational actions. Lorde (1984) contends that the misnaming and misusing of differences has this affect on our behavior toward one another. This implies a degree of choice, which would support the argument that race is socially constructed. She does acknowledge that there are differences between people, and

we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think

it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion. (Lorde, 1984, p. 115)

Whatever the justifications for one's beliefs, they must be addressed in some manner in the proposed transformation. Each person's perspective is his or her reality, which impacts beliefs about, interactions with, and responsibility towards others. What may be even worse, sometimes people do not know *why* they do what they do, even though the results of their unintentional or ill-conceived actions may be just as detrimental as *intentional* oppression.

To maintain the status quo may be another reason why African Americans had inequitable access to education in the past and receive inequitable treatment in the present. Giving the same opportunities would, to a certain degree, begin to level the playing field and allow other groups of people to experience educational, economic and social success, which may feel like competition for the American Dream to those who have always enjoyed it. Many slaves risked their lives to learn to read and then teach others. While "Black people who did receive academic instruction inevitably associated their knowledge with their people's collective battle for freedom" (Davis, 1981, p. 105), one slave code stated that "...teaching slaves to read and write tends to dissatisfaction in their minds, and to produce insurrection and rebellion" (Davis, 1981, p. 106). The Nat Turner Revolt in 1831 resulted in strengthened legislation prohibiting the education of slaves in the South, which meant that some in power did believe that "knowledge unfits a child to be a slave" (Davis, 1981, p. 100). People have known, at least since the

beginning of slavery, that education is the key to living humanely and productively. The willingness of Blacks/African Americans/Negroes to risk their lives to learn is evidenced by the words of a teacher in 1960s Raleigh, North Carolina: “It is surprising to me to see the amount of suffering which many of the people endure for the sake of sending their children to school” (Davis, 1981, p. 108).

The existence of legislation against educating Blacks/slaves/Negroes and institutionalized racism to deny certain groups equitable access to educational opportunities does not change the fact that “Black people want to be educated” (Davis, 1981, p. 106). It does, however, show the amount of work that would have to be put forth in changing this cycle of moral and educational disservice. The argument that African Americans do not value education is not substantiated, so any type of disservice should not be tolerated. “Denying African-Americans access to education and then arguing that their illiteracy proved their inferiority, was a central tool in whites’ subordination of Blacks; proving whites wrong in theory and in practice was a main concern of the free Black community” (Ammott & Matthaei, 1991, p. 154). The commitment to provide unbiased and appropriate educational service should be expected of all educators. Whether the practice is overt or covert, the result is the same—“social dominance benefits those in power and is detrimental to those who are not” (Graves, 2004, p. 203).

Does Race Determine Quality of Educational Service?

Janice E. Hale (2001) believes that “the school [should be] at the center of the effort to achieve upward mobility for African American children...[because] everyone is required to attend school” (p. 4). This is the one entity that can be systematically designed to be functional, unlike a child’s family or community. Not that schools do not need to vary in some ways based on the populations being served, but there are some life skills, lessons, and experiences that all children/students need to be exposed to in preparation for life. Hale’s personal experiences in negotiating her child’s education that she shares in *Learning While Black* (2001) are evidence of this and are quite similar to what I witnessed in my role as a school counselor. By learning how to negotiate the educational process so that her child would not suffer from educational disservice, Hale actually demonstrated two of the aspects of empowerment: “becom[ing] aware of the power dynamics at work in the [one’s] life context,...[and] develop[ing] the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over [one’s life]” (McWhirter, 1996, p. 224). Parents who are unable to negotiate the educational system in order to adequately advocate for their children/students are typically at the mercy of the school. When parents know what, why and how to demand on behalf of their children, educators are likely to step up to the plate and meet those demands—either to silence the squeaky wheel or because their own ability and ethics are called to task. No educators want to or like to have their commitment to students questioned, and when we come across parents who have the wherewithal to ask the right questions, we must show evidence of our commitment by performing and holding ourselves accountable. To address such an issue,

the school counselor, operating from an empowerment framework, works “collaboratively” with the parents and students, sharing any information about the educational process and academic program that will facilitate becoming “autonomous,...goal-directed,...independent,...internally controlled,...self-advocating,...self-reliant” (Bolton & Brookings, 1996, p. 255). However, this mode of operation must be pervasive throughout the educational program so that empowerment is not contained within the student’s relationship with the counselor. If the definition of empowerment and its many facets are embedded in the educational program by all educators in the school, students have the opportunity to skill-build toward empowerment through every experience.

Hale (2001) also believes that by changing the way educators think of African American children, we can change the way we educate them. “Correcting one’s earlier perceptions isn’t always easy” (Freire, 1985, p. 1985). The “self-examination” processes supported by Freire, Collins and hooks would have to be at the forefront of such change. Unless one is aware of and acknowledges his or her beliefs, in addition to taking corrective action, there can be no change. In Hale’s work with student teachers, she found that they were being taught to sympathize and empathize, which came to life in the form of low expectations for African American and low-income children/students. The low academic achievement, low educational and behavioral expectations, and low-level of instruction being offered were justified by statements such as: a “large number of our children receive free or reduced lunch,” “that is the best we can do with the populations we serve,” and “most of our children come from single-parent households” (Hale, 2001,

p. 44). If we as educators think of children in this way, then more than our actions have to change.

Transformation is a collaborative process, and a part of becoming empowered—the direction of the suggested transformation—is to be collaborative in our associations with others (Bolton & Brookings, 1996, p. 255). According to Freire (1985), “it is important to appreciate that social reality can be transformed; that it is made by men and can be changed by men; that it is not something untouchable, a fate or destiny that offers only one choice: accommodation” (pp. 39-40). The teachers Hale observed appear to have accepted this state as unchangeable as an excuse for their actions. One’s internal belief system about the ability levels of African American children and their educational philosophy of *how* and *why* these students need to be educated would require in-depth self-reflection.

One of the signals that [one has] chosen reactionary options...[instead of] developing opportunities for problem-posing to challenge her and the men and women with who she should be communicating...is [her] discomfort over the consequences of change, [her] distrust of the new, and (sometimes impossible to hide) [her] fears of losing “social status.” There is no room in [her] methodologies for communication, critical reflection, creativity, or collaboration; there is only room for ostensible manipulation. (Freire, 1985, p. 39)

According to the core concepts and dimensions that are a part of the empowerment counseling framework, communication, critical reflection, creativity, and collaboration are necessary in becoming empowered. The school does not have the direct power to change how a family functions, but educators “do have the power to have an impact on the functioning of the school, the basic unit of which is the interaction between the

teacher and the child” (Hale, 2001, p. 47). The school counselor operating from a framework of empowerment is appropriately positioned to facilitate this type of educational process.

Janice Hale conducted a study in which she tested children’s cognitive skills as they entered Head Start and then again in the higher elementary grades. The results revealed that “the longer the children stay[ed] in school, the more their performance deteriorate[d]. These data support the assertion that African American children do not *enter* school disadvantaged, they *leave* school disadvantaged. There is nothing wrong with the children, but there is clearly something wrong with what happens to them in school” (Hale, 2001, p. 46). This lead me to believe that these students are deprived of something within the formal educational process or something is done to adversely impact (stunt) their previously normal cognitive development. Regardless of which, the outcome is the same. The moral disservice and injustice are real.

Similar to the issues I have discussed as a part of my own counseling experiences, John Ogbu (2003) examined how the roles of counselors and teachers contribute to the achievement gap through the enrollment of African American students in honors and Advanced Placement (AP) level courses at the high school level. Having lower expectations for students based on race is in direct contradiction to the empowerment philosophy because it does not support “identity establishment” in a positive manner. Students Ogbu interviewed as a part of his study shared stories about how they were either discouraged from taking such courses or simply not “pushed” to take the courses.

Black students and their parents more or less perceived the counselors as gatekeepers who were reluctant to let Blacks into the honors and AP classes. Their gatekeeping function and reluctance make it necessary for some Black parents to intervene to enroll their children in those classes. It was widely believed that the reason the counselors were reluctant to let Black students take honors and AP courses was that they did not think that Blacks were capable of doing the work at that level. (Ogbu, 2003, p. 115)

Even though “becoming aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context” (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224) is a goal of empowerment, it is only empowering if you are attaining the skills to alter those dynamics. The counselors described in Ogbu’s work did not “support the empowerment of others in their community” (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224), which is key to the empowerment process. Acting as “gatekeepers” instead of supporters is the direct opposite of the counselor’s role in empowerment counseling. The empowerment philosophy can be utilized to help people work against racist beliefs and attitudes if they are acknowledged in the required self-examination process. The fact that parents would have to intervene for their child to be allowed an educational opportunity speaks directly to the same issue that Janice Hale (2001) shared and is more evidence that racism and bias do exist in present-day educational settings. But the question remains, who acts in the child’s best educational/academic interest when or if the parent is unaware of how to negotiate the system? Should not the child/student and parent be able to rely on the educators?

Adherence to a philosophy of empowerment would ensure parents that their students are receiving educational information and guidance that is consistent with that of affluent, “in-the-know” students. Plus, the students are not the only ones who are

supposed to benefit from the implementation of empowerment as a school counseling philosophy. The “community-oriented,” “collaborative,” and “interdependent” facets of empowerment are designed to benefit the collective group. This means that counselors will not act as gatekeepers, nor will students be arbitrarily enrolled in just any course. Whatever the method for enrolling children in the appropriate courses—using teacher recommendations, parental decisions, counselor placement, test scores, past academic records, etc.—it needs to be part of the transformative action. The course registration process is a direct reflection of teachers’, counselors’, and administrators’ expectations of students’ abilities and performance. According to Ogbu (2003), “equally important was that high school students believed that teachers’ lowered expectations were a part of lowered societal expectations for Blacks as a group” (p. 126), categorizing some of their biased actions towards students not as “outright racist, but it might even be like a subconscious thing” (p. 126). Whatever the reason, the result impeded the child’s pursuit of the “American Dream,” in which

the public school system is expected to provide all children, regardless of their background, with an equal opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills and credentials that will enable them enter the workforce and obtain jobs and wages based on a merit system. (Ogbu, 2003, p. 145)

When the Village is Not Allowed to Raise the Child

John Ogbu is not alone in his belief that educators’ expectations and beliefs about children’s abilities greatly impact the type of education they provide. In *Along Freedom Road* (1994), David Cecelski recounts the details of the desegregation of schools in Hyde

County, North Carolina, in the 1960s. The all-Black schools were closed, requiring those children to be bused to neighboring white schools and relegating many of the Black teachers and administrators to less visible, less influential positions. This inevitably changed the position many Black professionals held in the community. They were likely to have been the ones who were most strategically positioned to facilitate students/children becoming socially responsible, one of the dimensions of empowerment. (“Socially responsible: To understand and be committed to the collective well-being of the larger group to which one belongs)” (Bolton & Brookings, 1996, p. 256.) Educators were highly respected people in the Black community and parents had direct relationships with and knowledge of the people in charge of their children’s educational lives. This made them feel as if they had “voice” in their children’s education.

This educational climate and the loss of community control alienated some black citizens so thoroughly that they found it difficult to support the new schools. Many parents also observed a decline in student motivation, self-esteem, and academic performance. Racist treatment of black students within biracial schools only worsened an already difficult situation. Black students repeatedly encountered hostile attitudes, racial bias in student disciplining, segregated busing routes, unfair tracking into remedial and other lower-level classes, low academic expectations, and estrangement from extracurricular activities. (Cecelski, 1994, p. 9)

This type of educational experience can quickly alienate children in the school setting. If you are stripped of some of your most influential role models and of the nurturing environment that school once provided, and expected to learn from and with people who obviously do not want to share this experience with you, the direction and

meaningfulness of your educational experience will be altered, if not completely disrupted or roadblocked.

Audre Lorde makes a similar point in *Sister Outsider* (1984), and this also connects directly to my personal dilemma not only as an educator but as an African American having worked as a school counselor struggling to find a more effective resolution.

As Black people, if there is one thing we can learn from the 60s, it is how infinitely complex any move for liberation must be. For we must move against not only those forces which dehumanize us from the outside but also against those oppressive values which we have been forced to take into ourselves. (Lorde, 1984, p. 135)

Both inner and outer critical examination must occur in order for there to be true change. We must reflect upon our personal and professional beliefs and practices involving African Americans. Whereas David Cecelski (1994) documented African American educators as being highly respected to “take care of” the children of the community, I do not feel that parents have that kind of widespread collective commitment from today’s educators, including those of the African American race. Nor do I think they have that level of trust that African American educators are “raising the village’s children” as believed to have been the case in the past. So not only are today’s parents weary of the educational and social services being provided by whites in the formal educational system, they must be cautious of that of African Americans as well. This is not unrealistic or conspiracy theorist on the parents’ parts.

We who are Black are at an extraordinary point of choice within our lives. To refuse to participate in the shaping of our future is to give it up. Do not be misled into passivity either by false security (they don't mean me) or by despair (there's nothing we can do). Each of us must find our work and do it. (Lorde, 1984, p. 140)

Continuing the Mis-Education of the Negro

Another source that offers a critical perspective on the educational experiences of African Americans is Carter G. Woodson's *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933). According to Woodson (1933), "[r]eal education means to inspire people to live more abundantly, to learn to begin with life as they find it and make it better..." (p. 29). "Above all things, the effort [of education] must result in making a man think and do for himself" (p. xvi). This speaks directly to the focus of this study—empowerment. Children and students must be educated in preparation for life. Attending school to learn only what is in a textbook does not fulfill the needs they will have in life. Those in charge of the educational process have a social responsibility to make sure they are contributing positively to the lives of those seeking an education. However, given the issues that surrounded Jim Crow laws, the Dred Scott Decision of 1857, Plessey v. Ferguson (1896), Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954), and other acts of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation, not everyone shares this level of responsibility. "In the Dred Scott Decision of 1857, Chief Justice Taney said that Scott had '...no rights that a white man is bound to respect'" (Graves, 2004, p. 196). Probably the easiest way to control a person is to control the amount and quality of education he receives. "When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions" (Woodson, 1933, p. xix). By contributing to the denial of access to education to certain groups of

people, the cycle of oppression and dominance continues indefinitely. Such a problem is not easily or quickly rectified by boycotting or passing a law.

There must be realization and acknowledgment by parties on both sides of the issue that what is occurring is unjust in every manner—ethically, morally and socially. Those who have voice in the educational process have a responsibility to work in order to change the situation. Carter G. Woodson (1933) believes that “the only question which concerns us here is whether these ‘educated’ persons are actually equipped to face the ordeal before them or unconsciously contribute to their own undoing by perpetuating the regime of the oppressor” (p. xvii). For instance, if the educators, lawmakers, policymakers, and business people are not sure what to do, how to do it, or why it should be done, positive change is highly unlikely. The children/students and members of society who should benefit are not likely to reap any benefits at all. The changes are likely to have the same effect as using a bandaid on the wound of an amputated limb—only the *illusion* that someone is actually providing the needed help. “Education...has to be more than just a job...it is a great responsibility...and the future is at stake” (Giovanni, 1994, p. 111).

Race and Educational Justice

I agree with Carter G. Woodson (1933) that drastic action must be taken, but when these actions have the potential to affect others, particularly children, care and direction must go into the actions. We cannot simply continue *saying* that something is wrong; we must do something to correct or improve it. “One should rely on protest only

when it is supported by a constructive program” (Woodson, 1933, p. 29). The proposed empowerment philosophy for school counseling takes us beyond protest into the realm of critical action. This “constructive program” and its accompanying actions allow us to take into consideration factors that impact children and students, which may include race and the educational injustice that often accompanies it. We cannot just complain; we must put just as much effort into creating a program of change that will actually address the issues at hand. There are numerous reform and transformation models, as well as a great deal of educational propaganda and jargon, but how much of this addresses, for instance, the racial bias that is still prevalent in the formal educational arena? “Unfortunately for the youth of marginalized communities, their educational experience also includes an indoctrination into oppression” (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007, p. 328).

Now that we have noted the racial bias and educational injustice that have persisted over time, we must move beyond surface-level acknowledgement. This knowledge must inform our philosophy and practice of education, justice and service. If not, nothing changes and the only affect on those who have suffered through disservice will be continued suffering. What is worse than having power and knowledge and not taking action, is being oppressed and not knowing what needs to be done and not feeling you have the power (intellectually, educationally, economically, authoritatively) to affect the needed change. “American students collectively do not learn how centuries of racism and classism have contributed to the existence of privileged classes and oppressed classes” (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007, p. 328). For instance, consider the plight of African Americans who have been convinced that their race is the reason for their

oppressed state, their inferior opportunities and the unfair or unjust treatment by others.

Our race is something we cannot do anything about; have no control over.

[T]o handicap a student by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching. It kills one's aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime. It is strange, then, that the friends of truth and the promoters of freedom have not risen up against the present propaganda in the schools and crushed it. (Woodson, 1933, p. 3)

Until this action of rising against it and crushing it occurs, the cycle will continue. This action also depends on one's role.

For educators, according to bell hooks (1990), "education for critical consciousness is the most important task before us. Working in the academy,...it is through a liberatory pedagogy that we make useful critical intervention" (pp. 5-6). We cannot believe that we are accomplishing the task of liberation if those with whom we are working are not aware of what is occurring. "I have found that students are much more engaged when they are learning how to think critically and analytically by exploring concrete aspects of their reality" (hooks, 1990, p. 6). There must be connection between their reality and the abstract concepts being conveyed in the academic setting. Otherwise, much of it will be lost on their day-to-day lives and not have the intended impact of improving their situations and their beliefs about their future lives. As with empowerment counseling, if the experiences that are designed to assist students in becoming empowered are not revealed to them as such, they are most likely to yield no reward, no improvement.

A couple of critical factors must be remembered when trying to assist in improving the situation for a group of people as well as when trying to improve relationships between groups. Nikki Giovanni (1994) believes that “the purpose of any leadership is to build more leadership. The purpose of being a spokesperson is to speak until the people gain a voice” (p. 157). You do not want to put any group in a position of dependence where they are unable to stand on their own and begin to speak and act on their own behalf. Giovanni’s beliefs tie directly into some key facets of the empowerment school counseling philosophy.

[Becoming] *assertive*: To stand up for one’s convictions, values, and feelings.... *independent*: To be free from the influence or domination of others....*self-advocating*: To stand up for one’s rights and draw on internal strength and support for actions [and]....*self-efficacious*: To believe that one is able, through one’s own efforts, to bring about desired outcomes” (Bolton & Brookings, 1996, p. 255).

My belief that school counselors are already in the needed position to affect the needed change is in congruence with Cheryl Gilkes’ (1983) belief that we have to find a way to “...get inside those institutions and work from top to bottom: how they set policies; who’s setting policies; why this is the policy” (p. 159). If we remain on the outside, nothing can truly change. There must be a power shift in both how decisions are made and in the knowledge of why such decisions are made. Blind trust is not an option. This is not to say that no one can be trusted, but not everyone will know how to effectively utilize their position or power in the liberatory or empowerment process. Some educators today do not realize the power they hold in the lives of children/students with whom they work, which ultimately affects the societies and communities in which they live. And

even if some realize they possess such power, do they truly know how to utilize it in a manner that will benefit everyone? One must “understand [their] privileged position in the process of helping so as not to...turn help into a type of missionary paternalism and...limit the possibilities for the creation of structures that lead to real empowerment” (Macedo in Freire, 1998, p. xxix). Educators cannot simply look at their students and parents as charity cases and “throw” a variety of opportunities their way. An effective system of service must be devised and implemented.

In looking at the various methods of educational disservice from which African American children have suffered and are still suffering, whether because of blatant racism or other forms of bias, we are still in a state of crisis. With such similarities between what occurred decades ago when African Americans were legally denied access to different aspects of formal education and what is still occurring under more covert circumstances today, the same approaches or solutions will obviously not be effective.

If our history has taught us anything, it is that action for change directed only against the external conditions of our oppressions is not enough. In order to be whole, we must recognize the despair oppression plants within each of us—that thin persistent voice that says our efforts are useless, it will never change, so why bother, accept it. (Lorde, 1984, p. 142)

To create an effective resolution to address the issue at hand, several factors must come together almost simultaneously. Relegating behaviorally challenged African American boys to special education programs and denying African American students access to college preparatory (honors and Advanced Placement) courses are only two instances of how race might impact the educational process for some children. Race, on a variety of

levels, must be taken into consideration when addressing the needs of today's students and children. It is more than simply finding methods to improve standardized test scores and graduate more students. If the graduates are ill-equipped to live productive lives after receiving their diplomas, what has been achieved to improve their quality of life and the quality of community and society? The oppressors and oppressed maintain their positions in relation to one another, and those with power (on various levels) continue making decisions for the masses, which greatly effects the outcome of the educational process for everyone involved. In an effort to better serve children/students so that they leave their K-12 formal educational years empowered to live lives of choice, we as educators must chose to do transformative work, both philosophically and practically.

Summary

This chapter's discussion of the role race plays in school counseling, the overall educational process, and the proposed empowerment school counseling framework was necessary because the impact must be recognized by all involved stakeholders—counselors, administrators, teachers, parents, and the student/children themselves. All students/children need to be served by the school's programs, regardless of differences, which means any implemented programs must take those characteristics and qualities into consideration. And even though steps may need to be taken in some situations and locations to “level the playing field” for minority students, it must be done as a part of our responsibility to better serve students and children. Historical and contemporary literature on the subject of race in education was examined to shed light on the plight of

African Americans in the formal educational arena. Some of the obstacles and issues have not changed, despite policies, laws, and reform efforts. The variety of perspectives covered in the literature on race as it relates to education, academic aptitude and performance, social development, and problems encountered in the formal educational arena was to further set the stage for consideration of the suggested empowerment philosophy for school counseling. This chapter was not about recounting the many victories and defeats that African Americans have encountered in the fight for access and equity in education, but to illustrate that race is critical to any transformation that must take place, including in school counseling. The acknowledgement of race for this study is about how to improve service for everyone, not to continue oppressive practices to maintain the status quo or to garner sympathy for a particular group.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHIFT TO EMPOWER: A CONCEPTUAL ARGUMENT FOR AN EMPOWERMENT COUNSELING PHILOSOPHY AND FRAMEWORK

Revolution begins with the self, in the self. (Toni Cade Bambara, 1970, p. 229)

You become strong by doing the things you need to be strong for. This is the way genuine learning takes place. (Audre Lorde, 1984, p. 83)

My experiences as a school counselor were used to help illustrate and expose some of the philosophical and practical problems in school counseling and the need for change in how counseling services are provided to children/students and the school community. In determining the best direction for improvement, a range of relevant literature was examined. The previous chapters also explored factors that can positively impact school counseling. This culminating chapter is a conceptual look at what we can and should do differently and how it impacts those involved. This process is to pave the foundation for a transformation to empowerment as a school counseling philosophy. Not serving children and students in ways that are effectively addressing the needs they present when they arrive at the doors of the school makes this change necessary. Years have been spent trying to make students fit into existing models while we react in emergency mode to any non-conformist behaviors. Not that the school or educators are equipped to “fix” all of the problems presented by children and students, neither can we continue to overlook such problems as we pursue alternate ways to meet

students'/children's needs. The academic achievement gaps and behavioral issues that are at the center of numerous reform trends today will continue to exist until we begin to look through a different lens. To provide that lens and facilitate understanding of the proposed transformation, below I will compare it to and contrast it with the traditional school counseling paradigm, including what it entails theoretically for everyone involved. This will allow for extensive, focused discussion on the implications for school counselors, the children and students to be served, counselor educators, other school educators and members of the community and society.

EMPOWERMENT PARADIGM

- Developmental/ongoing
- Collective responsibility for growth
- Problem belongs to everyone (global)
- Educative
- Growth-focused
- Proactive/preventative
- Change requires self-examination by everyone

TRADITIONAL PARADIGM

- “Quick fix”
- Individual responsibility for growth (isolation)
- Problem belongs to the student (individual; alienated)
- Remedial
- Problem-focused
- Reactive
- Change focuses on routines/ techniques of practitioners
- Disruption gets attention

Looking Through a Lens of Empowerment

This suggested transformation will involve self-examination of one's beliefs, values, and concept of self and others. From the counselors' standpoint, attempting to

operate from a philosophical framework in which you do not believe amounts to little more than a routine, going through the motions. Though one must be careful not to handicap students, children, and parents by the kind of help being offered, such as the “false generosity” that Paulo Freire (1970) mentioned, one should not be able to stand by while an injustice occurs, especially toward children and students. We are all responsible. As their needs are not being met by current counseling and educational programs and services, we are committing an injustice. Considering the current voids in and level of ambiguity surrounding the school counseling profession, this discussion of a potentially educationally and socially responsible counseling philosophy is critical. Because without the adequate analysis and dialogue, how can effective practice be developed?

Is an empowerment philosophy encompassing enough and educationally and socially responsible enough to be an effective operating framework for school counselors? Can a counselor’s beliefs evolve into an empowerment philosophy that guides his/her practice? For this concept to be taken as a serious suggestion and given appropriate consideration in transforming school counseling practice to better meet the needs of school communities, consider it against the limitations of the currently popular counseling theories discussed in Chapter Two. Also taken into consideration how counselors spend much of their time. What are we *not* doing and why? Is there anything more important than children’s current and future welfare/quality of life? While the behavioral and reality counseling approaches have some benefits for students and children being served, there are also some significant areas in which they are inadequate:

sole focus on the currently presented problem (the here and now); focus on overt behavior/symptoms; lack of personal control (the world acts upon man); lack of focus on client's other needs (academic, personal/social, emotional). In some instances, it appears that the needs of *children* have taken a backseat to those of *students* in the school setting, which may account for the counseling focus on the behavior modification and our reliance on traditional counseling frameworks. If school counselors are to lead the way in establishing and maintaining a framework by which to more adequately meet the needs of students and the school community, the needs of *children* must also be acknowledged and addressed. What will it take to make us re-focus on what is important in education, namely people (children, students, parents, community members)?

Based on the following definition of empowerment as noted in Chapter One, one would feel that they have some degree of control over his/her life or destiny:

Empowerment is the process by which people, organizations, or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others, and (d) support the empowerment of others in their community. (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224).

The concept of empowerment in an educational setting and with particular regards to children and students is not simply a matter of *giving* someone power or authority over a situation or allowing them total autonomy within the process. This is "false generosity" in that power is granted on someone else's terms—when, how, and to what degree is determined by those in power. They are given the impression that their voices are being valued and heard even when or if they are not. This is a political act, whether intentional

or unintentional. Child/student empowerment must start with some of the most basic needs and move to the more refined skills needed for life-long learning and consistent productivity. Children and students need to have the ability to make informed decisions in the many aspects of their lives, but attempts to achieve this will be futile without an assessment of where they are starting, what personal baggage they carry, and the various needs that must be met in order for them to focus fully on becoming empowered.

In order for school counselors and their programs to aid the empowerment of children and students, a vast array of methodological techniques and services would need to be incorporated, inclusive of but not limited to: needs assessment inventories; skill-building opportunities and experiences; enrichment activities for the purposes of exposure and enlightenment; practice; refinement of skills and talents; information gathering; coping skills (academically, personally/socially, vocationally); decision-making skills. These techniques and services would need to be implemented in such a manner that is inclusive of Bolton and Brookings' (1996) and Thomsen's (2002) dimensions of empowerment, while holding sacred the relationship factors needed when working with children and students. Considering the various aspects of what an empowerment process would need to consist of from school counseling and educational perspectives, our attention would need to focus on the worthiness of this concept as a philosophical as well as a practical counseling framework.

Empowerment as School Counseling Practice: What Might It Look Like?

The transformation that is being proposed in this study is not a set of defined routines or an overly structured or methodical approach to school counseling like some of the earlier systems that were discussed and are prevalent in schools today, because students must be met where they are but still have a goal in mind. This process of attaining that goal, however, cannot be so concrete that adjustments cannot be made for children's/students' differences. This is a move away from the typical service-oriented and reactionary approaches of school counseling. The practices that accompany an empowerment school counseling philosophy are based on the needs presented by those being served at a particular school and as assessed by the faculty of that school.

Assessing students'/children's awareness and operational levels within these dimensions, individually and collectively, is what will determine the "how" aspects of the empowerment school counseling framework. Not everyone is at the same degree of empowerment and counselors and other educators need to be keenly aware of individual achievement. It must be both programmatic and developmental in nature, and this philosophical shift in school counseling requires a heightened level of sensitivity and attentiveness to children's/students' needs and impacting factors such as race, class, and literacy levels, and how such factors are articulated and assessed. For example,

a counselor who has some familiarity with the specific and unique issues that concern middle-class and African American youngsters is better poised to listen empathically, recognize the relationships between race and social class, and less likely to discount or unintentionally avoid prominent features of adolescents' lives. (Day-Vines, 2003, p 17).

Students/children need assistance and guidance in their preparation to lead productive lives both in and beyond the formal educational setting. Therefore, school counselors must have a belief that children/students can learn how to cope with whatever life presents while pursuing their goals. Guiding children/students through gaining and enhancing the skills necessary to be productive members of their schools and communities, where they are able to make sound, informed decisions, while adapting to the demands of their surroundings and the never-ending changes of society would be some of the overall responsibilities of the educators in the formal educational setting. Counselors are to facilitate this process. Granted, this sounds like the basic premise of many school mission statements, but to accomplish this task, we cannot make children/students fit into a framework that will not flex to account for their “baggage.”

To ignore the political, social, and economic context within which the client operates and survives is to risk identifying the source of the problems as the client, [in this case the student/child], even when these external variables clearly play at least a contributing role in client problems. (McWhirter, 1991, p. 225)

This is a part of serving the “whole child.”

The dimensions of the proposed empowerment school counseling philosophy provide a framework with a “lens” that helps *and requires* the counselor/facilitator to assess, plan, and assist. For instance, one school community may serve a population of more affluent students who are adept at speaking the Queen’s English, while another school community may need to tackle the issue of “code-switching” as they work with teenagers on job interviewing skills. However, the individual student in each of these

situations may be at very different places of mastery. “Each experience will have characteristics unique to the roles of the people and the situations involved, for what empowers members of one...group...may violate the...values of another” (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224). And since this process is about more than simply attaining a set of skills, counseling practice will have to give attention to the “whole child.” Facilitating empowerment by fostering critical consciousness can take the form of “consciousness-raising groups for students of marginalized communities [in which they] engage...in dialogue surrounding various issues of oppression” (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007, p. 330). Another method of facilitation might be participation in social action groups, such as student government, parent-teacher-student associations, political rally groups, or ethnic student groups. “This can help students in developing self-efficacy with regard to community organizing,...and give students a better understanding of the benefits of taking control of one’s sociopolitical condition” (Hipolito-Delgado, 2007, p. 330).

Empowerment in practice is not cookie-cutter, and a template for operation will more than likely serve the purpose of handicapping the counselors who have not made their own professional and personal philosophical shift. Such counselors are likely to think they are being effective simply by changing their routines. Attempting to operate from a philosophical perspective in which you do not believe will only feel like more work, because the goals and dimensions are not a part of who you are and what you believe about other people. Empowerment entails gaining skills that one needs in order to take control of and improve his/her quality of life and potential for productivity, which makes this quite different from the self-empowerment that Carolyn Tucker (1999)

discusses in regards to behavior and academic failure. “Choice by the learner is and always will be an important aspect of American education. The way to improve education is not to take the choice away from those who will be the most affected by choices, but to improve their ability to make their own decisions” (Walz, 1984, p. 1). In the school setting, counselors are key to this process because they *should* possess the training to assess and design educational programs to address such needs. How that training is used within an empowerment counseling framework impacts its effectiveness. Plus, it requires the support of the school’s administration through curriculum design and implementation, and counselors must be an integral part of the educational decision-making team in order to affect this type of change. “More than anyone in the school, the counselor is in a position to interpret the student to educational decision-makers and to emphasize the importance of understanding and working with students” (Walz, 1984, p. 1).

Like any other school counseling approach, this proposed empowerment school counseling philosophy possesses basic elements, not all of which will be utilized in the same way by all counselors at all schools with all students. However, it is critical that counselors and other educators in the school are aware of these elements and how they can be utilized within the educational program to achieve the goals of the program. They are not to be incorporated as quick-fix, triage techniques like those of current reactive and remedial counseling practices. Oftentimes counselors are required to implement an eclectic counseling approach to meet the specific needs of various students. An empowerment school counseling approach, in practice, requires the counselor and faculty

to design the most appropriate program based on the needs of the student. It is both proactive and flexible in design. Facilitating empowerment in schools “implies fostering [students’] critical consciousness, facilitating the development of positive identity, and encouraging social action on the part of students” (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007, p. 330). There is no one set of routines that will accomplish this with every student, which means the counselors, teachers, and administrators in the school would need to design and implement a progressive curriculum that incorporates means to expose students to these elements. This curriculum, however, would need to be inclusive of students from marginalized backgrounds, communities, etc.

According to Hipolito-Delgado & Lee (2007),

students can be aided in understanding how their sociopolitical situation is a product of their membership in a marginalized community. Students of marginalized communities can be helped to see how living in such areas influences their daily lives, their political representation, and their opportunities for advancement in American society” (p. 330).

Not only can students who are members of such marginalized groups become empowered through such critical consciousness, but so can non-members. A part of empowerment is becoming socially responsible, collaborative, and interdependent (Bolton & Brookings, 1996). There is not a call within this transformation for a separate multicultural empowerment philosophy for school counseling, as the goals and dimensions of the proposed recommendation lend themselves to widespread use, and any counseling framework that requires that students be segregated in any manner is counter to the philosophy.

Crises in schools will arise and must still be handled appropriately and efficiently, but outside of such an unforeseen event, this approach is a part of the day-to-day educational program. In addition to the subject area lessons that students learn in each of their classes, there are life lessons that are key to the educational process and their lifelong learning process. The students at my current high school studied and dialogued about the “Jena 6” case from a social justice perspective, not from a perspective of guilt or innocence. This is very close to the life that so many of them live. It was relevant on a number of levels and had the potential to be both motivational and enlightening. Students learned about the justice system by studying a real-life case, as well as interacted with one another and adults around the concepts of fairness, equity and individual rights versus community good. They were also able to self-disclose about similar personal situations. The activities and programs that were designed both inside and outside the classroom that tied together history/social science, English, civics, leadership, and science are just a sample of how a philosophy of empowerment can be integrated throughout the educational program. Incorporating means by which students/children can examine their current state, whether economically, socially, academically, politically, and their ways of being is at the heart of the empowerment school counseling framework. All aspects must be understandable, relevant, and useful. School counselors must be directly involved in leading these types of efforts to ensure that the “whole child” is addressed, that the experience is appropriate for students’ developmental levels, and that the experience is connected to the overall goal of empowerment. Since counselors are responsible for training the other educators in the

school to incorporate empowerment practices, they have to ensure that teachers and administrators are keenly aware of how such programs are driven by a philosophy of empowerment. As noted in the empowerment school counseling paradigm, everyone is responsible for growth, which means the educators as well as the students must be willing to step out of their comfort zones during such opportunities for growth process.

Within the proposed philosophy, there is enough flexibility that students from different backgrounds and levels of need can be effectively served—gain some degree of empowerment over their current state and/or to improve their future potential. An educational program designed to focus on certain key factors (in addition to subject area academics) is more likely to effectively meet the needs of students in a proactive, needs-attentive manner. “Because our actions change the world from one in which we merely exist to one over which we have some control, they enable us to see everyday life as being in process and therefore amendable to change” (Collins, 1991, p. 113). If students are able to learn the skills needed to become more independent and productive thinkers, learners, and societal members, they have the opportunity to gain greater control over their life outcomes. For instance, as students develop a sense of social responsibility through the experience of an intentionally designed counseling program, they are empowered to *choose* to “alleviate the suffering of others. Through experience, they find that choice and change are possible—first in themselves and, by extension, in the community and society at large” (Kessler, p. 72). They can leave with the ability to make the choice of success. And if school counselors take the lead in this process, it will help solidify their role in the school setting to students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

They can guide the process of “helping students find connection, compassion, and character at school” (Kessler, *cover*, 2000).

The high school where I currently work is designed to focus on health sciences and research. So not only do we provide exposure to the curriculum in the classroom and advice on how students are to present themselves to the numerous medical professionals they encounter, we take them into the real world to have that experience. During such an experience at the Morehouse College School of Medicine, students in grades 9-11 were able to participate in a simulated emergency room trauma, speak with current medical school students, and have one-on-one and small group conversations with practicing physicians. Without the real-world experience and opportunities to accompany the advice or the classroom lessons, students never know what “it” looks like in person. Our students have the opportunity to develop skills, test them in the real world, try and succeed or fail, form a community of learners, understand what it means to contribute or not, develop their “voice,” understand what happens when that voice is not used or heard, and study the meaning of justice and equity. These opportunities are incorporated in the process of learning to make more informed decisions that will inevitably affect their quality of life.

The elements of the proposed empowerment philosophy all require a transformed role for the school counselor, including their impact on the school’s curriculum. Classroom guidance can be disconnected when only provided by the school counselors on rare occasions and is not connected to any other experiences that students are having. If those guidance lessons are not being reinforced by other faculty members, what does

the student do with that information? When the elements of the philosophy are a part of the overall school program, they are no longer disconnected and the students do not have to decide how to compartmentalize the information because it is all life-related and they learn to easily transfer it from one experience to the next.

For instance, Potts (2003) holds that “the development of positive identity can come from teaching students more accurately about their history and culture” (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007, p. 30). The school counselor can advocate for this type of curriculum infusion by working directly with subject area teachers and helping design relevant programs. But without key people in place in order to begin and sustain this process, it will stall and the students will never find use for it beyond the schoolhouse walls. The fear is that “it may sound good in theory.” If the school counselor is unwilling to be transformed, what can be accomplished through a philosophical shift in the educational environment? “History tells us that great change can be brought about by even small groups with a vision” (Graves, 2004, p. 207).

Another key area that we cannot afford to overlook is how to ensure that the adopted empowerment school counseling philosophy and framework is inclusive of all groups. This is not a matter of equipping only the marginalized groups with the skills of empowerment. All students and children are in need of productive coping skills. While Solomon (1976) defined empowerment as

the process whereby persons who belong to a stigmatized social category throughout their lives can be assisted to develop and increase skills in the exercise of interpersonal influence and the performance of valued social rules (p. 6),

there is a need for such skills in all groups, regardless of the degree of marginality. While McWhirter (1991) promotes empowerment as a *part* of counseling, this study is promoting empowerment *as* counseling, using many of the facets that she calls for by her definition and methods, as well as those that Lee (1991), Bernak, Chung, and Siroskey-Sabdo (2005), and Astramovich and Harris (2007) call for in their descriptions of multicultural counseling strategies. These similarities illustrate how the proposed transformation can be beneficial when considering the “whole child” as well as when working with children and students of marginalized groups. The ultimate goal is still empowerment. The definitions of empowerment offered by Solomon (1976) and Gutierrez (1988) focus on what are considered powerless or marginalized populations, but the goals that are to be achieved through the empowerment process should not be exclusive to those groups, otherwise we have not gained a more human way of being with one another in the world. All that would be accomplished are several individuals who have privately achieved improved ways of being that are disconnected from the rest of society. The psychological and extrinsic gains of the empowerment process can be useful to all. The types of gains that can be made through the empowerment process are not to maintain or support oppression of any group, but to uplift those who need uplifting, individually and collectively, and to bring newfound awareness to the oppressors or those in power as to what their role is in the process. The strategies that an empowerment school counseling philosophy will require at individual schools, based on the needs of the students/children and the community being served, are critical to its success. Consideration must be made for facets of the empowerment framework that are unique to

groups based on factors such as race, but empowerment is not to be used as a means of segregating groups based on these differences. A different approach does not equate to a different outcome. Becoming empowered is the expected and desired outcome for all.

Implications When We Are All Responsible

School Counselors

As discussed in earlier chapters of this study, the proposed transformation would prove to be critical for school counselors, those who are already practicing and those in-training, as well as for counselor educators. This type of shift would require the type of personal and professional inner-change that Paulo Freire (1998) stated is oftentimes felt to be a threat to many. Going beyond routine changes in techniques and tasks means that a school counselor would need to engage in self-assessment and reflection when deciding whether or not to shift to an empowerment philosophy. “It is evident that if professional school counselors are to be successful in facilitating the empowerment of students, they must engage in a self-reflective process that leads to their own development of critical consciousness and sense of empowerment” (Hipolito-Delgado, 2007, p. 344). The definition of empowerment offered by McWhirter (1991) requires that counselors, teachers, counselor educators, and administrators examine their relations with others and approach them from both an ethic of care and an ethic of justice. The basic dimensions of empowerment promoted by Bolton & Brookings (1996) and Thomsen (2002) speak directly to the notion that in order to become empowered, one would need to do more than change a few routines. The social responsibility that the ethics of care and justice

exhibit incorporate practically all of the elements of empowerment, including the core concepts listed in Chapter One and discussed throughout this study, and offers additional guides to follow in determining in what regard we need to hold others, both personally and professionally. “The counselor’s view of human nature has implications for client empowerment” (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224).

The ethic of care requires that we take into consideration who benefits from decisions, who is hurt by decisions, long-term and short-term effects of decisions, individual contributions to society, how to build relationships/connections between people, everyone having a voice, listening to others when making moral decisions, how to facilitate a sense of belonging, and individual needs (Noddings, 1984, 1992; Gilligan, 1982, 1987; Larrabee, 1993; Kessler, 2000). The ethic of justice requires that we ask what is fair, equitable, and just, what are the exceptions, what are the priorities, and what are the rights of the individual vs. good of the community (Freire, 1921, 1971; Purpel, 1999; hooks, 1994). These ethics share similarities with one another as well as with the philosophy of empowerment. This proposed transformation requires a foundational framework on which to base the empowering work, because simply stating that being empowered is the best way to be/live or the ultimate life goal to achieve isn’t enough. But if you have a belief in a set of values, for instance, that are embedded in care and justice, then the goal of achieving empowerment for self and others is grounded in a way of life in which you believe.

From a practical perspective, counselors’ values and beliefs about individuals and human relationships should be evident. This may explain some of the oppressive acts on

the part of counselors that result in educational and moral disservice. The values and beliefs that are exhibited in their counseling philosophy and practice are indicative of how those counselors feel and what they believe about certain groups of people, which is quite similar to the “gatekeeper” practices that Hart and Jacobi (1992) described. Embedding the ethics of care and justice in one’s empowerment counseling framework does not mean moving away from the empowerment philosophy, but giving it additional foundational support and weight due to the similarities to empowerment and the credibility of these philosophies. Buying into a different philosophical perspective does not mean that everything will change about one’s practice. This does not mean that school counselors would no longer engage in one-on-one individual counseling sessions with students who are experiencing personal problems. There is still value in focused small group counseling in which counselors and students focus on grief/loss, divorce, etc. However, this does mean that counselor education programs need to prepare school counselors to practice effectively considering these expanded conditions.

Counselor Educators and Training Programs

Study and training in topics of ethics, confidentiality, and suicide lethality assessment are still very necessary in graduate programs. But additional training in some areas would be needed and other aspects would require some restructuring or stricter guidelines:

1. Counselors need to be able to manage adults as well as students in the empowerment process. (Counselors will not be able to create and/or monitor each

and every student's experiences.) Other professionals must be equipped with the necessary skills to have a "teachable" moment outside of their specific subject area. Counselors will need to have the capacity to provide professional development to help the other educators embed the empowerment processes into the school's overall educational program. How that happens in each school would need to become a part of curriculum development by the faculty, with the counselor playing an integral role.

2. Counseling philosophies need to be more fully and realistically examined as a part of the graduate training programs. This is not to say that counselor trainees with opposing views will be banished from the program or denied access, but if their philosophies about children, education, moral responsibility, etc. are incongruent with the needs of those to be served, are they going to help the situation or perpetuate the existing problems?
3. Even though counselor education programs may touch on the ethics of care and justice when teaching graduate students about helping relationships, the transformation of counselor education will require these perspectives be embedded in every course and every experience. If school counselor trainees and counselor educators engage in in-depth study of the ethics of care and justice, as they study empowerment school counseling, they are likely to gain a better understanding of their own personal human relationships as well as how they want to practice counseling in regards to children/students. Empowerment is not a set of routines; it is a fluid state of being. "It is...important to recognize that the

empowerment process represents a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Likewise, there are no specific beginning and end states of empowerment” (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224). In order for the fluid state of being to begin and exist, it must be grounded, and the ethics of care and justice are very closely related and quite encompassing of the dimensions, core concepts, and assumptions of the empowerment philosophy.

4. Counselor educators will need to reassess their program completion standards, possibly implementing more detailed processes by which to evaluate the trainees’ level of preparedness for potential effectiveness in real-world practice. This would require restructuring of practicum and internship experiences, because school counselors, for the most part, are likely to take on the habits of practice of those who train them.

Counselors are given lots of training in working with children/students, but graduate programs are lacking when it comes to training them to provide extensive professional development for the other adults in the building. Paulo Freire (1973) “emphasize[s] that in educating adults, to avoid a rote, mechanical process one must make it possible for them to achieve critical consciousness” (p. 56). School counselors must be taught how to do this, as it is key to an empowerment school counseling program because every adult in the building will need to be involved in some way. It will take on a train-the-trainer format in that the school counselor will be in a position to continuously provide professional development to teachers and administrators on how to best embed the dimensions of empowerment within the educational curriculum of the school. More

importantly, they must guide the process of thought-changing. “Teaching the purely technical aspect of the procedure is not difficult; the difficulty lies rather in the creation of a new attitude—that of dialogue, so absent in our own upbringing and education (Freire, 1973, p. 52).

Other Educators (Teachers, Administrators, Community)

In order to incorporate something substantially different into the overall educational program, the support of the administrators is also vital. Since building-level principals typically determine the role of the school’s counselors and any other duties that are assigned to various faculty members, they are likely to have to alter the structure of job assignments and responsibilities. The counselor and counseling program will need to become integral parts of the educational process. If it is determined that an empowerment philosophy and framework are appropriate to meet the needs of the school community, counselors will have to engage in training other faculty members to recognize teachable moments and implementing this philosophy as a part of the overall educational program. Just like counselors, if teachers do not believe in it, it is simply a change in routine, one more thing to do, so teacher buy-in is critical to successful implementation. “If the education profession is to flourish and if schools are to be a vital force in society, it is necessary to rebuild the school into a lifelong learning laboratory not only for children, but for the teachers as well” (Smith & Fenstermacher, 1999, p. 173). Very similar to practicing counselors, this also means intensive professional development or re-training for the teachers to involve a process of unlearning old methods, techniques,

and philosophies. For this to occur, the possibly threatening self-examination process that Freire and Collins mentioned is necessary. The practical aspect of this training would include how to train the faculty of the school as well as how the school's curriculum will need to be altered. This illustrates how, in the empowerment school counseling framework, the scope of practice must change for not only the school counselor, but other educators as well.

If counselors and teachers have not been trained to facilitate such methods of growth among students, their practice will appear fragmented and disconnected from the overall goal of empowerment. It is similar in some ways to that of developmental school counseling programs in that the responsibilities of design, delivery, individual and small group counseling, consultation, coordination, management, and evaluation still exist (Sears & Coy, 1991). The difference is in the philosophical beliefs and the details that need to accompany those beliefs. *How* a counselor, along with a school's faculty, would design an empowerment school counseling program would take on a different look than a typical service-oriented, reactionary school counseling program. Like with the examples discussed earlier, methodological details depend on the specific needs of the school community (students/children). This is also where the community becomes an integral part of this process.

Within the proposed empowerment counseling philosophy and framework, I contend that everyone owns growth, which means that everyone is responsible for not only his personal growth, but also for that of his fellow man, woman, and child, and everyone owns any problems that may be an obstacle to that growth.

Problem analysis within the schools is empowering when responsibility for the problem is shared among students, parents, the school system, and the larger society. Rather than assigning blame at the individual level, responsibility for the problem is shared among each group involved and each group is accountable for contributing solutions (McWhirter, 1991, p. 223).

No longer can you sit outside of society and wait for others to join you or to resolve all of the problems. You must join in the collective and collaborative efforts of creating a more just society for all. With traditional school counseling paradigms, the individual is held solely responsible for changing any negative behaviors, attitudes and views of humanity. In the proposed paradigm, the whole community is responsible. By not assuming responsibility for self as well as community, we are saying it is not about “us,” it is about “them.” As in most group efforts, people are likely to attempt to contribute positively to the endeavor when it impacts them in some way, whether personally, professionally, economically, psychologically/mentally, socially, etc.

For us all to be ultimately responsible for each other’s empowerment, we have to contribute with that same level of passion and commitment. We assume responsibility for successes and failures, trying and quitting. For members of the community who do not hold the position of faculty/staff within a school setting, this implies that you take a vested interest in what it means to become empowered, engage in the self-examination process that counselors, teachers and administrators are required to embark upon, and be willing to learn your role in the overall empowerment process. “People become more human and empowered only in the context of a community, and only when they ‘become seekers of the type of connections, interactions, and meetings that lead to harmony. The

power of the word generally, and dialogues specifically, allows this to happen” (Collins, 1991, p. 212). As a society, we must ask ourselves whether or not we can afford to continue living in a society of silence that perpetuates oppression, inequity, denial, isolation and injustice. This cannot even be afforded by those who believe they may be benefiting from this current state, and for whom the self-examination process may prove to be the most daunting in the midst of thinking something vital to their own survival will be lost.

Conclusion: The Significance of the Study and the Danger of Continuing “As Is”

The present situation cannot last, and how it ends will depend on what we do now. (Graves, 2004, p. 206)

With needed philosophical direction, counselors can make a positive difference in the school setting and in the lives of children, students, parents and community members. However, unless the counselors themselves actually believe in the need for change and the *direction* of that change, it will simply be a new routine. We have all changed routines for various reasons, but to alter one’s philosophy and then begin to operate based on that philosophical shift will not be easy. One of the David Purpel’s endeavors in his work *Moral Outrage in Education* (1999) was

to affirm a moral credo that informs and energizes educational policies and practices and to urge other educators to do the same. Given that education is inherently and inevitably a moral endeavor, it would seem that candor and honesty should require that educators address their own attempts to explicitly examine the moral grounding of their work. This is certainly a complex and excruciatingly difficult task, as moral issues

are not only notoriously elusive and ambiguous, but are also fraught with the potential for conflict, divisiveness, and polarization. Although this should compel us to proceed with humility, sensitivity, and caution, it does not make the task any less necessary. (pp. 4-5)

For many, the difficulty of this process will be enough not to do it. This is the same type of difficult struggle that Freire and Collins believe accompanies change. What happens when we, the educators in the position to affect change, do nothing? What happens when we decide the level of difficulty is not worth seeing what the outcome will be? We have ultimately decided the fate of children, students, communities, society, and humanity. We will maintain the status quo and perpetuate existing cycles. Those in power and who do not feel or acknowledge any ill-effects of the current situation are not likely to find fault with any of us who refuse to take action. Those living in an oppressed state and are not aware that change can come are *also* not likely to find fault with any of us who refuse to take action. Many in this latter group are not likely to be aware that we as educators are even in a position to effect such change or that steps can be taken to change the current state.

The significance of this study is based mainly on the potential quality of life improvements for the members of our society, particularly children and students. It is also critical for those in the educational and counseling fields because if we are not willing to step up and begin the empowering work proposed in this study, inequities will persist. Those who are suffering will continue to suffer. Regardless of how small the initial group of change agents may be, the school counselors in this case, the dialogue must begin somewhere. For some of us who hold key positions in this process, the start

of such dialogue could be significant both professionally and personally, as it will require us to reflect upon how we wish to live our lives from this point forward. “Counseling therefore needs to be about helping all people exploit personal and group power for positive sociopolitical change” (Lee, 1991, pp. 230-231). Do you continue oppressive practices now that you are aware that those practices *are* oppressive and that there is a way they can be changed? This type of acknowledgement can make for a much tougher life to live, or at least it should.

To some members of society and within the educational arena, continuing “as is” in some situations may not be looked upon in a negative light. School counseling serves the purpose that some want it to continue serving, both professionally and for mankind. If the administrative role that many school counselors currently fill is suddenly vacated, who will be responsible for completing those tasks? School principals or district-level policymakers will have to restructure assignments so that counselors are free to practice based on the requirements of their new empowerment philosophy. Continuing “as is” would maintain the reactive, service-oriented approach of the traditional school counseling paradigm. While the proactive, educative nature of the proposed empowerment school counseling philosophy allows the flexibility to address student/child needs on a broader scale without requiring him/her to bend to fit the model, continuing “as is” allows more students to continue falling through the cracks in the system.

It is obvious based on the drop out rates, national and individual state high school graduation rates, policies driven by standardized test scores, and the number of students

involved in the juvenile justice system due to truancy that our current school counseling methods of addressing the needs of the school community are inadequate. If the goal is to become empowered, then the dimensions appropriate for whatever group the counselor is working with will be a part of the dialogue and the methodological approach. The proposed empowerment school counseling framework does not require that we shift to a state of “multicultural empowerment counseling” when dealing with minority groups, but allows for the needs of all groups to be addressed. If another approach can be designed to address these deficits and help empower children and students to have the choice to live more humane, do we not owe them the effort of trying? We *must* try. It is both an educational and a moral disservice if we do not.

With a commitment to continue researching the effectiveness of school counseling programs, what details have been overlooked, and whether or not data has been accurately interpreted and applied to practice, counselors can present administrators or other decision-makers with a great deal of usable recommendations. If these recommendations are driven by a philosophy of empowerment, the necessary change will require one to explore his/her personal and professional beliefs about care, responsibility, and justice. If one’s research leads in a direction other than a philosophical shift toward empowerment, such as a direction that proves to be much more liberating and humane for a larger number, that process would be significant and worthy of consideration. A longitudinal study to follow different groups of students who have been exposed to different counseling philosophies would probably yield powerful results, but the risk factor is quite high and appropriate protective measures would need to be ensured. We

have already risked too much for too long by not ensuring that children and students are receiving the best possible service. Some counseling educators and practicing counselors are likely to have doubts, as this proposed transformation to an empowerment school counseling paradigm is a shift away from the norm of traditional school counseling practice. However, with the number of children/students not experiencing success (on various levels) in the today's school environments, a study such as this one can at least serve to raise questions, initiate dialogue, begin reassessment, and/or spark outrage to the point of being considered in the educational and counseling transformation arenas. With the transformation of school counseling having the potential to play such a vital role in the improved state of service for our children and students and in the overall educational program, all involved parties must assume their responsibility in the process. We need effective school counselors, counseling programs, counselor education programs, and a community of educators at all levels (formal and informal) to achieve the goal of providing the type of counseling program in schools that is truly needed—one designed to empower children and students. An empowerment school counseling philosophy and framework meets these needs.

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