

Introduction

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS



Issue 7

Dear reader,

It is with great enthusiasm that I share Issue VII of the TPBs with you in the co-editor role. One of my professional goals has long been to serve as a journal editor and am thrilled to serve in this role for the TPBs, a position I began in July 2025. I am especially impressed and grateful to our editorial team, Drs. Clare Merlin-Knoblich (co-editor), Tamika Jackson (associate editor), and Lillian Martz, (editorial assistant), who provided a warm welcome and robust training on the inner workings of moving through the publication process. During the fall we issued a call for Editorial Board members and were so excited at the overwhelming response. We now have a full board to include current faculty

members and doctoral students, and we are very appreciative of their review work.

Issue VII of the TPBs, an open themed issue, offers creative and current teaching strategies to support counselors-in-training (CIT). To begin, Lettner et al. share teaching tools and guidance on how to include climate justice related topics in the classroom. White and Hallam share a creative approach to utilizing mythical creature vignettes to expand on ethical-decision making activities in the classroom. Next, Ratliff et al., outline how compassion-focused photo journaling can be applied in practicum and internship classes to booster CIT wellness and mitigate imposter

syndrome. Nieves and Sheely-Moore introduce us to a somatic based teaching approach to addressing microaggressions in the classroom. Instructor modeled case conceptualization with specific focus on intergenerational trauma is described by Joseph and Nolan; and Elrod and Whiteback share their semester long service-learning classroom instructional activity with community participation. Finally, we are pleased to include a mixed methods research-based brief outlining how the True Goals curriculum can support school counselors-in-training to enhance their counseling skills and professional identity while also buffering from imposter syndrome.

Sincerely,
Susan Rodríguez Branco
Co-Editor, *Teaching Practice Briefs**

We believe the current issue offers a wide variety of teaching strategies on a broad range of topics that can be implemented in your classrooms to support your students. Stay tuned for our next issue, the TPBs Special Issue VIII, *Navigating Teaching in Challenging Sociopolitical Times*, expected in Summer 2026. It will feature creative and resilient teaching strategies specific to our current timeframe in the country. We anticipate our next open call for briefs will be in Fall 2026.

Until then, we thank you for your continued support of and engagement with the TPBs.

Take good care,

* Are you interested in submitting your own evidence-based counselor education teaching innovation or instructional strategy to a future issue of the *Teaching Practice Briefs*? Visit acesonline.net/TeachingPracticeBriefs to view calls for briefs and corresponding deadlines.

Contents

Incorporating Climate Justice into Counselor Education

Ananda Lettner, Kelly Green Hass, Laura Dunson Caputo, Ashley Laws, and Pit Kolodinsky

Mythical Creature Vignettes: A Creative Instructional Intervention for Ethical Decision-Making and Cultural Competence

Samantha S. White and Catherine Hallam

Using Compassion-Focused Photo Journaling to Address Impostor Phenomenon and Well-being in Clinical Supervision Courses

Kimberlee M. Ratliff, Sarah "Sage" J. Clapp, and Heidi L. Morton

A Mindfulness Approach to Address Racial Microaggressions in the Classroom

Natalie A. Nieves and Angela I. Sheely-Moore

Modeling Case Conceptualization: A Teaching Approach to Intergenerational Trauma

Akyla Joseph and Taylor Nolan

Cultural Carefest: A Service-Learning Project for Building Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competence

Krisy Elrod and Megan A. Whitbeck

Teaching a Research-Informed School Counseling Intervention to Practicum Students to Impact Competencies, Imposter Syndrome, and Self-Efficacy

Sarah M. Henry, Jenna Alvarez, Sangeun Lee, Patrick D. Cunningham, Rachel Saunders, Brett Zyromski, Ian Martin, Ryan Max, DeQuindre C. Hughes, and Sarah Shrewsbury-Braxton

Incorporating Climate Justice into Counselor Education

Climate change poses deeply existential concerns related to issues of equity, inclusivity, and well-being for populations affected by systemic barriers. The environment and other social determinants of health (SDOH) impact identity, culture formation, and wellness. Counselor educators currently lack knowledge and tools to incorporate climate justice into their curricula, although professional emphases on wellness models, multiculturalism, and social justice hold promise. This teaching brief includes a rationale for incorporating climate justice into counselor education and includes a collection of tools and resources counselor educators can use to prepare counselors-in-training.

ANANDA LETTNER¹, KELLY GREEN HASS²,
LAURA DUNSON CAPUTO³, ASHLEY LAWS⁴,
& PIT KOLODINSKY⁵

¹ Department of Counseling, Idaho State University

² Counselor Education Department, State University of New York

³ Department of Counseling, John Carroll University

⁴ Department of Counseling, University of the Cumberlands

⁵ Department of Educational Psychology, Northern Arizona University

KEYWORDS

Climate justice, climate change, social determinants of health, wellness, inclusivity

Introduction

Climate justice is becoming increasingly recognized by the mental health community as an important aspect of counseling, counselor education, and personal cultural identity (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2018; Hilert, 2021). Climate justice refers to the inequitable distribution of climate burdens and benefits on vulnerable and underserved populations and those facing systemic barriers (Boyle et al., 2023; Simmons, 2020; World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Mental health literature is evolving rapidly to reflect climate-related mental health phenomena (Ágoston et al., 2022; Pihkala & Kamenetz, 2024; Woodbury, 2019) and the incorporation of new, environmentally-inclusive wellness models (Reese et al., 2012). Given increasing trends in extreme weather events (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023) and climate-related mental health literature, we propose that counselor educators consider incorporation of climate justice into their curricula. In this teaching brief, we generated several suggestions and non-exhaustive tools and resources for counselor educators as they address climate justice.

Climate Change and Mental Health

In recent years, counseling researchers and organizations have increasingly called for clinicians and educators to attend to climate change, environmental factors, and other social determinants of health (SDOH; ACA, 2018; Hilert, 2021; Lenz &

Lemberger-Truelove, 2023). By proactively addressing SDOH in counselor education, counseling professionals support clinical and communal outcomes (Gantt-Howrey et al., 2024). Climate change, as an SDOH, creates a compounding problem of both increased distress and decreased access to the healing and cultural properties of the environment (Boyle et al., 2023; Hayes et al., 2018; IPCC, 2023). Extreme weather and sociopolitical events resulting from climate change can cause and/or worsen a range of mental health concerns, including anxiety, depression, posttraumatic

Author Note:

Ananda Lettner, Department of Counseling, Idaho State University, at Pocatello, ID. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ananda Lettner, 921

South 8th Avenue, Unit 8120, Pocatello, ID 83209 (email: anandalettner@isu.edu).

Kelly Green Hass, Counselor Education Department, State University of New York at New Paltz, NY. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Kelly Hass, 1 Hawk Drive, New Paltz, NY 12561 (email: hassk@newpaltz.edu)

Laura Dunson Caputo, Department of Counseling, John Carroll University at University Heights, OH. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Laura Dunson Caputo, 1 John Carroll Blvd, University Heights, OH 44118 (email: lcaputo@jcu.edu).

Ashley Laws, Department of Counseling, University of the Cumberlands at Williamsburg, KY. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ashley Laws, 1102 Toler Place Norfolk, VA 23503 (email: alaws56410@ucumberlands.edu)

Pit Kolodinsky, Department of Educational Psychology, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Pit Kolodinsky, NAU College of Education, POB 5774, Flagstaff, AZ 86011 (email: wjk4@nau.edu)

stress, and substance use (ACA, 2018; Hayes et al., 2018; Mandavia & Bonanno, 2019). Climate trauma, climate anxiety, eco-anxiety, eco-guilt, and eco-grief, have all been recognized as climate-related mental health phenomena (Ágoston et al., 2022; Pihkala & Kamenetz, 2024; Woodbury, 2019). Conversely, interacting within green spaces provides a wealth of psychological benefits, including increased mental well-being, relaxation, and perceived quality of life and decreased depressive symptoms (Bojorquez, 2018; Wood et al., 2017). Many cultural groups also have practices, traditions, and identities rooted in the natural world. For example, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities have historically strong ties to the land and have experienced notable distress related to displacement, gentrification, and inequitable proximity to pollutants and other anthropogenic environmental hazards (Middleton et al., 2020; Parris et al., 2021; Patel et al., 2021).

Climate crises disproportionately affect communities facing systemic barriers, including rural communities and communities with lower socioeconomic status (Boyle et al., 2023; IPCC, 2023). Those facing systemic barriers, including BIPOC groups, are at the highest risk due to their intersecting positionality and residence in ‘frontline communities’ (e.g., areas most at risk of climate change events [Sanders, 2021, p. 48]). BIPOC communities, despite contributing the least to climate change events, are often the most impacted, bearing the brunt of physical and mental health repercussions (Hilert, 2021; IPCC, 2023; Parris et al., 2021; Patel et al., 2021). Youth also exhibit higher susceptibility to climate distress due to perceived responsibility for managing future climate events (Hickman et al., 2021).

Counselors are uniquely equipped to address climate justice as a profession built upon wellness models (ACA, 2014; 2018; Myers, 1992). Some relevant wellness models that link counselor education to climate change impacts include Swarbrick’s (2012) eight dimensions of wellness, Gamby et al. (2021)’s equitable and decolonized lens of wellness, Indigenous People’s place-based wellness (Middleton et al., 2020), and Medicine Wheel model (Mashford-Pringle & Shawanda, 2023), the one welfare model (Pinillos, 2016), and finally Reese and Myers’ (2012) eco wellness model. These models connect components of wellness like environment (Pinillos, 2016; Swarbrick, 2012), community (Gamby et al., 2021; Middleton et al., 2020), access to nature, environmental identity, and capacity for transcendence (Reese & Myers, 2012) to climate. Incorporation of diverse, environmentally-inclusive, and holistic wellness models into counselor education will therefore encourage inclusivity of diverse cultures and identities in consideration of climate change and mental health.

RATIONALE FOR INCORPORATING CLIMATE JUSTICE INTO COUNSELING EDUCATION

Addressing climate justice embodies core counseling codes and tenets. Counselors are called to enact social justice to promote greater change for both clients and communities (ACA, 2014; Ratts et al., 2016; Toporek & Daniels, 2018). Many professional efforts have already

begun. For example, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2024 standards for counselor education and curriculum reflected an increased emphasis on social justice, diversity, and inclusion (2024). The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) recently approved the Climate Change and Environmental Justice Competencies for Counselor Education (ACES Climate Change Task Force, 2025) for incorporation into the CACREP curriculum. The ACES Climate Justice in Counseling interest network also supports counselor educators seeking to integrate climate justice into their curricula.

Despite efforts and calls for action regarding climate justice (ACA, 2018; Hayes et al. 2018; Hilert, 2021; IPCC, 2023; Reese et al., 2023), counselors report as unprepared to address climate topics in counseling (Reese et al., 2023). However, counselor educators and supervisors prepare counselors-in-training (CITs) to serve future generations, shaping student and client outcomes through their teaching decisions (Bernard & Goodyear, 2018; Hickman et al., 2021). We assert that counselor educators and supervisors can prepare CITs to address climate justice and have provided strategies for integrating climate justice into counselor education.

Instructional Strategies for Climate Justice in Counselor Education

Due to the novelty of climate justice discussions in counselor education, this teaching brief includes broad recommendations as opposed to a singular teaching strategy. We will first discuss optimal learning environments and attitudes and then introduce teaching strategies that can be implemented across existing counselor education curriculum. These will range from didactic materials on the topic of climate justice to advocacy-based community projects that CITs can integrate into their practicum, internship, and future counseling sites.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The classroom environment an instructor creates can help or hinder student learning (Higher Education Academy, 2015). It is critical to maintain a trauma-informed, culturally-responsive approach when introducing the topics of climate trauma, ecoanxiety, and climate justice (Abimbola et al., 2021). Students inherently approach learning through the lens of their own attitudes and experiences. A trauma-informed, culturally-responsive teaching approach embodies choice, autonomy preservation, and consideration for and inclusion of diverse perspectives, cultures, and learning styles in the classroom (Bowerman, 2024). We recommend that instructors strive to create emotionally open and responsive spaces, intentionally helping students experience and regulate their emotions during challenging topics.

Instructors should also model “eco-coping” (Ágoston et al., 2022), promoting environmental wellness that students can use for themselves and with clients. One of these methods includes taking classes outside to enjoy the benefits of green spaces, (Bojorquez, 2018; Wood et al., 2017) that might exist around campuses or, if a program is online, places of residence. Instructors can also model mindfulness and other connective practices.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND REFLEXIVITY

Instructors must remember to approach climate justice teachings with reflexivity and cultural humility. Reflexivity constitutes the practice of self-reflection and openness to feedback, while cultural humility is an attitude of ongoing curiosity and specific awareness of one’s own positionality (Yeager & Bauer-Wu, 2013). In regard to our own reflexivity, the authors of this paper believe in the relevance and reality of climate change. We strive to remain culturally humble as we explore the attitudes and beliefs of others, including our counseling students. We must be mindful and sensitive to the fact that, according to a recent University of Chicago study on climate change attitudes, approximately 27% of Americans, across all political orientations do not believe climate change is factual, and approximately only half (52%) believe in human-driven climate change (The University of Chicago Energy Policy Institute, 2025). Climate justice discussions can evoke strong emotions and awareness of personal and communal identities, especially if inclusive of topics such as power and privilege, bias, inequity of access, and other social justice issues faced by students and clients as a result of climate events. We suggest establishing collaborative learning agreements that encourage students to practice self-regulation and non-judgmental attitudes during sensitive discussions.

INITIAL CLIMATE JUSTICE TOPIC INTRODUCTION

During initial exposure to a topic, CITs may benefit from a didactic approach (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Informational lectures and readings lay the foundation of vocabulary, awareness of historical and current topic impact, and potential ways counselors can intervene in client and community issues regarding climate justice. We have selected peer-reviewed resources that we feel may be useful to counselor educators. Example didactic tools include: the ACA’s *Climate Crisis Fact Sheet* (Sturm et al., 2020) and the Climate Mental Health Network’s *A Guide to Climate Emotions* (Pihkala & Kamenetz, 2024), featuring a climate emotions wheel and detailed descriptions of how climate-related emotions may emerge and function for individuals.

Prior to considering applying climate justice knowledge, students should also be encouraged to construct an understanding of their own attitudes, emotions, experiences, and perspectives related to the environment. A personal history task features an evaluation of the systems an individual lives in and how they have changed or impacted the individual over time, including aspects of multiculturalism and intersectionality. During this assignment, students are prompted to reflect upon their history of environmental interactions. Prompts can include topics

such as community resources, historical ‘safe spaces,’ major moves or transitions into new environments, loss, or generational geographic origins. Participants can write reflectively and narratively, engage in dialogue, use creative methods of expression, or create a collaborative place-based presentation.

Instructors can employ initial assessments to foster student self-awareness, encourage dialogue, and generate valuable data related to climate justice competence. Assessments can increase students’ awareness of interactions with and impact on the environment, including overconsumption of Earth’s resources or negative impact on vulnerable populations (Grothaus, 2024). We have selected a range of climate-related assessments that we have used in our own counselor education activities successfully, including tools for teaching, research, and clinical practice. Tools include: (a) *Ecological Footprint Calculator* (<https://www.footprintcalculator.org>); (b) *Climate Change in the American Mind Survey* (Marlon et al., 2024); (c) *Climate Change Counseling Scale* (Peterson & Kozlowski, 2024); and the (d) *Environmental Attitudes Inventory* (Milfont & Duckitt, 2007; 2010).

CURRENT EVENT INCORPORATION

Research findings suggested that self-application encourages information retention (Higher Education Academy, 2015). A current event assignment can encourage students to think critically about how events in the world around them may impact them and their clients. In this task, students present and lead a discussion on a current event related to climate justice. Instructors should encourage accuracy of information and thought-provoking questions that consider social justice and equity, environmental effects, interpersonal and intrapersonal impacts, and generally be multiperspectival. Students should consider what populations and systems are involved and how they can address issues at various levels. Additionally, students and instructors alike should be mindful to process emotional reactions that may emerge from this activity—a mutually beneficial and therapeutic practice for students and future clients.

HOPE AND ADVOCACY-BUILDING

Instructors can use concrete activities to encourage a felt sense of effective advocacy—something that students often lack within the classroom. Concrete, collaborative activities allow students to imagine future possibilities and challenge assumptions in real time.

On a large surface (table) or the floor in a classroom, create a series of rings representing Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological systems model. Students will place a collection of random objects (e.g. pencils, pinecones, fidgets, etc.) into the model. When placing an object, they will share what the object represents to them and why they have chosen its position. After the group is satisfied with the current model and discusses their reactions, students will move the existing objects into new positions that represent their future hopes for climate justice advocacy in counseling. Students will reflect and identify winnable goals for climate justice advocacy and how all of this pertains to their future work as clinical mental health counselors

or school counselors. This activity may also be conducted in an interactive online space for online or hybrid programs.

Counselor educators can incite CIT hope of combating climate justice by collaborating outside of the classroom, as well. Projects highlighting involvement with pre-existing local groups can assure students that there are platforms from which to build advocacy efforts. Including a professional activity assignment encourages students to connect with other professionals doing climate justice in various counseling contexts. In this activity, students will participate in a professional event related to climate justice, including attending climate justice and mental health-related conferences or workshops, webinars, and counseling speaker series or meetings, or listening to appropriate professional development podcasts. A culminating project within a course could involve providing a local climate justice talk to undergraduates or high school students, either in-person or online. CITs should provide proof of attendance and a brief description of the activity, including key takeaways and reactions.

IMPLEMENTING INTO COUNSELING AND TEACHING PRACTICE

With a basic understanding of climate justice and how these issues are relevant to clients, students may grow in their ability to confidently apply their knowledge within practicum and internship. At one state university in the southwestern United States, for instance, CITs have been gathering outcome data from half-semester long eco-wellness-based support and psychoeducational groups from an acceptance and commitment therapy lens within practicum. With vocabulary from didactic presentations, CITs can practice discussing topics like climate emotions, ecoanxiety, climate justice, and climate trauma with their clients. Practical activities include hosting “climate cafes” (<https://www.climate.cafe/what-is-a-climate-cafe/>) or therapeutic groups for eco-distress. Mindfulness groups can highlight client’s connections to the world around them or holistic, communal self-care practices (Gamby et al., 2021). Students can also volunteer with organizations like the Red Cross that serve climate-distressed communities. Volunteer mental health work can provide concrete opportunities for advocacy and professional identity development (Toporek & Daniels, 2018).

Table 1 illustrates how each of the aforementioned activities may be used to address current 2024 CACREP standards.

Table 1*Alignment of 2024 CACREP Standards with Identified Instructional Activities*

Activity	CACREP Standard	Activity	CACREP Standard
Didactic Lectures & Readings	A.1., A.4., B.4, C.7, E.1., E.11.	Current Event Assignment	A.4., B.4., B.9., E.2.
Personal History Task	B.2., C.11, E.8.	Ecological Systems Activity	B.3., B.5., C.13., D.2.
Climate-Related Assessments	B.6., B.7., G.7., G.8.	Professional Activity Assignment	A.2., A.9., B.10.
Support/Psychoeducation Groups	A.11., B.8., C.13., E.6., E.20., F.2., F.7., E.10.	Volunteer Mental Health Work	A.2., A. 3., A.5., A.9., E.20.

Evaluation of Effectiveness

Currently, a relative dearth of CACREP-accredited programs have incorporated climate justice into their curriculum (Kozlowski, 2024). We acknowledge the broad scope of the topic and the difficulty in evaluating its effectiveness in education. Thus, we have provided multiple avenues for incorporation of climate justice and environmental components into curricula through a trauma-informed and culturally-responsive lens (see Table 1). As instructors build upon and expand our recommended tools, they should consider conducting program evaluations, longitudinal studies, pre- and post-tests, and focus groups, among other kinds of research. Their research efforts may additionally address broader impacts of climate-related instruction on students' advocacy efforts, awareness of SDOH, client satisfaction and wellbeing, and personal experiences of ecoanxiety and climate trauma. Individual educators may also consider conducting informal polls, asking for student feedback and attitudes specific to the topic.

Assessment Tools and Methods

Given the novelty of climate justice in counselor education, climate-related assessment tools are few and far between. Peterson and Kozlowski (2024) developed the *Climate Change Counseling Scale* to measure "...counselors' ability to provide counseling to address the mental health impacts of climate change" (p. 1), including knowledge of climate change and skills and abilities related to climate-informed counseling. However, this scale does not specifically address components of social justice, equity, and inclusion. Given the lack of culturally-responsive assessments for didactic stages of counselor education, students may be assessed through knowledge application assignments such as journals and collaborative

projects. We encourage counselor educators to consider their instructional theory and what measures of evaluation best align with their conceptualization of learning.

Discussion and Implications

Climate change continues to affect the world in increasingly lethal and unpredictable ways, impacting communities facing systemic barriers and other vulnerable populations disproportionately (IPCC, 2023; Sturm et al., 2020; WHO, 2021). However, it is often a divisive topic (Marlon et al., 2024). Given the tasks counselor educators and supervisors face in shaping student outcomes (Bernard & Goodyear, 2018), their decisions to incorporate climate justice into their teachings will impact the next generation of counselors and clients.

The novelty of climate justice, ecoanxiety, and other climate-related mental health concerns in counseling discussions (Reese et al., 2023) makes it challenging to find and employ relevant teaching resources. We encourage counselor educators to increasingly incorporate elements of climate justice into their existing curricula, including the various tools we have provided. Infusing the *ACES Climate Change and Environmental Justice Competencies for Counselor Education* (ACES Climate Change Task Force, 2025) either across the curriculum, within crisis, trauma and disaster counseling courses, or as stand-alone special topics electives may be a constructive start. We also encourage counselor educators to adapt their own environments, whether they be in-person or online. Climate-supportive academic settings allow for more exploration of this topic. The CACREP (2024) core curriculum also includes numerous entry points for climate justice topics, such as ethical considerations, multicultural and social justice components, concerns for human growth and development, and much more. We recommend that upcoming iterations of CACREP standards more directly include climate justice themes within the core curricular sections of the standards, perhaps especially as these relate the crisis, trauma and disaster counseling standards. The climate crisis impacts all systemic levels from micro to macro (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), providing numerous creative and tailored opportunities for advocacy, awareness, and intervention.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Though climate change has been documented for decades (IPCC, 2023; WHO, 2021), counselors have only recently begun to discuss its impact on mental health. Counselor educators still have many questions about instructional tools, implementation strategies across settings, and general openness to the topic. Climate change can be politically divisive and emotionally burdensome to discuss (Abimbola et al., 2021; Marlon et al., 2024), and many counselor educators are already experiencing burnout and overwhelm related to pre-existing curricular and role-related requirements (Coaston & Cook, 2017). Despite these obstacles, we hope counselor educators make the decision to explore the impacts of climate justice on mental health.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The authors suggest future research on climate justice incorporation into curriculum. Researchers should assess the effectiveness of teaching tools mentioned in this brief and methods for improvement. Additionally, researchers could investigate counselor educator attitudes towards climate justice. As explored in previous sections, diverse CITs and clients will benefit from understanding and application of climate justice concepts. Addressing climate justice in counselor education will promote adaptive and inclusive approaches to a rapidly changing future.

References

- Abimbola, O., Aikins, J. K., Makhesi-Wilkinson, T., & Roberts, E. (2021). *Racism and climate (in)justice how racism and colonialism shape the climate crisis and climate action*. 1-39. <https://us.boell.org/en/2021/03/19/racism-and-climate-injustice-o>
- Ágoston, C., Csaba, B., Nagy, B., Kóváry, Z., Dúll, A., Rácz, J., & Demetrovics, Z. (2022). Identifying types of eco-anxiety, eco-guilt, eco-grief, and eco-coping in a climate-sensitive population: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(4), 2461. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042461>
- American Counseling Association. (2014). *2014 ACA code of ethics*. <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ethics/2014-aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>
- American Counseling Association. (2018, November). *Climate Change Statement*. https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/resolutions/climate-change-statement--november-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=a65c552c_4
- Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Climate Change Task Force (2025). *Climate Change and Environmental Justice Competencies for Counselor Education*.
- Bernard, J. M., & Goodyear, R. K. (2018). *Fundamentals of clinical supervision (6th ed.)* Pearson.
- Bojorquez, I; Ojeda-Revah, L. (2018). Urban public parks and mental health in adult women: Mediating and moderating factors. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 64, 637–646. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764018795198>
- Bowerman, M. J. (2024). *Integrating culturally responsive teaching and trauma-informed practices*. Edutopia. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/culturally-responsive-trauma-informed-teaching-strategies/>
- Boyle, L., Coleman, M. L., Garrett, M., Griffith, J., Peterson, G., Reese, R., & Sturm, D. (2023, October 11-15). *Climate change, environmental justice, and counselor education: An opening conversation* [Conference session]. Association for Counselor Education & Supervision 2023 National Conference, Denver, CO, United States.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 32(7), 513-531. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.32.7.513>
- Coaston, S. C., & Cook, E. P. (2017). Burnout in counselor education: The role of cynicism and fit in predicting turnover intention. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 10(1), 8. <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/jcps/vol10/iss1/8>
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2024). *2024 standards*. <https://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2024-cacrep-standards/>
- Gamby, K., Burns, D., & Forristal, K. (2021). Wellness decolonized: The history of wellness and recommendations for the counseling field. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 43(3), 228-245. <https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.43.3.05>
- Gantt-Howrey, A., Lin, M., Shaikh, A., Johnson, K. F., Preston, J., & Wilson, L. (2024). Assessing social determinants of mental health: Client experiences and counselor practices. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12519>
- Grothaus, T. (2024, November). *Climate justice & advocacy beyond borders* [Speaker series presentation]. Climate Justice in Counseling, Online.

- Hayes, K., Blashki, G., Wiseman, J., Burke, S., & Reifels, L. (2018). Climate change and mental health: Risks, impacts and priority actions. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 12, 28. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-018-0210-6>
- Hickman, C., Marks, E., Pihkala, P., Clayton, S., Lewandowski, R. E., Mayall, E. E., Wray, B., Mellor, C., & van Susteren, L. (2021). Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: A global survey. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(12), e863–e873. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(21\)00278-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00278-3)
- Higher Education Academy. (2015). *Higher education pedagogies*. Routledge.
- Hilert, A. J. (2021). Counseling in the Anthropocene: Addressing social justice amid climate change. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 49(3), 175–191. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12223>
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2023, March 20). *Urgent climate action can secure a liveable future for all* [Press release]. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/press/IPCC_AR6_SYR_PressRelease_en.pdf
- Kozlowski, W. (2024). Promoting integration into CES. In *Minutes of the climate justice in counseling interest network meeting 18 October 2024*. Virtual.
- Lenz, A. S., & Lemberger-Truelove, M. E. (2023). The social determinants of mental health and professional counseling: A call to action. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 101(4), 375–380. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12489>
- Mandavia, A. D., & Bonanno, G. A. (2019). When natural disaster follows economic downturn: The incremental impact of multiple stressor events on trajectories of depression and posttraumatic stress disorder. *Disaster medicine and public health preparedness*, 13(2).
- Marlon, J., Goddard, E., Howe, P., Mildemberger, M., Jefferson, M., Fine, E., & Leiserowitz, A. (2024). *Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2023*. <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us/>
- Mashford-Pringle, A. & Shawanda, A. (2023). Using the Medicine Wheel as theory, conceptual framework, analysis, and evaluation tool in health research. *Qualitative Research in Health*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmqr.2023.100251>
- Middleton, J., Cunsolo, A., Jones-Bitton, A., Wright, C. J., & Harper, S. L. (2020). Indigenous mental health in a changing climate: A systematic scoping review of the global literature. *Environmental Research Letters*, 15(5). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ab68a9>
- Milfont, T. L., & Duckitt, J. (2007). *A brief version of the environmental attitudes inventory*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Milfont, T. L., & Duckitt, J. (2010). The environmental attitudes inventory: A valid and reliable measure to assess the structure of environmental attitudes. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30(1), 80–94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2009.09.001>
- Myers, J. E. (1992). Wellness, prevention, development: The cornerstone of the profession. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 71(2), 136–139. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1992.tb02188.x>
- Parris, C. L., Hegtvædt, K. A., & Johnson, C. (2021). Assessments of environmental injustice among Black Americans. *Social Currents*, 8(1), 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329496520950808>
- Patel, S. S., Robb, K., Pluff, C., Maldonado, E., Tatar, G., & Williams, T. (2021). *Elevating mental health disparities and building psychosocial resilience among BIPOC children and youth to broaden the climate and health discourse*. <https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/childrenatrisk/vol12/iss1/3>
- Patnik, A., Ade, C., & Son, J. (2020, August 20). *Racial disparities and climate change*. Princeton University.
- Peterson, G. H. & Kozlowski, M. B. (2024). Development and initial validation of the climate change counseling scale. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 57(4), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481756.2024.2303461>

- Pihkala, P. & Kamenetz, A. (2024). A guide to climate emotions. *Climate Mental Health Network*. <https://www.climatementalhealth.net/>
- Pinillos, R. G., Appleby, M. C., Manteca, X., Scott-Park, F., Smith, C., & Velarde, A. (2016). One Welfare - a platform for improving human and animal welfare. *The Veterinary Record*, 179(16), 412–413. <https://doi.org/10.1136/vr.i5470>
- Ratts, M. J., Singh, A. A., Nassar-McMillan, S., Butler, S. K., & McCullough, J. R. (2016). Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies: Guidelines for the counseling profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 44(1), 28–48. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12035>
- Reese, R. F., & Myers, J. E. (2012). EcoWellness: The missing factor in holistic wellness models. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 90(4), 400–406. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2012.00050.x>
- Reese, R. F., Swank, J. M., & Sturm, D. C. (2023). A national survey of helping professionals on climate change and counseling. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 62(3), 201–215. <https://doi.org/10.1002/johc.12211>Digital Object Identifier (DOI)
- Sanders, M. C. (2021). Equity in addressing climate change: Using law and policy to serve frontline communities. *Traumatology*, 27(1), 48–51. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/trm0000284>
- Sturm, D. C., Daniels, J., Metz, A. L., Stauffer, M., & Reese, R. (2020, August). *ACA Task Force Fact Sheet*. American Counseling Association. https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/center-resources/climate-change-fact-sheet.pdf?sfvrsn=83c7222c_2
- Swarbrick, M. (2012). A wellness approach to mental health recovery. *Recovery of People with Mental Illness*, 30–38. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780199691319.003.0003> The University of Chicago Energy Policy Institute (2025). *2025 poll: Americans' views on climate change and policy in 15 charts*. <https://epic.uchicago.edu/news/2025-poll-americans-views-on-climate-change-and-policy-in-15-charts/>
- Toporek, R. L., & Daniels, J. (2018). *American Counseling Association advocacy competencies*. <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/competencies/aca-advocacy-competencies-updated-may-2020.pdf>
- Wood, E., Harsant, A., Dallimer, M., De Chavez, A.C., McEachan, R., Hassall, C. (2018). Not all green space is created equal: Biodiversity predicts psychological restorative benefits from urban green space. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9(2320). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02320>
- Woodbury, Z. (2019). Climate trauma: Toward a new taxonomy of trauma. *Ecopsychology*, 11, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1089/eco.2018.0021>
- World Health Organization. (2021, October 30). *Climate change and health*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>
- Yeager, K. A., & Bauer-Wu, S. (2013). Cultural humility: essential foundation for clinical researchers. *Applied nursing research*, 26(4), 251–256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnr.2013.06.008>

Mythical Creature Vignettes

A Creative Instructional Intervention for Ethical Decision-Making and Cultural Competence

Mythical vignettes represent a new and creative instructional method for teaching ethics and cultural competency to master's-level counseling students. By incorporating scenarios involving mythical creatures and their unique cultural and ethical dilemmas, instructors can promote student engagement and critical thinking. Students can practice strategies for addressing cultural issues in ways that align with ethical principles as well as state, local, and federal laws. Through developing treatment plans tailored to "mythical" clients, students enhance their understanding of the ACA Code of Ethics, improve their cultural competency, and prepare for real-world practice in navigating ethically complex and culturally diverse situations.

SAMANTHA S. WHITE
& CATHERINE HALLAM

Grand Canyon University

Author Note:

Samantha S. White <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2207-7428>

Catherine Hallam <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2753-9864>

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

Correspondence about this article should be addressed to Dr.

Samantha S. White, 3049 Galveston St., Plano, TX 75075

Email: samanthastarrwhite@gmail.com

KEYWORDS

ethical decision making, cultural competency, counselor training vignettes, creative case conceptualizations, creative counselor education

Introduction

Ethical practice represents one of the most fundamental skills that must be taught in a quality counselor education program. As a counselor, ethical practice requires a deep knowledge of ethical codes, laws, and one's own personal values (Levitt et al., 2019). Without a strong foundation in ethical practice, counselors may make decisions that lead to ethical violations, thus putting their clients and their licensure at risk. For this reason, all counseling programs accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) must teach ethics to their counselors-in-training (CACREP, 2024). The 2024 CACREP standards emphasize that counselors-in-training should understand how to engage in ethical practice when they begin working with clients.

However, teaching ethical practice to counselors-in-training (CITs) can be a difficult task. This is because learning about ethics goes beyond simple knowledge acquisition through textbooks or lectures (Zakaria & Warren, 2016). Teaching and learning about ethics draws from a diversity of salient elements, requiring both teacher and student to engage in an exploration of the personal and cultural values they have developed throughout their lifetime (Zakaria & Warren, 2016). The use of creative methods may provide a way to better engage students in the ethical learning process.

The use of creative, play-based andragogical strategies are known to be valuable in developing a variety of skills for CITs (Isawi et al., 2024). Further, the use of creative storytelling - through clinical vignettes, archetypes, metaphors, myths, fables, and even personal anecdotes from practice - have been found to enhance the learning practice for CITs (Dempsey, 2023). As such, the creation of adapting fairy tales to address typical ethical counseling dilemmas has become a popular method of instruction in counselor education programs (Henderson & Malone, 2012). Creative scenarios, such as adapted fairy tales, allow CITs to explore the nuances of ethical decision-making in a non-threatening environment, reducing anxiety about potential mistakes (Levitt et al., 2019). By integrating mythical vignettes, CITs gain the opportunity to address ethical dilemmas that might not be immediately evident in traditional case studies.

This brief acts as an extension of the popular tradition of adapting fairy tales to clinical vignettes, by demonstrating that vignettes generated about mythical or supernatural creatures may be useful in educating CITs on ethical decision making and cultural sensitivity. In the following sections, we provide examples of how creative vignettes of mythical creatures may be used as a tool for educating CITs about ethical practice with cultures with which they are not familiar.

DESCRIPTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY: MYTHICAL CREATURE VIGNETTES

The use of vignettes as an andragogical strategy has long been valued in counselor education for its ability to simulate realistic yet controlled scenarios that elicit students' genuine reactions

and decision-making skills (Gray, 2024). Those genuine reactions and decision-making skills can then be reflected upon, in an effort to help counselors-in-training build insight and further develop their skills. While many traditional vignettes focus on human contexts, the inclusion of mythical creature scenarios offers a unique, creative avenue to address complex ethical and cultural dilemmas.

This innovative approach aligns with experiential learning theory by providing CITs with opportunities to actively engage, reflect, and conceptualize abstract concepts in counseling ethics and multicultural sensitivity (Kolb, 1984; Isawi et al., 2024). Through the use of mythical vignettes, students are immersed in complex scenarios that require them to analyze ethical dilemmas, evaluate cultural nuances, and apply theoretical knowledge in a structured yet creative manner. For example, a vignette that explores the ethical implications of working with a faerie who feels pressured to hide their pointed ears due to the societal pressure to “fit in” with non-magical creatures could allow CITs to engage actively and creatively with the issues of conformity, authenticity, and cultural assimilation.

This active engagement fosters a deeper understanding of abstract principles, as students move beyond passive learning to actively constructing meaning from their experiences. Reflection plays a key role in this process, allowing CITs to critically assess their assumptions, biases, and decision-making strategies. By applying these insights to develop culturally responsive and ethically sound treatment plans, students bridge the gap between theory and application. This method not only enhances their conceptual grasp of counseling ethics but also builds essential skills for navigating the complexities of real-world practice in diverse and multicultural settings.

ENHANCING ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

Ethical practice requires CITs to navigate multifaceted issues involving autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, fidelity, and justice (ACA, 2014). Mythical creature vignettes introduce imaginative yet plausible dilemmas that challenge students to think critically about ethical codes, laws, and the students’ own personal biases. For example, a vignette where a deaf Giantess faces exclusion from society due to her size and disability status could represent an opportunity for students to safely explore compounded discrimination due to intersectional marginalized identities. Students are challenged to think critically about personal values and cultural sensitivity, key areas of competency within the American Counseling Association (ACA) code of ethics (2014). By working through these imaginative yet realistic scenarios, students practice navigating complex ethical landscapes, gaining confidence and skills that will translate to their work with diverse human clients. This experiential approach enhances ethical competence and prepares CITs for the unpredictability of real-world counseling.

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH CREATIVITY

Counselor education research has increasingly focused on the value of creative strategies in promoting engagement, reflection, and empathy among CITs (Isawi et al., 2024; Saunders & Cogburn, 2024). By integrating storytelling elements from mythology, educators can create a dynamic learning environment that captivates students' imaginations while meeting CACREP (2024) standards for ethical and cultural training. The playful nature of mythical creature vignettes also aligns with the therapeutic powers of play, which facilitate self-expression and emotional exploration (Schaefer & Drewes, 2013). Storytelling, particularly through the lens of mythology, allows students to immerse themselves in creative scenarios that feel engaging yet non-threatening. Mythical creature vignettes can stimulate creative thinking by introducing unusual dilemmas, such as a phoenix experiencing burnout from constant rebirth, which mirrors real-world concerns like professional exhaustion or identity struggles. These imaginative, creative contexts draw CITs into active problem-solving, fostering greater emotional investment and a willingness to consider diverse perspectives.

As students engage with these scenarios, they develop skills that can later be applied to real-world counseling cases, such as analyzing client behavior through both an empathetic and critical lens. Such scenarios also encourage students to collaborate and share interpretations, building classroom cohesion and reinforcing the idea that multiple viewpoints can coexist. In this way, creative storytelling through mythical creature vignettes not only meets educational goals but also nurtures the emotional and intellectual growth of CITs, preparing them for the nuanced challenges of real-world counseling.

DEVELOPING CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Incorporating mythical creatures into vignettes broadens the scope of cultural competence training by encouraging students to reflect on the "otherness" of fictional beings. As Gray (2024) notes, vignettes can bridge gaps in understanding by fostering empathy and reducing bias. For example, a vignette featuring a merfolk client experiencing systemic discrimination due to their aquatic heritage can parallel real-world issues faced by marginalized groups, providing a creative lens for exploring privilege, oppression, and advocacy. This approach complements existing literature advocating for culturally relevant andragogy in counselor education (Henderson & Malone, 2012). Using mythical creatures as an allegory for marginalized groups allows CITs to safely examine their biases and assumptions without the defensiveness that may arise in discussions about real-world populations. Such exercises challenge students to develop deeper cultural humility and a more nuanced understanding of how privilege, power, and oppression manifest in diverse client experiences.

APPLICATION ALONGSIDE AN ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING MODEL

When utilizing an innovative, creative instructional method like this, it is prudent to simultaneously utilize an ethical decision-making model. This helps provide scaffolding for students to

understand the serious process of making ethical decisions as future counselors. While these creative mythical creature vignettes can be used alongside any ethical decision-making model, the Transcultural integrative ethical decision-making model, as proposed by Garcia et al. (2003), provides a helpful framework for resolving ethical dilemmas by incorporating cultural variables into traditional ethical decision-making processes.

The transcultural integrative ethical decision-making model consists of four stages that guide counselors through ethical dilemmas (Garcia et al., 2003). The first stage focuses on enhancing sensitivity and conducting thorough fact-finding to understand the nature of the dilemma and the cultural values of all stakeholders (Garcia et al., 2003). Counselors are encouraged to reflect on their own cultural identity and biases to recognize how these might influence their perception of the situation. In the second stage, counselors formulate ethical decisions by reviewing relevant ethical codes, laws, and policies while generating culturally informed courses of action (Garcia et al., 2003). This stage emphasizes the inclusion of diverse worldviews and the use of relational methods, such as negotiation and consensus-seeking, to reach a balanced resolution.

The third stage involves weighing competing nonmoral values and affirming the chosen course of action (Garcia et al., 2003). Counselors must critically evaluate their own values and consider how institutional, societal, and cultural influences may impact the implementation of their decisions. The fourth and final stage focuses on planning and executing the selected course of action, including anticipating potential barriers and developing culturally relevant strategies to address them. This comprehensive process ensures that ethical decisions are grounded in both principle and virtue ethics while remaining sensitive to cultural diversity (Garcia et al., 2003). When applied to mythical creature vignettes, this model offers a dynamic tool for counselor education. This model's emphasis on cultural adaptability and relational methods aligns well with the imaginative and diverse nature of mythical creature vignettes. It equips CITs to approach ethical dilemmas with a reflective and culturally competent mindset, ensuring they are well-prepared for the complexities of real-world counseling practice.

Assignment Recommendations

This instructional framework integrates the ethical decision-making model into a series of mythical creature vignettes, offering a structured approach for teaching ethics and cultural sensitivity to CITs. The pre-activity instructor preparation allows instructors to engage with the mythical vignettes ahead of time. Following the pre-activity stage, the instructor will be well-equipped to guide students through this four-step mythical creature vignette. In this activity, students can learn to engage with complex scenarios, applying ethical principles and counseling theories to culturally nuanced cases. Four full vignettes, including an instructor and student copy, can be found [here](#).

PRE-ACTIVITY INSTRUCTOR PREPARATION

Instructors may benefit from engaging with this content ahead of implementing it in class. This can help instructors become aware of their own reactions to this assignment before using it with CITs. The following prompts can act as a journaling exercise to help instructors better frame, guide, and debrief students.

Instructor Self-Reflection

1. How might my own cultural background, values, and lived experience (personal and professional) influence my ability to lead students through this creative exercise?
2. How can I model ethical decision-making and cultural sensitivity to my students?
3. How can I model humility and curiosity when biases or blind spots may appear – both my own and my students?
4. How did my own instructors/supervisors/mentors successfully model ethical decision-making and cultural sensitivity to me?

Classroom and Student Preparation

1. What are the core ethical principles and cultural competencies that I want students to take away from this exercise?
2. What classroom “rules” or guidelines may be put in place before this assignment begins to help students approach these mythical vignettes with the right mindset? For example, respect, curiosity, confidentiality, non-judgment, etc.
3. What steps can I take to ensure my classroom is a place where students feel safe to explore ethical decision-making and cultural competence?
4. How can I help frame this exercise so that students...
 1. Make meaning of these mythical vignettes by translating metaphor into practice?
 2. Apply those insights from fictional scenarios to their own current or future human clients?

Instructor Practice/Preparation Tips

1. Run through the chosen vignette yourself before assigning it to students, using the student handout. See what you come up with on your own, without the instructor’s guide. Note anywhere that you felt curious, defensive, or surprised – these moments can be powerful teaching cues.
2. Identify any parts of your own response that you may feel comfortable sharing with the class after they complete the assignment. This can be a great opportunity to model openness and reflection.
3. Consider and reflect on what kind of feedback you may anticipate from students (e.g., discomfort, disengagement) and take a moment to plan how you will respond. Prioritize

curiosity over correction.

After running through this pre-activity instructor preparation stage, instructors will be better prepared to lead students through the next phase of the assignment, which consists of four steps: applying the ethical decision-making model, applying counseling theories, developing a treatment plan, and reflecting on the process. To demonstrate this four-step process, the mythical vignette of Ghoulberta will be used.

Scenario: Ghoulberta

Ghoulberta is a ghost presenting to your private practice for counseling. She wants to work on minimizing her negative self-talk, but reports having difficulty speaking kindly to herself, especially when she makes a mistake. Ghoulberta would like your support to become a more confident version of herself. However, she works at a demanding job and has very little free time to attend counseling. She asks if you offer video appointments, but there's only one issue - as far as you know, ghosts can't be seen on video! Does this present an issue for telehealth visits? Can you ask Ghoulberta to wear a sheet over her ghostly form so you can see her?

Step 1: Apply the Ethical Decision-Making Model

Students begin by going through the steps of the transcultural integrative ethical decision-making model (Garcia et al., 2003). Using the first stage, CITs identify the cultural norms and values relevant to their assigned mythical client's circumstances. In the second stage, the students would need to review the relevant ethical and legal codes. This could include the ACA code of ethics (2014) and relevant national and state laws. In the third and fourth stages, CITs would be able to discuss and evaluate their chosen course of action while addressing relevant cultural considerations.

In the case of Ghoulberta, students are asked to analyze the ethics of an interesting situation related to telehealth. Telehealth, also called online therapy, e-therapy, or teletherapy, is a method of delivering health and psychotherapeutic services either synchronously or asynchronously via phone, e-mail, application, and/or live video (du Preez et al., 2024). Video-based therapy has become popular, particularly after the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic (du Preez et al., 2024). As such, it is important to consider the ethical considerations that accompany a type of therapy that has grown so rapidly in popularity in recent years.

Per the first stage of the ethical decision-making model, the counselor should first ensure that they have an accurate understanding of the nature of the dilemma. First, it might be a good idea for the counselor-in-training to make sure that they were right in understanding that ghosts can't be seen on video. Is this fact or fallacy? When you do not have a lot of experience with a new group of people, it is important that you take the time to check your own understanding. Making unintentionally discriminatory statements or inquiries, like asking Ghoulberta to wear a sheet so you can see him during telehealth sessions, would constitute a microaggression. This could damage or even fracture the counseling relationship.

Per the second stage of the ethical decision-making model, the counselor should review any relevant ethical codes and laws. Regarding laws, the counselor should check their own local

and state laws at the time of this assignment. Because telehealth is a budding industry, there are near-constant changes to local, state, and federal laws that make this a vital step for any counselor who chooses to engage in telehealth sessions (Sheperis & Smith, 2021). Some states have strict and well-defined laws regarding telehealth, and others do not yet have any specific laws that regulate teletherapy (Sheperis & Smith, 2021). As such, each counselor should regularly familiarize themselves with the laws that govern telehealth.

Regarding ethics, there are also many considerations. While teletherapy has many benefits, there are also ethical risks that need to be considered when choosing to engage with a client over a telehealth platform. Many of these ethical considerations are also relevant in traditional face-to-face therapeutic practice, but they may require more careful consideration in a video-based therapeutic session (du Preez et al., 2024). For example, competency, security, and accessibility are concerns in traditional face-to-face therapy, but may require extra thought in the context of a virtual session.

One of the most widely cited competency-based ethical concerns for teletherapy is the potential absence of nonverbal cues - this could lead to miscommunications or misunderstandings between the therapist and client (Stoll et al., 2020). It is possible that the therapist could miss important clinical information, which could lead to incorrect diagnoses and as such, incorrect or ineffective treatment planning (Stoll et al., 2020). Additionally, there is a noted lack of ethical and legal guidelines for the practice of telehealth (Stoll et al., 2020). Online therapy may not be appropriate for all clients or all treatment modalities (Stoll et al., 2020).

There are also security-based ethical concerns that must be considered in telehealth therapy when you cannot see the client. Since Ghoulberta cannot be seen on camera, there may be concerns about identity verification issues. Deception or fraud is a possibility when the client cannot be seen on camera (Harris & Birnbaum, 2015; Stoll et al., 2020). Additionally, the ACA code of ethics states that counselors must verify the identity of their clients at the beginning of the therapeutic process, and throughout the entirety of their treatment (ACA, 2014). What methods could students employ to verify the identity of their ghost client?

Accessibility also represents an important consideration in telehealth therapy. Telehealth therapy provides flexibility and increased accessibility to care for most patients (du Preez et al., 2024). However, there is an added burden on therapists to assess the suitability of telehealth for each client (du Preez et al., 2024). It may be important to ask whether in-person therapy be accessible to Ghoulberta, given her scheduling concerns. If not, it may be time to get creative, or refer Ghoulberta to a counselor with availability that closer matches her needs.

For stage three of the ethical decision-making model, the counselor-in-training should weigh all the aforementioned values, ethical codes, and laws before ultimately affirming their chosen course of action. There are many legal and ethical codes that need to be considered. Ultimately, mental health interventions should be easily accessible and, whenever possible, targeted to a client's unique circumstances (Griner & Smith, 2006). For Ghoulberta, this may make therapy over the telephone the best fit.

Per the fourth and final stage of the ethical decision-making model, the counselor should plan and implement the selected course of action. This would, for Ghoulberta, consist of deciding whether to offer teletherapy or refer Ghoulberta out to a counselor with availability that more closely matches her needs. While there are greater risks for miscommunication in teletherapy than there are in traditional, face-to-face therapy, sometimes this represents the most accessible and feasible option for clients (Manalili, 2024). The counselor should adequately complete and document written informed consent for treatment that provides information about the limits of confidentiality when using electronic communications (Brenes et al., 2012). Additionally, counselors who wish to utilize telephone therapy should ensure that they engage in training or study of methods that strengthen their reflective listening skills, their attentiveness to auditory cues from clients, and their ability to convey warmth and emotion using only their voice (Brenes et al., 2012).

Step 2: Apply Counseling Theories to Ethical and Cultural Dynamics

In step two of this mythical vignette, students should evaluate the merits of different counseling theories to address the cultural and ethical dimensions of their mythical client cases. In examining the counseling theories that may be most appropriate for Ghoulberta, students should begin by looking at her presenting concern. During Ghoulberta's intake session, she reported a desire to minimize her negative self-talk and increase her confidence. With these goals in mind, a few options for treatment may include:

- strengths-based counseling
- positive psychotherapy
- acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)
- humanistic therapy
- cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)

Step 3: Develop a Treatment Plan

Students draft treatment plans tailored to their mythical clients, bringing together ethical, legal, cultural, and theoretical considerations. Guided by the third and fourth stages of the decision-making model, students evaluate proposed solutions and plan their implementation, considering potential cultural barriers and ethical implications.

For example, as discussed through the lens of the ethical decision making model in step one, treatment planning would involve deciding whether or not to offer teletherapy or refer Ghoulberta out to a counselor that may be more accessible to Ghoulberta. Treatment planning would also include a plan on how to properly address Ghoulberta's presenting concern: a desire to minimize negative self-talk and increase confidence.

Step 4: Reflection

In step four, students reflect on their own reactions to this assignment. In this stage, students are prompted to challenge their own biases and preconceived ideas. Without this reflection stage, it may be easy for students to treat this exercise as an unserious assignment about fake

clients, but this reflection stage allows the CITs to take examine their biases and preconceived ideas about clients who have problems that may not seem “real” to them. The instructor will play a pivotal role in guiding the students through this reflective process and may choose to have students engage in reflection individually, as a small group, as part of a discussion with the whole class, or any combination of those options. The instructor has the flexibility of choosing which option makes the most sense for their specific class and their individual learning needs.

Evaluation and Assessment

Evaluation of an assignment based on these mythical vignettes would be centered around assessing students’ ability to integrate ethical principles, cultural awareness, counseling theories, and thoughtful self-reflection into practical applications. Students’ ability to apply ethical principles and demonstrate cultural sensitivity is evaluated through their engagement with the mythical vignettes, aligning with the cognitive levels outlined in Bloom’s taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001). Faculty assess how well students identify and address ethical dilemmas, such as interspecies confidentiality or cultural power dynamics, within the context of their assigned mythical clients, focusing on their progression through Bloom’s stages of learning.

Evaluation for this assignment occurs over two domains: self-evaluation and instructor-evaluation. The opportunity for self-evaluation is built into the assignment, where students are expected to reflect upon their own experience of the assignment. Instructors will evaluate the students’ performance on the treatment plans students draft for their mythical clients. Additionally, instructors will evaluate the students on their performance in the reflective portion of the assignment, which can be conducted individually, as a small-group discussion, or as a full classroom discussion. The instructor can choose which reflective evaluation is most appropriate, based on the needs of the learners.

The feedback should highlight strengths in aligning counseling theories with ethical and cultural considerations while offering constructive suggestions for improvement. For example, students may be encouraged to refine their treatment approaches to address the unique cultural norms or relational dynamics of their mythical clients. This iterative feedback process reinforces learning and supports the development of practical counseling skills. Additionally, the feedback for both small and large group discussions are evaluated through an analysis of the students’ comprehension, creativity, collaboration, and thoughtful reflection. Faculty observe how students analyze ethical and cultural dilemmas, propose innovative solutions, and engage in critical dialogue with peers. Attention should be given to how well students incorporate diverse perspectives and demonstrate creative problem-solving in addressing the complexities of their mythical clients’ scenarios.

Emphasis is placed on the depth of understanding and accuracy in applying the ACA code of ethics (2014) and relevant state laws, aligning with the knowledge level of Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001). Students will be expected to recall and recognize relevant ethical standards and state laws, increasing their retention of key ethical guidelines. At the comprehension level, students demonstrate their understanding by accurately explaining the ethical and cultural principles underlying their decisions. The application level is evident as students implement these principles in crafting treatment plans and addressing specific challenges posed by mythical clients. Faculty will further assess how well students deconstruct complex ethical dilemmas, examining the interactions between counseling theories and cultural nuances in the provided vignettes. At the synthesis level, students are encouraged to integrate multiple theoretical approaches with ethical considerations, creating cohesive and culturally sensitive treatment plans. Finally, at the evaluation level, students critically assess their own work and the feedback provided, demonstrating reflective thinking and a commitment to improving their professional skills (Anderson et al., 2001; Bloom et al., 1956).

Discussion and Implications

This brief serves as a demonstration of how mythical creature vignettes may be useful in educating CITs about ethics and cultural responsiveness in counseling. Mythical vignettes like those in the appendices may help creatively engage counselors-in-training about topics that are paramount to successful practice in the field of clinical mental health. While the application of fairy tale vignettes has been popular in the field of counselor education for many years (Henderson & Malone, 2012), this brief acts as an extension of current creative counselor education methods in an effort to provide more tools to counselor educators and supervisors. Through the use of these mythical creature vignettes, counselors-in-training will be able to apply their skills to novel cases and, in doing so, practice their ethical counseling skills.

The use of mythical creature vignettes in counselor education offers unique implications for enhancing cultural competency and ethical decision-making skills among CITs. By reflecting on the "otherness" of fictional beings, CITs can safely examine their biases and develop empathy for clients from diverse cultural backgrounds (Gray, 2024). This approach aligns with culturally relevant andragogy and fosters greater understanding of privilege, oppression, and advocacy (Ratts et al., 2015). Additionally, these vignettes allow CITs to practice ethical decision-making in a non-threatening environment, promoting engagement with principles like autonomy, beneficence, and justice. By applying structured ethical decision-making models to imaginative scenarios, students develop confidence in addressing ethical dilemmas, which translates to their real-world practice.

Limitations

As with any teaching exercise, it is important to recognize that the use of mythical vignettes in a classroom setting comes with limitations. These include the risk of student over-detachment, cultural misrepresentation, and poor transferability. As mythical vignettes are centered around fictional beings rather than real client examples, students may mentally “check out” and detach from the seriousness of the exercise unless instructors explicitly frame the activity as a metaphor, rather than a diversion from human-centered ethical decision making. Students should be reminded that ethical dilemmas always involve people, even when framed fictionally, and their analyses must reflect empathy, human dignity, and awareness of real-world parallels (Rogers, 1957, 1961). Clear guidance and reflective debriefs can help students address why it may feel easier to dismiss cultural sensitivity when the “client” is not perceived as human, prompting students to explore implications for their practice. This can help the risk of depersonalization.

Cultural vignettes always carry the possibility of misrepresentation and poor transferability. With mythical vignettes, this risk is heightened because students may project human cultural stereotypes onto fictional beings if left unguided. Rather than challenging biases, such projection can inadvertently reinforce them. To mitigate this, assignment instructions include a directive that students use multiple credible sources, both online and print, to ground their work in evidence-based cultural construction rather than assumption. Faculty must reinforce that multiple representations exist for mythical figures, and critical engagement across sources is expected. This approach reduces the likelihood of reinforcing stereotypes and instead cultivates critical cultural reflection. However, mitigation depends on strong faculty framing. Without explicit guidance linking fantasy to real cultural frameworks such as intersectionality and systemic oppression, the assignment risks reinforcing bias rather than dismantling it (Sue et al., 2007). This will also help mitigate the risk of poor transferability, helping students apply these mythical scenarios to human clients and in doing so, carry over important lessons in empathy, ethics, and cultural competence into their professional work. Mitigation requires faculty to explicitly coach students through holding both metaphor and personhood in mind. Pre-activity lectures or guided discussions should clarify that allegory must deepen, not diminish, ethical clarity.

Future Directions

A promising direction is adapting mythical vignettes for online and/or hybrid learning environments. Virtual platforms could incorporate storytelling through simulations or collaborative activities, making this creative approach more accessible to CITs in diverse

educational settings. Incorporating global mythologies could further enhance cultural awareness by exposing students to values and beliefs from various cultural perspectives. These future directions not only support innovative teaching strategies but also ensure CITs are better equipped to navigate the complexities of counseling practice with cultural sensitivity and ethical integrity (Isawi et al., 2024). Through continued research and development, mythical creature vignettes can evolve as a valuable tool for preparing counselors for diverse and ethically complex scenarios.

Future research could explore how mythical creature vignettes can extend beyond ethical training to other clinical skills, such as diagnosis, treatment planning, and crisis intervention. Studies could also assess the effectiveness of these vignettes in improving student outcomes, such as cultural humility and ethical reasoning (Parker et al., 2022). Expanding this approach to include intersectional identities within mythical narratives, such as a werewolf facing stigma due to overlapping marginalized traits, would deepen CITs' understanding of how societal attitudes and systemic barriers affect clients' mental health and well-being.

References

- American Counseling Association (ACA). (2014). *ACA code of ethics*. American Counseling Association. <https://www.counseling.org/>
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). (2010). *ADA standards for accessible design*. U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. <https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/design-standards/>
- Anderson, L. W., Krathwohl, D. R., Airasian, P. W., Cruikshank, K. A., Mayer, R. E., Pintrich, P. R., Raths, J., & Wittrock, M. C. (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Brenes, G. A., Ingram, C., & Danhauer, S. C. (2012). Benefits and challenges of conducting psychotherapy by telephone. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 42(6), 543–549. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026135>
- Cain, D. J. (2010). *Person-centered psychotherapies*. American Psychological Association.
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2016). *2016 CACREP standards*. Author. <https://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2016-cacrep-standards/>
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). (2024). *2024 CACREP standards*. <https://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2024-cacrep-standards/>
- Dempsey, K. (2023). How storytelling impacts students in their psychotherapy training. *European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, 13, 136–152. <https://doi.org/10.24377/EJQRP.article3080>
- Du Preez, E., van Kessel, K., & Webb, X. (2024). A systematic review of the ethical considerations of delivering video-based therapy. *Psychotherapy and Counseling Journal of Australia*, 12(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.59158/001c115608>
- Garcia, J. G., Cartwright, B., Winston, S. M., & Borzuchowska, B. (2003). A transcultural integrative model for ethical decision-making in counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 81(3), 268–277. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00253.x>
- Gray, J. (2024). *Developing clinically relevant vignettes from empirical data as teaching tools for counselors-in-training in Pennsylvania* (Doctoral dissertation). Pennsylvania State University.
- Griner, D., & Smith, T. B. (2006). Culturally adapted mental health interventions: A meta-analytic review. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 43(4), 531–548. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-3204.43.4.531>
- Harris, B., & Birnbaum, R. (2015). Ethical and legal implications of the use of technology in counseling. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 43(2), 133–141. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-014-0515-0>
- Henderson, K. L., & Malone, S. L. (2012). Ethical fairy tales: Using fairy tales as illustrative ethical dilemmas with counseling students. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 7(1), 65–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2012.660128>
- Isawi, D., Schoonover, T. J., Davis, E., & Gomez-Torres, B. (2024). Creative pedagogy in counselor education: The use of play strategies. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2024.2432251>
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.
- Levitt, D. H., Ducaine, C. S., Greulich, K., Gentry, K., & Treweweke, L. (2019). Teaching ethical decision-making in counselor education. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 12(3), Article 8.
- Manalili, J. C. (2024). Digital boundaries: A review of clinical and ethical issues in telepsychology among mental health professionals. *Diversitas Journal*, 9(1), 328–343. <https://doi.org/10.48017/dj.v9i1Special1.2870>
- Parker, M. M., Attia, M., & Lee, K. (2022). Utilizing experiential activities to facilitate multicultural understanding within ethical decision-making. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 17(4), 533–545. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2021.1921645>
- Ratts, M. J., Singh, A. A., Butler, S. K., Nassar-McMillan, S., & McCullough, J. R. (2015). Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies: Guidelines for the counseling profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 44(1), 28–48. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12035>

- Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 21*(2), 95–103. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0045357>
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Saunders, R., & Cogburn, B. (2024). Creativity in the online classroom: Fostering student connectedness in counselor education courses. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2024.2375522>
- Schaefer, C. E., & Drewes, A. A. (2013). *The therapeutic powers of play: 20 core agents of change*. Wiley.
- Sheperis, D., & Smith, A. (2021). Telehealth best practice: A call for standards of care. *Journal of Technology in Counselor Education and Supervision, 1*(1), 27–35. <https://doi.org/10.22371/tccs.0004>
- Stoll, J., Müller, J. A., & Trachsel, M. (2020). Ethical issues in online psychotherapy: A narrative review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 10*, Article 993. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2019.00993>
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist, 62*(4), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>
- Tarvydas, V. M. (1998). Ethical decision-making processes. In R. R. Cottone & V. M. Tarvydas (Eds.), *Ethical and professional issues in counseling* (pp. 144–154). Prentice Hall.
- Zakaria, N. S., & Warren, J. (2018). Counseling ethics education: Teaching and learning development reformation. In I. H. Amzat & B. Yusuf (Eds.), *Fast forwarding higher education institutions for global challenges* (pp. 83–96). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-603-4_8

Using Compassion-Focused Photo Journaling to Address Impostor Phenomenon and Well-being in Clinical Supervision Courses

Impostor phenomenon (IP) is a common challenge that counselors-in-training (CITs) report during practicum and internship. Without intervention, IP has the potential to decrease effectiveness, compromise mental health, exacerbate perfectionism, and contribute to impairment and burnout. Counselor educators are uniquely positioned to support CITs with proactive strategies to address these challenges and facilitate counselor wellness and sustainability. The proposed innovative supervision strategy utilizes compassion-focused photo journaling (CFPJ) inspired by narrative therapy, self-compassion, and feminist andragogy to help CITs reauthor their relationship with IP and create alternative narratives that reduce IP through focusing on CIT strengths, wellness, and compassion satisfaction.

Author Note:

Kimberlee Ratliff, Sarah (“Sage”) Clapp, and Heidi Morton

Counseling Department, School of Education, University of Puget Sound

There are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Kimberlee Ratliff,

University of Puget Sound, School of Education, 1500 N. Warner Street, CMB#1051, Tacoma, WA 98416. Email: kmratliff@pugetsound.edu

KIMBERLEE M. RATLIFF, SARAH “SAGE” J. CLAPP, & HEIDI L. MORTON

School of Education, University of Puget Sound

KEYWORDS

counselors-in-training, impostor phenomenon, photo journaling, group supervision, self-compassion

Introduction

Impostor phenomenon (IP), also known as imposter syndrome, is a common experience for graduate students and for those working in the helping professions (Salari et al., 2025; Tigranyan et al., 2020). The term, introduced in a 1978 study of high-achieving women, was “...used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phonies” (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 1). Common beliefs and feelings associated with this phenomenon include self-doubt, fear of failure, identifying success as luck rather than competence, and feeling like a fraud (Clance & Imes, 1978). The initial study conceptualized IP through internalized gender stereotypes but lacked exploration of intersecting identities, external factors (i.e., racial discrimination, culturally-isolating environments), and systemic oppression (Brown et al., 2025; Chakraverty, 2022; Cokley et al., 2024).

Counselors-in-training (CITs) are susceptible to IP. In a recent study, 65.1% of CITs reported frequent or intense IP, with 46.3% reporting symptoms of generalized anxiety (Clarke, et al., 2025). The rate of IP is even higher for high-achievers (Clance & Imes, 1978; Siddiqui et al., 2024). Other groups shown to experience high rates of IP include college students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Brown et al., 2025).

IP is exacerbated when racism-related stressors are present (Bernard et al., 2017; Cokley et al., 2024). For example, experiencing microaggressions and racially isolating environments contributed to IP among Hispanic/Latine and Native American college students (Chakraverty, 2022) and the combination of minority status stress and IP among Black college students decreased mental health wellness (Bernard et al., 2017; McClain et al., 2016). Current findings indicate a prevalence of IP among racially and ethnically minoritized groups (Bravata et al., 2020; Cokley et al., 2024, Cokley et al., 2017). A primary concern related to IP is the correlation with decreased mental health wellness and increased burnout and stress. Impostor phenomenon in counselors and CITs can increase compassion fatigue (Clark et al., 2022), decrease sense of self-efficacy (Clarke et al., 2025), and negatively impact the therapeutic alliance (Langford & Clance, 1993), which in turn may negatively impact client outcomes (Lawson & Venart, 2005).

Recent research reframes IP as a logical response to systemic conditions rather than solely individual-level cognitive distortions (Chamarthi et al., 2025; Feenstra et al., 2020). CITs navigate systems built on predominantly White, cisgender norms (Mullangi & Jagsi, 2019) and evaluative supervisor-supervisee relationships (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Given these systemic contributors and IP’s harmful effects, counselors have an ethical imperative to equip graduate students with counter-strategies during training.

STRATEGIES THAT COUNTER THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON

Counselor education programs bear a responsibility to address IP and help CITs cultivate practices that encourage professional sustainability and resilience (Clarke et al., 2025). These practices, integral to the profession (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Ellison et al., 2024; Nelson et al., 2017; Radey & Figley, 2007) can be advanced within the supportive supervision environment through a collective focus on self-care and wellness. Approaches that promote self-compassion and compassion satisfaction can address IP by reshaping how CITs relate to themselves and their work. Neff (2003) defined self-compassion as “...acknowledging that suffering, failure, and inadequacies are part of the human condition, and that all people—oneself included—are worthy of compassion” (p. 224). Self-compassion promotes kindness over criticism, acknowledges shared humanity, and encourages mindful awareness in lieu of overidentification (Clarke et al., 2025; Neff, 2003; Neff et al., 2007). Closely related, compassion satisfaction refers to the joy of witnessing client progress in counseling (Radey & Figley, 2007; Stamm, 2009). However, IP can disrupt this experience (Clark et al., 2022), increasing the likelihood of practitioner discontent and potentially reducing positive client outcomes. Both self-compassion and compassion satisfaction are positively associated with greater connectedness, resilience, and well-being (Beaumont et al., 2016; Burnett & Wahl, 2015; Clarke et al., 2025; Neff et al., 2005; Neff & Vonk, 2009; Nelson et al., 2017), and reduce the chances of burnout (Bahari et al., 2022; Beaumont et al., 2016; Stamm, 2009; Thompson et al., 2014). Behaviors that strengthen compassion satisfaction include cultivating positive attitudes toward clients, building stress management skills, practicing self-care, adopting a reflective stance, and participating in discussion groups that can provide social support (Baumann et al., 2020; Dehlin & Lundh, 2018; Milasan, 2024; Radey & Figley, 2007; Rivera et al., 2021). Through a critical pedagogy lens, self-care can be viewed as a radical resistance to oppressive hierarchies that promote systems or profits over individual and collective wellness; self-care can also be grounded within the feminist ethics of care, and the concept that “...we must take care of ourselves before we can take care of others” (Mountz et al., 2015, p. 1251).

Because IP thrives in isolation, group-based approaches can be particularly effective. Group supervision offers CITs structured space to discuss IP, normalize self-doubt, and alleviate isolation (Baumann et al., 2020; Clance & Imes, 1978; Rivera et al., 2021; Tigranyan et al., 2021) while integrating proactive strategies that counter IP and promote resilience before problems escalate (Agarwal et al., 2023; Clarke et al., 2025).

RATIONALE

Students in counselor preparation programs experience many stressors including ongoing evaluation of professional dispositions, knowledge, and skills, heavy workloads (Tigranyan et al., 2021), and performance pressures (Warren et al., 2017). These conditions

contribute to self-doubt, perfectionism, stress, anxiety, and depression, which are hallmarks of IP (e.g., Clark et al., 2022; Clarke et al., 2025; Hill & Gotwals, 2025). During practicum and internship, CITs may experience feeling “under the microscope” which can trigger or intensify IP, particularly in the absence of effective coping strategies. CITs’ learning, clinical presence, and effectiveness are compromised when self-doubt becomes overwhelming (Salari et al., 2025; Tigranyan et al., 2021).

The use of creative modalities can mitigate IP by fostering reflection, emotional processing, perspective-taking, and cultural competence (Gladding, 2021; Luetkeymeyer et al., 2021). Despite calls for more attention to IP in counseling curriculum (Clarke et al., 2025; Tigranyan et al., 2021), guidance is limited regarding ways to apply creative arts in group supervision in order to disrupt IP narratives.

Group supervision provides an ideal setting to explore how CIT beliefs and experiences influence IP, compassion satisfaction, and burnout (Clark et al., 2022). Integrating strategies into group supervision that center self-care, collective care, compassion satisfaction, and burnout prevention empowers CITs to cultivate skills germane to sustaining careers in counseling. Counselor educators are encouraged to communicate a wider lens of career sustainability and vitality.

ADDRESSING IP THROUGH COMPASSION-FOCUSED PHOTO JOURNALING IN GROUP SUPERVISION

One creative arts strategy commonly used during practicum and internship is reflective journal writing. CITs recognize journaling as a valuable method that supports freedom of expression and professional development (Woodbridge et al., 2017), and it is a recommended strategy to reduce feelings of self-doubt and anxiety associated with IP (Wade-Bell et al., 2024). Compassion-focused photo journaling (CFPJ) builds on this approach by incorporating photography and compassion-focused reflections to enhance well-being and prevent or address common IP thoughts and feelings expressed in supervision. Integrating narrative therapy techniques, such as exploring unique outcomes and externalizing, CFPJ normalizes rather than pathologizes the experience of IP and helps CITs identify strengths and resources that promote resilience and self-compassion (DeCandia Vitoria, 2021).

Adding the visual element of photography to the journaling process introduces an alternative method through which to express feelings and thoughts that are difficult to convey through words (Ingeberg, et al., 2012), utilizing sensory, kinesthetic, and imaginal ways of knowing (Chilton et al., 2015) and providing further insight into how CITs interpret events (Niese, et al., 2024). Mindful photography can enhance mood, life satisfaction, and overall well-being (Brewster & Cox, 2019; Diehl & Zauberman, 2022). Techniques such as therapeutic photography in counseling practice (Milasan, 2024; Upton et al., 2023) and the participatory method of photovoice (Emelianchik-Key et al., 2025) demonstrate photography’s ability to foster intrapersonal reflection, self-

awareness, and professional identity, while simultaneously buffering against burnout (Upton et al., 2023).

Counselor educators can use this strategy in supervision to help reauthor the CITs' relationships with IP-related thoughts and feelings during clinical training and foster self-compassion, compassion satisfaction, and well-being. Utilizing CFPJ in group supervision involves four key components: (a) preparation, (b) education, (c) implementation, and (d) connection. Through CFPJ, CITs can explore values, skills, and strengths that support their well-being and longevity in the profession. This approach also explores systemic wellness challenges, creating space for mutual support (Lorde, 1988).

Innovative Teaching Strategy: Compassion-Focused Photo Journaling

Informed by feminist andragogy, this strategy integrates compassion-focused practices with inclusive pedagogy emphasizing personal empowerment, systemic awareness, self-expression, and creativity (Alhumaid, 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2025). Utilizing narrative therapy and photovoice, it invites CITs to curate images locating their wellness and growth within sociocultural contexts while interrogating systems and nurturing self- and community-compassion. The approach aligns with CACREP standards for self-care and social/cultural diversity (CACREP, 2024, 3.A.11 & 3.B), and culturally responsive supervision (ACA, 2014, F.2.b; American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2024, C.3).

COMPASSION-FOCUSED PHOTO JOURNALING PROCESS

Implementing CFPJ in group supervision involves a scaffolded process where faculty model the approach, provide an initial structured prompt to practice the process, and empower CITs to select the prompts that have the most meaning for them in that moment. Later in the course, CITs may create their own journal prompts as they authentically tell their field experience story. Prompts are influenced by narrative therapy through externalizing and identifying unique outcomes and promoting self-compassion and compassion satisfaction.

Preparation

The preparation stage involves building a safe, supportive environment where sharing of photos and stories is respected and validated (Houin & Perryman, 2023). The first class begins with community agreements and team-building activities that set the stage for navigating challenging topics such as IP. Engaging CITs in a safe and supportive group supervision environment is an important aspect of this teaching strategy.

Education

Early in the term, instructors provide psychoeducation on IP, facilitate discussions of cultural factors that influence the development of IP, share strategies associated with well-being, and review legal and ethical considerations when taking photos (e.g., informed consent; Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in schools; Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in clinical contexts). CITs are introduced to the use of photo journaling as a self-care strategy for self-awareness, meaning-making, well-being, connection, and sustainable practice. Instructors model the photo journaling approach to demonstrate how to implement this process into their field experience journey.

Implementation

CFPJ prompts are provided to all students at the beginning of the course rather than assigning a designated prompt each week. The prompts are provided for ongoing personal reflection to help CITs deepen their field experience story to acknowledge inequitable power structures and identify unique outcomes, values, and strengths in order to build resilience, improve mental health wellness, encourage self-care, and increase focus on compassion satisfaction. Using a variety of prompts allows each CIT the flexibility to focus on their most salient individual experiences and cultural and environmental factors rather than expecting students to respond to a prompt that may not resonate with them. CITs have freedom to choose the journal medium (electronic or physical) to accommodate personal preferences. Counselor education programs operating on a quarter schedule may opt to implement a weekly photo journal schedule; a full semester course might use a journal schedule every other week. This strategy is adaptable to online and in-person field experience courses, as well.

Sample compassion-focused prompts may be:

- Think about how you are feeling as you are about to begin your practicum or internship placement. Take a photo of something that represents that feeling. Where do you feel the emotions in your body? What internal and external influences are underlying that feeling? Describe them without placing judgment on that feeling.
- Take a photo of the values and strengths that symbolize how your social identities, culture, and worldview contribute to your emerging counseling identity. Journal about the richness that these values and strengths bring to your work.
- Take a photo that reflects a challenging experience at your practicum/internship site. Externalize and name the “problem” or “issue” as if it is a character in your story. Journal about how this problem shows up during your field experience and note when it is absent. What strengths do you notice when the problem is not present?
- Take a photo of something that represents wellness and joy that you experienced at your placement site this week. What sustains you on days when practicum/internship is challenging, or when you receive difficult feedback?
- Think about a self-critical thought or feeling you experienced this week that connects to a sense of impostor phenomenon, feeling out of place, or “othered.” Take a photo

of something that symbolizes self-compassion and write a poem, or letter as if from an encouraging friend. Note how you feel after writing and reading your letter.

- Take a photo of an image symbolizing a systemic institutional issue or practice at your field experience site that impacts your well-being. In your journal, write about the issue and how it creates a barrier to wellness. Acknowledge its presence in your experience and hold space for the feelings that emerge. Notice what relationships, strengths, and moments of joy sustain you as you navigate the issue.

Connection

Sharing stories with others facilitates group connection, encouragement, validation, enhanced empathy, and perspective taking (Gladding, 2021; Gottlieb et al., 2020; Houin & Perryman, 2023). Group supervision offers an opportunity to examine systemic influences on IP, practice self-compassion, foster social connections, and receive encouragement and feedback from faculty and peers (Clarke, et al., 2025). We integrate photo and reflection sharing periodically during group supervision to facilitate connection, validation, and collective meaning-making. CITs typically take turns sharing their photo from their phone or laptop computer and provide a brief summary of their reflection at the beginning of group supervision.

APPLICATION TO COUNSELOR EDUCATION

Current prevalence data indicate that CITs are vulnerable to developing IP and experiencing its adverse effects, which interfere with their personal and professional lives (Clarke et al., 2025; Salari et al., 2025; Tigranyan et al., 2021). Counselor educators and supervisors play a crucial role in CITs' development and preparation to enter the workforce. Integrating self-care practices, self-compassion, compassion satisfaction, feminist andragogy, and creative arts into a supportive group supervision environment has the potential to minimize the negative impacts of IP and contribute to satisfying and sustained careers in the counseling profession.

During practicum and internship, CITs are exposed to new situations and complex scenarios when providing mental health care to clients and K-12 students, increasing the potential for self-doubt and feelings of being a fraud. Fears of making a mistake or saying the wrong thing are frequently expressed in practicum and internship supervision. Rather than waiting for compassion fatigue and signs of burnout to emerge, CFPJ can be applied as a prevention strategy. Group supervision has been identified as a helpful format for CITs' development (Gonultas et al., 2024) and is an optimal place within the curriculum to implement self-care practices and strategies to support resilience and sustainability during the transition from CITs to professional counselors.

Integrating a creative arts approach provides another way for counselor educators to broach conversations related to micro- and macro-level injustices. When CITs share images depicting systemic barriers, the group can name patterns across individual experiences. Supervisors can consider participating alongside students in the CFPJ

activity. Supervisors can model power-sharing by making visible their own impostor histories and the institutional conditions that shaped them. By doing so, supervisors can disrupt the supervisor-as-infallible dynamic and reframe IP as a shared professional experience requiring structural intervention, not just individual resilience.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND FOSTERING INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Integrating self-care and wellness into teaching and supervision aligns with CACREP standards and ACA and ASCA ethical codes that highlight self-care and well-being as ethical expectations in order to fulfill professional responsibilities (ACA, 2014, Section C; ASCA, 2022, B.3.h; CACREP, 2024, 3.A.11; Ellison, et al., 2024; Nelson, et al., 2017; Radey & Figley, 2007). Additionally, counselors must have the ability to recognize impairments to well-being and seek assistance to avoid harm to clients (ACA, 2014, C.2.g.).

Drawing inspiration from narrative theory, feminist andragogy, and creative arts, this method creates an inclusive space for learning that honors each CIT's unique story. This strength-based approach empowers CITs and acknowledges the systemic and sociopolitical influences on IP (Bernard et al., 2017; Chakraverty, 2022; Clance, et al., 1995; Cokley et al., 2024). An inclusive learning environment fosters a sense of safety within the group supervision setting, allowing for vulnerability and centering and validating the stories of CITs.

Acknowledging IP and closely-related characteristics such as perfectionism (Hill & Gotwals, 2025) brings awareness to systemic and sociopolitical factors that influence counselors' beliefs and life experiences. It is important to consider external messages and positions of power that may contribute to IP (Chakraverty, 2022; Cokley et al., 2024). Reflecting on dominant narratives perpetuated by unjust systems raises critical consciousness and lays the foundation for centering social justice and sustainability. Photovoice centers the voices of marginalized groups to inspire social change by combining photography, storytelling, and advocacy (Emelianchik-Key, 2025). Similarly, the CFPJ centers the voices of CITs during their field experiences. In alignment with feminist pedagogy, this method facilitates sharing diverse perspectives and the acknowledgment of structures that reinforce inequalities. It is essential to note that photo journaling is an activity designed for personal growth. Counselor educators have an ethical responsibility to inform students of their autonomy in this process, as they have a choice in what information is shared (ACA, 2014; F.8.c).

Because the CFPJ strategy relies on the use of photography, counselor educators need to consider accessibility and have a means to provide cameras to CITs who may not have them, such as checking out cameras from campus technology services. This strategy can be adapted to combine or substitute photo journaling with other forms of visual expression such as collages, drawing, painting, digital images/memes, and

sculptures. When using this strategy in an online course, the privacy policies and permission settings of the platforms used to share or submit students' photos and journals must be considered (Warren et al., 2017). Using a secure platform in the campus' learning management system or a private file storage system with robust password protection is advised.

This model is adaptable to meet the needs of specific environments or students from varying cultural backgrounds. Photo-journal prompts may also be updated to reflect emergent topics and experiences. Journal reflections need not be restricted to prose; students can use poetry, native language, storytelling elements, found -pictures, internet memes, sketches or doodles, collages, or music. Videos or voice recordings can be used to submit their journal reflections.

REFLEXIVITY AND INTRAPERSONAL AWARENESS

Counselor educators must remain attuned to potential impacts on individual participants and the classroom when incorporating CFPJ into supervision. Expressive and reflective activities can surface emotionally-sensitive material that may require additional exploration and support. Students from collectivist cultural backgrounds may experience photo journaling's emphasis on individual introspection as culturally incongruent, while students with trauma histories involving photography or visual surveillance may find the modality triggering rather than healing. Some students may experience their instructor's co-engagement in the activity as unsettling rather than enriching, particularly given the inherent power differential. In addition, educational and socioeconomic differences among both faculty and students can influence group dynamics if the activity is not facilitated with care.

It is important to acknowledge that IP is likely not a universal phenomenon, and therefore, not every CIT will endorse or resonate with experiences of IP. Emerging critiques of IP as a construct also argue that framing IP as primarily an individual experience masks larger systemic and institutional cultures that are discriminatory or exclusionary in nature (LaDonna et al., 2025). Regardless of IP presence, CFPJ's creative and experiential nature offers opportunities to deepen intrapersonal awareness, foster authentic relationships, reduce power differentials, and normalize reflective practice (Houin & Perryman, 2023).

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Free and low-cost resources are available to support the implementation of a compassion-focused photo journaling strategy. The Professional Quality of Life (ProQol) website (<https://proqol.org/>) offers handouts on self-care strategies, provides free access to the *ProQol* 5 measure, and includes links to additional resources related to their work. Kristin Neff has established a self-compassion community at the Self-Compassion Practice website (<https://>

self-compassion.org/), featuring guided practice, self-compassion exercises, a complimentary self-compassion assessment, and opportunities to participate in workshops and community events. Counselor educators can provide a resource list to CITs to encourage ongoing mentoring and group support; potential resources include the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) Minority Fellowship Program, professional organization emerging leader and mentorship programs, and ASCA affinity groups.

Evaluation of Effectiveness of Innovative Instructional Strategy

Counselor educators can engage in qualitative and quantitative observations and data collection methods to assess the CFPJ's effectiveness and benefits to CITs. Instructors may utilize the qualitative method of memo writing to reveal meaning and engage in thematic analysis of CITs' experience and journal reflections (Birks et al., 2008; Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). Quantitative assessment measures may be utilized as a pre-post assessment to measure intended outcomes that are associated with reducing IP. Suggested assessments to measure compassion satisfaction and self-compassion include the *ProQol 5* (Stamm, 2009) and the *Self Compassion Scale* (SCS, Neff, 2003), respectively. Several instruments are available to assess levels of impostor phenomenon, belonging, and inclusive andragogy approach effectiveness. Examples of such instruments include the *Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale* (CIPS; Clance & O'Toole, 1987) or the shorter *CIPS-10* version (Wang et al., 2022); The *Yorke Belonging, Engagement, Self-Confidence* (BES) Scale (Yorke, 2016) or *Program Sense of Belonging* (ProSB) Questionnaire (Almonroeder et al., 2024); the *Dispositions for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Scale* (DRPS) (Whitaker & Valtierra, 2018); and the *Andragogy in Practice Inventory* (API) (Bates, 2020). Counselor educators should select appropriate assessment measures and provide clear guidelines regarding how reflections will be reviewed, privacy protections when sharing content, and safeguards for anonymity in feedback and formal measures.

At the time of publication, CFPJ is being piloted in an internship course at a small liberal arts university. Feedback from CITs will be collected anonymously using a Google form at the conclusion of the course, with the intention of reporting the results in a future publication. We encourage others who wish to pilot or use the CFPJ instructional strategy to also evaluate the strategy for its efficacy in fostering supportive learning environments and reducing the negative impacts of IP and perfectionism.

Assessment of Student Learning

Assigning a letter grade for this activity is not recommended, as this reflective activity prioritizes process over product (Houin & Perryman, 2023). Letter grades could invite self-judgment, perfectionism, comparison, and self-censoring, inhibiting the strategy's purpose. Instead, consider using complete/incomplete or pass/fail grading, and assess learning through qualitative surveys, interviews, or a gallery walk showcasing critical incidents and defining moments (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Instructors can provide prompts to CITs, such as “Which photo or reflection was the most impactful?”

Discussion and Implications

CFPJ addresses the critical need for IP-focused self-care practices in counselor education (Ellison et al., 2024; Nelson et al., 2017). In the context of group supervision during field experience courses, this approach also creates communal spaces of collective care and support while fostering a sense of belonging to counter the narrative of “otherness” often experienced by minoritized students. Importantly, this approach situates IP not as an individual pathology, but as a systemic response to oppressive structures that have historically constructed “otherness” within academic and clinical spaces. Strengthening CITs' resilience and well-being during the practicum and internship courses may have positive long-term implications for career sustainability while building collective capacity for advocacy and structural change.

LIMITATIONS

Although use of the creative arts as an experiential teaching method has several benefits, CITs may feel uncomfortable with a creative approach that is less structured or that may be perceived as being outside their comfort zone. The implementation of a specific art form, such as photography, may lead to comparison and pressure to excel for CITs who have varying photography skills. Counselor educators can mitigate some of these concerns by properly preparing CITs for the experience: emphasizing the process over the product, acknowledging the varying levels of comfort, and processing any concerns. They can also share research literature that highlights the benefits of using photography and model the process with CITs. Similarly, some counselor educators may hesitate to use photography due to a lack of experience or time constraints in group supervision, which may inhibit effective processing.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

More research is needed on CITs' experiences with CFPJ in group supervision and whether it contributes to personal and professional growth during the practicum and internship courses. Providing a proactive and preventative approach to address common career sustainability challenges contributes to the way we prepare CITs for their careers. It would be beneficial to conduct follow-up studies post-graduation using instruments such as the *ProQol-5* to measure long-term effects of this method on compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and burnout.

References

- Agarwal, P., Singh, D. C., & Srivastav, D. (2023). Relationship between imposter phenomenon and compassion fatigue among clinical psychology trainees. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(3). DOI: 10.25215/1103.289
- Aird, R. (2017). From impostership to mastersness: Experiences of a postgraduate student's transition to higher education reflected through poetry. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 22(6-7), 522-532. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987117731480>
- Alhumaid, K. (2019). Feminist perspectives on education and pedagogy: A meta-synthetic insight into the thought of four American philosophers. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 8(3), 31. <https://zuscholars.zu.ac.ac/works/1667>
- Almonroeder, T. G., Duellman, J., Edmonds, N., O'Rourke, B., & Rivera, N. (2024). Preliminary evaluation of a questionnaire to measure program-level sense of belonging among student physical therapists. *Journal of Physical Therapy Education*, 38(4), 293-299. <https://doi.org/10.1097/JTE.0000000000000347>
- American Counseling Association. (2014). 2014 ACA code of ethics. <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ethics/2014-aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>
- American School Counselor Association. (2022). ASCA ethical standards for school counselors. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/44f30280-ffe8-4b41-9ad8-f15909c3d164/EthicalStandards.pdf>
- American School Counselor Association. (2024). *Ethical standards for school counselor education faculty* (Revised 2024). American School Counselor Association. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/d450c592-48e7-45fb-8b4b-b37e650b6691/SCE-Ethical-Standards.pdf>
- Bahari, G., Asiri, K., Nouh, N., & Alqahtani, N. (2022). Professional quality of life among nurses: Compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress: A multisite study. *SAGE Open Nursing*, 8, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2377960822112329>
- Bates, R. A. (2020). Andragogy in Practice Inventory. In M. S. Knowles, E. F. Holton, R. A. Swanson, & P. A. Robinson, *The adult learner* (9th ed.). Routledge.
- Baumann, N., Faulk, C., Vanderlan, J., Chen, J., & Bhayani, R. K. (2020). Small-group discussion sessions on imposter syndrome. *MedEdPORTAL*, 16:1004. https://doi.org/10.15766/mep_2374-8265.11004
- Beaumont, E., Durkin, M., Hollins Martin, C.J., & Carson, J. (2016). Measuring relationships between self-compassion, compassion fatigue, burnout and well-being in trainee counsellors and trainee cognitive behavioural psychotherapists: A quantitative survey. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 16(1), 15-23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12054>
- Bernard, D. L., Lige, Q. M., Willis, H. A., Sosoo, E. E., & Neblett, E. W. (2017). Impostor phenomenon and mental health: The influence of racial discrimination and gender. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 64(2), 155-166. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000197>
- Bernard, J. M., & Goodyear, R. K. (2019). *Fundamentals of clinical supervision* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Birks, M., Chapman, Y., & Francis, K. (2008). Memoing in qualitative research: Probing data and processes. *Journal of research in nursing*, 13(1), 68-75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987107081254>
- Bravata, D. M., Watts, S. A., Keefer, A. L., Madhusudhan, D. K., Taylor, K. T., Clark, D. M., Nelson, R. S., Cokley, K. O., & Hagg, H. K. (2020). Prevalence, predictors, and treatment of impostor syndrome: A systematic review. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 35(4), 1252-1275. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-019-05364-1>
- Brewster, L. & Cox, A. M. (2019). The daily digital practice as a form of self-care: Using photography for everyday well-being. *Health*, 23(6), 621-638. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459318769465>
- Brown, E., & Morley, E. (2025). Feeling like a fraud: Exploring how the impostor phenomenon manifests in neurotypical and neurodivergent first-year undergraduate students in the UK using the impostor phenomenon assessment. *Journal of College Student Mental Health*, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/28367138.2025.2493896>
- Burnett, H. & Wahl, K. (2015). The compassion fatigue and resilience connection: A survey of resilience, compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction among trauma responders. *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience*, 17(1), 1-9. DOI: 10.4172/1522-4821.1000

- Chakraverty, D. (2022). A cultural impostor? Native American experiences of impostor phenomenon in STEM. *CBE Life Sciences Education*, 21(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.21-08-0204>
- Chamarthi, S., Parsi, S., Ravi, U., Kashyap, R., Chamarthi, V. S., Chamarthi, S., Parsi, S., Ravi, U., Kashyap, R., & Chamarthi, V. S. (2025). Coping mechanisms and resilience strategies for addressing impostor phenomenon in healthcare professionals. *Cureus*, 17(11). <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.97367>
- Chilton, G., Gerber, N., & Scotti, V. (2015). Towards an aesthetic intersubjective paradigm for arts-based research: An art therapy perspective. *UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts*, 5(1), 1–27.
- Clance, P.R., Dingman, D., Reviere, S. L., & Stober, D. R. (1995). Imposter phenomenon in an interpersonal/social context: Origins and treatment. *Women & Therapy*, 16(4), 79–96.
- Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy Theory, Research and Practice*, 15(3), 1–8.
- Clance, P.R. and O'Toole, M.A. (1987). Impostor phenomenon: An internal barrier to empowerment and achievement. *Women and Therapy*, 6, 51–64.
- Clark, P., Holden, C., Russell, M., & Downs, H. (2022). The impostor phenomenon in mental health professionals: Relationships among compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction. *Contemporary family therapy*, 44(2), 185–197. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-021-09580-y>
- Clarke, B. J., Hartley, M. T. & Button, C. (2025). Impostor phenomenon and counselor development: The critical role of self-compassion. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 103(2), 149–160. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12544>
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2024). *2024 CACREP standards*. <https://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2024-cacrep-standards/>
- Cokley, K. O., Bernard, D. L., Stone-Sabali, S., & Awad, G. H. (2024). Impostor phenomenon in racially/ethnically minoritized groups: Current knowledge and future directions. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 20(1), 407–430. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-081122-015724>
- Cokley, K., McClain, S., Enciso, A., & Martinez, M. (2013). An examination of the impact of minority status stress and impostor feelings on the mental health of diverse ethnic minority college students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 41(2), 82–95. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.2013.00029.x>
- Cokley, K., Smith, L., Bernard, D., Hurst, A., Jackson, S., Stone, S., Awosogba, O., Saucer, C., Bailey, M., & Roberts, D. (2017). Impostor feelings as a moderator and mediator of the relationship between perceived discrimination and mental health among racial/ethnic minority college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 64(2), 141–154. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000198>
- DeCandia Vitoria, V.A. (2021). Experiential supervision: healing impostor phenomenon from the inside out. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 40(2), 200–217. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/07325223.2020.1830215>
- Dehlin, M., & Lundh, L. G. (2018). Compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction among psychologists: Can supervision and a reflective stance be of help? *Journal for Person-Oriented Research*, 4(2), 95–107. <https://doi.org/10.17505/jpor.2018.09>
- Diehl, K., Zauberman, G., & Barasch, A. (2016). How taking photos increases enjoyment of experiences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 111(2), 119–140. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000055>
- Ellison, S., Tyler, J., & Tuttle, M. (2024). Beyond the standards: A qualitative analysis of perfectionism among master's-level counseling students. *Teaching and Supervision in Counseling*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.7290/tsc06jdar>
- Emelianchik-Key, K., Labarta, A. C., Bossie, C., Gill, C. S. (2025). Using photovoice to explore the role of self-compassion in mothers post-COVID-19 pandemic. *The Professional Counselor*, 15(2), 131–147. <https://doi.org/10.15241/kek.15.2.131>
- Feenstra, S., Begeny, C. T., Ryan, M. K., Rink, F. A., Stoker, J. I., & Jordan, J. (2020). Contextualizing the impostor “syndrome.” *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.575024>
- FitzGerald, K., Seale, N. S., Kerins, C. A., & McElvaney, R. (2008). The Critical Incident Technique: A useful tool for conducting qualitative research. *Journal of Dental Education*, 72(3), 299–304. Portico. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.0022-0337.2008.72.3.tb04496.x>
- Furr, S. R., & Carroll, J. J. (2003). Critical incidents in student counselor development. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 81(4), 483–489. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00275.x>

- Gladding, S. T. (2021). *Counseling as an art: The creative arts in counseling (6th ed.)*. Pearson Education.
- Gönültaş, M., Meydan, B., & Sağkal, A. S. (2024). The examination of the counseling supervision effect on personal and professional development of first-time supervisees. *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies*, 11(4), 342–356. <https://dx.doi.org/10.52380/ijpes.2024.11.4.1375>
- Gottlieb M., Chung, A., Battaglioli, N., Sebok-Syer, S. S., & Kalantari, A. (2020). Impostor syndrome among physicians and physicians in training: A scoping review. *Med Educ.*, 54(2), 116–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13956>
- Hill, A. P., & Gotwals, J. K. (2025). A meta-analysis of multidimensional perfectionism and impostor phenomenon. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 118, 104639. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrjp.2025.104639>
- Houin, C. B. & Perryman, K. L. (2023). Creating counselors: Master's level counseling students' experience of expressive arts in a multicultural course. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 18(3), 438–453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2021.1988024>
- Ingeberg, M. H., Wikström, B. M., & Berg, A. (2012). The essential dialogue: A Norwegian study of art communication in mental health care. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*, 50(8), 22–30. <https://doi.org/10.3928/02793695-20120703-01>
- LaDonna, K. A., Cowley, L., Field, E., Ginsburg, S., Wätling, C., & Pack, R. (2025). Introducing the intruder paradox: “It’s not the imposter syndrome, it’s you don’t want me in the field.” *Medical Education*, 59(10), 1058–1066. Portico. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.15741>
- Langford, J., & Clance, P. R. (1993). The imposter phenomenon: Recent research findings regarding dynamics, personality and family patterns and their implications for treatment. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 30(3), 495–501. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-3204.30.3.495>
- Lawson, G., & Venart, B. (2005). *Preventing counselor impairment: Vulnerability, wellness, and resilience*. <https://manifold.counseling.org/read/preventing-counselor-impairment-vulnerability-wellness-and-resilience/section/a97bc67d-ff05-4ed7-a8c1-81ac144ba15c>
- Lorde, A. (1988). *A burst of light: Essays*. Firebrand Books.
- Luetkemyer, J., Adams, T., Davis, J., Redmond, T., & Hash, P. (2021). Creative practices in higher education: Decentering academic experiences. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 62(4) <https://doi.org/10.3138/jelis.62-4-2020-0097>
- McClain, S., Beasley, S. T., Jones, B., Awosogba, O., Jackson, S., & Cokley, K. (2016). An examination of the impact of racial and ethnic identity, impostor feelings, and minority status stress on the mental health of Black college students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 44, 101–117. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12040>
- Milasan, L. H. (2024). “Taking pictures is like treasure hunting”: Exploring the therapeutic value of photography as a qualitative research method. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 23, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241236219>
- Mohajan, D., & Mohajan, H. K. (2022). Memo writing procedures in grounded theory research methodology. *Studies in Social Science & Humanities*, 1(4), 10–18. <https://doi.org/10.56397/sssh.2022.11.02>
- Mountz A, Bonds A, Mansfield B, et al. (2015) For slow scholarship: A feminist politics of resistance through collective action in the neoliberal university. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 14(4): 1235–1259. <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v14i4.1058>
- Mullangi, S., & Jagsi, R. (2019). Imposter syndrome: Treat the cause, not the symptom. *JAMA*, 322(5), 403–404. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2019.9788>
- Neff, K. D. (2003). The development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity*, 2, 223–250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309027>
- Neff, K. D., Hsieh, Y., Dejitterat, K. (2005). Self-compassion, achievement goals, and coping with academic failure. *Self and Identity*, 4, 263–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357650044000317>
- Neff, K. D., Kirkpatrick, K.L., & Rude, S. (2007). Self-compassion and adaptive psychological functioning. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41, 139–154. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrjp.2006.03.004>
- Neff, K. D., & Vonk, R. (2009). Self-compassion versus global self-esteem: Two different ways of relating to oneself. *Journal of Personality*, 77, 23–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2008.00537.x>
- Nelson, J. R., Hall, B. S., Anderson, J. L., Birtles, C. & Hemming, L. (2017). Self-compassion as self-care: A simple and effective tool for counselor educators and counseling students. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2017.1328292>
- Niese, Z. A., Libby, L. K., & Eibach, R. P. (2024). Picturing your life: The role of imagery perspective in personal photos. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 15(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506231163012>

- Radey, M., & Figley, C. R. (2007). The social psychology of compassion. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 35(3), 207–214. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-007-0087-3>
- Rivera, N., Feldman, E. A., Augustin, D. A., Caceres, W., Gans, H. A., & Blankenburg, R. (2021). Do I belong here? Confronting imposter syndrome at an individual, peer, and institutional level in health professionals. *MedEdPORTAL*, 11166. https://doi.org/10.15766/mcp_2374-8265.11166
- Rodrigues, N., Entigar, K., & Balyasnikova, N. (2025). (Re)collecting and (re)turning to ourselves: Creative feminist and queer praxes with migrants in adult learning. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 37(1). <https://doi.org/10.56105/cjsacv37i01.5827>
- Salari, N., Hashemian, S. H., Hosseinian-Far, A., Fallahi, A., Heidarian, P., Rasoulpoor, S., & Mohammadi, M. (2025). Global prevalence of imposter syndrome in health service providers: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Psychology*, 13, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02898-4>
- Siddiqui, Z. K., Church, H. R., Jayasuriya, R., Boddice, T., & Tomlinson, J. (2024). Educational interventions for imposter phenomenon in healthcare: A scoping review. *BMC Medical Education*, 24, 43. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-023-04984-w>
- Stamm, B. H. (2009). *Professional Quality of Life: Compassion Satisfaction and Fatigue Version 5 (ProQOL)*. www.proqol.org
- Stephens, M. B. (2022). Taking off the mask: Impostorism and medical education. *PRiMER*, 6(5). <https://doi.org/10.22454/PRiMER.2022.527933>
- Thompson, I. A., Amatea, E. S., & Thompson, E. S. (2014). Personal and contextual predictors of mental health counselors' compassion fatigue and burnout. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 36(1), 58–77. <https://doi.org/10.17744/mhcc.36.1.p61m73373m4617f3>
- Tigranyan, S., Byington, D. R., Liupakorn, D., Hicks, A., Lombardi, S., Mathis, M., & Rodolfa, E. (2021). Factors related to the impostor phenomenon in psychology doctoral students. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 15(4), 298–305. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tep0000321>
- Upton, C. & Diambra, J. & Brott, P. & Budesa, Z. (2023). Photography as a wellness tool for counselors-in-training. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.5590/JERAP.2023.13.1.01>
- Wade-Ball, E. D., Isawi, D. T., & Fisher, T. A. (2024). Racial identity development and imposter phenomenon as predictors of counselor self-efficacy. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 18(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.70013/h3rl6ny1>
- Warren, J. M., & Schwarze, M. (2017). Exploring internship experiences of counselors-in-training through Pinterest: A consensual analysis. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 9(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.7729/92.1139>
- Whitaker, M. C., & Valtierra, K. M. (2018). The dispositions for culturally responsive pedagogy scale. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 12(1), 10–24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-11-2016-0060>
- White, R. G., Fay, R., Chimento, A., Giurgi-Oncu, C., & Phipps, A. (2022). Communication about distress and well-being: Epistemic and ethical considerations. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 59(4), 413–424. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13634615221082795>
- Woodbridge, L. & O'Beirne, B. (2017). Counseling students' perceptions of journaling as a tool for developing reflective thinking. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 9(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.7729/92.1198>

A Mindfulness Approach to Address Racial Microaggressions in the Classroom

Racial microaggressions are commonplace in higher education with negative psychological consequences for students of color, including isolation, disconnection, and a lack of support from faculty and peers. This brief provides instructors with a somatic based teaching strategy when racial microaggressions occur in the classroom. We outline how counselor educators can help students enhance empathy and cultural competence by remaining present with their discomfort after witnessing a racial microaggression, shifting their stance from defensiveness to curiosity, and increasing their self-awareness. Ethical considerations and assessment methods for this instructional activity are also explored.

NATALIE A. NIEVES¹ & ANGELA I. SHEELY-MOORE²

¹Clinical Mental Health Counseling Department, Molloy University

²Department of Counseling, Montclair State University

KEYWORDS

racial microaggressions, counselor education, contemplative andragogy, mindfulness strategies, multicultural competencies

Author Note:

Correspondence about this article should be addressed to Natalie Nieves, Clinical Mental Health Counseling Department, Molloy University, 1000 Hempstead Avenue, Rockville Centre, NY 11570. Email: nnieves@molloy.edu

Introduction

Racial microaggressions occur often in higher education, with graduate students of color expressing negative emotional consequences that include emotional distress, internalized feelings of inferiority, and a lack of belonging in their academic environments (Curtis-Boles et al., 2020; Maiden, 2021). Experiencing racial microaggressions over time can have deleterious effects on students of color's self-esteem and race-related stress, in addition to retention and degree completion (Curtis-Boles et al., 2020; Lilly et al., 2023; Maiden, 2021). Furthermore, hostile classroom environments can place graduate students of color as outsiders and in the unwanted position to speak for their entire racial group (Park & Bahia, 2022). Failing to acknowledge and address racial microaggressions with sensitivity and cultural humility can ultimately result in students of color feeling invalidated and coping in isolation (Jones, 2023; Joseph et al., 2023).

To avoid the aforementioned negative outcomes when difficult conversations on race occur in the classroom, it behooves instructors to provide a non-judgmental space for students to sit with their uncomfortable feelings and somatic reactions. Bentley-Edwards et al. (2020) stressed the need for educators to support students, when racially charged topics arise in the classroom, with empathy as well as “self-awareness, self-confrontation, and self-expressive methods” (p. 1250). One andragogical strategy to acknowledge, name, and process racial microaggressions in real time is the use of contemplative practices. Contemplative teaching approaches involve a variety of techniques aimed at enhancing students' self-awareness, empathy, and cultural competencies (Campbell et al., 2018; Hilert & Tirado, 2019; Martinez & Dong, 2020). One common type of contemplative practice is mindfulness, which Kabat-Zinn (2013) defined as the practice of intentional and nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment. This awareness encompasses not only what students are thinking, but also what they are experiencing at a somatic level. There is evidence to support how mindfulness enhances counseling students' multicultural competencies and how it improves their cognitive flexibility when encountering difficult emotions and cognitive dissonance (Campbell et al., 2018; Hilert & Tirado, 2019; Sappio et al., 2023).

Moreover, Dougherty et al. (2020) found that counselor educators who use mindful andragogy fostered trust, mutuality, acceptance, and authenticity in the classroom. The use of mindfulness was particularly helpful when multicultural issues arose in class, specifically in promoting students' ability to remain present and be an effective, active listener when broaching race-based discussions. Lastly, these authors posited how mindful andragogy enhanced communication between themselves and their students and strengthened their relationships with students.

Relatedly, embodied andragogy is an emerging focus within educational research which consists of learning approaches that integrate the entire body, rather than focusing on cognitions (Clughen, 2024). Moreover, embodiment andragogy challenges traditional mind-body separation found within traditional cognitive focused teaching practices. Grounded

in polyvagal theory, embodiment practices support the notion of one's physiological state having a profound impact on one's cognitive processing. Hence, polyvagal-informed learning exercises such as social co-regulation have been used in higher education classroom settings with promising results (Clughen, 2024). Furthermore, researchers posit that Aikido's self- and co-regulation skills hold potential as an embodied pedagogy for intercultural communication training. These skills help interrupt defensive physiological responses, enhance the body's ability to self and co-regulate, and help maintain openness and curiosity during intercultural communication conflict and perceived threats (De Baets & Van Praet, 2024). Menakem (2017) stressed how embodiment practices for race-based discussions can serve to "build [one's] self-awareness and deepen [one's] capacity for empathy" (p.17). The emotional intensity that can follow after experiencing a racial microaggression can be ameliorated through the integration of contemplative exercises and, similar to the Aikido study, might support students' ability to maintain meaningful engagement rather than withdrawing or shutting down.

KNOWLEDGE GAP

Nascent research on general mindfulness practice on counseling students' multicultural competencies have demonstrated increased self-awareness, reduction of color-blind racial attitudes, and increased knowledge and skills related to counseling diverse clients (Baggs et al., 2024; Hilert & Tirado, 2019; Lenés et al., 2020). On an intrapersonal level, Dye et al. 's (2019) study explored the use of mindfulness to support counseling student wellness, with reported positive outcomes including physiological relaxation, as well as reduction of stress and anxiety in response to general difficult classroom discussions. However, we found only one study to date regarding empirical studies centering on mindfulness teaching practices and racial microaggressions. In this qualitative study, Mirick and Davis' (2022) focused on students' *cognitive* understanding of a microaggression, which included what constitutes a microaggression and the impact of the words and actions used within microaggressions. For this study, Mirick and Davis examined cognitive reactions of social work students after reading case study vignettes on race-based incidents in the classroom. Two primary themes that emerged from their study were the students' thoughts about 1) deciding whether or not to intervene and 2) specific actions to take when intervening.

What remains missing in the counseling literature is not just the *somatic* experience but also addressing a racial microaggression *in real time* in the classroom setting. According to Menakem (2017), centralizing the somatic experience when encountering racial microaggressions, while deemphasizing cognition, is the nexus of change and growth. Bartoli et al. (2015) echoed the need for students to "learn how to withstand their own anxiety, confusion, and uncertainty" (pp. 257-258) in order to develop genuine relationships, which can include the therapeutic alliance with future clients. Current counselor education research on mindfulness focuses on areas such as cultural competence and counselor self-awareness (Baggs et al., 2024; Dye et al., 2019; Lenés et al., 2020). However, to date, there are no known empirical or conceptual studies in the counseling literature that examines the use of mindfulness strategies as a specific intervention when racial microaggressions occur in a counselor education classroom.

Integrating mindfulness strategies, with an emphasis on the somatic experience, into the classroom, can help navigate difficult conversations related to racial microaggressions, while inviting students to explore their personal biases and cultivate a deeper understanding of systemic inequities (King, 2018; Lenes et al., 2020). King's RAIN activity aims to begin addressing this gap which consists of a 4-step mindfulness exercise, which centers the topic of race, to help students navigate and mitigate their emotional distress when racial microaggressions occur in the classroom.

Description of Instructional Strategy

The RAIN framework was originally used to help individuals after witnessing or being the target of a racially charged incident (King, 2018). Specifically, this exercise has been adapted from King's work to address racial microaggressions on the part of students and to provide space to slow down by turning inward and being with their experience without judgment. King's RAIN approach involves four steps: 1) Recognize what you are feeling; 2) Allow the experience to be there without judgment; 3) Investigate with curiosity how it shows up in your body and thoughts; and 4) Nurture yourself with compassion and care.

PREPARATIONS

Prior to introducing the RAIN approach to students, it is essential for instructors to have the capacity to acknowledge and identify when racial microaggressions occur in the classroom. Dougherty et al. (2020) suggested counselor educators engage in their own mindfulness practices before teaching mindfulness exercises, as it can increase the effectiveness of particular mindfulness-based skills (e.g., intentional pauses, managing emotional discomfort). In alignment with Dougherty et al. (2020), we emphasize the benefit of engaging in a personal mindfulness practice, which allows us to authentically model and promote a mindful classroom environment. Therefore, instructors who intend to implement the RAIN instructional strategy should consider integrating mindfulness into their daily lives before introducing and teaching the activity to students. This can include here-and-now practices such as sitting meditation, breath-focused attention, disconnecting from technology, mindful eating or walking, and spending time in nature. To build this capacity, it would help—yet is not required—for instructors to have an ongoing mindfulness practice. With continued somatic practice, this consistency in remaining grounded can help foster emotional regulation and build the instructor's capacity to remain present with their own reaction as well as the reactions of their students when faced with a racial microaggression in the classroom (Dana, 2021). Similarly, exposing students to basic mindfulness practices throughout the semester, from the first day of class, will help them remain with their own emotions and bodily sensations when experiencing discomfort, instead of engaging in fight or flight (Dana, 2021). Instructors can invite students to participate

in brief mindfulness activities, lasting no more than five minutes, at the start of class time and can include strategies such as box breathing, guided meditation, and sitting in silence. Recommended websites, apps, and textbooks are provided below, in this teaching brief, for additional information.

THE RAIN FRAMEWORK: A MINDFULNESS CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

The RAIN instructional strategy can serve as a preventive and responsive tool that instructors can use at any time throughout the semester. Instructors can introduce this activity as a separate lesson through the use of role plays or case scenarios, which can help students acclimate to experiencing these new steps. Additionally, instructors can also utilize the RAIN activity in real time, after a racial microaggression occurs.

The first step of RAIN begins with students identifying their somatic and emotional reactions after witnessing the racial microaggression. The following guiding questions and statements can assist students to connect with their bodies:

- “Return to your breathing and see if you noticed a change in your breath when the racial microaggression occurred.”
- “Where did you experience a change/changes in your body?”
- “What did you experience in those particular areas of the body? For example, did you experience muscle tension? If so, where and what feelings are associated with these bodily states?”

It is anticipated for students to express discomfort; hence, instructors can provide verbal reassurances of feeling uneasy while completing the first step of RAIN. To further normalize feelings of discomfort, instructors can provide a personal example of a feeling and where this feeling is experienced in the body (e.g., anger as communicated through a clenched jaw) prior to inviting students to do the same.

The second step of RAIN involves students staying with their somatic and emotional reactions to the experienced racial microaggression that occurred. While remaining in this full embodied state, and without judgment, students use words, images, and/or symbols to describe their experience of the racial microaggression. For learners who are neurodivergent, offering mindfulness based multisensory approaches (e.g., mindful walking, mindful listening, mindful observation) during the RAIN activity can be used (Finck et al., 2023). Offering flexible time frames to complete each step of the RAIN framework or breaking the activity into smaller parts allow neurodivergent students to engage in this activity at their own pace (Finck et al., 2023).

For the penultimate RAIN step, students are challenged to investigate their thoughts and bodily sensations from their cultural lens. Here, students investigate how the racial microaggression interacts with their racial socialization. Racial socialization refers to the ways in which “individuals learn about, interpret, and interact with members of their own and other racial/ethnic group” (Bartoli et al., 2015, p. 249). Rather than staying with the intellectual understanding of what

students know about themselves and others from a racial standpoint, students are also challenged to examine where these thoughts *land in the body at this very moment*. To help students with this step, King (2018) provided several prompts:

- “What assumptions am I silently making related to the racial microaggression and where do I feel it in my body?”
- “Am I holding privilege when it comes to my race? If so, where is this privilege, or lack thereof, felt in my body?”
- “What might I not be considering from my cultural perspective related to this microaggression (p. 91)?” “How does this reflection of what I’m missing land in my body?”

For the last step of the RAIN framework, students create personal distance away from the experienced racial microaggression. Specifically, students are invited to center self-compassion to parts that were activated within themselves and to affirm their worth beyond the moment of discomfort and harm. To help students activate self-nurturance, students are asked to reflect on a memory, place, person, or animal that brings them comfort. Students are also welcomed to draw this comforting image and take note of how their body responds to seeing this picture.

IMMEDIATE FOLLOW UP CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

It is important to remind students about the relevancy of the RAIN framework by relating it directly to their future roles as counselors. One of the main ethical guideposts for counselors is to do no harm to clients (ACA, 2014). Instructors highlight to students how this instructional strategy provides the opportunity to practice emotional regulation in order to increase their capacity to engage in difficult conversations about race with their clients. Time permitted, the instructor can assign students in dyads to discuss reactions to the activity with curiosity and authenticity. The following prompts can be used to assist in the dyad discussion:

- “What physical sensations, emotions, or thoughts came up for you during RAIN?”
- “At what point during RAIN did you feel the most challenged?”
- “As a counselor-in-training, what are you committed to do to increase your capacity to engage in difficult discussions about race to best serve future clients?”

These questions help students unpack their reactions in real-time rather than intellectualizing or saying what might be deemed “right” to the instructor. Instead, it gives them an opportunity to communicate with their peers in a genuine and open manner on the topic of race. Such skills are essential for any counselor in training to demonstrate and perhaps even more critical when encountering difficult conversations on race.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Students may find discussions about oppression and marginalization challenging, which can trigger strong emotional responses (Hilert & Tirado, 2019), including defensiveness and inflexibility that may impede their learning. Ahluwalia and colleagues (2019) contend that student resistance often stems from the discomfort of confronting their privilege, making it difficult for them to challenge their own biases. The RAIN framework seems well-suited to help students explore their reactions with greater openness and reduce emotional intensity that can disrupt the learning process.

Instructors are challenged to maintain safety for all students while also encouraging self-exploration, particularly when a student expresses a racial microaggression. The role of gatekeeping is paramount in such instances to ensure that students are able to witness counternarratives without harm towards each other and with future clients. One of the counseling profession's ethos is to do no harm (ACA, 2014). While racial microaggressions can occur from student-to-student, faculty members have also been identified as direct perpetrators of racial microaggressions and lacking agency to address these incidents effectively in the classroom (Curtis-Boles et al., 2020; Jones, 2023; Joseph et al., 2023; Lilly et al., 2023). Therefore, it behooves counselor educators to be honest about their own readiness to facilitate discussions on racial microaggressions, in the moment, with keen cultural self-awareness and cultural humility.

To further support student's well-being following the emotional intensity of racial microaggressions, instructors may consider including the University's Counseling Center contact information in the syllabus and reinforcing this resource at the completion of the RAIN activity, which promotes beneficence and supports institutional safeguards. Lastly, counselor educators should also avoid imposing neurotypical standards of professionalism and participation that inadvertently marginalize neurodivergent students (ACA, 2014). To accommodate diverse learners for the RAIN activity, we incorporated several teaching strategies that included adjusting time frames as warranted, using various modalities to express students' reactions (e.g., colors, symbols, diagrams), as well as engaging in dyad discussions or providing students the option to remain in individual reflection. In total, these ethical considerations posit the need for counselor educators to be reflexive about how their own intersecting cultural identities may shape the learning environment.

INSTRUCTOR REFLEXIVITY

Even with scaffolded mindfulness exercises prior to the introduction of the RAIN activity, we recognized that students might remain resistant to the activity along with feelings of discomfort. As women of color, we are attuned to how our intersecting identities may activate comfort for some students and unease for others. For some, our identities may foster a sense of safety and validation. Whereas for others, our intersecting cultural identities may trigger defensiveness, discomfort, or resistance, particularly when addressing racial microaggressions. Therefore, we remained aware of how our own racial and gender dynamics influence the emotional

landscape of the classroom. Hence, we remained vigilant to not only what we communicated to our students but also how we communicated to them. For example, we were aware how our body language, nonverbals and tone can promote a learning environment of curiosity rather than judgment. Another identity that aided in the comfort of discussing race and racial microaggressions was tenure status. Specifically, the second author, who is biracial (and visibly brown skinned) found it less threatening to unpack race given her tenure status. It is noteworthy to mention the first author is a doctoral candidate and current faculty member who, yet, experienced minimal personal fear of possible repercussions for engaging in the RAIN activity.

We both found it helpful to honestly reflect upon the following four prompts before and after the RAIN activity: 1) What is my overall comfort level in unpacking race-based conversations in the classroom? Is there a particular racial group that I find more challenging to discuss than others, and where is this discomfort coming from? 2) What supports would be beneficial for students should a racial microaggression occur in the classroom? 3) Do I have the emotional capacity to sustain space for dialogue if a racial microaggression were to occur in class? and 4) What resources would I need to further enhance my emotional capacity to have race based conversations during class time? We also found it helpful to process and debrief after implementing this teaching strategy, which was optimal, as we served as co-instructors for the mindfulness course.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Successful delivery of this activity would include prior scaffolding of brief mindfulness activities for students; the instructor's willingness to identify, in the moment, when racial microaggressions occur in the classroom; openness to stay with the discomfort when a racial microaggression happens in real time, as well as ample classroom time (approximately 30-60 minutes). For introductory mindfulness practices for students, we recommend sites such as ruthking.net, jonkabat-zinn.com, and smartphone apps such as Calm, Insight Timer, UCLA Mindful, and JKZ Meditations.

Although not required for the RAIN activity, we suggest the following resources to enhance instructors' foundational learning on somatic basic practices. For those who are brand new to mindfulness practices, Kabat-Zinn's (2013) *Full Catastrophe Living* provides a hands-on approach that is based on the author's evidence-based, 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction program. The majority of our course reading assignments were obtained from this book. To better understand racially centered contemplative practices, Menakem's (2017) *My Grandmother's Hands* and King's (2018) *Mindful of Race* are two resources to explore. Finally, Dana's (2021) *Anchored* is another resource to help ground students and instructors when navigating challenging conversations, in order to remain engaged and connected with others, rather than choosing "fight or flight" behaviors. The introductory chapter in *Anchored* can be assigned to students to help them understand the basic functions of the nervous system and how it impacts the capacity to remain connected (and at times, disconnected) with others.

Assessment and Evaluation of RAIN

Our aim of using the RAIN activity is to facilitate students' capacity to *slow down* in order to engage in self-awareness and full embodiment of their somatic experience when witnessing a racial microaggression in the classroom. Two types of student-facing assessments were used for this activity: 1) formal assessment via journal writing and 2) student-engagement assessment via the dyad discussion immediately following the activity. Students received participation credit for completing the journal assignment that was due a week after engaging in the class activity; however, the earned points were not contingent upon the content. Rather, the emphasis of the journal reflection is to further support students' ability to become more comfortable in exploring race openly within themselves and, hopefully, with future clients. Journaling provides another strategy to honestly and openly reflect upon students' thoughts, feelings, and somatic experiences. Due to the andragogical nature of this activity centering embodiment, the use of traditional methods emphasizing cognitive complexity for evaluation and assessment via rubrics are counterintuitive for this activity. Hence, students received full participation credit points for completing the following three prompts for this assignment: 1) In reflecting back on the RAIN activity, what did you learn about yourself as it relates to difficult conversations about race? 2) When you think about the racial microaggression that occurred in class, what comes up for you now cognitively, behaviorally, emotionally, and somatically? and 3) As a counselor-in-training, identify one concrete and feasible step to increase your capacity to sit with discomfort as it relates to conversations on race. How will you measure progress on this goal?

The effectiveness of this teaching innovation can directly relate to student learning objectives based on current 2024 CACREP standards. For example, after completing both the RAIN activity and journal assignment instructors, can assess students' capacity to: 1) "engage in self-awareness and self-evaluation strategies to enhance multicultural counseling practice; 2) to understand the impact of biases, power, privilege, oppression, and microaggressions on counselors and clients; and 3) to identify culturally sustaining and responsive strategies for establishing and maintaining counseling relationships" (CACREP, 2024, A.11, B. 5, E.7.).

Anecdotal feedback from our students was encouraging. One student reported feeling more engaged while completing the RAIN activity, which made participation easier and different from other race-based activities that put them more on the defensive. Another student expressed appreciation for the safe space and for not being put in a position to speak on the issue but could, instead, turn inward and validate their own experiences. Another student agreed and mentioned that it was meaningful to witness less participatory classmates engage in the activity with an openness and a willingness to learn. These student responses highlighted the benefits of integrating practices like RAIN to support emotional regulation and deepen their capacity to engage with difficult conversations.

Unanswered Questions and Limitations

The RAIN activity was conducted during a mindfulness counseling course and seemed to be well-received by our students based on anecdotal feedback. However, given our lack of empirical data collection to verify these testimonies, much remains to be explored and verified regarding the effectiveness of the activity. It is noteworthy that this particular course was an elective. Hence, it can be assumed that those students enrolled in our course had a natural inclination and comfort to engage in somatic based practices. What if somatic body work was infused throughout the curriculum when difficult conversations on race occur? Is there a threshold of mindfulness exposure necessary to observe changes in a student's racially based competencies (e.g., self-awareness, skills)? And what if students have no interest in mindfulness-based practices and somatic work? This limitation can also apply to instructors, who might have reservations to engage in mind-body practices, in general in addition to possible reluctance to help navigate difficult conversations on race in the classroom.

Another limitation involves the use of self-reports (i.e., journaling, student dyad discussion) for this teaching activity. Observing and assessing students' role play within a counseling techniques or group counseling course could demonstrate their capacity to address difficult conversations via role play and mock counseling sessions. These skills can be directly connected with a 2024 CACREP standard that highlight the students' need to demonstrate "culturally sustaining and responsive strategies" (E.7.) with clients.

Future Studies

Students were only exposed to the RAIN activity at one point during the semester given that the use of this activity was contingent upon a racial microaggression occurring during class time. Future studies could explore the use of RAIN to address any form of microaggression that occurs in the classroom. Qualitative studies could provide rich narratives of students' encounter of the RAIN activity, across various microaggressions, to explore their capacity to sit with uncomfortable feelings based on specific cultural identities (e.g., race, ability status, gender). With the emphasis on their somatic experience, using pre and post biofeedback measures (e.g., heart rate, muscle tension) could help identify specific physiological changes to the body when engaging in somatic-based practices after reading case vignettes featuring various forms of microaggressions and students' self-efficacy to address these scenarios. For the next course offering of mindfulness in counseling, the second author plans to conduct an autoethnographic study exploring the use of mindfulness exercises when addressing race-related topics in the classroom, including possible experiences of racial microaggressions, as a woman of color.

For instructors facilitating the RAIN activity, a quantitative study examining their self-efficacy and stress level when addressing racial microaggressions in the classroom can shed much-needed light on this process. Bentley-Edwards et al. (2020) explained how competent instructors in K-12 schools are not inherently competent in handling racial matters in the classroom. This statement could also apply to counselor educators. Using Bentley-Edwards et al.'s School-Teacher Racial Encounter Scale beyond K-12 teachers and with counselor educators in graduate-level programs could provide valuable insights into effective andragogical approaches. With promising nascent research in counseling on mindfulness teaching approaches that center on students' cognitive understanding of microaggressions, expanding the use of activities centered on somatic reactions when encountering racial microaggressions in the classroom, activities such as RAIN can offer students a fully embodied and potentially impactful learning experience.

References

- Ahluwalia, M. K., Ayala, S. I., Locke, A. F., & Nadrich, T. (2019). Mitigating the “powder keg”: The experiences of faculty of color teaching multicultural competence. *Teaching of Psychology, 46*(3), 187–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00986283198488>
- American Counseling Association. (2014). *ACA Code of Ethics*. American Counseling Association.
- Baggs, A., Duhel, O., Justice, E., & Henderson, F. (2024). Mindfulness practice and expressions of wellness: Experiences of doctoral counselor education and supervision students. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 20*(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2024.2345366>
- Bartoli, E., Bentley-Edwards, K. L., García, A. M., Michael, A., & Ervin, A. (2015). What do White counselors and psychotherapists need to know about race? White racial socialization in counseling and psychotherapy training programs. *Women & Therapy, 38*(3–4), 246–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2015.1059206>
- Bentley-Edwards, K. L., Stevenson Jr, H. C., Thomas, D. E., Adams-Bass, V. N., &
- Coleman-King, C. (2020). Teaching scared: Pre-service teacher appraisals of racial stress, socialization and classroom management self-efficacy. *Social Psychology of Education, 23*, 1233–1257. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-020-09578-8>
- Campbell, A., Vance, S. R., & Dong, S. (2018). Examining the relationship between mindfulness and multicultural counseling competencies in counselor trainees. *Mindfulness, 9*(1), 79–87. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0746-6>
- Clughen, L. (2024). ‘Embodiment is the future’: What is embodiment and is it the future paradigm for learning and teaching in higher education? *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 61*(4), 735–747. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2023.2215226>
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2024). *2024 CACREP standards*. <https://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2024-cacrep-standards/>
- Curtis-Boles, H., Chupina, A. G., & Okubo, Y. (2020). Social justice challenges: Students of color and critical incidents in the graduate classroom. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 14*(2), 100–108. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tep0000293>
- Dana, D. (2021). *Anchored: How to befriend your nervous system using polyvagal theory*. Sounds True.
- De Baets, G. A., & Van Praet, E. (2024). Aikido’s self-regulation and co-regulation: A promising embodied pedagogy for intercultural communication training. *Sport in Society, 27*(7), 1094–1117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2023.2286018>
- Dougherty, A. E., Haddock, L., & Patton, J. (2020). Exploring the use of mindful andragogy to create inclusive classrooms. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 15*(1), 43–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2019.1639092>
- Dye, L., Burke, M. G., & Wolf, C. (2019). Teaching mindfulness for the self-care and well-being of counselors-in-training. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 15*(2), 140–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2019.1642171>
- Finck, C., Avila, A., Jiménez-Leal, W., Botero, J. P., Shambo, D., Hernandez, S., Reinoso-Carvalho, F., & Andonova, V. (2023). A multisensory mindfulness experience: Exploring the promotion of sensory awareness as a mindfulness practice. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*(14), Article 1230832. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1230832>
- Hilert, A. J., & Tirado, C. (2019). Teaching multicultural counseling with mindfulness: A contemplative pedagogy approach. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 41*(4), 469–480. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-018-9363-x>
- Jones, A. M. (2023). Letters to their attackers: Using counter storytelling to share how Black women respond to racial microaggressions at a historically White institution. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 36*(9), 11825–1837. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2021.1942292>
- Joseph, R., Thomas, L., Vatalaro, A., Anderson, R., Akiwumi, F., & Briscoe, R. (2023). Learning while Black: Racial and educational challenges of Black students. *Journal of Black Studies, 54*(8), 639–660. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219347231200888>
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Bantam.
- King, R. (2018). *Mindful of race: Transforming racism from the inside out*. Sounds True.

- Lenes, E., Swank, J. M., Hart, K. A., Machado, M. M., Darilus, S., Ardel, M., Smith, A.S., Rockwood Lane, M., & Puig, A. (2020). Color-Conscious Multicultural Mindfulness Training in the Counseling Field. *Journal of Counseling & Development* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), 98(2), 147–158. <https://doi.org/molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/jcad.12309>
- Lilly, J. M., Hillyer, J., Jagers, E., & Garnigan, K. (2023). A “totally, acceptably racist environment”: Examining anti-Black racism in a school of social work. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 59(2), 391–406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2022.2119357>
- Maiden, J. (2021). Minority males and graduate education: Confronting microaggressions in counsellor education programs. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education Research*, 3(1), 66–73. <https://doi.org/10.51986/ijer-2021.vol3.01.07>
- Martinez, J. K., & Dong, S. (2020). An investigation of multicultural counseling competence development among graduate-level counseling students through mindfulness, cognitive complexity, and cognitive flexibility. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 42, 292–306. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-020-09400-2>
- Menakem, R. (2017). *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies*. Central Recovery Press.
- Mirick, R. G., & Davis, A. (2022). Teaching note – Teaching note —witnessing microaggressions: BSW students’ responses to vignettes. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 58(4), 794–801. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2021.1969301>
- Park, A. S., & Bahia, J. (2022). Exploring the experiences of Black, Indigenous and racialized graduate students: The classroom as a space of alterity, hostility, and pedagogical labour. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, 59(2), 138–155. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12373>
- Ratts, M. J., Singh, A. A., Nassar-McMillan, S., Butler, S. K., & McCullough, J. R. (2016). Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies: Guidelines for the counseling profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 44(1), 28–48. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12035> <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.41.2.137>
- Vaishnav, S., & Wester, K. L. (2023). Microaggressions, mentoring, and connectedness: Doctoral students’ experiences in counselor education. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 62(4), 311–322. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12268>

Modeling Case Conceptualization

A Teaching Approach to Intergenerational Trauma

As CACREP continues to advocate for more effective instruction on trauma-informed care to counselors-in-training (CITs), counselor educators ought to integrate the impact of intergenerational trauma (IGT) into counselor education. Counselors may overlook contributing factors outside of individual influences, therefore feeling unprepared to address ecological components associated with IGT. Additionally, there is limited research on how to best teach IGT within counselor education. In this teaching brief, we propose the modeling of IGT-focused case conceptualization by faculty members within a counseling program. We include suggestions on how to integrate modeling into the curriculum and discuss assessments to measure the impact of modeling on counseling students.

AKYLA JOSEPH & TAYLOR NOLAN

Department of Graduate Psychology, James
Madison University

KEYWORDS

*intergenerational trauma, case
conceptualization, counselor education,
modeling, trauma-informed*

Author Note:

Authors have no known conflict of interest to disclose.
Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to
Taylor Nolan. Email: nolantl@dukes.jmu.edu

Introduction

Mental health counselors are called by the *ACA Code of Ethics* to guide effective practice and support clients' growth and development (American Counseling Association, 2014). For example, the *ACA Code of Ethics* requires counselors who are appropriately trained to meet the needs of clients. Although the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) has made strides to include standards related to trauma, there is a continued need for improvement in effective teaching on addressing trauma within counseling sessions (CACREP, 2024; Felter et al. 2022; Modeste-James et al., 2024; Moh & Sperandio, 2022; Nelson, 2024). Most clients seeking counseling have experienced some form of trauma, with recent studies citing an estimate of more than 70% of individuals worldwide having exposure to trauma (Moh & Sperandio, 2022; VanAusdale & Swank, 2020). Further, we must recognize the impact that trauma has on individuals, including mental health problems, substance abuse, and relational issues (Moh & Sperandio, 2022). Acknowledging the prevalence of this issue, more research has recently been conducted on how to prepare counselors-in-training (CITs) for providing trauma-informed care, constituting a need for comprehensive trauma-informed education integrated into required counseling courses (VanAusdale & Swank, 2020).

A notable gap in trauma-informed care is intergenerational trauma (IGT), which can also be referred to as generational trauma, transgenerational trauma, or historical trauma (Isobel et al., 2021; Petion et al., 2023). IGT is defined as the transmission of unresolved trauma across generations, including the potential for this transmission to be epigenetic (Day & Shloim, 2021; McAllister et al., 2024). IGT is often considered from a historical or cultural context (Henderson et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2023). Some examples include adversity experienced by children of Holocaust survivors, Indigenous Peoples and residential schools, and the impact of slavery within the African American community (Isobel et al., 2021; McAllister et al., 2024; Petion et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2023). However, individual experiences of traumatic events can also be transmitted to future generations (Sharma et al., 2023). Beyond mental health symptoms like anxiety and relational difficulties (McAllister et al., 2024; Moh & Sperandio, 2022), IGT is linked to health disparities, though healing can also be passed across generations (Henderson et al., 2021).

RATIONALE FOR INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

The need for training and education of trauma has been established through CACREP foundational curriculum standards, such as: 3.B.4, the effects of historical events, multigenerational trauma, and current issues on diverse cultural groups in the U.S. and globally; 3.C.14, effects of crises, disasters, stress, grief, and trauma across the lifespan; 3.D.2, approaches for conceptualizing the interrelationships among and between work, socioeconomic standing, wellness, disability, trauma, relationships, and other life roles and factors; 3.E.20, crisis intervention, trauma-

informed, community-based, and disaster mental health strategies; and 3.G.14, procedures for assessing clients' experience of trauma (CACREP, 2024). Yet counselors often leave programs feeling unprepared to competently work with clients presenting with various trauma experiences (Moh & Sperandio, 2022; VanAusdale & Swank, 2020). Barriers to effectively teaching CITs arise when instruction emphasizes the science of trauma over the clinical skills required to support clients, often reflecting educators' limited experience in the field (Moh & Sperandio, 2022; VanAusdale & Swank, 2020). Research on IGT is minimal, and understanding how to teach this concept to CITs is even more limited despite its importance (Bray, 2023; Petion et al., 2023). Though some counselor educators may have explored intervention techniques to utilize in sessions to support clients with the exploration of IGT, no found research indicates how to teach CITs to understand the concept and integrate IGT into their theoretical approaches to counseling. In order to address the complexities of IGT, it is necessary to engage in culturally responsive strategies in response to systemic, sociocultural and historical traumas, like racism and oppression that occur in marginalized communities while acknowledging that these responses may be different than the Eastern or Euro-centric common practices (Modeste-James et al., 2024; Wright et al., 2023). Due to its ability to provide structure for integrating multiple components of a client's history and needs, case conceptualization should be considered a method for helping counseling students explore the complexity of IGT and incorporate these factors into treatment planning (Hinkle & Dean, 2017).

Case conceptualization is a well-known pedagogical component of the counselor education process, in which CITs learn how to collect, organize, and interpret information gathered from a case to develop an approach for effective counseling treatment (Cline et al., 2022; Hinkle & Dean, 2017; Sperry & Sperry, 2020). Case conceptualization can encourage counselors to develop treatment plans through various theoretical lenses (McTavish et al., 2024). Researchers also found that the effectiveness of treatment can correlate with the level of diligence in a case conceptualization (Hinkle & Dean, 2017). As counselors engage in in-depth reflection to further understand their clients' experiences, they may be more likely to adapt their clinical interventions to fit the client's needs and reduce the frequency of misdiagnosis. Lack of awareness and exploration of IGT by counselors can contribute to mislabeling the symptoms displayed by clients (Isobel et al., 2021; McAllister et al., 2024; Petion et al., 2023). Understanding the intricate layers that constitute IGT may require counselors to engage in more complex cognition, and case conceptualization is one pedagogical approach counselor educators can use to develop this skill within CITs (Cline et al., 2022; Hinkle & Dean, 2017). Further, through case conceptualization, counselors can reduce pathologizing based on culturally normative behaviors by assessing how cultural identity has been shaped through culturally and familial histories (Day & Shloim, 2021).

There are various strategies for teaching case conceptualization, though research on the most effective methods remains limited (Cline et al., 2022). Methods include following an eight-step framework (Sperry & Sperry, 2020), student role play or drama therapy (Hinkle & Dean, 2017), case-based workshops (Cline et al., 2022), and the use of fictional or online simulations. We propose a framework for faculty modeling of case conceptualization within first-year counseling courses, considering that CITs' developmental stage influences their

ability to conceptualize and that the cognitive complexity required is still developing (Hinkle & Dean, 2017).

Grounded in experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), case conceptualizations allow students to engage with a client experience through a written narrative, reflect on that situation from multiple perspectives, integrate prior and newly acquired knowledge to think abstractly, and actively develop a potential treatment plan to support the client. Social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) further informs this approach by emphasizing the importance of social interaction, such as students' observations of faculty and their participation in class discussions, as well as the role of cultural factors in knowledge development, which can include an awareness of intergenerational trauma. From this perspective, modeling by faculty members is a valuable learning tool, as observing expert practices can support students' cognitive growth and their navigation of diverse client experiences. Together, these theories suggest that learning can be strengthened through the integration of modeling and case conceptualization. Through modeling, the counselor educators can scaffold information needed in case conceptualization, preparing them to actively engage in their own learning process and implement new skills in their own practice. Given the gaps in trauma training, this teaching brief proposes a unique approach to addressing the complexity of intergenerational trauma (IGT) through faculty modeling of case conceptualization.

Description of Instructional Strategy

We recommend that counselor educators use the instructional strategy of modeling case conceptualization as a precursor to students conceptualizing independently to address IGT in case studies during the first year of a master's-level counselor education program in the lifespan development course. The activity would address section 3.C.11, "systemic, cultural, and environmental factors that affect lifespan development, functioning, behavior, resilience, and overall wellness," and 3.C.13, "effects of crises, disasters, stress, grief, and trauma across the lifespan," within the lifespan development standard, and 3.E.1, "case conceptualization skills using a variety of models and approaches," and 3.E.13, "developmentally relevant and culturally sustaining counseling treatment or intervention plans," within the counseling practice and relationships standard (CACREP, 2024).

To do so, CITs engage in an educational session where their professors introduce a case study with facets of IGT, including historical trauma (e.g., war, forced migration), societal traumas (e.g., racism, poverty), and personal experience (e.g., addiction, violence) incorporated. Throughout this lesson, counselor educators ought to model frameworks of case conceptualization within the case study, promoting the scaffolding of students' new learning of IGT and case conceptualization together. Students then independently complete a case conceptualization of a new case using the previously modeled techniques in the lesson and throughout their previous learning. In this way, students demonstrate their cognitive complexity and critical

thinking developed, as well as their understanding of clinically supporting clients with IGT. The instructional strategy is meant to be built upon and used in both the fall and spring semesters but could be carried into subsequent years of the counseling degree program if desired. Faculty can be given a list of sample case studies they can choose from that coincide with the topic of the week, and these sample case studies will also include details about personal, familial, historical, and societal factors to facilitate conversations about intergenerational experiences with mental health, with a focus on the CACREP (2024) 3.B.4, 3.B.6 and 3.C.11 standards.

APPLICATION TO COUNSELOR EDUCATION

Within counselor education, experiential learning offers CITs ways to enhance their cognitive complexity in several ways. Utilization of case conceptualization as a part of the learning process of IGT provides an opportunity to apply theory to practice while integrating concepts of trauma-informed counseling to diagnosis and treatment planning. Through the modeled case study and conceptualization, students are provided with the scaffolding of material that will support the development of their own conceptualization. For example, the engagement in this process allows counselor educators to model vulnerability in navigating challenges and provide feedback and reflection on student processing. Additionally, providing ample experiences for CITs to gain exposure to experienced clinicians utilizing case conceptualization can help enhance students' clinical skills as they prepare for their first professional experiences. Furthermore, representations of clinical thinking and decision-making may be offered throughout educational programming by seeing various faculty members approach conceptualizing a case with general information and modeling how to engage in more complex cognition.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND REFLEXIVITY

Through the application of case conceptualization of case studies of IGT, it is important to implement pedagogical theories that support students in navigating these complex topics. When teaching using a trauma-informed pedagogy (Moh & Sperandio, 2022), educators must recognize that students may have shared experiences similar to those depicted in the IGT case studies and may be at risk for retraumatization. Additionally, all students could experience secondary traumatization through these discussions and exercises (Carello & Butler, 2014; Kim et al., 2024). Engaging in the key principles of trauma-informed pedagogy can minimize these risks to students by creating a safe and respectful classroom environment and promoting collaboration, empowerment and cultural care (Kim et al., 2024). We recommend that faculty educate themselves on understanding trauma, develop a plan to minimize risks, and have resources available for students who need it (Carello & Butler, 2014).

It is critical that counselor educators maintain awareness of vulnerability in the classroom while modeling how to navigate personal biases during case conceptualization in order to encourage CITs to consider what symptoms we identify as individual issues for some populations compared to systematic issues for others. It is also important for counselor

educators to be mindful of the language used when providing diverse case study examples. Counselors should recognize that IGT can affect all people in different ways, even folks with different levels of privilege or cultural backgrounds (Bray, 2023). When addressing IGT, there is an inherent involvement of systemic issues, which promotes a need for advocacy on a community level, not only individual changes in session. Counselors hold a responsibility to advocate for their clients' needs and to address those needs at the multiple levels in which clients are impacted.

We, the authors of this brief, are graduate students in a doctoral counselor educator program and practice as licensed mental health professionals. In our clinical work, we have worked with underserved populations impacted by stigma when trying to access healthcare resources. Through our work in various settings, such as inpatient hospitals, partial hospitalization, substance use facilities, in-home services, and universities, we have worked with clients with complex trauma and recognize the interconnectedness between a client's individual issues and systemic barriers to well-being. With these experiences, we have been exposed to the impact of IGT within our clients and noticed that providers often do not feel equipped to effectively identify and address these issues, resulting in clients cycling through services. We have implemented trauma-informed pedagogical methods in courses taught, including crisis intervention and multicultural counseling. It is with understanding and care that we recognize the multitude of experiences, situations, and systemic influences with which students enter into the classroom.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

To protect both students' and faculty members' well-being, we recommend using a trauma-informed approach when engaging the case modeling activity, such as Harris & Fallot's (2001) trauma-informed care approach. Following Choudhuri's (2019) suggestions on how to utilize this model, faculty can maintain a trauma-informed approach by first providing clear guidelines and content warnings about the sensitive nature of the material. Since students will be working from a provided sample case, they can emphasize that no personal disclosures are required, which helps maintain emotional safety. They also ought to incorporate grounding techniques or brief mindfulness exercises before and after the activity to help students regulate emotions and stay within their Window of Tolerance (Siegel, 1999). Finally, counselor educators should normalize and validate any discomfort that arises during discussion, encourage check-ins, and model professional boundaries to create a safe and supportive learning environment.

For generating sample case studies, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) might be a useful tool for educators. AI can be a helpful resource for counselor educators to gather a range of examples for classes. However, it is important to note that any work produced by AI should be reviewed and edited, as its use in the counseling field is still novel and may have errors that would not be helpful for students. Next, we have included the prompt we used with AI to develop case studies and the unedited version of the case example produced. Educators should be transparent with students that the case studies they are utilizing have been developed with support of AI. It is especially critical that counselor educators make

sure to note any potential cultural biases or stereotypes in produced case studies. This step is especially important because we recommend that counselor educators employ culturally diverse case studies to enrich students' learning and understanding of IGT through various communities and intersecting identities.

Additionally, students would benefit from having the activity conducted by at least two different professors in each semester so that students can be exposed to different perspectives on navigating case conceptualization. Faculty members can be given a template, such as Sperry and Sperry's (2020) eight P's or the cultural framework of generational trauma (Sharma et al., 2023), for which topics to include in the final organization of the case conceptualization. We recommend that the template modeled by faculty is the same one given to students to use for other case conceptualization assignments throughout the program. Please note that the table in the example below is filled out only to demonstrate what a faculty member might identify based on the case. During the exercise, the faculty member would use a blank template and model how to complete it. Students are then given their own blank template to complete.

Case Study and Conceptualization Structure Example

AI Prompt given to ChatGPT: Create a case study illustrating intergenerational trauma to be used for a developmental counseling course. Use Sperry and Sperry's (2020) eight P's as the structure for the case conceptualization and include 3 processing questions to encourage critical thinking:

Case Study

Sofia Ramirez, a 16-year-old, Mexican American high school junior, was referred to counseling after panic attacks, nightmares, and a sharp academic decline. Once engaged with peers and schoolwork, she has become withdrawn and fatigued, often missing class. She lives with her mother, Ana, who works long hours as a home health aide and tends to avoid emotional conversations, and her grandmother, Maria, who fled violence in Mexico during the 1980s. Maria frequently reminds Sofia that their family has "survived worse" and stresses the need to be strong, while rarely acknowledging emotional pain. Sofia's father was deported when she was 10, creating ongoing instability and loss. Although Sofia expresses a strong desire to succeed, she feels guilty for wanting a different life than her family's hardships and often minimizes her struggles by comparing them to her grandmother's suffering. Her recurring nightmares of separation and danger, coupled with strained family communication, highlight the weight of intergenerational trauma. Survival narratives, silence around emotions, and unprocessed historical stressors contribute to Sofia's anxiety and difficulties in identity development.

Questions:

- How might Sofia's experiences of anxiety and guilt be connected to intergenerational patterns of trauma, resilience, and silence within her family?
- What protective factors can you identify in Sofia's life, and how might these be leveraged in treatment planning?

- How could cultural values, family dynamics, and systemic factors (e.g., deportation, economic stress) be considered when conceptualizing this case?

Table 1

Case Conceptualization Structure using Sperry and Sperry's (2020) eight P's

Domain	Case Application
Presentation	Panic attacks, nightmares, anxiety, academic decline, withdrawal, fatigue, strained family communication.
Predisposition	Family trauma history, father's deportation, cultural norms of silence, poverty, limited emotional expression.
Precipitants	Recent school stress, academic struggles, limited parental availability, reminders of past losses.
Protective Factors	Motivation to succeed, prior academic strengths, access to school counseling, extended family presence.
Pattern	Emotion suppression, self-blame, minimizing distress, conflict between family expectations and personal goals.
Perpetuants	"Be strong" messages, emotional avoidance in family, ongoing stressors, lack of open communication.
Plan	School counseling, family involvement, trauma-informed and culturally responsive therapy, anxiety-management skills.
Prognosis	With help: improved coping and academics; without help: worsening anxiety and continued withdrawal.

Evaluation of Effectiveness of Instructional Strategy

The goals of this instructional strategy are twofold: (1) to support CITs in identifying and addressing the impact of IGT and demonstrate effectiveness in case conceptualization according to their level of training, and (2) to cultivate in CITs the ability to recognize IGT within the context of a case study and future clients. Our instructional activity aims to increase student competency in both trauma-informed treatment and multicultural awareness in counseling. To impactfully address the effects of IGT, a counselor must show competence in both areas. The use of case conceptualization has been shown to be an effective tool in the development of counselors to address the treatment planning needs of clients (Cline et al., 2022; Hinkle & Dean, 2017). Mastering the art of case conceptualization takes practice, reflection, and feedback. By starting this skill early in the counselor's education process, CITs can embrace subsequent opportunities for growth in the comprehension and application of conceptualizing. This instructional strategy can continue to be utilized throughout training, as it can be modified to grow with the CIT's developmental level. In doing so, CITs can increase their knowledge of IGT and apply this through their learning of case conceptualization.

Assessment Tools/Methods Used in Instructional Strategy to Assess Student Learning

Within the instructional strategy, students will be provided with a rubric, which outlines criteria for both the technical aspects of the case conceptualization as well as the integration of IGT throughout the conceptualization (see Appendix A). This rubric will be utilized by educators to assess understanding of IGT concepts and application of conceptual practices based on the developmental training level of the CIT.

Additionally, students ought to reflect on their case conceptualization process. This reflection allows them to identify areas for growth without concern for grading impact. Students are encouraged to provide honest, reflective responses regarding their confidence levels, challenges encountered, and areas where they seek further development. They will also address how having the case conceptualization modeled for them prior to completing their assignment informed their learning process.

Implications

This instructional activity aims to address the need to better prepare CITs for clinical work with clients who have experienced trauma. Although CACREP standards have implemented criteria to address trauma in foundational curriculum, some CITs leave their programs unprepared to identify and address the treatment of trauma in clients (Nelson, 2024). Through the education on IGT, CITs gain knowledge and competence of both trauma and its symptomology as well as the systematic, historical, and cultural contexts in which trauma has impacted populations. By modeling and practicing case conceptualization, CITs gain experience in recognizing trauma and applying treatment planning strategies in context. Developing these skills is essential for CITs as they enter the field, particularly when working with clients whose trauma may have been previously overlooked due to gaps in provider training.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

As this strategy has yet to be utilized in a classroom setting, it is difficult to address its effectiveness. Once applied, we recommend that counselor educators assess learning outcomes through student assignments; however, follow-up data on its long-term impact for CITs working with clients with similar experiences may not be available. Accordingly, there is a need for counselor educators to design studies that analyze these data to determine

the impact of these instructional activities and strategies on clients. Future Directions for Practice and Research

Future research could explore how this instructional strategy can be integrated into the overall curriculum, allowing students to engage with IGT concepts at multiple stages of their professional development, including practicum and internship. This research would provide opportunities for students to apply foundational knowledge from early fictional case studies to real clients they work with in person. Additionally, as CITs progress throughout their program, providing them opportunities to build on their conceptualization skills as well as implement knowledge of trauma-informed strategies can support continued growth. We further recommend that counselor educators implement variations of case conceptualization teaching. They can do so using researched methods like case conceptualization workshops (Cline et al., 2022) and the student role play/drama therapy (Hinkle & Dean, 2017). The collective utilization of these teaching methods can provide a practical framework for preparing CITs to effectively address trauma when working with future clients.

References

- American Counseling Association. (2014). *ACA code of ethics*. <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/ethics/2014-aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>
- Bray, B. (2023, January). Generational trauma: Uncovering and interrupting the cycle. *Counseling Today*. <https://www.counseling.org/publications/counseling-today-magazine/article-archive/article/legacy/generational-trauma-uncovering-and-interrupting-the-cycle>
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2024). 2024 CACREP standards. . <https://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2024-cacrep-standards/>
- Carello, J., & Butler, L. D. (2014). Potentially perilous pedagogies: Teaching trauma is not the same as trauma-informed teaching. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 15(2), 153–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2014.867571>
- Choudhuri, D. D. (2019, September 27). *Trauma-informed teaching in counselor education* [PowerPoint slides]. ACES Webinar.
- Cline, J. L., Sturm, D. C., & Staton, A. R. (2022). Teaching case conceptualization skills to clinical mental health students to enhance clinical competency and cognitive complexity. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 15(3). Retrieved from <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/jcps/vol15/iss3/1>
- Day, N. and Shloim, N. (2021). Therapists' experiences of working with the intergenerational impact of troubles-related trauma. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 19(2), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.1585>
- Felter, J. M., DiDonato, S., Johnson, N., Moh, Y. S., Richardson, A., & Czerny, A. (2022). Creating sanctuary: A programmatic approach for trauma integration in counselor education. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 61(4), 391–403. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12249>
- Harris, M., & Fallot, R. D. (2001). Envisioning a trauma-informed service system: A vital paradigm shift. In M. Harris & R. D. Fallot (Eds.), *Using trauma theory to design service systems* (pp. 3–22). Jossey-Bass/Wiley.
- Henderson, Z. R., Stephens, T. N., Ortega-Williams, A., & Walton, Q. L. (2021). Conceptualizing healing through the African American experience of historical trauma. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 91(6), 763–775. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000578>
- Hinkle, M. S., & Dean, L. M. (2017). Creativity in teaching case conceptualization skills: Role-play to show the interconnectedness of domains. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 12(3), 388–401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2016.1249813>
- Isobel, S., McCloughen, A., Goodyear, M., & Foster, K. (2021). Intergenerational trauma and its relationship to mental health care: A qualitative inquiry. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 57(4), 631–643. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-020-00698-1>
- Kim, I., Moh, Y. S., Adams, C. R., & Kim, J. (2024). Introduction to trauma-informed counselor education and supervision (TICES) framework. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 46(4), 923–939. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-024-09573-0>
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice-Hall.
- McAllister, C. A., Kress, V. E., Spisak, T., & Reider, A. (2024). Hidden burdens: Creative techniques for understanding and addressing clients' transgenerational trauma. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2024.2376922>
- McTavish, J. R., McHolm, A., Niece, A., Pietrantonio, A. M., McKee, C., & MacMillan, H. L. (2024). Case conceptualization in child welfare: An underused resource to improve child, family, and provider outcomes. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 14, Article 1292690. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2023.1292690>
- Modeste-James, A., McClain, T., & Hanna, M. (2024). “The system isn’t set up for us”: Stories of young Black women’s mental health journey. *Women’s Health*, 20(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17455057241297106>
- Moh, Y. S., & Sperandio, K. R. (2022). The need to consider requiring trauma training in entry-level academic training programs in clinical mental health counseling. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 44(1), 18–31. <https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.44.1.03>
- NC State University. (2024). *Rubric best practices, examples, and templates teaching resources*. NC State University. https://teaching-resources.delt.ncsu.edu/rubric_best-practices-examples-templates/
- Nelson, A. R. (2024). A guide to infuse trauma informed principles in counselor education. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 18(1), 1–9. <https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/jcps/vol18/iss1/8>

- Petion, A. R., Chang, C. Y., Brown-Thompson, C., Mitchell, M. D., Grinnage, D., & Huffstead, M. E. (2023). "Battling something bigger than me": A phenomenological investigation of generational trauma in African American women. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 101, 69–83. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12454>
- Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The developing mind: Toward a neurobiology of interpersonal experience*. Guilford Press.
- Sharma, J., Shivers, C., & Bolinger, C. (2023, June). A cultural framework for generational trauma. *Counseling Today*. <https://www.counseling.org/publications/counseling-today-magazine/article-archive/article/legacy/a-cultural-framework-for-generational-trauma>
- Sperry, J., & Sperry L. (2020, December). Case conceptualization: Key to highly effective counseling. *Counseling Today*. <https://www.counseling.org/publications/counseling-today-magazine/article-archive/article/legacy/case-conceptualization-key-to-highly-effective-counseling>
- VanAusdale, S., & Swank, J. M. (2020). Integration of trauma based education in counselor education. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 13(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.7729/42.1354>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wright, W., Stover, J. H., & Brown-Rice, K. (2023). Understanding racial trauma: Implications for professional counselors. *The Professional Counselor*, 13(1), 17–26. <https://doi.org/10.15241/ww.13.1.17>

Appendix A

Conceptual Framework and Processing Rubric

Criteria	3 – Meets Expectations	2 – Approaching	1 – Does Not Meet
Lifespan, Context, & Trauma (CACREP 3.C.11, 3.C.13)	Integrates systemic, cultural, and environmental factors with development, trauma, and resilience.	Factors identified; connections limited or unclear.	Factors missing, inaccurate, or unconnected.
Intergenerational Trauma (CACREP 3.C.13)	Clearly identifies IGT patterns using historical/cultural context.	IGT identified with limited depth or context.	IGT not identified or misinterpreted.
Case Conceptualization Framework (CACREP 3.E.1)	Uses clear framework (e.g., Eight P's); organized and complete.	Framework present but incomplete or unclear.	No clear framework or organization.
Treatment Planning & Cultural Responsiveness (CACREP 3.E.13)	Developmentally appropriate, culturally sustaining interventions with rationale.	Interventions noted; rationale or cultural fit limited.	Interventions inappropriate, missing, or culturally insensitive.
Clinical Reasoning	Integrates client data, theory, and context to justify decisions.	Partial integration; reasoning incomplete.	Minimal or unsupported reasoning.
Professional Communication	Clear, organized, professional counseling language.	Generally clear; minor issues.	Unclear, disorganized, or unprofessional.

Performance Levels: Excellent (16–18) | Proficient (13–15) | Developing (10–12) | Needs Improvement (<10)

Note. IGT = intergenerational trauma. CACREP standards included for instructional alignment.

Cultural Carefest

A Service-Learning Project for Building Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competence

Cultural Carefest was a semester-long service-learning project that helped counseling students develop multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (MSJCC). The project took place in a multicultural counseling course, where students completed five step-by-step assignments. The final event was a community-engaged presentation where they shared research on the link between culture and healthcare. The project's design incorporated trauma-informed and accessibility-focused practices, with reflexivity integrated through a pedagogical partnership. Evaluation suggested that students gained confidence and advocacy skills and made a positive impact on the community. This brief describes Cultural Carefest and offers recommendations for counselor educators seeking to adapt this model.

KRISY ELROD & MEGAN A. WHITBECK

Department of Counseling and Human Services,
University of Scranton

Author Note:

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose. Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Krisy Elrod,

Department of Counseling and Human Services, University
of Scranton, 800 Linden St. Scranton, PA, 18510

Krisy Elrod ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7135-6686>
Megan Whitbeck ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4391-872X>

KEYWORDS

*advocacy, service-learning, multicultural
counseling, counselor education, social
justice*

Introduction

Counselor education programs are tasked with preparing students to integrate the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies into professional practice (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2016). These competencies are central to ethical practice as they guide counselors in addressing systemic barriers and understanding diverse worldviews. The American Counseling Association code of ethics (2014) highlight that counselor educators have an ethical imperative to infuse multiculturalism and diversity across the curriculum. Similarly, the 2024 CACREP Standards emphasize culturally sustaining practices across all eight core content areas.

While course activities can build foundational knowledge and provide opportunities to discuss cultural issues, these activities do not extend beyond the classroom. Many students reach practicum and field experiences without having meaningful opportunities to apply multicultural and social justice competencies in real-world contexts. This gap is particularly apparent in the MSJCC's action domains, which emphasize advocacy with and on behalf of clients and communities. Without intentional experiences that bring advocacy into lived experience, students may leave their programs confident in theory but unsure about culturally competent practice.

Cultural immersion and service-learning allow students to engage directly with diverse cultural groups and can improve cultural humility and awareness (Atkins & Lorelle, 2022). Instead of relying only on didactic teaching methods, researchers have implored educators to actively involve students in cultural learning experiences (Barden et al., 2014; Collins & Pieterse, 2007). Through in-vivo learning, students have opportunities to examine their own assumptions and biases and reflect on their identities. Engaging with culture in real-life contexts helps students build confidence in their ability to work across differences and better prepares them for the realities of counseling (Barden et al., 2014). Service-learning has been shown to connect academic learning with meaningful civic engagement, thereby deepening knowledge and fostering professional identity development (Chang, 2022; Langellier et al., 2020; Machuca & Martinez, 2022; Rodríguez-Zurita et al., 2024).

Chang (2022) demonstrated the value of experiential pedagogy through the Advocacy and Creativity in Community (ACC) Project. In this project, students were asked to produce a creative artifact that highlighted the intersection of mental health and advocacy. The process required them to engage in dialogue about pressing societal issues with peers, colleagues, friends, family, and community members. Students reported feeling proud of the products they created and the impact those products had within their communities. Many also described growth in their advocacy self-efficacy and a renewed commitment to social justice and mental health advocacy. These types of outcomes are the central goals of multicultural counseling courses.

Building on Chang's (2022) work, Cultural Carefest was grounded in constructivist, humanistic, and liberation psychology principles. These frameworks emphasize the lived experiences,

autonomy, and dignity of learners (Freire, 1970; Rogers, 1961; Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivist approaches recognize that students construct knowledge through interaction, reflection, and collaboration within a sociocultural context, making community engagement a natural extension of classroom learning (Barnes & Marlatt, 2020). Humanistic theory highlights the importance of student autonomy, holistic growth, and psychological safety, which are values that are inherent in the project's pacing and structure (Purswell, 2019; Rogers, 1961). Liberation psychology, developed in response to systemic oppression, encourages educators to challenge dominant narratives and elevate the voices of marginalized individuals through collaborative, action-oriented learning (Martín-Baró, 1994). By integrating these perspectives, Cultural Carefest positioned students as recipients of cultural knowledge, co-creators of meaning, and advocates within their community.

This project was carried out in a graduate multicultural counseling course within a CACREP-accredited program in the northeastern United States. The course included a variation of the “group cultural presentation,” an assignment commonly found in multicultural counseling curricula. While this format traditionally asks students to research and share cultural knowledge, it is usually limited to the classroom and shared only with peers in the course. Cultural Carefest was created to expand the scope of this assignment by turning it into a scaffolded, public-facing advocacy initiative. By taking the work outside the classroom, the project provided structured opportunities for students to practice advocacy skills emphasized in the MSJCC and fostered dialogue that benefited both the campus and the local community.

Description of the Teaching Innovation

APPLICATION TO COUNSELOR EDUCATION

Cultural Carefest was designed as a semester-long, scaffolded project that resulted in a community-engaged event attended by around 100 people, including students, faculty, professionals, and community members. The project intentionally guided students through a series of experiences that gradually developed their knowledge, skills, and confidence for public advocacy. Preparation started early in the course as students formed self-selected pairs, identified cultural groups relevant to the local context, and conducted initial research. This early phase ensured that students' projects were academically rigorous and grounded in the realities of the communities they might serve as professional counselors someday.

Building upon that foundation, the course dedicated in-class time to a collaborative planning day. During this session, students were encouraged to refine their projects by considering multiple perspectives and reflecting on how different audiences might perceive their work. This process fostered accountability, encouraged critical reflection, and helped students shift

their mindset from just preparing a classroom assignment to developing a project meant for a broader public audience.

Chang's (2022) ACC project demonstrated the benefits of experiential approaches in counselor education. Inspired by this work, Cultural Carefest evolved into a semester-long, scaffolded sequence that explicitly linked advocacy skills to the MSJCCs and provided students with practical experiences directly connecting counselor education to learning outcomes. The next section outlines the design and implementation of Cultural Carefest, describing how the project was structured throughout the semester and how each assignment contributed to the community event.

Prep Day 1: Group Formation and Preliminary Research

At the start of the semester, students formed self-selected pairs and chose a cultural group or theme related to culture and healthcare. This choice was intentionally open-ended so students could explore topics that match their professional interests and the communities they might serve in the future. Each group then began initial research on their chosen group or theme, using scholarly sources, community contacts, and publicly available resources. The goal of this first step is to build a knowledge base and guide their next actions before moving on to more formal project stages. Although this stage did not count toward the grade, it was required to participate in the next phase to ensure all students come to planning day prepared with background knowledge and potential ideas. Students were encouraged to select topics that aligned with their professional interests and with communities represented in the local area. Groups could select a cultural group they personally belonged to or one outside their own identity. Allowing this choice was intentional and trauma informed. Some students preferred to work with a cultural group they knew well, while others felt safer or more comfortable engaging with a group outside their own identity. Rather than requiring students to disclose or use their own lived experiences, the assignment emphasized student choice, psychological safety, and supported autonomy. Instructor approval was required only to ensure cultural groups were framed respectfully and that sufficient scholarly and community-based resources were available for meaningful research.

Prep Day 2: Collaborative Planning Day

During this class session, each group met individually with the instructor to review their preliminary research, clarify their focus, and discuss community contacts and resources. After these meetings, groups participated in structured peer feedback rotations, sharing their early ideas with other groups and collecting suggestions to improve content, accessibility, and clarity. These feedback exchanges fostered constructive dialogue and collaborative learning, while also helping students anticipate potential challenges when presenting their work to a public audience. By the end of the session, students had a clearer understanding of how to frame their projects for real-world impact.

Stage 1: Video Presentation

Building on the feedback received during the planning day, students created a 25 to 30-minute video presentation introducing their chosen cultural group. These presentations were designed to explore the intersections of cultural customs, resilience factors, wellness practices, healthcare needs, and healthcare disparities. To ensure depth, each presentation was required to include at least eight scholarly and community-based sources, highlight cultural strengths, and identify relevant local resources. Students could submit their videos in multiple formats, including narrated PowerPoint presentations or recorded presentations done in person or digitally, to the learning management system. The instructor reviewed the content for accuracy and to prevent stereotyping or deficit framing, defined here as portraying a cultural group primarily in terms of problems, lacks, or pathology rather than strengths and contextualized systemic factors, emphasizing trauma-informed and ethically responsible teaching practices.

Instructors implementing this assignment may find it helpful to provide students with examples of culturally responsive presentations from previous cohorts or publicly available advocacy videos. Offering a brief mini lecture on avoiding deficit framing and identifying cultural strengths can help students conceptualize their work in alignment with MSJCC principles.

Stage 2: Peer Feedback on Video Presentations

After viewing classmates' videos, students provided structured written, audio, or video feedback focused on clarity, cultural responsiveness, accessibility, and advocacy framing through the course learning management system. Each student was required to offer at least one suggestion for improving accessibility and one for enhancing advocacy messaging. This activity gave presenters constructive feedback to improve their projects and encouraged reviewers to think critically about the standards of effective advocacy communication. Before students begin reviewing peer work, instructors should consider modeling what constructive, culturally responsive feedback looks like by providing a short template or sentence starters can help students balance encouragement with specific, actionable guidance.

Stage 3: Research Poster Design

Building on the content from their videos and the suggestions they received through peer feedback, students created research posters for presentation at Cultural Carefest. Posters were required to include a plain-language summary that made their findings accessible to a broad audience, culturally responsive visuals that reflect the communities they studied, and accessibility features such as large-font text and high-contrast color schemes. Preparation was supported by an in-class workshop on poster layout, visual communication, and inclusive design. This workshop was led by the local chapter of the Chi Sigma Iota Counseling Academic and Professional Honors Society International. The workshop emphasized clarity, accessibility, and creativity, reinforcing the counselor's role as both communicator and advocate. Students submitted their poster designs to the instructor at least one week before Cultural Carefest to ensure they could be printed in adequate time. Instructors may support student poster development by sharing posters from professional conferences or demonstrating basic visual

design strategies. Coordinating with campus partners such as accessibility services or learning centers can reinforce accessibility standards and inclusive design.

Stage 4: Public Presentation at Cultural Carefest

With their posters finished and printed, students presented them to an audience of community members, faculty, and peers at the hour-long Cultural Carefest event. Each presenter delivered a quick “elevator pitch” summarizing their project, engaged in conversations with attendees, and answered questions. The event was designed with flexibility to support student participation. Presenters could rotate if needed, and those who preferred to sit while presenting to manage fatigue or anxiety could do so. Students were encouraged to share digital information from their posters and provide additional details via QR codes. This public presentation gave students the chance to practice advocacy and cultural communication skills. To prepare students for the event, instructors may role-play sample attendee questions or facilitate a rehearsal session. Discussing professional communication and advocacy framing beforehand can help students feel more confident and grounded during the event.

Stage 5: Reflective Integration

The sequence ended with a structured reflection to help students reinforce their learning and link it to professional growth. In this assignment, students assessed their development in cultural self-awareness, evaluated the effectiveness of their advocacy communication, and outlined specific steps for ongoing growth as counselors. Each prompt was deliberately aligned with the MSJCC domains (Ratts et al., 2016) and matched with CACREP 2024 standards on multicultural competence and advocacy.

Reflections can be submitted as written, audio, or video files through the learning management system. Example prompts included: “How did researching and presenting on cultural and healthcare topics enhance your understanding of the intersection between culture and mental health in your future practice?”, “How has your perspective on the importance of cultural competence in counseling evolved?”, and “How do you plan to apply this knowledge in your future work with diverse populations?” Instructors may invite students to revisit course learning objectives and the MSJCC framework before beginning the reflection. Doing so can help anchor students’ reflections in explicit competencies and highlights areas of growth.

By concluding the project with reflection, students were able to critically assess their growth, cultural responsiveness, and professional identity. This step helped turn the experience of preparing and presenting research into a stronger commitment to ongoing multicultural and social justice competence.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The project was designed using trauma-informed and accessibility-focused practices. Trauma-informed elements included avoiding stereotyping or deficit framing through instructor review, allowing students to choose their own groups and topics, and providing flexible assignment

formats (written, audio, video). Accessibility was incorporated following the national counseling honor society workshop guidelines, which included high-contrast, large-font poster designs, and digital QR codes for additional resources. The trauma-informed components of the project were grounded in ethical principles related to beneficence, nonmaleficence, and respect for students' lived experiences. Allowing students to self-select their partners and cultural groups reduced the likelihood of any forced disclosure, tokenization, or pressure to represent a cultural group on behalf of others. Instructor review of content before submission served as an ethical safeguard against stereotyping or misrepresentation. Providing flexible assignment formats also honored accessibility needs and recognized that students bring varied experiences of safety and comfort when engaging with sensitive cultural material. These practices aligned with the ACA code of ethics (2014) and supported the creation of a classroom environment that prioritized student agency, cultural humility, and psychological safety.

REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity was intentionally incorporated at various levels of the course. The instructor highlighted the importance of transparency with students regarding how their own positionality, life experiences, and biases influenced the course's design and teaching. Students were prompted to understand that the course material was viewed through the instructor's perspective, even as the course aimed to expand the classroom discussion.

To improve accountability and inclusion, the instructor took part in a university-wide student–faculty pedagogical partnership program, which pairs faculty with students to strengthen inclusive teaching. The student partner was an undergraduate student outside the counseling field. She attended every class, met with the instructor weekly, and gave feedback on accessibility and inclusion. She also held mid-semester feedback sessions with students and shared observations that helped make real-time changes to classroom practices. This partnership acted as an additional safeguard to keep student experiences at the center of the project's design and implementation (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Cook-Sather, 2025).

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Counselor educators aiming to adopt or modify this model may find it helpful to intentionally scaffold assignments that lead to public engagement, partner with campus organizations to improve accessibility, and build community collaborations to increase relevance and impact. Assignment descriptions and grading rubrics used in Cultural Carefest are available on the project's blind-review OSF page (Author, 2025), serving as additional resources for replication. Educators might also think about working with campus offices, such as disability services or student organizations like the national counseling honor society, to improve accessibility and involvement.

Evaluation of Effectiveness

Cultural Carefest was evaluated through student and attendee surveys as well as faculty observation. Post-event survey feedback suggested that participants gained exposure to unfamiliar cultural practices and traditions, learned new information relevant to healthcare and wellness, and identified strategies they could apply in their personal and professional lives. Students also reported increased confidence in communicating their research to a public audience.

Faculty observations supported these findings. The scaffolded sequence seemed to effectively prepare students for public engagement by gradually building their knowledge, skills, and confidence. The inclusive poster workshop led to noticeable improvements in poster design and clarity, while the option to rotate presenters or hold seated presentations supported student comfort and participation. Together, these observations indicated that Cultural Carefest provided meaningful opportunities for students to practice advocacy and see themselves as contributors to a broader cultural dialogue within both campus and community contexts. However, the findings are descriptive and aimed at improving the program, not for general research use.

Assessment Tools and Methods

Each assignment was created to both instruct and assess student learning. The video presentation measured students' ability to synthesize research and accurately present cultural information. Peer feedback demonstrated collaborative critique and focused on accessibility and framing in advocacy. The research poster evaluated students' skill in condensing complex ideas into a clear, visually appealing, and inclusive format. The public presentation assessed students' ability to engage diverse audiences, practice advocacy, and communicate effectively in real time. The final reflection documented growth in cultural self-awareness and professional identity development, aligned with MSJCC domains and CACREP 2024 standards.

Grading rubrics were created for each assignment to set clear expectations and align with course goals, program outcomes, and professional skills. These rubrics promoted accountability and modeled the evaluation students will encounter in professional settings. Additionally, reflection prompts were included to help students explore the links between culture, healthcare, and counseling practice. Full assignment descriptions and rubrics are available as supplemental materials on the project's blind-review OSF page linked above.

Discussion and Implications

Cultural Carefest demonstrated how a typical classroom assignment can be transformed into a structured service-learning project with broader community and professional impact. By extending student work beyond the classroom, the project offered opportunities to translate multicultural and social justice counseling competencies into real world experiences. This project also highlighted how public-facing advocacy activities can foster early professional identity development and cultivate culturally responsive communication skills that students can carry into practicum, internship, and future counseling roles.

Although the project shows potential to be an impactful intervention, several limitations should be noted. It was implemented within a single course, and evaluation relied on descriptive program assessment rather than validated research measures. Survey feedback also identified logistical challenges such as the event's one-hour timeframe and the lack of a poster map. These limitations offer concrete directions for refinement and point to the importance of balancing classroom and event planning skills. Future iterations will incorporate IRB-approved assessment tools, including measures of cultural humility and advocacy skill development, to evaluate outcomes more systematically. Planned modifications include extending the event to 90 minutes, providing printed maps of poster titles and locations, and expanding community partnerships to involve more local organizations and stakeholders. These improvements are expected to enhance accessibility, engagement, and the overall educational value of the event. Cultural Carefest may serve as a replicable model for counselor education programs seeking to bridge the gap between multicultural coursework and authentic advocacy experiences. Integrating service-learning, community engagement, and structured reflection supports the MSJCC's call for action in both individual and community contexts while promoting ethical, culturally responsive professional development.

References

- American Counseling Association. (2014). *2014 ACA code of ethics*. <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ethics/2014-aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>
- Atkins, K., & Lorelle, S. (2022). Cultural humility: Lessons learned through counseling cultural immersion. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 15(1). <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/jcps/vol15/iss1/9>
- Barden, S. M., Mobley, K., & Shannonhouse, L. (2014). Cultural immersion in counselor education in the United States: A quasi-experimental study. *Journal for International Counselor Education*, 6, 46–60. <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jcps/vol14/iss1/4>
- Barnes, M. E., & Marlatt, R. (2020). From involvement to solidarity: Community engagement to foster culturally-proactive and constructivist pedagogy. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 19(1), 4–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2020.1832005>
- Chang, V. (2022). Advocacy and creativity in community: A social justice project for counseling students. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling & Psychology*, 14(1), 2–16. <https://doi.org/10.33043/JSACP.14.1.2-16>
- Collins, N. M., & Pieterse, A. L. (2007). Critical incident analysis based training: An approach for developing active racial/cultural awareness. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 85(1), 14–23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2007.tb00439.x>
- Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in teaching and learning: A guide for faculty*. Jossey-Bass. ISBN: 978-1-118-43458-1
- Cook-Sather, A. (2025). The impact of pedagogical partnership on students' professional skills and lives. *Social Sciences*, 14(2), 114. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14020114>
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2023). *2024 CACREP standards*. <https://www.cacrep.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024-Standards-Combined-Version-4.11.2024.pdf>
- Blinded Author (2025). Cultural Carefest teaching materials. *Open Science Framework*. https://osf.io/8jdc9/?view_only=394239f3c3bc474caa106df51d9722d9
- Langellier, K. A., Astramovich, R. L., & Doughty Horn, E. A. (2020). Infusing service-learning into the counselor education curriculum. *The Professional Counselor*, 10(2), 194–203. <https://doi.org/10.15241/kal.10.2.194>
- Machuca, M., & Martinez, T. (2022). Service-learning in multicultural counselor education after disaster situations: A case study. *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*, 10(1). Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.37333/001c.66272>
- Purswell, K. E. (2019). Humanistic learning theory in counselor education. *The Professional Counselor*, 9(4), 358–368. <https://doi.org/10.15241/kcp.9.4.358>
- Ratts, M. J., Singh, A. A., Butler, S. K., Nassar-McMillan, S., McCullough, J., & Fong, M. (2016). *Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (MSJCC)*. American Counseling Association. <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/competencies/multicultural-and-social-justice-counseling-competencies.pdf>
- Rodríguez-Zurita, D., Jaya-Montalvo, M., Moreira-Arboleda, J., Raya-Diez, E., Carrión-Mero, P. (2024). Sustainable development through service learning and community engagement in higher education: a systematic literature review. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 26(1), 158–201. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-10-2023-0461>
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

Teaching a Research-Informed School Counseling Intervention to Practicum Students to Impact Competencies, Imposter Syndrome, and Self-Efficacy

School counselors-in-training (SCIT) have unique needs related to their counseling skill development, which may be addressed through scaffolded learning experiences during practicum field work. In this brief, we propose that course instructors can best meet the needs of SCIT in practicum by teaching SCIT to implement the True Goals curriculum during their practicum experiences. We describe this approach as well as the results of a mixed methods study across three universities exploring practicum SCIT' levels of counseling skill development and self-efficacy in response to the curriculum. Participants expressed a stronger foundation as a school counselor, development of fundamental counseling skills, and how the process of delivering the intervention provided an opportunity for personal critical reflection. Implications for counselor education regarding school counseling training are discussed, including using the curriculum in fieldwork to support students.

SARAH M. HENRY¹, JENNA ALVAREZ², SANGEUN LEE³, PATRICK D. CUNNINGHAM⁴, RACHEL SAUNDERS⁵, BRETT ZYROMSKI³, IAN MARTIN⁶, RYAN MAX³, DEQUINDRE C. HUGHES⁷, AND SARAH SHREWSBURY-BRAXTON⁸

¹School of Education, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

²Educational Psychology, Human Development, Learning and Technology, Miami University

³Department of Educational Studies, The Ohio State University

⁴Department of Counseling, Family Therapy, and Higher Education, Appalachian State University

⁵Southside High School, Greenville, SC

⁶School of Leadership and Education Sciences, University of San Diego

⁷Counseling and Higher Education, Ohio University

⁸Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education, Pennsylvania State University

KEYWORDS

school counseling training, goal-setting curriculum, school counseling practicum, self-efficacy

Introduction

School counselors offer a wide range of preventive and responsive services to students through individual, group, classroom, and school-wide programs (ASCA, 2023). To develop the skills needed to carry out such services, school counselors-in-training (SCIT) benefit from structured learning experiences regarding implementing evidence-based practices (Ohrt et al., 2016; Zyromski et al., 2018). As SCIT engage in such learning, they may struggle with self-efficacy and the imposter phenomenon (IP), which is characterized by feelings of inadequacy despite clear evidence of their competence (Bandura, 1977; Perry et al, 2020). Structured supervision and course requirements during practicum provide opportunities for trainees to develop essential problem-solving skills and critical thinking to overcome IP (Lietz et al., 2014). These opportunities help SCIT develop their professional identity and enhance their self-efficacy, which may be a critical factor in counseling performance and the frequency of school counseling programmatic service delivery (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005; Mullen & Lambie, 2016). Structured support through supervision can play a crucial role in helping SCIT gain self-efficacy and competence in delivering comprehensive school counseling programs (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005; Clarke et al., 2024; Mullen & Lambie, 2016; Sweeney & Creaner, 2014).

Furthermore, Zyromski and colleagues (2018) emphasized the need for evidence-based practices to be implemented by both practitioners and counselor educators to help train school counselors in providing interventions for K-12 students. However, they noted that some counselor educators may lack the awareness or training needed to effectively implement these practices in school settings. By focusing on a research-based curriculum, counselor educators can identify programs and interventions that may be beneficial for SCIT development and begin to integrate similar programs into their training programs.

Despite the value of structured support through supervision in practicum and internship, course instructors often do not utilize a specific curriculum to guide student development. The True Goals Intervention (Martin, 2021) offers a structured, flexible curriculum that focuses

on setting goals, which is a key responsibility of school counselors (ASCA, 2021). True Goals contains ten principles that school counselors can use to guide K-12 students through the steps in successful goal setting, including having students establish their own goals, having students track their progress towards achieving their goals, and having students celebrate their successes (Martin, 2021). Each of the ten principles is well supported

Author Note:

Sarah M. Henry <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3710-3604>
 Jenna Alvarez <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7743-9028>
 Sangeun Lee <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0131-7144>
 Patrick Cunningham <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5613-6572>
 Rachel Saunders <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0354-7090>
 Brett Zyromski <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5405-749X>
 Ian Martin <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0766-4478>
 Ryan Max <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2174-1525>
 DeQuindre C. Hughes <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8707-4728>
 Sarah Shrewsbury-Braxton <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2730-5934>

by the goal-setting and motivation literature, and they are delivered as a series of lessons as a function of the school counseling program (Martin, 2021).

According to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), goal setting brings energy and direction toward motivational outcomes (Bandura, 2001; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Further, individuals exercise their sense of agency and build self-efficacy through goal setting, goal pursuit, and self-reflection (Locke, 2001; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Thus, the aim of True Goals is to guide K-12 students through the goal setting and goal-achievement process in a way that fits the specific needs of the students according to their location and setting (Martin, 2021), which leads to student gains in motivation, self-knowledge, self-direction, positive relationships, and social self-efficacy (Martin, Choi, et al., 2022; Martin, Cunningham, et al., 2022; Zyromski et al., 2018).

Although the impact of True Goals on K-12 student outcomes has been previously studied, no found research has explored whether training SCIT in True Goals in practicum enhances SCIT' feelings of self-efficacy and competency, while also reducing their experiences of impostor syndrome (Martin, Choi, et al., 2022; Martin, Cunningham, et al., 2022; Zyromski et al., 2018). Currently, there is a gap in research examining how the delivery of curriculum during practicum impacts the professional identity development and learning experiences of SCIT. To address this gap, we employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate how training SCIT in the use of True Goals, a research-supported school counseling curriculum, impacted their self-efficacy, competence, and experiences of imposter syndrome during their practicum.

Description of Teaching Strategy and Application to Counselor Education

To strengthen SCIT's self-efficacy and competence, as well as reduce the occurrence of imposter phenomenon, our proposed teaching strategy is teaching students the True Goals curriculum in a school counseling practicum course. In doing so, instructors can deliver an evidence-based curriculum that provides a structured learning opportunity with supportive supervision. SCIT may benefit from learning how to deliver and implement such a curriculum while learning to become school counselors.

To deliver the True Goals curriculum in a school counseling practicum course, we recommend that instructors provide SCIT six hours of training on how they ought to implement the True Goals curriculum at their practicum sites. These six hours of training may be broken up across two class sessions. Such training should include an overview of the ten principles of True Goals, with special attention given to how Principle 1 (It Is All About You), Principle 2 (Write a Goal or Three) and Principle 3 (Rate Yourself) can often be combined into the first session of their time with K-12 students at their practicum site in about 30-minutes. The training should also review the remainder of the ten principles, noting Principle Seven (Identify Your Influences)

and Principle Eight (Figure Out Who Else Can Help) can be combined, and Principle Nine (Look for Patterns) and Principle Ten (Celebrate Your Learning) can also be combined during two separate 30-minute sessions with the students. In all, True Goals can often be delivered across six meetings with K-12 students.

In introducing SCIT to the True Goals curriculum, we recommend teaching SCIT how to use the True Goals Student Workbook to facilitate their interventions at their practicum sites. Moreover, the True Goals school counseling curriculum has been used with diverse populations successfully (Martin, Choi, et al., 2022; Martin, Cunningham, et al., 2022). As instructors teach students the curriculum, they ought to emphasize that it is a flexible approach for working with diverse populations in a way that increases inclusivity and empowers K-12 students to control their goal-setting priorities, instead of having those driven by adults in the building, which is a common mistake in PK-12 environments.

Instructors encourage SCIT to work with their site supervisors to determine which curricular constructs are priorities to assess as a pre-post evaluation tool to measure the impact of their True Goals intervention across time. Beyond these parameters, we encourage instructors to allow SCIT to implement the True Goals curriculum in a way that fits their sites, as an individual, small group, or classroom intervention. The student workbook is a guide to help facilitate sessions, often with visuals for students to more easily engage in the material. Throughout the semester, instructors should provide SCIT check-ins regarding their implementation process of the curriculum and deliver subsequent supervision to support their efforts.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When implementing the True Goals curriculum in practicum, instructors should consider the ethical implications of requiring a specific curriculum in a certain format. For example, in this study, participants were able to utilize the curriculum with individuals, groups, or classrooms. Some school districts have specific guidance and regulations on the use of specific curriculum, which may need to be approved. Therefore, it is important to send an email out to all the site supervisors, letting them know that this intervention is an expectation of the program and may benefit their K-12 students. Providing forms of communication through which site supervisors can contact the instructor is helpful for answering any questions or concerns that may arise. Further, if the course instructor is not the Field Experiences Coordinator for the school counseling track, it would be important to go through the Field Experiences Coordinator to approve the True Goals intervention and pre/post assignment as well.

DEMONSTRATED REFLEXIVITY

Counselor educators utilizing True Goals in a practicum course need to consider their bias towards delivery methods and goal setting. We recommend that counselor educators reflect upon their beliefs and bias related to individual, group, and classroom delivery before implementing True Goals in practicum coursework. For example, prior to teaching, a counselor

educator ought to consider their bias around building levels being unable to engage in a particular delivery method or having restricted access to certain student populations. Through bias reflection, the counselor educator can prevent or weaken preferential treatment or feedback related to the mode of delivery of this curriculum to students. Counselor educators also would benefit from reflecting on their own beliefs related to goal setting, particularly related to the types of goals K-12 students should establish. This notion is especially relevant because the True Goals curriculum highlights the importance for K-12 students to set their own goals related to their own desires, instead of goals being pre-established for K-12 students.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Suggested resources to implement the True Goals curriculum in a school counseling practicum course include the *True Goals School Counseling Curriculum Facilitator Guide and Student Workbook* (Martin, 2021), course assignment, and assignment rubric (see page for resources: <https://bit.ly/tpbtruegoals>). Practicum instructors can also adapt the True Goals training detailed below and encourage SCIT in practicum to work with their site supervisors to ensure that, as K-12 students set goals, pathways for achieving those goals are created whenever possible, even if systemic change is required. We recommend that instructors provide multiple avenues to check for understanding of SCIT in practicum during the training via interactive learning activities with sticky notes, verbal feedback, and processing groups. Doing so can help adjust the training content for differentiated learning.

Assessment Methods Used to Assess Student Learning

To formally assess the value of teaching the True Goals curriculum to SCIT in practicum, we conducted a mixed methods study with a convergent design, which involves qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis before being merged into the findings (Creswell & Clark, 2021). The objective of our study was to evaluate the impact of the True Goals school counseling intervention on SCIT's (a) competency levels, (b) imposter syndrome, and (c) self-efficacy among graduate-level students enrolled in a school counseling practicum course. Our guiding research question was: "How does training in the True Goals practicum curriculum influence students' professional competence, experiences of imposter syndrome, and self-efficacy?" Participants were SCIT enrolled in practicum classes at three different universities across the Midwest and Western United States in the same semester. In previous semesters, the instructors had assignments within the syllabus requiring students to collect pre-and-post evaluation data related to an intervention they conducted at their sites. At two of the universities involved in the study, in previous years, True Goals had been a required intervention for the students to conduct at their practicum sites, in partnership with their site

supervisors and school staff. The course instructors had anecdotally noted that students in past years had benefited from a structured intervention to conduct at their sites. This study then evolved from the normal educational practices conducted at these universities in their practicum courses to using True Goals for SCIT to apply as an intervention at their sites to enhance their professional development.

We used a one-group pre-post quantitative design (O-X-O) to evaluate student changes in professional competency, and for self-efficacy, we used the Counselor Competencies Scale-Revised (CCS-R; Lambie et al., 2018) and the School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSE; Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005). Initially, the scales included the Clance Imposter Syndrome scale; however, participants received an incomplete scale in the survey, so this construct was only explored qualitatively. As part of the mixed-methods approach, the research team utilized Yin's multiple-case study design to collect qualitative data simultaneously at three different institutions (2018) through semi-structured interviews. In these interviews, we explored the changes SCIT experienced in learning about the True Goals curriculum and how doing so interacted with potential imposter syndrome, competency levels, and self-efficacy levels.

QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENTS

The SCSE is a 43-item scale which includes five subscales: personal and social development, leadership and assessment, career and academic development, collaboration, and cultural acceptance, which the scale was normed with master's-level students (and others), with a population composed of mostly White women (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005). The CCS-R is a 23-item instrument comprised of two factors: (a) counseling skills and therapeutic conditions and (b) counseling dispositions and behaviors. Norming of the instrument was completed with counseling students in a CACREP-accredited program, and the scale was completed by their practicum supervisors (Lambie et al., 2018). Thus, the SCSE and CCS-R aligned well with the purpose of this study.

We utilized a single, group pretest/posttest research design to evaluate student changes in professional competency and school counselor self-efficacy. Using SPSS (Version 27), we conducted a preliminary analysis of the data using one-way between groups ANOVAs to assess score differences according to gender and race on the SCES and CSS-R scales and subscales to ensure that these two covariates did not have a confounding effect on the dependent variable. Subsequently, we conducted paired samples t-tests to compare the mean pre- and post-test scores of the participants for each scale and subscale. Cases were excluded listwise for each scale so that only participants with fully completed pre- and post-test scales were included in the analysis for each, resulting in 23 paired samples. We utilized a p value < 0.5 as a cutoff for statistical significance. We calculated treatment effect size using Cohen's d for each mean difference gain score as an indicator of the relative strength of each gain. Cohen's (1988) recommendations for interpreting effect size were applied. We summarized these results in Table 2.

Table 2
Paired Samples T-Test Results

	Gain Score (Post – Pre)	t	DF	p	d
CCS-R Skills and Therapeutic Conditions	.40	4.05	22	<.001*	.84**
CCS-R Dispositions and Behaviors	.38	3.06	22	.003*	.64
SCSE Personal and Social Development	.41	3.33	22	.002*	.69
SCSE Leadership and Assessment	.55	4.79	22	<.001*	1.00**
SCSE Career and Academic Development	.42	4.52	22	<.001*	.94**
SCSE Collaboration	.41	4.16	22	<.001*	.87**
Cultural Acceptance	.51	4.11	22	<.001*	.86**
SCSE Total	.45	5.40	22	<.001*	1.13**

**Reflects statistically significant level*

***Reflects large effect size*

QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENTS

In addition to the quantitative assessment, we also used qualitative exploration to understand the potential impact of the True Goals curriculum on SCIT in practicum. A member of the research team not affiliated with the participants' university conducted semi-structured interviews virtually, lasting 45-60 minutes. The interview protocol included questions that reflected constructs from the CCS-R, hoping to highlight the participants' experiences implementing the True Goals curriculum and their reflections on self-efficacy, imposter syndrome, and leadership and advocacy. The qualitative analysis team (first, second, third, fifth, ninth and tenth authors) was made up of three faculty members and three doctoral students. They conducted the analysis using individual and group processes. The team met to decide how to begin the coding process and assign pseudonyms for participants. Each member of the qualitative analysis team individually reviewed the four interview transcripts and coded on the same document by highlighting statements and adding comments to documents. Each member kept independent notes and summarized their initial codes and impressions of the interview data. Although the sample size was small ($n = 4$), saturation occurred, as the participants provided similar views on their experiences in implementing the True Goals curriculum and its impact on their professional growth. After their initial review, the qualitative analysis team reconvened to discuss their codes and create a table that showed connections between coded quotes from participants. Each team member then reviewed the collective codes and quotes to further develop themes and subthemes.

We identified three overarching themes using each team member's summarized notes, team member reflection, and open discussion: (1) professional foundation, (2) counseling development, and (3) critical reflection process. We utilized trustworthiness strategies outlined by Goodman-Scott and Cholewa (2023), including member checking transcripts with each participant after the interview and before the coding process and discussing our experiences as educators and doctoral students. We use direct participant quotes within the findings section that follows to illuminate our themes.

Findings

PROFESSIONAL FOUNDATION

Delivering the True Goals curriculum to SCIT in practicum may help foster fundamental counseling skills and professional identity development for SCIT by fostering self-efficacy. We found significant differences in pre-test and post-test scores for all subscales of the CCS-R, which represented statistically significant increases in perceived professional competency. This result aligns with the qualitative findings of this study, in which participants expressed increases in self-efficacy and confidence over time when delivering this curriculum, as the curriculum served as a professional foundation for them to grow. Because instructors provided SCIT with this adaptable curriculum during their first clinical experiences in schools, participants reported feeling more confident working with students because they felt they had a framework for individual, group, and/or classroom sessions. For example, Morgan explained how using True Goals as a framework “remedied those anxieties that I was having before” practicum about what to say and what to work on with students when she was feeling out of her element with a different age group. Building these foundational skills can help influence SCIT's perspectives regarding their self-efficacy as a counselor as well as help reduce the impacts of imposter syndrome. By providing practicum SCIT with this guidance and experiential learning, participants reported increased levels of self-efficacy in counseling, which is demonstrated in both qualitative and quantitative results of this study.

COUNSELING DEVELOPMENT

Study participants also had statistically significant increases in self-reported counseling skills, dispositions, behaviors, and ability to create and maintain therapeutic conditions, which directly assists SCIT in development across delivery modalities (Mullen & Lambie, 2016). In qualitative interviews, participants illustrated how they developed their direct and indirect school counseling skills. Carter shared, “I really wanted them to decide their goals for themselves and just be there for support.” Similarly, another participant, Taylor, described that True Goals

taught her “to help kids to set their own goal that was not set by me or influenced by me.” Respecting students’ voices and their needs was also manifested in adapting curriculum during sessions. Participants also highlighted specific counseling skills they were able to practice using True Goals. One common topic centered around goal setting and monitoring students’ progress. Participants reported having opportunities to use other skills such as reflection, summarization, and refocus in the process of implementing True Goals. Morgan used the curriculum as a tool for gentle confrontation, stating, “because their behavior wasn’t matching their goal, and so just kind of pointing out the discrepancy there.” The structure of True Goals provided students with opportunities to practice counseling skills, like challenging.

Participants also noted an increase in self-efficacy related to their skills related to collaboration and consultation, a noteworthy finding given that many SCIT may have limited exposure to experiential practices in these domains in their coursework (Cholewa et al., 2020). Participants described feeling empowered to make changes and advocate at the individual and systemic level for themselves and their students. Participants described how True Goals created moments for collaboration and consultation with teachers. Taylor shared, “I was able to touch base a little bit with the teachers. I think having that communication with the teacher from the school counselor, me, was sort of a new skill.” Some participants used students’ progress on their True Goals as evidence to support their work. Morgan, for instance, shared, “I checked in with this student, and they rated themselves, and they gave themselves a 5. I mean, that’s just data. And that’s evidence that I can share with my supervisor.” The need for SCIT to be equipped with leadership and advocacy skills is a consistent theme in school counseling literature as well as one that emerged in participants’ experiences learning True Goals in practicum (Li & Peters, 2022; Perry et al., 2020; Young et al., 2015).

CRITICAL REFLECTION PROCESS

Furthermore, participants described how they used the True Goals curriculum to navigate ever-changing levels of confidence and IP for SCIT. As growth is not linear, participants described the ups-and-downs related to their time in practicum. All four participants noted a spectrum of emotions that varied greatly and cycled from high to low or low to high confidence. Carter mentioned high levels of IP in the first few weeks of practicum. In contrast, Taylor initially experienced high levels of confidence based on their previous educator experience and then experienced dips in confidence and IP from the shift from a teacher to a school counselor mindset. She described this, saying, “I think I was initially very confident, and then I was very unconfident ... I got knocked down a few pegs, like I just need to grow and learn. And I think that is good, and now that the group is over, I think I saw my growth to adjust my ability to learn, and that boosts my confidence as a counselor that I can learn and do things differently than I did in the classroom.” Using True Goals helped participants build confidence in not only their skills but in their professional judgement and identity, which further strengthened their overall impression of their professional self-efficacy and abilities.

Implications and Future Directions

By providing this curriculum to SCIT during this stage of their development, participants also described how the True Goals curriculum provided a professional foundation for them to grow upon by providing a framework for multiple delivery modalities (e.g., individual counseling, group counseling, and classroom lessons). This finding further aligns with research regarding SCIT's desires for gaining experience in group work to increase feelings of self-efficacy (Flasch et al., 2016). Additionally, True Goals proved a strong learning tool for participants to better understand research-based practices and data-driven interventions, which is a necessary component of the professional identity of school counselors (Zyromski et al., 2018). By providing students with this structured experiential learning, SCIT can be the bridge between theory and practice, which can also help improve feelings of self-efficacy (Flasch et al., 2016).

LIMITATIONS

While this study provided valuable information about the impact of implementing True Goals with SCIT, there were some limitations within the qualitative portion of this study. First, there was a small sample size ($n = 4$) of participants who participated in semi-structured interviews, despite broad efforts to recruit more students. Additionally, the total number of participants was small ($N = 23$), which also provided a limitation for statistical analysis. Secondly, participants from only two universities completed interviews. In addition, the current study did not include control groups of SCIT who did not receive the training, which poses a challenge to fully understanding the impact of this teaching strategy, as factors other than True Goals training may have contributed to SCIT growth. Finally, the participants' demographics in both the quantitative and qualitative data collection stages did not fully represent the full range of student identities at the three sites. However, the sample was skewed toward female and White participants, which is representative of ASCA professional membership.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Within the realm of counselor education, the results of this mixed-methods study provide implications for school counselor preparation around student development. Future directions may include the utilization of specific assignments, curriculum, and training with an emphasis on increasing self-efficacy in a broad range of counseling skills. Other researchers have noted similar needs related to implementation of an in-class problem-based learning activity for counseling students (Casado Pérez & Witherspoon, 2019). Such learning activities can consist of the possible benefits of providing a research-based curriculum such as Student Success Skills or Kelsos's Choice (see Abel et al., 2018; Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2015; Mariani & Silvestro, 2020), in a formative field experience (e.g., practicum) to help students develop self-efficacy, professional identity, and combat feelings of imposter syndrome. The

results demonstrated that students not only benefited from being exposed and trained on research-based interventions, but then, being able to implement the intervention, supported their self-efficacy. Other researchers noted how hands-on or “experimental” training allowed school counseling students to work through challenges which then increased their confidence when working with English Learners (Shi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the benefits of structured support in delivering research-based curriculum are not exclusive to those in graduate school, as professional development of practicing school counselors can also be considered. Professional development in research-based curriculum and goal setting may benefit practicing school counselors in their self-efficacy and counseling skills. For example, Perry and colleagues (2020) discovered that advocacy training impacted self-efficacy for practicing school counselors. Further inclusion of training in goal setting may be pivotal to school counselors, given ASCA mindsets and behaviors for school counselors to facilitate short- and long-term goal setting with students (e.g., B-LS 7 and B-SMS 5; ASCA, 2021). Additionally, counselor educators may consider future directions related to the timing of this teaching strategy in practicum or internship. Overall, the results from this mixed methods study point to the benefits of including structured experiences in implementing research-based interventions during SCIT training programs, particularly during practicum, when SCIT have their formative experiences in schools.

References

- Abel, N. R., Oliver, B. M., Keller, T. J., McAulay, A., & Piatek, L. (2015). Using student success skills to address ASCA behaviors standards in K-3. *Professional School Counseling, 19*(1), 116–125. <https://doi.org/10.5330/1096-2409-19.1.116>
- American School Counselor Association (2021). *ASCA student standards: Mindsets and behaviors for student success*.
- American School Counselor Association (ASCA). (2023). *The role of the school counselor*. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/cc8b2e1b-d021-4575-982c-c84402cb2cd2/Role-Statement.pdf>
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*, 191–215.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1>
- Bodenhorn, N., & Skaggs, G. (2005). Development of the school counselor self-efficacy scale. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development, 38*(1), 14–28.
- Casado Pérez, J. F., & Witherspoon, E. (2019). Problem-based learning in human growth & development counselor education. *Teaching and Supervision in Counseling, 1*(2), 46–66. <https://doi.org/10.7290/tsc010204>
- Clarke, B. J., Hartley, M. T., & Button, C. (2024). Impostor phenomenon and counselor development: The critical role of self-compassion. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 103*(2), 149–160. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12544>
- Cholewa, B., Goodman-Scott, E., Warren, J. M., & Hull, M. F. (2020). School counselor consultation preparation: A national study. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 59*(1), 46–58. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12165>
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2021). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage publications.
- Goodman-Scott, E., & Cholewa, B. (2023). Research design: Qualitative approaches. In B. Zyromski & C. Dimmitt (Eds.), *Research in the Schools* (pp. pages of chapter add here). Oxford University Press.
- Flasch, P., Bloom, Z., & Holladay, K. (2016). Self-efficacy of counselor trainees in pre-practicum: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Counselor Practice, 7*(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.22229/sft309871>
- Lambie, G. W., Mullen, P. R., Swank, J. M., & Blount, A. J. (2018). The counseling competencies scale: Validation and refinement. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development, 51*(1), 1–15.
- Lemberger-Truelove, M., Selig, J., Bowers, H., & Rogers, J. (2015). Effects of the student success skills program on the executive functioning skills, feelings of connectedness, and academic achievement in a predominantly Hispanic, low-income middle school district. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 93*(1), 7 25–37.
- Locke E. A. (2001). Self-set goals and self-efficacy as mediators of incentives and personality. In Erez M., Kleinbeck U., Thierry H. (Eds.), *Work motivation in the context of a globalizing economy* (pp. 13–26). Erlbaum.
- Li, H., & Peters, H. C. (2022). Supervision of school counseling leadership for school counselors in training. *Professional School Counseling, 26*(1), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X221087658>
- Mariani, M., & Silvestro, K. (2020). Making Choices to Resolve Conflict: An Evaluation of the Kelso's Choice Program for Elementary Students. *Professional School Counseling, 23*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X20940665>.
- Martin, I. (2021). *True goals: A school counseling curriculum* (2nd ed.). Swallowtail Educational Consulting.
- Martin, I., Choi, J., Zyromski, B., Campos, L., Mansheim, S., Cunningham, P. D., & Callahan, W. (2022). Small-group investigation of the true goals curriculum with elementary and middle school students: A randomized control study. *Professional School Counseling, 26*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X221134259>
- Martin, I., Cunningham, P. D., Zyromski, B., Nuñez, M., Romero, S. D., & Choi, J. (2022). Small-group investigation of the true goals curriculum with high school students: A randomized control study. *Professional School Counseling, 26*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X221137312>

- Mullen, P. R., & Lambie, G. W. (2016). The contribution of school counselors' self-efficacy to their programmatic service delivery. *Psychology in the Schools, 53*(3), 306–320.
- Ohr, J. H., Blalock, S., & Limberg, D. (2016). Preparing school counselors-in-training to conduct large group developmental guidance: Evaluation of an instructional model. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 4*(2), 96–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01933922.2016.1146377>
- Perry, J., Parikh, S., Vazquez, M., Saunders, R., Bolin, S., & Dameron, M. (2020). School counselor self-efficacy in advocating for self: How prepared are we. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision, 13*(4). Retrieved from: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/jcps/vol13/iss4/5>
- Schunk, D. H., & DiBenedetto, M. K. (2020). Motivation and social cognitive theory. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 60*, Article 101832. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2019.101832>
- Shi, Q., Cournoyer, C., Randolph, A., Scheffnacker, M., & Brown, J. (2022). Experiential learning of school counselors-in-training to work with English Learners. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice, 12*, 132–147. <https://doi.org/10.5590/JERAP.2022.12.1.10>
- Sweeney, J., & Creaner, M. (2014). What's not being said? Recollections of nondisclosure in clinical supervision while in training. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 42*(2), 211–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2013.872223>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.). Sage.
- Young, A., Dollarhide, C. T., & Baughman, A. (2015). The voices of school counselors: Essential characteristics of school counselor leaders. *Professional School Counseling, 19*(1). <https://doi.org/2156759X1501900101>.
- Zyromski, B., Dimmitt, C., Mariani, M., & Griffith, C. (2018). Evidence-based school counseling: Models for integrated practice and school counselor education. *Professional School Counseling, 22*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X18801847>