

Introduction

LETTER FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM



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Dear reader,

Author Greg Boyle (2017) wrote in his second book, “The truth is, I’m only writing this because I need it.” In some ways, the same feels true for this issue of the *Teaching Practice Briefs* (TPBs). We launched it because we needed it. Since January 2025, so much of the United States and the world have been shaped by new political and social forces, and counselor education has felt these impacts in diverse, profound ways. As an editorial leadership team working at four different universities, we felt these effects firsthand as we navigated hostility towards DEI research, anti-equity policies, reduced budgets, and anticipatory compliance.

When our editorial team convened in the Spring of 2025, former co-editor Dr. Javier Casado Pérez reminded us that we have a tool to respond to such sociopolitical forces: these very practice briefs. As new co-editor, Dr. Susan Branco, came on board last year, she reiterated the need for a TPB issue like this one to provide ideas and potential solutions to colleagues in our field. One year later, we are grateful to present this issue rich with innovative teaching ideas and instructional strategies to respond to the current sociopolitical times.

Admittedly, as we prepared the call for this issue and waited for submissions, we were nervous. We

confessed to one another that we ourselves felt we had limited tools to respond to the current sociopolitical times, and though we were hopeful that we could mine wisdom from our colleagues in the field, we were unsure if they would prepare and share such ideas for the TPBs. In response to our apprehension we provided an opportunity for anonymous submissions for this special issue. Ultimately, our colleagues showed up. We received more than 40 submissions for the special issue and our fears about not receiving enough ideas transformed into struggles deciding how many briefs we had the capacity to publish. The endeavor was a reminder of the brilliance, creativity, and commitment of our colleagues in counselor education.

The enclosed issue is our final product, an effort designed to answer questions counselor educators (including ourselves) have asked so many times in the last year and a half, like “what can I do?”, “how should I teach about this?”, and “how can I respond in the classroom?” Some article topics in this issue are highly specific, like Jalilzadeh’s instructional strategy preparing counseling students to navigate documentation for pregnant clients in states with limited medical options and Finn et al.’s article on how to use career case studies reflecting sociopolitical themes in flipped classrooms. Other articles are broader, theory-based pieces, like Su and Martz’s brief on Community Cultural Wealth and Sawyer and Leazer’s brief about implementing

Relational-Cultural Theory, Connected Teaching, and the Pedagogy of Vulnerability to facilitate learning in sociopolitically complex times. Lastly, several briefs straddle theoretical concepts to recommend innovative teaching practices, like Green and Daniel’s ideas on using abolitionist praxis to support client wellness and safety in contexts of police violence and Guthery and Ausloos’ brief about reflective activism in counseling classrooms to address sociopolitical issues. We are grateful to all of these authors for their ideas and recommendations in such challenging times.

On a personal note, this is the final issue that Clare will publish for the TPBs, closing her term as co-editor. As she reflected on the past four years, what stood out most was a comment a counselor educator made at the 2023 ACES conference in Denver during a panel discussion with TPB authors about their teaching innovations. She posed this question to us, “Shouldn’t we be having these conversations about teaching more often? Isn’t this more important than budgets or policies or the other things we always meet with our colleagues about?” Indeed, these conversations about teaching matter, and we hope that the TPBs have helped to facilitate them among counselor educators. The remainder of the editorial leadership team, the TPB editorial board, and the many TPB authors will continue the meaningful dialogue in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Clare Merlin-Knoblich, Co-Editor; Susan Rodriguez Branco, Co-Editor; Tamika Jackson, Associate Editor; Lillian C Martz, Editorial Assistant

Editorial Team, *Teaching Practice Briefs**

* 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.

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Ethical Documentation in a Politicized Reproductive Health Climate

A Trauma-Informed Teaching Strategy for Counselor Education

Restrictions on reproductive health care have created ethically complex conditions for counselors documenting crisis and trauma cases involving pregnancy. This brief outlines an instructional strategy that prepares counseling students to navigate documentation in states where pregnant clients face limited medical options and where clinicians fear legal or licensure consequences. Using a reproductive mental health vignette, state policy analysis, and SOAP note practice, the activity teaches students to balance client autonomy, confidentiality, and nonmaleficence during documentation. Ethical considerations, instructor reflexivity, and assessment approaches are described. The strategy promotes competent, trauma-informed practice amid today's challenging sociopolitical climate.

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KEYWORDS

reproductive health, clinical documentation, perinatal mental health, crisis intervention, ethical practice

Politicized Reproductive Health Climate

The reproductive health landscape in the United States has become increasingly complex, as many states have implemented restrictive pregnancy-related laws. These restrictions have created delays in medically necessary care and have placed clinicians in positions of uncertainty regarding legal boundaries (Brandi & Gill, 2023). Researchers have documented significant fear among medical providers regarding criminal penalties, threats to licensure, and the possibility of civil action if they provide or refer for pregnancy-related care that state law now considers unlawful (Arora et al., 2024; Brandi & Gill, 2023).

Pregnant individuals who receive diagnoses involving fetal nonviability or severe pregnancy complications face heightened emotional distress, especially when care options available within their state are limited (Ramer et al., 2024). Studies have identified increased rates of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress symptoms, and feelings of immobilization among individuals who are denied necessary medical interventions or who must travel long distances to seek care (Gerdtz et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2022; Serchen et al., 2023). These experiences compound the emotional and physical stress already associated with medically complex pregnancies.

Mental health counselors frequently work with clients who seek support during moments of crisis related to pregnancy loss, fetal diagnoses, or complicated decision-making. Documentation in these situations requires accuracy, clinical reasoning, and ethical restraint. Record keeping in crisis services becomes even more delicate when clients fear that their personal health decisions could be used against them in legal or political contexts. Counselors must consider how documentation might be interpreted by courts, employers, insurance companies, or other entities that may legally request access to clinical notes (O'Neil et al., 2021; Syed et al., 2024). As recommended by the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (Standard B.2.d), counselors must prepare for such requests by taking steps to prohibit the disclosure or limit it as narrowly as possible to avoid harm (ACA, 2014).

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Research demonstrates that restrictive reproductive health policies negatively impact perinatal mental health outcomes, increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and trauma-related symptoms among pregnant individuals (Gerdtz et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2022). These policies create barriers to care that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, including low-income individuals, people of color, and those in rural areas (Jones & Jerman, 2017). The criminalization of pregnancy outcomes in some jurisdictions has created a “chilling effect” on healthcare provision, with providers fearful of legal repercussions for standard medical care (Arora et al., 2024; Goodwin, 2020). Documentation practices have emerged as a particular concern, as medical records can be subpoenaed and used in criminal investigations or civil

proceedings (Ghaith et al., 2022). Therefore, counselors must understand the ethical principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy, and justice as they relate to documentation practices with pregnant clients (ACA, 2014, Standards A.1.a., A.1.b., B.6.a.; Cottone & Tarvydas, 2021). The *ACA Code of Ethics* emphasizes the protection of client welfare and the maintenance of confidentiality, while also requiring adequate documentation to ensure ethical practice (ACA, 2014, Standard B.6.g). These obligations necessitate careful ethical reasoning and a thorough understanding of state-specific regulations.

RATIONALE AND KNOWLEDGE GAP

Although documentation is a central component of counselor training, most programs do not address how shifting political environments influence documentation practices. Students often report uncertainty about how to document pregnancy-related distress, how to protect client autonomy when laws limit available medical options, and how to reduce potential risks if records are later disclosed (Syed et al., 2024). These challenges are compounded by the need to uphold ethical standards, such as nonmaleficence, confidentiality, fidelity, and sound professional judgment, within legal climates that may threaten client safety.

Despite the relevance of these concerns, counselor education programs rarely offer structured instruction on the intersection of reproductive health, mental health treatment, and documentation ethics (Bridges, 2020). As a result, students often feel unprepared for real-world practice, particularly when determining what information is necessary to document, how to limit sensitive details, and how to safeguard clients from potential legal or political consequences while still producing clinically useful records.

The andragogical approach described here addresses this gap by providing structured, case-based learning that integrates crisis intervention theory, ethical decision-making frameworks, and practical documentation skills. By examining state-level policy variations and their implications for clinical practice, students develop critical thinking skills necessary for ethically responsive counseling in restrictive contexts. This instructional strategy responds to current sociopolitical realities by preparing counselors to be particularly cautious about how they communicate a client's decision-making process, emotional reactions, and risk factors in written records.

Description of Teaching Innovation and Instructional Strategy

APPLICATION TO COUNSELOR EDUCATION

This teaching strategy is implemented in a crisis intervention and prevention course. The activity is conducted in a single class session, with the first hour focused on perinatal mental health crisis, including discussion of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs), statistics and prevalence of PMADs, and maternal mortality rates. The second hour focuses on case analysis and documentation practice.

First Hour: Perinatal Mental Health Crisis

Students examine the landscape of reproductive health policy across states, learning about trigger laws, gestational limits, health exception clauses, and provider protection statutes. This contextual foundation helps students understand how policy environments shape clinical practice. The class reviews perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs), their prevalence, and maternal mortality rates, with attention to how restrictive policies impact perinatal mental health outcomes and create disparities in care access.

Second Hour: Case Analysis and Documentation

Students receive a detailed clinical vignette featuring a pregnant client facing health complications that threaten pregnancy viability. The case captures the complexity of supporting a client through pregnancy decision-making while attending to her mental health needs and safety.

Clinical Vignette. “Maria, a 32-year-old Latina woman, presents for counseling after learning that her pregnancy has a low likelihood of viability. Her medical team explained that continuing the pregnancy may cause severe complications, but due to her state’s restrictions, she cannot obtain all treatment options locally. Maria reports overwhelming anxiety, difficulty sleeping, and episodes of hopelessness. She expresses fear that her medical and counseling records may someday be accessed or misinterpreted. She denies current suicidal intent but acknowledges feeling emotionally exhausted and unsure how to proceed. She states, ‘I’m scared about my health, but I’m also scared that anything I say here could somehow be used against me later. Can you promise me this stays private?’ She asks directly about what will be documented from the session and whether anyone else could access her records.

Students work in small groups to identify the clinical, ethical, and documentation challenges presented in this case. They consider: What are Maria’s immediate mental health needs? What are the counselor’s ethical obligations? How might state law impact treatment planning? What documentation considerations arise? How should the counselor respond to Maria’s direct questions about confidentiality and record keeping?

SOAP Note Exercise and Critical Discussion. Students individually complete a SOAP (Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan) note for an initial session with Maria (See Appendix for SOAP Note Exemplar and Rubric). They are specifically instructed to:

- Document only what was verbally stated or directly observed without unnecessary information. In doing so, students practice the principle of minimal disclosure, revealing only essential information for clinical purpose (ACA, 2014, Standard B.2.e.).
- Avoid assumptions, judgmental or speculative language.
- Record emotional distress in a way that is clinically relevant.
- Acknowledge risk factors clearly and objectively.
- Avoid including personal beliefs, moral judgments, or unnecessary reproductive details.

After completing the note, students compare their documentation choices in pairs, noting what information they included, what they omitted or modified, and their rationale for these decisions.

The class reconvenes for structured discussion using the following prompts:

- What specific information did you include or exclude? Why?
- How did you document Maria's presenting concerns without creating potential legal exposure?
- What language choices did you make regarding pregnancy decision-making and medical complications?
- How did you address Maria's explicit fears about documentation and confidentiality?
- What differences did you notice between your approach and your partner's?

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE AND RESPONSIVE LEARNING

This teaching approach requires careful attention to the diversity of students' personal experiences, beliefs, and values regarding reproductive health. Because reproductive health intersects with culture, religion, gender, and personal values, this instructional strategy requires an inclusive classroom environment that is trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and attentive to students with lived experiences involving reproductive loss or pregnancy complications. The following practices foster such an environment:

Establishing Psychological Safety

On the first day of class, before introducing any course content, students collectively develop community agreements that explicitly address respectful dialogue on sensitive topics. I share my commitment to creating space for diverse perspectives while maintaining focus

on professional ethical obligations and client-centered care. Students are invited to reflect on their own beliefs related to pregnancy and medical decision-making, but they are also reminded of the counselor's ethical obligation to support client autonomy regardless of personal opinion and values.

Acknowledging Positionality and Addressing Disparities

I openly share my social location as a woman, my professional training in reproductive health counseling, and my commitment to social justice while acknowledging that students may hold different personal beliefs. The discussion includes attention to the disproportionate impact of reproductive restrictions on individuals from marginalized communities. Research has documented that racial and socioeconomic disparities shape access to reproductive care and mental health outcomes (Bridges, 2020; Jones & Jerman, 2017). Counselors and counselor educators have a responsibility to recognize historical and social prejudices in the treatment of marginalized groups and strive to address these biases (ACA, 2014, Standard E.5.c.). The activity encourages students to recognize how systemic inequities influence clients' emotional and practical decision-making processes. I emphasize that the learning objective is not to prescribe personal values but to develop skills for client-centered, ethically grounded practice, regardless of the counselor's personal position on reproductive decision-making.

Providing Content Warnings

Students receive advance notice that the module addresses pregnancy loss, reproductive decision-making, and healthcare restrictions. I encourage students to take breaks and step out if needed and communicate with me privately if they need additional support due to personal experiences with reproductive trauma.

Centering Client Autonomy

Throughout the module, I emphasize that the counselor's role is to support the client's autonomous decision-making process, not to influence the outcome. This framing helps students distinguish between personal values and professional responsibilities.

DEMONSTRATED REFLEXIVITY AND INTRAPERSONAL AWARENESS

Before introducing the activity, I acknowledge my professional background in reproductive mental health and explain why I believe it is important for counselors to learn about documentation in this context. I share my awareness of the cultural and political sensitivities surrounding pregnancy decisions and reflect on how my own identities and clinical experiences shape the way I teach these topics. As an educator teaching this material, I continuously examine my own positions and their potential influence on student learning. My background includes clinical work with diverse populations around reproductive health, experience living in both restrictive and protective policy contexts, and scholarly work on intersectionality in mental health care. Reflecting on this background, I recognize that counselor educators' awareness

of personal bias regarding reproductive health is paramount to effective instruction that centers client autonomy and avoids imposing personal values on student learning.

I also acknowledge the privilege inherent in my current position, teaching in a state with relatively protective reproductive health policies, while preparing students who may practice in more restrictive contexts. This geographic privilege shapes my perspective, and I actively seek consultation from colleagues practicing and teaching in diverse policy environments to ensure I accurately represent the challenges students may face.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Educators implementing this teaching strategy should develop familiarity with current reproductive health policy landscapes. The following resources provide regularly updated information:

Policy Resources:

- Guttmacher Institute State Policy Updates ([guttmacher.org/state-policy](https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy))
- Kaiser Family Foundation State Health Facts ([kff.org](https://www.kff.org))
- American Civil Liberties Union Reproductive Freedom Project ([aclu.org/issues/reproductive-freedom](https://www.aclu.org/issues/reproductive-freedom))

Clinical and Ethical Resources:

- ACA Code of Ethics (2014), particularly sections on client welfare (Standard A.1.), confidentiality (Standard B), and diversity (Standard B.1.a.)
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) Committee Opinion on Role of Obstetrician-Gynecologists in Abortion Care and guidance on pregnancy complications and emergency care
- American Psychological Association documentation and record-keeping guidelines

EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of this teaching strategy is evaluated through students' SOAP note documentation and critical reflections, which indicate improved critical thinking and clinical confidence. The paired SOAP note comparison consistently generates rich discussion because students make diverse documentation choices. This diversity demonstrates that multiple ethically defensible approaches exist, helping students develop tolerance for ambiguity and appreciation for context-dependent decision-making.

ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND METHODS

Student learning is assessed through one two-part assignment and in-class dialogue:

- **Part 1: SOAP Note** - Students complete a SOAP note documenting Maria's initial session, demonstrating their ability to balance clinical thoroughness with protective documentation practices.
- **Part 2: Written Reflection** - Students write a reflection exploring their process of documentation, including what choices they made, why they included or excluded specific information, and what they learned about ethical documentation in politically sensitive contexts.
- **In-Class Dialogue** - Structured class discussions allow students to compare documentation approaches, consider diverse perspectives, and engage in critical analysis of how documentation can support or compromise client welfare.

IMPLICATIONS

This teaching approach prepares counselors-in-training to navigate the increasingly complex intersection of mental health care and reproductive health policy. Students develop critical competencies including: understanding policy contexts and their clinical implications, applying ethical decision-making frameworks to ambiguous situations, creating documentation that serves clinical purposes while minimizing potential harm, and maintaining client-centered practice despite personal values or external pressures.

The andragogical model described here can be adapted across counselor education curricula beyond crisis intervention courses. Documentation ethics could be integrated into practicum/internship seminars, clinical diagnosis courses, or professional ethics classes. The case-based approach transfers well to other sociopolitical topics where counselors must navigate restrictive or discriminatory policies, including conversion therapy bans, gender-affirming care restrictions, or immigration-related issues.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, state laws change frequently, which requires the instructor to update class materials every semester to reflect current legal landscapes. This ongoing investment of time and attention to policy developments represents a significant challenge for busy faculty. Second, some students may find this topic emotionally challenging due to personal experiences with pregnancy loss or reproductive trauma. While content warnings and additional support help address this concern, the risk of retraumatization requires careful attention to creating a trauma-informed classroom environment. Third, this module does not address all dimensions of reproductive health counseling. Topics like fertility challenges, pregnancy loss, perinatal mood disorders, postpartum care, foster care, and adoption each merit dedicated attention that time constraints limit.

Future Directions

Future scholarship should examine how counselors in restrictive policy states navigate documentation dilemmas in practice and what protective documentation practices are most effective while maintaining clinical utility. Future teaching strategies may include electronic health record simulations, interdisciplinary coursework with medical or public health students, and more advanced case studies involving diverse pregnancy complications and client presentations. Research is also needed on how documentation-focused training influences counselors' long-term competence and on supporting practitioner wellness in restrictive contexts.

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Appendix

SOAP NOTE EXEMPLAR AND RUBRIC

SOAP Note Components for the Maria Case Study

SOAP component	Exemplar content (Maria case study)	Evaluation rubric
Subjective	Client reports “overwhelming anxiety,” “hopelessness,” and “emotional exhaustion.” States distress is related to an “ongoing medical crisis” and express concern regarding “confidentiality”	Focuses on reported mood symptoms and stated fears without specific reproductive details.
Objective	Observed tearfulness, rapid speech, and psychomotor agitation. Client appeared fatigued but remained alert and oriented. Denies suicidal or homicidal ideation.	Uses neutral, nonjudgmental language. Records only direct clinical observations.
Assessment	Adjustment Disorder with Anxiety (F43.22). Symptoms developed in response to an identifiable stressor, with onset within the past three months. Client is experiencing a high level of distress that impairs daily functioning (e.g., sleep disturbance and hopelessness). Symptoms are exacerbated by external stressors related to medical care access.	Establishes medical necessity for mental health treatment without mentioning pregnancy outcomes.
Plan	Continue weekly individual counseling sessions focused on anxiety management, distress tolerance, and grounding techniques. Collaborated on a safety plan and provided crisis resources.	Focuses on mental health intervention and safety without outlining specific medical decisions.

A Flipped Classroom Approach to Developing Sociopolitical Case Studies in Career Counseling

Career counseling courses have long struggled with low student engagement and a persistent gap between career theory and applied practice with challenges intensified by a sociopolitical climate that increasingly shapes clients' employment experiences. This teaching brief presents a flipped classroom learning activity that prepares counselors-in-training to address sociopolitical career barriers through the small-group development of sociopolitical case studies. Recommendations are provided to facilitate pre-class content on sociopolitical topics and the development of small-group case studies. We provide ethical, evaluation, and assessment considerations to support faculty in delivering this content.

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Artificial intelligence (AI) was used to summarize and organize literature, however, all final interpretations, writing, and writing decisions were made by the authors. The case scenario was developed using AI.

Introduction

Teaching career counseling occupies a unique and often challenging position within counselor education. Although career development is one of the eight common core curricular areas of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), the career counseling course has historically been associated with faculty reluctance and frustration, as well as lower levels of student engagement and perceived relevance compared to other areas of training (Carter & Bowman, 1994; Oberman & Studer, 2009). These longstanding pedagogical challenges are largely rooted in the difficulty of supporting counseling trainees in translating career theory into applied practice and integrating career concerns into their emerging clinical identities. Consequently, counselor trainees often approach career counseling with limited confidence and perceived competence in conducting career-related interventions (Lara et al., 2011).

Recent sociopolitical shifts have reshaped both the content and the instructional context of career counseling, requiring counselor educators to address career concerns embedded in broader social and structural conditions. Scholarship now emphasizes how systemic oppression and racial disparities shape clients' employment experiences, particularly during periods of widespread economic disruption such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Hill et al., 2021). Within counselor education, new legislation regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion has introduced tensions between ethical duties, curriculum requirements, and external regulatory pressures (Wilson, 2024). Furthermore, research in higher education indicates that heightened political polarization can inhibit instructional decisions and discourage students from engaging meaningfully with contentious sociopolitical content, thereby diminishing crucial learning opportunities (Aydarova et al., 2023).

Despite the recognized importance of practical learning, a persistent gap exists in the provision of experiential and case-based training that prepares trainees for real-world practice. While past surveys suggest that case studies have long been used in graduate-level career counseling courses, this use has often been informal and instructor-dependent, lacking systematic pedagogical design (Osborn & Dames, 2013). More recently, Holladay et al. (2025) found that counseling students, practitioners, and educators consistently reported inadequate preparation for applying career theory, prompting calls for greater use of applied, case-based, and inclusive teaching methods. In conclusion, a primary challenge when teaching career counseling is not the absence of case-based learning but the need for structured, pedagogically intentional approaches that actively involve students in the creation and analysis of career counseling cases.

Application of the Topic to Counselor Education

Career counseling is central to the identity of the counseling profession with its historical roots in vocational and career guidance distinguishing it from other mental health disciplines (Mellin et al., 2011). Frank Parsons, regarded as the father of the vocational guidance movement, used career guidance as a vehicle for social advocacy, working to connect marginalized and economically disadvantaged individuals with meaningful and sustainable work (Londoño-McConnell, 2014). Reflecting this legacy, CACREP (2024) identifies career counseling as a core curricular area and, in its 2024 Standards, outlines essential knowledge that all counselors must demonstrate related to career foundations, contextual influences, and evidence-based career counseling practice.

Although vocational guidance was originally designed as a pathway for promoting social justice (O'Brien, 2001) and despite the counseling profession's strong emphasis on multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (Ratts et al. 2016), a disconnect remains in how career courses are utilized to teach counseling students about advocacy and increase their awareness of sociopolitical factors that shape career development and overall quality of life (Fickling, 2016; Hansen, 2003). As Hutchinson (2019) stated in his keynote at the National Career Development Association (NCDA) conference in 2019, "Career development work always impacts social justice." With this understanding, we encourage counselor educators to integrate sociopolitical case studies into career counseling courses to more effectively highlight the systemic influences on clients' career trajectories.

A Flipped Classroom Approach to Developing Sociopolitical Case Studies

Flipped classrooms build on problem-based and case-based learning approaches by shifting the focus from instructor-centered teaching to student-led engagement and knowledge construction (Counselman-Carpenter, 2018; Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2019; Osborn & Dames, 2013). Implementing a flipped model requires instructors to intentionally prepare students for this pedagogical shift by assigning pre-class activities such as targeted readings and recorded lectures that equip learners with foundational content before they arrive for the in-person class session (Merlin, 2016; Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2019; Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2020). Instructors can prepare students to participate in a flipped classroom by having students watch pre-recorded lectures before the face-to-face class period. To complete the learning activity proposed in this brief, students need foundational knowledge of career counseling theories and

assessments. Therefore, we recommend that this learning activity be incorporated into a career counseling and development course after students have already been introduced to a variety of career counseling theories and assessments, likely around halfway through the course.

The literature on the use of a flipped classroom model in counselor education is introduced in a case study by Moran and Milsom (2015) involving the use of a flipped classroom approach in the Foundations of School Counseling course, a master's-level course. The authors utilized the flipped approach by providing content (e.g., webinars, narrated PowerPoints) before class and more interactive learning during the in-class meeting times (e.g., small group projects, guest speakers). Although there was a small number of participants ($N = 15$) in their study analyzing the flipped learning approach, results suggested that, for facilitating student learning, the in-class activities were more effective than the pre-class content. In an examination of a flipped career development course, Fulton and Gonzalez (2015) implemented flipped learning in two career development courses ($N = 58$). They found more positive student attitudes toward and increased confidence in performing career counseling. Both studies highlight that a flipped classroom in a career development course can be an effective way to facilitate student learning and potentially improve attitudes towards this form of helping. Furthermore, Merlin (2016) noted that the career development course is an ideal setting for implementing a flipped approach. Given research supporting the use of flipped learning in counselor education, we propose counselor educators use an experiential learning activity focused on sociopolitical case study development to enhance student learning in career counseling.

LEARNING ACTIVITY STEPS

In the current learning activity, we recommend engaging in five steps. First, to prepare students to develop sociopolitical case studies, they must first establish a connection between career counseling and social justice advocacy. Students could begin forming these connections by reading short articles published by the NCDA, such as *Empowering Clients to Manage Uncertainty in the Job Search* (Smith, 2024) and *Career Crossroads: Guiding Clients Through Transition and Reinvention* (Seo & Elrath, 2025). Students could also read *Helping Federal Workers Manage the Uncertainty of a Chaotic Work Environment*, published by the American Psychological Association (Andoh, n.d.).

Second, after reading these articles or relevant articles of the instructor's choosing, the instructor assigns students to complete a discussion board post prior to class to encourage students to reflect on the following prompts: "What are your initial thoughts, feelings and reactions to the assigned readings?" and "As a counselor, what would it be like for you to work with a client whose career has been impacted by sociopolitical issues?" Instructors could use this task as time to provide students with some examples of current sociopolitical issues impacting career development, such as the lack of availability of decent work, labor migration, job displacement and reallocation, the impact of artificial intelligence on the job market, and the need for workers to develop new skills to remain relevant in the job market (Warwick, 2024). Alternatively, instead of asking students to write a response, students could

be given the option to record a video to share their reactions to the readings. To that end, Hadmai and colleagues (2023) found in a small study that video responses on discussion board posts increased student engagement.

Third, when students arrive at the career counseling class, having already prepared by completing the assigned readings and responding to the discussion board prompt, they will utilize class time to develop a case study in groups of three or four. The learning activity can be completed for in-person and online, synchronous classes if there are options for students to enter breakout rooms. The case study should focus on a client that is seeking counseling due to the impact of current sociopolitical issues and career development or obtainment. The case study should include these items: (a) client's background, (b) client's sociopolitical/contextual concerns, (c) application of one career theory, (d) identification of one career assessment that counselors could use with the client, and (e) identification of two-to-three goals for work with the client. A sample sociopolitical career case (Lina) that models these required elements is provided in Appendix A. We have also included a list of current sociopolitical topics below that students might consider when developing their case study.

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF SOCIOPOLITICAL CASE STUDY TOPICS

- Dismantling of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging efforts through the elimination of related terminology (e.g., workplace mandate to remove pronouns from email signature) and office closures
- Reclassification of professional degrees impacting access to student loans and leading to workforce shortages
- Job displacement due to artificial intelligence (AI) replacement
- Assumptions related to ageism, such as one's cognitive or physical capabilities due to their age
- Mass layoffs of the federal workforce due to the Department of Government Efficiency's (DOGE) downsizing
- Cutting of federal funds and grant programs impacting access to support services and research

Fourth, after working in small groups, students present their case studies to the class and answer questions from classmates. Presentations can be kept brief (e.g., 5-10 minutes per group) with peers prompted to ask about the group's choice of career theory, the fit of the proposed assessment, and the feasibility of the client goals. Lastly, at the end of the presentations, the instructor facilitates a discussion on ethics and multicultural considerations, which invites students to reflect on which sociopolitical factors were most challenging to address and how their own reactions shaped their case conceptualization. In the following section, we provide ethical considerations that faculty can use to foster a safe classroom environment.

Ethical Considerations

We recognize that discussing sociopolitical issues in the classroom environment can cause discomfort for some students. Counselor educators must also recognize that classrooms are themselves diverse spaces, where students bring varying political perspectives, lived experiences, and personal connections to the issues being discussed. Some students may have directly experienced the career barriers depicted in the case studies, while others may hold differing views regarding the causes or significance of these issues. Counselor educators are ethically obligated to actively infuse multicultural and diversity competency into their teaching and to foster inclusive learning environments that support students across diverse backgrounds (NCDA, 2024, Standards G.6.c, G.8.c), while remaining aware of their own values and avoiding imposing those values on students (NCDA, 2024, Standard A.4.b).

Although we cannot guarantee that all students will feel safe enough to disclose their feelings related to the current political climate and issues impacting career development, Trottier (2024) recommended that counselor educators utilize the promoting excellence and reflective learning in simulation (PEARLS) framework to debrief experiential activities, and we recommend employing that framework with this learning activity. Eppich and Cheng (2015) described the PEARLS framework as one that supports students' psychological safety through a structured five-stage debriefing process that includes: setting the expectation for the debrief, processing student reactions, describing the learning experience, analyzing the experience by having the students self-assess and offering feedback, and finally applying and summarizing the takeaways from the activity (Trottier, 2024). This framework can assist students in reflecting on their experience of the pre-class materials and in-class activities while tending to the potentially sensitive nature of sociopolitical discussions.

Moreover, we recommend establishing clear group norms at the outset of the activity, such as maintaining confidentiality within the classroom and approaching differing perspectives with curiosity rather than judgment, which can further support a psychologically safe learning environment. Counselor educators are also encouraged to remain available for individual follow-up conversations after class and to be familiar with campus-based student support resources should a referral be warranted (NCDA, 2024, Standard G.7).

Demonstrated Reflexivity and Intrapersonal Awareness

We hold both privileged and marginalized identities and identify racially as White, Black, and Chinese women, respectively. We have all taught or co-taught the career counseling

course at our respective institutions and met at an academy geared towards enhancing the career counseling course. As we discussed implementing this activity into our courses, we discussed the personal impacts that the current sociopolitical climate has had on us and how this might impact how we would present and debrief this activity with our students. We processed these feelings with each other and engaged in reflexivity and consultation over the course of this project. Processing how the current sociopolitical climate has impacted our career experience and trajectory as a writing team allowed us to identify potential biases that we hold and how that might impact how we implement and evaluate this assignment in our courses. Our reflection also led us to revisit the case study included in Appendix A to ensure it accurately represented the experience of an international student currently seeking work in the United States. We encourage instructors implementing this assignment in their career counseling courses to engage in reflexivity prior to implementing this assignment.

Evaluation and Assessment of the Flipped Classroom

Instructors can align this activity with the *2024 CACREP Standards* and use it either as a standalone assignment or as a key performance indicator within their program evaluation plan. This activity directly supports CACREP Standard 3.D. Career Development, particularly standards 3.D.2, 3.D.4, 3.D.7, 3.D.8, and 3.D.12. These standards address the interrelationships between work and other life roles, the impact of work on life experiences, the development of culturally responsive strategies for supporting individuals in education and employment contexts, advocacy for clients facing work-related barriers, and ethical and legal considerations in career development and counseling (CACREP, 2024). Through this activity, students can demonstrate their ability to integrate sociopolitical awareness with career counseling competencies, applying both conceptual understanding and practical skills.

Engaging in a class discussion after the groups share their case study with the class can serve as an assessment tool to understand students' takeaways related to ethics and multicultural considerations. Given that students will have different views and experiences of the current sociopolitical climate, instructors could also assign students to complete a brief reflection paper or video in which they share their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to how people are currently being impacted by the sociopolitical climate. Providing their reflections in a private format may allow students to be more vulnerable and open in what they choose to share. Prompts that instructors could assign students to reflect upon include the following: "Describe how the current sociopolitical climate has affected your thoughts, emotions, or sense of safety or belonging" and "In what ways does your identity (race, gender, class, etc.) shape how you interpret current events?"

Implications

In this teaching brief, we have presented a learning activity counselor educators can employ in a flipped classroom to better prepare trainees in career counseling courses to address sociopolitical career barriers. One key implication is the adoption of a flipped classroom format. This approach narrows the theory-practice gap by dedicating pre-class time to foundational theory and reserving in-class time for competency-based application, which culminates in an assessable career case formulation (Chan et al., 2021; Fulton & Gonzalez, 2015; Moran & Milsom, 2015). Furthermore, in environments where teaching sociopolitical topics may face intense scrutiny, counselor educators should utilize instructional designs that clearly define sociopolitical material as essential professional training. This approach involves transparent learning outcomes and demonstrable deliverables, making the content more structured than loosely bound classroom discourse (Dhanani et al., 2024). The implementation of these strategies is further strengthened by a PEARLS-guided debrief (Eppich & Cheng, 2015). This process supports psychological safety and helps students convert their affective reactions into reflective learning, clinical reasoning, and concrete, actionable career counseling decisions (Eppich & Cheng, 2015; Trottier, 2024).

Limitation and Future Directions

A primary limitation of this teaching brief is that the authors have not been able to collect data to evaluate the learning activity. Future research could gather qualitative data on students' experiences, allowing the activity to be refined and adapted over time as well as pre-and-post measures of students' perceived counseling preparedness and confidence. Another limitation is that the current climate of anti-DEI legislation may constrain faculty in delivering content on these topics. Pitts et al. (2024; $N = 129$) found that the barriers to inclusive teaching were both systemic, such as politics and local bills ($n = 43$), and personal, including limited confidence ($n = 24$) and fear of difficult conversations ($n = 23$). Faculty can address these systemic concerns by grounding the activity in the *2024 CACREP Standards* (2024) and the *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014), framing it as professional competence rather than partisan advocacy and adapting case study topics to their local context. The personal barriers may ease when faculty recognize they need not do this work alone, as organizations such as Counselors for Social Justice and the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development have publicly supported educators who continue this work despite restrictive measures (Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development [AMCD], 2025). With this support, faculty facing significant constraints can scale or adapt the activity rather than abandon it, preserving its goal of preparing students to address sociopolitical career barriers.

In addition, faculty will want to stay up-to-date with the sociopolitical climate in order to provide pre-class materials that are relevant and current. Given the fast-paced nature of how quickly issues may arise, change, or evolve, it may require faculty to spend time to intentionally revisit the pre-class materials and revise. Faculty can modify the assignment with videos, if appropriate, which would accommodate diverse learning styles.

Future directions for this learning activity could more intentionally center the social determinants of health (SDOH), emphasizing how non-medical factors, like economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhoods and built environments, and social and community context, shape health outcomes across populations (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion [ODPHP], n.d.). Building on the existing case study, instructors could also deepen the learning experience by asking students to analyze how the sociopolitical climate influences long-term economic stability for disenfranchised groups. This activity would allow students to trace how barriers to obtaining meaningful, sustainable employment reverberate across other SDOH domains, including healthcare access, mental health services, housing security, and community well-being.

Conclusion

Career counseling has traditionally been connected to social justice, but counselor education has not always prepared trainees to address the sociopolitical factors that influence clients' work lives. This teaching brief introduces a flipped classroom activity aimed at bridging that gap through student-created sociopolitical case studies, with ethical and evaluative guidance for faculty. We hope it motivates counselor educators to include this vital content in career counseling courses and to keep improving its instruction.

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Appendix A

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE: “NAVIGATING AN UNCERTAIN SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION”

1. Client Background

- **Client:** Lina (pseudonym), a 29-year-old, cisgender woman originally from China.
- **Training status:** Currently in her final semester of a master’s program in clinical mental health counseling at a university in the United States.
- **Immigration context:** Lina resides in the U.S. on a student visa and has submitted an application for post-graduation work authorization. She experiences significant uncertainty regarding the timing of her approval and the availability of future employers willing to provide sponsorship.
- **Career goal:** To secure a professional counseling position following graduation that aligns with her clinical interests while establishing a viable pathway toward full professional counselor licensure.

2. Sociopolitical and Contextual Concerns

- Lina is concurrently managing the demands of graduation and a job search within a highly regulated profession while navigating the precarious timeline of her work authorization.
- As most counseling roles require licensure eligibility immediately upon graduation, Lina feels overwhelmed by the need to sequence her licensure steps and fears that any delay might jeopardize her ability to begin employment.
- While considering opportunities across various states, she experiences anxiety related to the transfer of credentials and the complexities of differing state board requirements.
- Furthermore, Lina is increasingly distressed by contemporary public discourse and policy shifts that appear to heighten employers’ reluctance to sponsor noncitizen workers.
- Presenting symptoms include:
 - Persistent anxiety manifested through rumination, sleep disturbances, and diminished concentration;
 - Avoidance of networking opportunities and professional development events;
 - A significant erosion of professional confidence and an emerging sense of non-belonging within the field.

3. Career Theory Conceptualization: Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT)

- Happenstance learning theory (HLT) posits that career development is fundamentally shaped by unpredictable events, highlighting the importance of developing skills to identify and capitalize on opportunities amidst uncertainty.
- In Lina's situation, unpredictable factors include work authorization timelines, processing delays for licensure, and shifting employer screening practices regarding sponsorship.
- Lina's current avoidance behaviors are limiting her exposure to chance encounters and potential opportunities thereby exacerbating her uncertainty.
- Counseling implications involve fostering planned happenstance skills (PHS) to help Lina regain professional engagement and generate new pathways through active information-gathering and values-aligned clinical decision-making.

4. Career Assessment: Planned Happenstance Career Inventory (PHCI)

The PHCI can be used to evaluate Lina's current strengths and needs across the five PHS domains—curiosity, flexibility, persistence, optimism, and risk-taking—allowing for interventions tailored to her lowest-scoring areas.

5. Counseling Goals

Grounded in the HLT conceptualization and assessment results, the following goals target each of the five PHS:

- **Curiosity:** Identify specific licensure requirements across different states and conduct informational interviews with potential supervisors or clinical directors.
- **Persistence:** Establish a consistent weekly routine for job-seeking and develop a coping strategy to manage inevitable professional setbacks.
- **Flexibility:** Formulate secondary employment pathways based on the feasibility of licensure and sponsorship across various geographic locations.
- **Optimism:** Monitor tangible indicators of progress, such as applications submitted and exams scheduled, to bolster a sense of clinical momentum.
- **Risk-taking:** Engage in active networking and rehearse professional discourse regarding work authorization with prospective employers.

Teaching Equity Without Indoctrination

Using Community Cultural Wealth to Cultivate Critical Consciousness in Counselor Education

In an increasingly polarized sociopolitical climate, counselor educators face increased scrutiny of equity-focused teaching while also being tasked with ethically preparing counselors to recognize systemic inequities. In this article, we introduce the community cultural wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005) framework as an asset-based, inquiry-driven pedagogical framework to teach equity without ideology. Using critical race theory, we describe a five-phase CCW cycle used in a graduate school counseling course on Tier 1 classroom guidance. Combined with the universal design for learning framework, this approach repositions students as knowledge holders, challenges deficit assumptions, and promotes culturally affirming teaching. Implications for counselor education and future research are discussed.

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community cultural health, counselor education Pedagogy, asset-based instruction, universal design learning, school counseling

Introduction

Counselor educators are training future counselors in a sociopolitical context characterized by rising polarization and increased examination of language concerning equity, diversity, and social justice (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2024; Ratts et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2020). Across many regions, efforts to address racism, systemic inequities, and culturally responsive practice have become increasingly subject to political and legislative scrutiny, leaving counselor educators navigating tensions between their professional responsibility and evolving sociopolitical constraints (Goodman-Scott et al., 2025; Wilson, 2024). At the same time, counselor education programs have an ethical obligation to train counselors capable of supporting, affirming, and advocating for students and families from historically marginalized communities (CACREP, 2024; Ratts et al., 2016; American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014). This effort includes striving for equitable participation, safety, and inclusion within educational systems (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2022, A.10). These competing realities create a central tension for the field: counselor educators must equip future counselors to recognize and respond to inequity, yet direct “equity instruction” may be resisted, misunderstood, or politicized.

In today’s sociopolitical climate, counselors-in-training often experience multicultural and social justice learning as both developmentally meaningful and emotionally demanding as they develop multicultural awareness, advocacy, and social justice competencies (Chopra et al., 2024; Malott et al., 2023). Throughout this developmental process, students commonly encounter intellectual and emotional challenges as they navigate systemic inequities, identity issues, and power dynamics (Chopra et al., 2024). Trainees from marginalized groups also share experiences of microaggressions and worries about training that prioritizes White comfort, highlighting the complexities of developing cultural competence and advocacy abilities in counselor education (Chopra et al., 2024). While universities have begun reexamining the long-standing inequities embedded within their institutions (Mull, 2020), counselor educators can intentionally embed asset-based approaches within coursework so that this orientation benefits not only counselors-in-training but also the students, families, and communities they will ultimately serve.

In this context, counselor educators require pedagogical methods that are both principled and adaptable. The community cultural wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005) framework offers such a bridge. Rather than positioning equity as a set of beliefs to be transmitted, CCW invites students into an asset-based, inquiry-driven process of noticing and interpreting human experience. By focusing on the existing cultural knowledge, skills, and resilience within communities, CCW shifts the approach from ideological persuasion to careful observation in learning (Yosso, 2005; Reyes & Duran, 2021). Counselor educators can use this approach to help future practitioners to observe and identify strengths, patterns, and inequities within real contexts, rather than simply telling students what to think. This article demonstrates how CCW can be implemented as a pedagogical cycle in counselor education, providing a practical model for teaching equity through observation, reflection, and practice instead of persuasion.

Critical Race Theory and Community Cultural Wealth

Scholarship based on critical race theory has long shown that the knowledge, resilience, and survival strategies developed by BIPOC and immigrant communities are often overlooked or undervalued within Western academic traditions, including counselor education (Yosso, 2005). In many graduate training settings, culturally rooted ways of knowing, especially those shaped by migration, racialization, and collective struggle, are often viewed as “background” rather than valuable epistemic resources (Reyes & Duran, 2021; Yosso, 2005). This pattern of epistemic marginalization not only devalues the knowledge and experiences of students from historically excluded communities (Reyes & Duran, 2021; Yosso, 2005) but also narrows the perspectives and forms of knowledge that counselor education legitimizes, thereby limiting opportunities for all counselors-in-training to develop more expansive understandings of clients, communities and culturally responsive practice (Malott et al., 2023; Shure et al., 2023).

CCW (Yosso, 2005) is an alternative pedagogical paradigm that can be used to challenge deficit-oriented and White-centered frameworks embedded in counselor preparation. Rather than treating culture as an “add-on” to core content, counselor educators can use CCW to reconceptualize students’ lived experiences as foundational sources of knowledge. Although counselor educators may recognize similarities between CCW and broader strengths-based approaches, the CCW framework extends beyond identifying individual assets or resilience. Rooted in Latina and Latino critical legal theory (LatCrit), Yosso (2005) conceptualized CCW as recognizing forms of cultural knowledge, resistance, and community-based capital developed within Black, Indigenous, and Brown communities in response to systemic inequities. In naming CCW, Yosso (2005) identified six forms of capital: aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, resistant, and social capital. They reflect long-standing, community-created systems of resilience, survival, and resistance to racism and structural marginalization.

CCW has been discussed broadly across disciplines such as education, sociology, and youth development (Acevedo & Solorzano, 2021; Boettcher et al., 2022; Park et al., 2025). The approach has also been intentionally integrated into teacher preparation programs where it has been shown to shape candidates’ perceptions of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Boettcher et al., 2022). For example, Moeller and Bielfeldt (2011) examined the integration of critical race theory and CCW into a teacher education curriculum and found that teacher candidates identified multiple forms of cultural capital while reflecting on their direct interactions with Native American students during a diversity workshop. Candidates most frequently recognized aspirational, familial, and linguistic capital suggesting that CCW provided a concrete lens for noticing strengths that might otherwise be overlooked or pathologized. Importantly, the authors concluded that CCW holds promise for transforming perceptions and attitudes in professional preparation particularly when paired with intentional pedagogical strategies such as pre-contact activities and the use of counterstories (Moeller & Bielfeldt, 2011).

Extending the Community Cultural Wealth Framework to School Counselor Education

While these findings highlight the educational impact of CCW in teacher training, similar application efforts in counselor education are limited. This absence is significant because school counselors play a key role in tackling inequity, assisting marginalized youth and families, and navigating systems influenced by race, power, and privilege (ASCA, 2024a; ASCA, 2024b). Integrating CCW into counselor training, therefore, represents a critical and underexplored opportunity to move beyond deficit-based frameworks and prepare counselors-in-training to recognize, honor, and mobilize the cultural assets already present within their peers, clients, and communities.

Integrating CCW into a graduate school counseling course shifts the instructional stance from remediation to recognition. Students are not positioned as novices who must abandon their cultural frameworks in order to become “professional” but rather as knowledge holders whose histories, languages, family systems, and survival strategies actively shape their clinical insight. In this way, CCW-informed teaching reframes counselor preparation as a collective, relational, and justice-oriented process that affirms students’ cultural assets and prepares them to recognize and leverage similar forms of wealth among the youth, families, and communities they will serve.

In school counseling, Tier 1 classroom-based guidance represents one of the most powerful and underutilized levers for systemic impact (Savitz-Romer & Sink, 2023). Comprehensive school counseling programs aligned with the larger multitiered system of support (MTSS) serve all students through the avenue of Tier 1 classroom lessons provided to all students (Goodman-Scott & Ockerman, 2023). These lessons offer an avenue for school counselors to reach all students, shape norms around belonging and behavior, and influence school climate at scale (ASCA, 2025; Lopez & Mason, 2018). When designed thoughtfully, Tier 1 instruction can be used to interrupt deficit narratives, normalize cultural affirmation, and cultivate shared language around relationships, emotion, and community (National Center for School Mental Health [NCSMH], 2023). Conversely, when classroom guidance is grounded in behavior-focused frameworks that address student conduct without confronting racism, bias, and cultural context, the school counselor risks reproducing the very inequities counselors aim to disrupt (Scott et al., 2025). Preparing school counselors-in-training to design classroom guidance through an asset-based framework is therefore not ancillary; it is central to the ethical and systemic mission of school counseling (American School Counselor Association, n.d.).

In school counselor education, one particularly generative site for CCW-informed pedagogy is the course context in which school counselors-in-training learn how to design and facilitate classroom-based guidance lessons. These courses typically emphasize instructional planning, developmental appropriateness, classroom management, and alignment with school standards and comprehensive school counseling frameworks, yet they may inadvertently privilege

deficit-oriented perspectives on students and behavior (Pinto, 2013). This deficit mindset blames individuals or cultures for challenges, ignoring systemic barriers and inequities (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019). Educators influenced by deficit thinking often attribute educational challenges to students, families, and communities rather than addressing systemic issues (Dudley-Marling, 2015). Viewing educational challenges primarily as the result of individual or cultural deficiencies conceals structural accountability and perpetuates harmful stereotypes about learners. Critiquing deficit-based thinking does not mean ignoring disparities in achievement, opportunity, access, or outcomes (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022). School counselors use disaggregated data to identify inequities and advocate for interventions for historically underserved students (ASCA, 2022). A CCW-informed view reframes these disparities, urging counselors to examine systemic, structural, and contextual factors behind inequitable outcomes, while recognizing students' cultural strengths, resilience, and resources. Asset-based and equity-focused approaches are complementary.

Integrating CCW into graduate school counseling coursework redefines lesson planning as both a form of cultural acknowledgment and an ethical duty. Instead of questioning, "What do students lack?", school counselors-in-training are encouraged to consider, "What cultural knowledge, resilience, and connections are already available?" and how guidance can be developed from the identified strengths. In this way, CCW becomes not an abstract theory but a practical lens for curriculum design, classroom facilitation, and professional identity development, preparing future school counselors to view classrooms as sites of possibility and cultural wealth rather than deficiency. This teaching practice brief outlines the design and implementation of a CCW-informed instructional approach within a graduate-level school counseling course focused on classroom-based guidance and instructional lesson design. The strategy aims to disrupt deficit-oriented assumptions in counselor preparation by equipping school counselors-in-training with an asset-based framework for interpreting students' behavior, learning, and lived contexts.

Community Cultural Wealth Framework– Informed Instructional Strategy

In a sociopolitical context where equity-focused language is frequently politicized, this CCW-informed strategy provides counselor educators with a way to promote justice without framing students as ideological subjects. CCW (Yosso, 2005) functions not as a set of beliefs to be adopted but as a disciplined method for noticing cultural assets, relational patterns, and systemic inequities in everyday practice. Although CCW is explicitly grounded in critical race theory and LatCrit, the phrase "teaching equity without indoctrination" does not suggest political neutrality or distance from these theoretical foundations. Rather, it reflects a pedagogical approach that emphasizes inquiry, observation, reflection, and authentic practice rather than directing counselors-in-training toward predetermined conclusions. Students are invited to

critically examine lived experiences, systems, and cultural knowledge while developing their own understanding of equity and professional practice.

This strategy herein was created for a graduate counseling course that trains school counselors-in-training to develop and deliver Tier 1 classroom guidance lessons, universal and preventive classroom-based interventions designed to promote students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral development at the school-wide level through activities such as social-emotional learning, relationship-building, conflict resolution, and classroom community development (Savitz-Romer & Sink, 2023). While the community cultural wealth framework served as the interpretive and ethical center of our guidance lesson course, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework provided an additional pedagogical layer by guiding school counselors-in-training in designing lessons that promote equitable access and engagement for all learners (CAST, 2024; Vostal et al., 2023). UDL emphasizes designing instruction through multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression to reduce barriers and increase accessibility for diverse learners. School counseling students were taught to pair CCW's asset-based lens with UDL's commitment to removing barriers, ensuring that Tier 1 guidance lessons were culturally affirming and accessible to all learners. In this way, UDL was used as a guide to how students could engage, represent understanding, and express learning, while CCW was used to shape whose knowledge and ways of being were centered once students arrived.

Within our guidance lesson course, CCW served as the organizing pedagogical framework shaping not only what students learned but how they learned and how they came to understand themselves and others as cultural beings within educational systems. Because classroom guidance has the potential to increase belonging (Cunningham et al., 2025), surface and challenge biased, "race-neutral" assumptions that normalize inequity (Better-Bubon et al., 2022), and influence peer norms at scale (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021), preparing counselors-in-training to design Tier 1 instruction through an asset-based lens is central to the ethical and systemic mission of school counseling (ASCA, n.d.). Instruction about our CCW-integrated strategy unfolded through a five-phase pedagogical cycle (see Figure 1) that operationalized CCW as a method for seeing, teaching, and becoming.

PHASE 1: REPOSITIONING STUDENTS AS KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS

From the first week, CCW was enacted through experiential and relational practices that positioned students as knowledge holders. During the opening sessions, students were invited to bring a meaningful object from their cultural background or to share a food connected to their family or community. They reflected on how these artifacts shaped their identities, values, and professional aspirations. This activity functioned as more than an icebreaker; it modeled aspirational, familial, and linguistic capital in action and established the classroom as a space where lived experience constituted legitimate knowledge. For example, one student shared a family recipe passed down across generations and reflected on how food traditions shaped their understanding of care, belonging, and resilience within their community. Starting with students' cultural assets, lived experiences, and existing strengths, the course invited

students to reflect on and share the knowledge, values, and perspectives they already brought into the learning environment. Instead of positioning students from a deficit perspective, the course emphasized cultural strengths and community knowledge as important foundations for learning.

PHASE 2: TRAINING ASSET-BASED NOTICING

Throughout the semester, CCW was woven into discussions of school counseling practice, with particular attention to how counselors can recognize and affirm K-12 students' assets in classroom-based work. Rather than framing guidance around "fixing" behavior or remediating deficits, lesson planning was reframed as an opportunity to build from students' existing forms of capital. When designing activities related to peer relationships, conflict resolution, or emotion regulation, students were prompted to ask: "Whose ways of communicating, problem-solving, and caring are being centered?" and "How might these lessons honor the cultural strengths already present in students' communities?" By repeatedly engaging with these questions, students developed a habit of asset-based noticing that they carried across content areas. For instance, rather than interpreting frequent peer conversation as classroom disruption, students were encouraged to consider how collaborative communication and relational engagement may reflect forms of social and linguistic capital that could be harnessed through the UDL principles of providing multiple means of engagement, representation and expression (CAST, 2024).

PHASE 3: SCAFFOLDED PRACTICE

The guidance lesson course sessions were deliberately designed to build a CCW perspective gradually. Early weeks highlighted the school counselor's role as a classroom leader and examined culturally responsive methods for managing student behavior and engagement. Later sessions emphasized restorative practices and culturally responsive strategies to promote a positive school culture, explicitly connecting these methods to CCW's resistant and social forms of capital by viewing discipline as a form of collective repair rather than punishment. Later sessions also emphasized the importance of relationships, voice, and mutual accountability as core sources of strength. Mid-semester content introduced social-emotional learning (SEL) and state-level SEL initiatives, inviting students to analyze whether SEL frameworks reproduce individualistic, deficit-based assumptions or can be reimaged through a CCW lens. Students critiqued traditional SEL lessons that frame self-regulation as personal compliance and redesigned activities to reflect communal values, cultural expressions of emotion, and collective coping strategies. For example, students revised traditional self-regulation activities by incorporating collaborative reflection, cultural expressions of emotion, and peer support strategies rather than emphasizing quiet, individual compliance.

PHASE 4: AUTHENTIC ENACTMENT

The Developmental Classroom Guidance Project course assignment served as the primary vehicle for translating CCW into instructional design. Building from the ASCA classroom guidance lesson template, we adapted the format to include explicit sections of the community cultural wealth (CCW) and universal design for learning (UDL) frameworks (see Appendix A). The adapted template is based on the American School Counselor Association classroom guidance lesson format. Using this revised template, students designed multi-lesson units for elementary or middle school contexts with intentional alignment to both CCW and UDL. At each stage, school counseling students were prompted to articulate which forms of cultural wealth their lessons aimed to honor and activate (e.g., familial narratives, peer networks, resistant storytelling). This shift in lesson planning moved practice from remediation toward recognition, positioning K-12 students' cultural realities as the starting point for guidance instruction. Although CCW-informed pedagogy may align naturally with the ASCA standards related to inclusion, empathy, advocacy, and social awareness (ASCA, 2021, M 2, B-SS 2, B-SS 4, B-SS 6, B-SS 10), the framework described herein is intended to function as a cross-cutting pedagogical lens that can be integrated into a wide range of classroom guidance topics and ASCA standards.

Throughout the semester, CCW was used to structure each phase of the project, from lesson design to reflection. School counseling (SC) students were encouraged to engage with community knowledge, family stories, and cultural context, learning to identify and intentionally create lessons that respect and leverage the diverse cultural assets of their students' communities. Lesson plans required counseling students to identify how activities drew on specific forms of community cultural wealth and how multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression were embedded to ensure access for diverse learners. SC students implemented lessons centering connection, belonging, and cultural affirmation with their peers acting as K-12 students during experiential project class nights.

PHASE 5: REFLECTION AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION

Through these layered experiences, CCW was transformed from a simple conceptual framework into a practical approach for observing, teaching, and personal growth. Counselors-in-training learned to approach Tier 1 classrooms not as sites of deficiency but as spaces rich with cultural wealth. In doing so, SC students started to build a professional identity rooted in recognition, relationality, and justice; this identity aligns with the ethical and developmental goals of school counseling during challenging sociopolitical periods (ASCA, 2022; Rahal, 2005; Ratts et al., 2016). This approach further reflects an ethical commitment to respond to learning and classroom diversity in ways that affirm K-12 students' cultural identities and avoid reproducing harm through deficit-based assumptions (ASCA, 2022; Yosso, 2005). By positioning cultural wealth as foundational to instruction, CCW-informed pedagogy fosters inclusive learning environments in which difference is treated as an asset rather than a liability.

Ethical Foundations of CCW-Integrated Teaching

The CCW-integrated design of our guidance lesson course was grounded in ethical commitments to safety, dignity, and belonging, particularly in a sociopolitical climate where equity-oriented discourse is contested, and minoritized voices may feel silenced or discouraged. We acknowledge that our perspectives are shaped by identity, lived experiences, and geographical region. As faculty members at a public university situated on an urban campus, we acknowledge that these experiences inform our teaching and scholarship. The demographics of the school counseling cohort skew heavily toward first-generation, students of color who consider themselves advocates for systematically disadvantaged populations of students. Author one is a first-generation Asian American, former international student, and current tenured faculty member. Author two is a first-generation, White, cisgender female faculty member who grew up in poverty but who is now situated firmly in the upper-middle class.

As instructors, we intentionally worked to foster learning environments that invited students to express and appreciate themselves as cultural beings. Trauma-informed principles were embedded throughout the course by offering flexible participation options, providing materials in advance so students knew what to expect, and structuring activities to support psychological safety. At the beginning of the course, we established classroom norms that emphasized restful dialogue, curiosity, and the expectation that differing perspectives would be explored rather than judged. We reinforced these norms by consistently modeling the ways we speak and how we interact with each other. We tried to model the relational and restorative stance students are expected to enact in K-12 schools. These choices reflected an ongoing awareness of how instructional design shapes power, belonging, and risk within the classroom.

Evaluation of Effectiveness and Assessment Methods

To evaluate the effectiveness of the CCW-informed instructional strategy and assess student learning, multiple sources of evidence were used, including a college-wide equity-focused midterm survey and performance-based assessment embedded within the Developmental Classroom Guidance Project course assignment.

COLLEGE-WIDE EQUITY-FOCUSED MIDTERM SURVEY

A voluntary, equity-focused midterm survey administered across the College of Education was used as one indicator of the instructional strategy's impact on students' learning experiences and perceptions of the classroom climate. The survey was intended to support faculty understanding of students' classroom experiences and guide ongoing pedagogical adjustments rather than serve as a formal research measure. Although the survey was not originally designed specifically for this course, it aligned closely with the goals of this CCW-informed pedagogy and provided meaningful formative feedback.

Survey items asked about students' perceptions of whether course content and instruction communicated that diverse identities and social positions (e.g., race, language, ability, gender identity, socioeconomic and legal status, and other forms of human difference) were valued. It also assessed students' sense of psychological safety when engaging in open and inclusive communication, their overall satisfaction with the course, and invited open-ended feedback on equity-related concerns and instructional suggestions.

Quantitative and qualitative student feedback was reviewed descriptively to identify recurring patterns related to belonging, perceived inclusivity, and comfort engaging in dialogue. Across the course offerings in which the survey was utilized, responses generally suggested that many students perceived the course as intentionally engaging issues related to diversity and social positions and that students experienced the classroom climate as supportive of open and inclusive communication. Open-ended feedback further reflected students' appreciation for opportunities to share lived experiences, engage with multiple perspectives, and participate in discussions that recognized cultural assets and affirmed diverse identities. Student feedback was used to inform ongoing instructional adjustments and to reflect on how CCW-informed teaching practices may contribute to an inclusive and affirming classroom environment in future courses.

DEVELOPMENTAL CLASSROOM GUIDANCE PROJECT

Student learning was assessed through multiple major course assignments; among these, the Developmental Classroom Guidance Project functioned as the primary performance-based evaluation of students' ability to translate CCW into concrete school counseling practice. In this project, students designed multi-lesson Tier 1 classroom guidance units aligned with ASCA standards. They were required to apply UDL principles to ensure accessibility and explicitly integrate CCW by identifying which forms of cultural capital their lessons aimed to honor and activate. Lesson plans and reflective components were evaluated using a rubric that assessed asset-based framing, cultural responsiveness, and alignment with CCW principles. We gave particular attention to the SC students' ability to move beyond deficit-oriented problem definitions and instead design instruction that centered on K-12 students' cultural strengths, relational resources, and community knowledge.

The survey data and project-based assessments together offered complementary insights into the effectiveness of the CCW-integrated instructional strategy. The survey reflected students' personal

experiences of the learning environment and their perceptions of inclusivity, while the guidance project showcased students' ability to apply CCW from theory into practical teaching via guidance lessons. This integrated method enabled an evaluation of both the classroom atmosphere created by CCW-informed teaching and the professional skills students gained as future school counselors.

Discussion & Implications

PEDAGOGICAL TENSIONS AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

When centering CCW as a foundational framework, particularly in classrooms with a high concentration of students of color, some students who held racial majority identities appeared hesitant to share or express pride in their own backgrounds. Early in training, some counselors-in-training appeared to interpret CCW as a framework intended only for individuals from marginalized backgrounds. This misperception reflects a broader risk, specifically that asset-based, equity-oriented frameworks may be misunderstood as exclusionary rather than expansive.

CCW, however, centers on how all individuals survive, adapt, and thrive within unequal systems, and how these processes generate forms of strength, knowledge, and resilience. Its pedagogical purpose is not to delimit who “has” culture but to broaden what counts as cultural wealth and to cultivate a shared language for recognizing assets across differences. This tension highlights the importance of intentional instructional framing. Counselor educators must explicitly communicate that CCW is a collective lens, one that positions every student as a cultural being and knowledge holder.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Instructors bear responsibility for creating learning environments in which counseling students feel psychologically safe to explore identity, power, and difference. Trauma-informed practices, such as offering flexible modes of participation, modeling curiosity over judgment, and establishing norms that resist blame-based discourse, are essential to supporting this work. Without such safeguards, some students may retreat into silence, misinterpret CCW as exclusionary, or disengage from reflective practice. While our practice has been to gather mid-term survey feedback from students about their experience of safety within the course, this data has purposefully been anonymous and de-identified. Unfortunately, that means we cannot determine whether students occupying different social positions (e.g., across racial, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and other identity dimensions) complete this survey at similar rates or whether perceptions of psychological safety differ across these groups. Additionally, because our counseling program's located in an urban, progressive, racially and ethnically diverse city, our mission, values, and application focus on social justice

and advocacy as key professional counseling dispositions; we recognize that our student demographics are unique and may differ from those of counseling programs in more rural, politically different, and/or less racially and ethnically diverse communities. It is unknown how this CCW-integrated strategy would be received in counseling programs with different demographic features. Future implementations should examine how instructors can more effectively scaffold students' understanding of CCW as an inclusive, relational framework that invites all learners into asset-based ways of seeing.

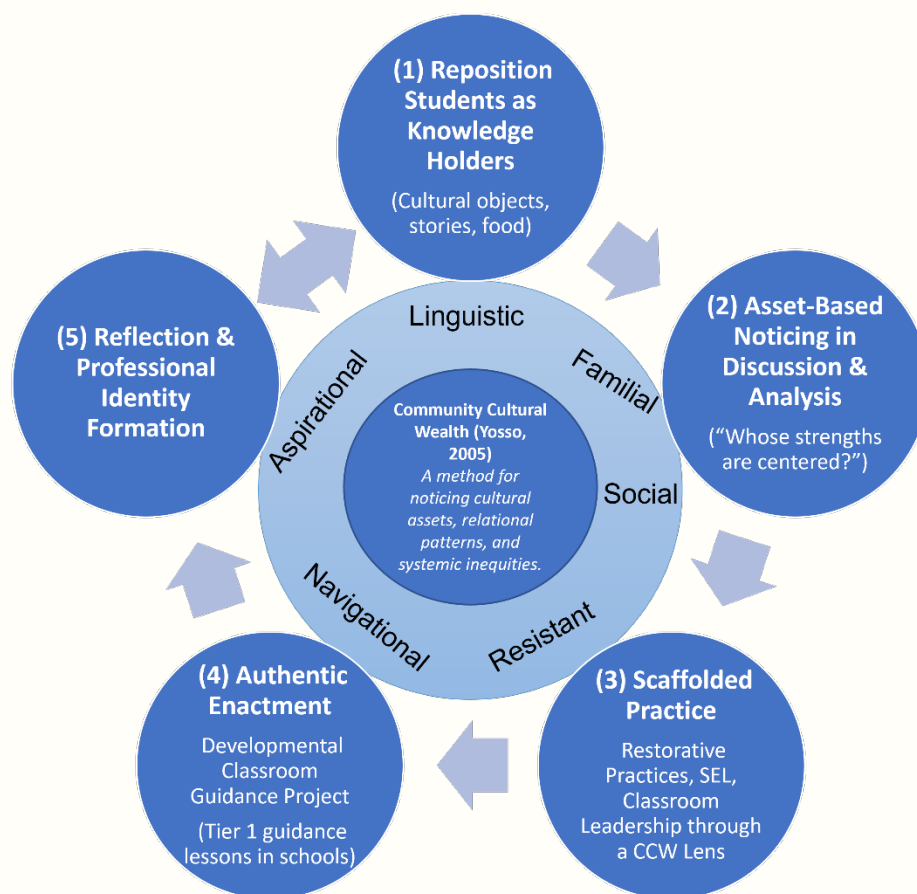
FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Although illustrated here within a school counseling course, the CCW pedagogical cycle is intentionally designed to be transferable across counselor education contexts. The five phases represent instructional moves rather than content-specific activities. Counselor educators in clinical mental health, marriage and family, or rehabilitation counseling can adapt each phase by substituting discipline-specific learning tasks while retaining the underlying pedagogical intent: repositioning students as knowledge holders, training asset-based noticing, scaffolding practice through CCW-aligned frameworks, creating authentic enactment opportunities, and supporting reflection and professional identity formation.

For example, this model has also been implemented in a career counseling course that enrolls students in school counseling, clinical mental health counseling, marriage and family counseling, and rehabilitation counseling. Students began that course by constructing a career journey detailing their own knowledge and lived experiences. As we examined career development theories, students are encouraged to examine whose voices and strengths are represented or may have been left out. In the middle phase, students dive into examining not only the career-related barriers that racially and ethnically diverse clients face but also the unique strengths and assets they bring to their workplaces and career journeys. The culminating project in that course involves students conducting a constructivist career interview (Savickas, 2019). Many questions within that interview lend themselves to developing a complete picture of a client, including cultural inspirations in the form of heroes or role models and counter-narratives to deficit-based thinking. Students complete a case conceptualization that highlights their client's cultural wealth and the impact on career goals.

Future directions for practice and research include testing the CCW pedagogical cycle across counselor education contexts and course types to examine its transferability beyond the guidance lesson course. Empirical research could examine how involvement in the five-phase cycle influences counselors-in-training's asset-based mindsets, cultural humility, and decision-making in instructional or clinical settings over time. Future studies should also consider how students from different positionalities and identities experience each phase, especially whether and how the cycle encourages participation among students occupying relatively privileged social positions across different identity dimensions. This research can help improve the CCW-integrated model, enhance its evidence base, and better understand how CCW serves as a resilient pedagogical framework in counselor education.

Figure 1. CCW Pedagogical Cycle



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Appendix A

CCW Guidance Lesson Plan Template (Adapted From the ASCA Lesson Plan Template)



Lesson Plan and Data Report

School Name			
School Counselor Name		School Year	2026
Lesson Title/Topic	Building Friendships in First Grade		
Participants	First Grade Students		
Setting – Lesson(s) will be delivered in:	☒ Classroom (Tier 1 whole-class instruction or Tier 2 specific classroom) ☐ Large Group (grade-level or multi-class instruction) ☐ Small groups (single session delivered to a group of students, ex., junior planning conferences) ☐ Individual (one-on-one student instruction) ex. senior credit checks		
Reason for this lesson: Select from each: Life-Readiness – select no more than one category Academic Success – select any category that applies	Life-Readiness ☐ Learning Strategies ☐ Self-Management Skills ☒ Social Skills	Academic Success ☒ Improve academic performance ☐ Meet benchmarks ☐ Improve test scores ☐ Meet promotion/graduation requirements	
☒ Single Lesson ☐ Unit of Lessons: Lesson _____ of _____			

ASCA Student Standards, Objectives and Assessment Items for Lesson

Behavior Standard from ASCA Student Standards	Learning Objectives	Pre-/Post-Assessment Statements
M.1. Belief in the development of the whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional, and physical well-being. B-SS 2. Positive, respectful and supportive relationships with students who are similar to and different from them	Students will identify what it means to be a good friend.	1. What does it mean to be a good friend? 2.
	Students will practice ways to build and maintain friendships through kind actions and words.	1. Name one way you can be a good friend at school. 2. How do you feel when you are a good friend to someone else?

Materials:



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- Chart paper and markers
- Friendship word cards (e.g., kind, sharing, listening, helping, respectful)
- Markers or crayons
- Fish template for each student
- Colorful paper “scales”

Steps

1. Administer pre-assessment.
2. Record pre-assessment data. Optional data organizer can be used for this information (baseline data column under Life-Readiness.)

Describe how you will:

1. Introduce lesson and objective:

Begin by asking students, “What makes someone a good friend?” Write their responses on chart paper. Share that today’s lesson will focus on how we can be good friends and make our classroom a friendly, welcoming place.

“What are some things people can do to help others feel happy or welcome at school?”

After a few responses, ask:

“What do you think makes someone a really good friend?”

Write their answers on chart paper or the board (e.g., sharing, helping, playing nicely, kind words).

“Wow, those are great ideas! Today we’re going to talk about how we can all be good friends—and how to make our classroom a friendly, welcoming place for everyone.”

Clearly state the objectives: “Today, we will learn what it means to be a good friend. We’ll also practice ways to show kindness, include others, and build strong friendships with our classmates.”

Write or post the student-friendly objective:

I can name what makes someone a good friend and show friendly behavior at school.
2. Teach content:

Use visual friendship word cards (e.g., kind, share, listen, help) and introduce each word with a real-life example.

Use a short picture, “The Rainbow Fish,” to show examples of friendship in action.
3. Practice content:

Draw or Symbolize Acts of Kindness

Students write or draw one kind thing on each paper scale.

Use your board to model examples with simple words and drawings:

 - Say something kind



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- 🙌 Help a friend
- 😊 Include someone
- ❤️ Share a toy/supply

Practice the Action (Kindness in Motion!)

After they finish decorating their scales, students pick one act of kindness to practice in the classroom.

Ask:

"What's one kind action on your scale that you can practice right now?"

Examples:

- Invite someone new to play during free choice time
- Say something kind to a peer
- Offer to help a classmate clean up

4. Summarize:

Bring students together in a circle.

Ask: "What's one thing you're going to do to be a good friend this week?"

Go around the circle and let each student share.

Wrap-up:

"Let's remember—being a good friend means being kind, including others, and helping each other. Let's keep our classroom full of friendship every day!"

Accessibility Plan – How will the lesson be made accessible for ALL students.

Accessibility
Considerations
Using Universal
Design for Learning
(UDL) Framework:

Multiple Means of Engagement:

Use a mix of verbal discussion, visual cards, and hands-on activities to engage different learning styles.

Multiple Means of Representation:

Provide visual cues, such as the friendship word cards, and allow students to express themselves through drawing and writing on their friendship "scale". Students can write or draw on kindness scales; they also act out kind behaviors (verbal and non-verbal expressions).

Multiple Means of Action and Expression:

Offer different ways for students to share their thoughts, including speaking, drawing, and writing. Provide physical assistance if needed for students who have fine motor challenges.

- *Area to improve: could add choice and sensory/movement-based activities to meet different engagement needs.*



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Community Cultural Wealth–Informed Design (Please select at least one of the focus areas below to address in your lesson plan. You are not required to include all three, but I encourage you to be intentional in your selection and choose the area(s) most relevant to your lesson topic and the needs of your student population.)

Focus Area	How Is This Addressed in the Lesson Through a CCW Lens?
Cultural Sensitivity	How does this lesson honor students' cultural identities and activate forms of community cultural wealth (e.g., familial, linguistic, aspirational)? How are diverse identities (e.g., race, language, ability, family structure) acknowledged and respected? Things to consider: Encourage students to share friendship qualities from their own cultural backgrounds and emphasize that being a good friend looks different in different cultures. "Do different cultures show friendship in different ways?" and validate multiple expressions of kindness (e.g., touch, words, shared food, gift-giving).
Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)	How are SEL skills taught in ways that reflect students' cultural expressions of emotion, connection, and coping? Which CCW capitals are being leveraged? Students practice relationship skills, empathy, communication, and inclusion through discussion, reflection, and kindness activities. Rather than assuming a single "correct" way of expressing emotions or friendship, students are encouraged to recognize that people may show care and connection differently. The lesson leverages social capital through relationship-building and peer interaction and familial capital by drawing upon students' existing experiences and understandings of caring relationships.
Restorative Practices	How does the lesson create space for voice, relationship, and collective meaning-making? How are social and resistant capital supported? Closing circle includes student voice and reflection, promoting a sense of belonging and community. Things to consider: Frame the sharing circle as a restorative practice: "We sit in a circle because everyone belongs and everyone matters." Add a restorative language anchor like: "When you _____, I feel _____, and I need _____." (Introduce this gently at a first-grade level.) The lesson supports social capital by strengthening peer relationships, encouraging collaboration, and fostering a sense of belonging within the classroom community. Through classroom discussions and sharing



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	circles, students are also encouraged to recognize and value diverse experiences and perspectives related to friendship and connection.
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END OF PLAN

Note. Adapted from the *ASCA Lesson Plan Template*. Used with permission from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (permission granted Spring 2026).

RCT in Really Complex Times

A Framework for Mutually Supportive Pedagogy

Faculty across the country face an increasing challenge of creating classrooms that are both focused and supportive amid ongoing sociopolitical uncertainty. This brief proposes a teaching framework grounded in Relational-Cultural Theory, Connected Teaching, and the Pedagogy of Vulnerability to foster mutually supportive learning environments. Within counselor education, these principles are particularly salient, as students must navigate their own sociopolitical stress while learning to support clients experiencing similar challenges. The proposed three-step framework offers a practical approach to cultivating authentic, growth-fostering classroom spaces that promote vulnerability, deepen learning, and enhance psychological safety during sociopolitically difficult times.

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KEYWORDS

relational-cultural theory, pedagogy of vulnerability, sociopolitical stress, counselor education, connected teaching

Introduction

RELEVANT RESEARCH AND LITERATURE SUPPORT

Sociopolitical Stress in Counselor Education

Increased sociopolitical stress has rippled throughout higher education, with counselor education faculty and administration acknowledging the need for effective protocols when navigating charged conversations within the classroom. Events such as school shootings, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, and subsequent protests have compounded, leading to emotional responses of uncertainty, fear, and grief. At the administrative level, it is widely understood that effective crisis training is necessary for responding to sociopolitical crises (Hill-Berry & Burris-Melville, 2024). Further, engaging in institutional courage requires counselor educators to express accountability and responsiveness to the populations they serve (Center for Institutional Courage, n.d.). Many institutions have published guidelines highlighting ways to address activating events within classrooms. Commonly, these guidelines include preparing early for potential stressors, creating a safe space to process, setting guidelines for conversation, and maintaining awareness of the critical responsibilities of the classroom facilitator (University of Michigan, 2021; Central Michigan University, 2026; Northern Illinois University, 2026). Guidelines to navigate critical conversations of power and privilege are further expanded on in the research emphasizing the need for faculty to develop conversation guidelines, to be an active facilitator, to encourage student self-reflection and critical thinking, and to conclude the conversation with appreciation and reconnection (Kang & O'Neill, 2018; Ruiz-Mesa & Hunter, 2019).

Relational-Cultural Theory in Counselor Education

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) recognizes that humans grow through and towards connection, with isolation being a primary reason for suffering (Jordan, 2010). The theory posits that active participation in the development of others leads to mutual growth, termed growth-fostering relationships. Growth-fostering relationships exist across contexts—between friends, faculty and students, or counselors and clients—and lead to the experience of the five good things: (a) increased energy (zest), (b) increased knowledge about one's own and others' experiences (clarity), (c) increased sense of worth, (d) increased productivity, and (e) the desire for more connection (Jordan, 2010).

When implementing RCT-informed practices in the classroom, Lertora et al. (2020) found that when counselors-in-training were offered a safe environment to practice counseling techniques, it led to the experience of mutual empathy, authenticity, and the ability to sit with discomfort. In a review of RCT-informed advising, Dipre and Luke (2020) concluded

that RCT-informed principles of mutuality, empathy, and authenticity are a seamless fit for students within relationally-driven disciplines. Schwartz (2019) expanded on the use of RCT as theoretical support to enhance the learning environment, highlighting the importance of the relationship between instructors and their students. Overall, RCT-informed practices allow for a theoretically-informed approach to the ever-evolving culture of higher education that is sociopolitically complex and at times, emotionally charged. Within counselor education, fostering growth-fostering relationships equips students to practice empathy, authenticity, and mutuality—skills essential for supporting clients in sociopolitically complex contexts.

Pedagogy of Vulnerability

Brantmeier (2013) eloquently reflected that “[...] a pedagogy of vulnerability is all about taking risks—risks of self-disclosure, risks of change, risks of not knowing, risks of failing—to deepen learning. Vulnerability is an act of courage” (p. 96). While acknowledging positionality, Moulton and Leonard (2020) shared that one of the most important responsibilities of a teacher is to “distinguish vulnerability from weakness,” honoring the possibility that is inherent in being vulnerable and highlighting the intentionality that must be present in navigating social climates of classrooms. Mancilla (2020) built on this with the concept of “learning con el corazón,” or “learning that starts in the heart and travels to the mind” (p. 190). This concept brings the assumption that learning transcends simply acquiring new knowledge or skills, but changes the ways in which learners perceive themselves and their world. In a world rife with geopolitical strife, the vulnerability between teachers and students, or mentors and mentees, becomes central to the effectiveness of the learning environment.

The power of instating a pedagogy of vulnerability is its simplicity—educators do not need extensive resources to create this environment for their students, but instead promote an environment in which experiences are honored and risks are seen as educational opportunities to enhance empathetic learning (Brantmeier, 2013). The impact of small, relationally-rooted, and intentional choices not only places a demand of courage on behalf of the educator and students, but creates an environment apt to achieve a connected and expansive teaching environment (Schwartz, 2019). Implementing a pedagogy of vulnerability within counselor education specifically allows trainees to engage safely with emotionally charged topics, developing skills to manage both their own and future clients’ responses to sociopolitical stress. As Moulton and Leonard (2020, p. 85) reflected, “All of our intentional choices, when accumulated over time, have the potential for a resounding impact on creating a more peaceful and just world.”

RATIONALE OR KNOWLEDGE GAP

We are currently living within a sociopolitical climate where the next crisis is not a matter of “if” but “when.” This is especially salient on college campuses where a majority of students report sociopolitical-related stress (Ballard et al., 2024). To date, limited guidance exists regarding theoretical approaches rooted in counseling principles that aim to address the complex feelings that students experience due to sociopolitical crises. Implementing RCT-

informed principles paired with the pedagogy of vulnerability is a seamless fit within counselor education as its core tenets mirror many of the values and expected competencies within counselor education: growth, empathy, vulnerability, and reflection.

HOW THIS STRATEGY ADDRESSES THE GAP

The proposed teaching strategy introduces a unique approach to navigating complex, challenging, and often emotional conversations that arise within the classroom as a result of sociopolitical stress. The approach pulls strategies from guidelines shared by academic institutions (University of Michigan, 2021; Central Michigan University, 2026; Northern Illinois University, 2026) as well as models for best practice identified within the research (Kang & O'Neill, 2018; Ruiz-Mesa & Hunter, 2019). Unique to the proposed teaching strategy is the intentional inclusion of RCT-informed principles paired with the pedagogy of vulnerability. The inclusion of these approaches provides counselors-in-training the opportunity to explore complex situations within a safe, trauma-informed space while getting the felt sense of existing within a growth-fostering relationship—both necessary skills within counselor education.

Description of Teaching Innovation/ Instructional Strategy

The strategy will follow a three-step process: preparation, action, and reflection. The strategy emphasizes empowerment through choice to support students with differing needs as a response to challenging situations. The stages may be revisited and utilized as many times as necessary during a semester.

These stages will be illustrated using a case study covering the experience of Sylvia, a counselor educator teaching an introductory clinical mental health counseling course for a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)-accredited program.

PREPARATION

It is the responsibility of the instructor to initiate preparatory action to create an environment suitable for addressing such delicate concerns. Without the relationship between learners and instructor, vulnerability within the classroom may feel forced, uncomfortable, or detrimental to the learning process. Supporting the relational processing needed to create this enhanced classroom is centered in creating space for the lived experiences of students and faculty alike as primary sources of knowledge (Brantmeier, 2013). This begins with the instructor's first contact with students. Upon a student's expression of interest in the program, the instructor must work to build a relationship that can withstand the demands of vulnerability. Building

rapport that can later be used to support such a demand is instrumental in the success of taking action and reflection.

Concretely, a first step towards setting an environment that permits disclosure is through the use of an anonymous questionnaire. Simply providing an avenue for students to share what they need in order to have vulnerable conversations communicates that the instructor is not only comfortable with these expressions, but that they will also protect the space in a way suitable for the students to engage safely. This questionnaire includes questions such as:

1. What do you need from your classmates during vulnerable conversations?
2. What are some ideas you have for rules you would like to see upheld by the group?
3. What might be important for your instructor to know in the event you experience discomfort or distress in vulnerable conversations?
4. In the event of stressful events or emotionally charged topics impacting our classroom environment, what are some activities that might provide an opportunity for grounding and/or connection for you?

In the case example of Sylvia, she prioritized the inclusion of a questionnaire built to obtain this feedback from students. She reviewed the anonymous data and drew conclusions about the needs of students, as well as recommendations to help facilitate conversations within the classroom environment. Upon arriving for class one day, Sylvia noticed students' shock, disgust, and fear about ICE in the area, especially after recent events in their area. As students discussed their reactions, Sylvia reviewed the previously submitted feedback on ground rules and classroom needs for difficult topics. It was evident that students had contrasting needs: some felt a need for directive and productive conversations, while others identified a need for co-regulation.

This not only positions the instructor as a facilitator of disclosures rather than an expert, which dismantles power differentials that may impede a student's ability to participate openly, but also promotes the students as caretakers of the learning space with a responsibility not only to themselves or their professors—but to their fellow learners as well.

ACTION

When instances occur in the classroom which are rooted in controversy or emotional response, confrontations serve as a response to a desire for recognition (Westberg, 2025, p. 5). Students require an example of vulnerability and permission from a person who holds systemic power to engage in such a way, emphasizing the role educators play in providing mentorship and guidance (Michael, 2020). Attunement, empathy, and offering choice are crucial components of the action phase. Thus, providing options for small-group activities based on students' unique needs in response to an activating event is recommended. Instructors may use their judgment when they identify an activating event, or students may request its use when they

feel a conversation requires additional support, promoting shared responsibility for the learning environment.

Students will indicate whether they need space to actively process the event, discussing the stressor directly with their peers to understand and reflect on their response, or if they prefer to engage with adaptive distraction, or a designated window of regulation for students who may not wish to discuss the stressor in extensive detail. Students will self-select a type of group and be placed into groups of no more than four students with similar needs with a clear time limit for which the students will engage within their group. Even if all students report the same level of need, small groups are recommended to create a less intimidating environment and allow everyone time to engage authentically. At least 30 minutes is recommended for small-group processing followed by an extra 10 minutes for reflection and reconnection as a class; however, depending on the needs of students, the instructor may designate additional time for reflection and reconnection. Instructors should monitor each small group during their activities until inviting them back to the larger group for reflection.

Instructors may offer optional activities for students who wish to actively process difficult topics or take a brief adaptive distraction, pulling inspiration from the questionnaires provided in the Preparation phase. More important than the specific activity is that the instructor maintains a safe and structured space, monitors group dynamics, and ensures that students can return to the main classroom discussion smoothly.

Students Who Choose to Actively Process

Instruct students within each group to agree on guidelines for the conversation which emphasize mutuality, empathy, and nonjudgement. The instructor may share guidelines developed based on the data gathered within the preparation phase, reminding students that they may agree as a small group to make edits as desired. The instructor should remain prepared to intervene with “reframing, refocusing, or questioning...to maximize shared meaning” (Ruiz-Mesa & Hunter, 2019, p. 138). Instructors may choose to integrate a creative means of processing, such as the use of art or music, to enhance overall reflection.

Students Who Choose Adaptive Distraction

Provide these students with the option of a fun, light-hearted activity, or an activity that is related to course content. Options for a fun activity may include an icebreaker-style game, a puzzle, or another creative outlet such as coloring. Options for a content-related activity may include collaborating on a case study or working through an ethical dilemma. While facilitation will differ in this format, instructors should prepare to be available for questions, brief participation, or redirecting conversations if it strays from the intended purpose.

The specific activity chosen is secondary to the environment the instructor is creating; what matters most is the instructor’s attentiveness, the safety of the learning environment, and the smooth reintegration into class discussion. Instructors facilitate reconnection to the

larger class by summarizing key reflections and addressing lingering questions. This ensures continuity while also respecting students' processing needs, providing counseling students with hands-on experience navigating emotional dynamics, practicing relational skills, and fostering resilience—preparing them to support clients during sociopolitically complex times.

Returning to the case of Sylvia, she encouraged students to self-select a stressor-related active processing or coping-focused distraction group to reset before course content. She provided thought-provoking questions for stressor discussions and offered coping options like art activities or campus walks for distraction and connection. Sylvia set a 30-minute timer and encouraged group check-ins. She rotated within groups to evaluate processing, ensuring participation without intrusion. Students in active processing groups discussed potential community culture shifts, while those in distraction groups engaged in self-soothing art and community-building.

REFLECTION

When Sylvia's class returned to the large group, she engaged in mutual vulnerability by sharing the following: "I recognize today has been distressing for many in this room for reasons both personally and professionally. I also share feelings of fear for members of our community who may be targeted. I am approaching this conversation as a fellow counselor and human who is worried and hurting. It can be impossible for politics to not come up both in the classroom and in the counseling office during these times, so I would like to emphasize the importance of our continued processing of what this means for us professionally." Sylvia highlighted the role of counselors during geopolitically complex times, encouraging students to reflect on the ways they experienced the sighting, as well as how they would navigate approaching that conversation should a client bring forth the topic. The class moved forward to continue discussing the content, finding opportunities to connect to this experience regularly throughout the class.

At the end of class, Sylvia thanked her students for sharing their vulnerabilities and trusting her with their experiences and emotions. She reinforced that her classroom is a space where lived experiences are a primary source of learning. Sylvia consulted with colleagues for support on difficult conversations and used a rubric (Appendix A) to evaluate the impact of this intervention and prepare for their next class. Sylvia started class the next week by following up on the experiences of students within the classroom. The class discussed professional implications, such as how adaptive coping and active processing could be used to enhance their presence in the counseling room and the limitations present (i.e., being unable to use some adaptive distraction skills in a counseling session). The class discussed ways to approach active processing and adaptive coping skills during sessions, highlighting the moments between sessions as a prime opportunity to utilize modified versions of the skills modeled during this classroom intervention.

Core to RCT is attention to power differentials, with emphasis placed on dismantling a culture of "power over" within the classroom. Thus, seeking student appraisal is a necessary next step in which space is held for reflection and feedback. Faculty may offer students the option

to hold constructive, reflective conversations within the classroom (either in writing, in small groups, or as a large group) and/or to provide anonymous feedback to the instructor. The instructor may model vulnerability by openly acknowledging what went well, what could be improved, and changes to implement in the future, while offering gratitude to their students for engaging in mutual growth. If classroom instruction will continue following the reflection, accommodate for a break to allow for regulation and reorientation to course instruction. Finally, it is the responsibility of the instructor to engage in self-reflection and consultation with colleagues related to the classroom experience, especially if they find themselves becoming emotionally activated (Kang & O'Neill, 2018; University of Michigan, 2021). This approach ultimately provides an example for counseling students not only of how to navigate distress in their work as a clinician, but also how to seek appraisal and engage in ongoing positioning.

Application to Counselor Education

Utilizing a mutually supportive andragogical approach in counselor education has particular benefits. The current geopolitical climate is not exclusively affecting classrooms, but is present in counseling sessions across the world. Preparing counselors-in-training to address these topics and to provide a safe environment to process is necessary in order to practice ethically and responsibly. Many students find it difficult to promote a safe and socially aware environment in the counseling space, and this model may provide hands-on experience with navigating difficult topics. It might, additionally, provide an opportunity to model for students the experience of understanding and responding to needs while still providing structure and offering guidance in clinical sessions. This also provides an opportunity to discuss the importance and limitations present in the clinical space related to counselors' adaptive reflection and coping. These are invaluable skills to students entering the field, as it promotes a parallel process of learning that is both supportive to their emotional needs, but also provides an opportunity to learn necessary skills of creating that space for others. This supports numerous CACREP standards, such as those related to Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice (Section 3, Standard A), Social and Cultural Identities and Experiences (Section 3, Standard B), and Counseling Practice and Relationships (Section 3, Standard E) (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2024).

Additionally, it is vital to reflect on the demand of vulnerability on the counselor educator. Just as students often require a person in a position of power to help model for and promote the acceptability of vulnerability, educators must also experience a level of support institutionally. Additionally, educators must reflect personally upon the balance between maintaining professional boundaries and showing up authentically in relationships with students. Educators are encouraged to pay particular attention to the ways in which they experience reluctance to integrate authenticity and vulnerability in the classroom—is this resistance to honor a boundary, or is this resistance a result of “traditional” institutional expectations rooted in power struggles and a demand for respect?

Ethical Considerations

Faculty operating through a lens of RCT recognize the inherent power dynamics involved in navigating student relationships within counselor education. This teaching strategy intentionally emphasizes “power with” rather than “power over,” thus fostering a collaborative and growth-fostering relationship between students and faculty. By acknowledging their own intersecting identities and practicing cultural humility, faculty model curiosity and openness toward the diverse identities of their students (F.2.b; ACA, 2014), many of whom may be uniquely and disproportionately impacted by sociopolitical stressors. This intentional stance helps cultivate a sense of “mattering” in students—particularly those navigating marginalization—by affirming their value and contributions within the learning environment (Zimmerman & Castronova, 2021).

Reflexivity and Intrapersonal Awareness

Both authors identify as first-generation college students, and as such, empathize with students who may experience fear with vulnerability and/or advocacy within academic settings. Thus, both authors value the use of appropriate self-disclosure and authenticity to strengthen growth-fostering relationships within the classroom where critical thinking, honesty, and advocacy are encouraged. However, both authors also acknowledge the innate privilege of being white women with advanced degrees. We humbly acknowledge our inability to innately understand the experiences of our diverse students with intersecting identities and their roles within the oppressive systems around them. With this awareness, both authors recognize the importance of mutual empathy, vulnerability, and “power with” in their roles as faculty. Finally, both authors are committed to the continuous self-reflection, humility, and continuing education necessary to strengthen their roles as social justice advocates to their students and the profession.

Suggested Resources for Implementation

Relational-Cultural Therapy by Judith V. Jordan (2010)

Connected Teaching by Harriet Schwartz (2019)

The Pedagogy of Vulnerability by Edward J. Brantmeier and Maria K. McKenna (2020)

Evaluation of Effectiveness

The learning outcome of this teaching strategy is the creation of a psychologically safe classroom, which promotes student engagement, authentic participation, and deeper connection to the course material. In a Master's-level Counselor Identity course, this approach fostered frequent vulnerable conversations and meaningful discussion. End-of-semester evaluations, including anonymous student feedback on course structure, instructor presentation, and classroom climate, indicated that co-developing class rules and intentionally building relationships at the macro level contributed to a positive learning environment. Students noted that small- and large-group collaboration, along with opportunities for self-disclosure, enhanced their connection to the material. When utilizing this approach in an undergraduate course on methods for screening for substance use disorder (SUD), students reported greater connection between peers as well as increased comfort within the classroom setting. Specifically, a fun activity for adaptive distraction was utilized following a politically traumatic event. Students expressed learning more about their peers, experiencing a moment of joy, and becoming regulated for the subsequent lecture.

Assessment Tools/Methods

Within the master's-level Counselor Identity and Function course, assessment of student learning was seen through end-of-semester grades, reflection papers, in-class discussions, and end-of-semester surveys. Reflection papers included an initial reflection paper about their interests in the profession, an advocacy project reflection where they discussed their experience with a local non-profit partner organization, and a final reflection paper where students revisited their initial reflection after the end of the course. Students engaged with their reflection papers in a more critical manner at the end of the semester after learning material and being provided opportunities for continued exploration. Students identified pressure points that require continued support, such as the difficult climate of the medical system, burnout, navigating cultural concerns, and effectively managing ethical concerns such as suicidal ideation and limitations of confidentiality. Ultimately, these concerns are developmentally appropriate for first and second-semester counseling students—however, there was a marked difference in the ways students reflected on these concerns from the beginning of the semester. Many now find excitement in advocacy-driven work and have a greater understanding of the role of cultural experiences, political acts and events, and systemic injustices to overall wellness.

Within the undergraduate addictions course, students regularly engaged in small group experiential activities intended for increased comfort with interpersonal interactions necessary

for counseling. By the end of the semester, students displayed increased comfort and eagerness when engaging in experiential learning with their peers. They became more vocal when asking reflective questions related to course content, including exploration of how to work with clients from culturally diverse backgrounds, particularly when those backgrounds differ from their own. End-of-semester surveys highlighted students' excitement to attend class, a desire for even more interactive activities with peers, as well as an appreciation for instructor vulnerability.

Implications

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS OR LIMITATIONS

There is a need for longitudinal research related to this model as a means of determining the impact of such a learning environment over time. It was evident in the courses mentioned above that students found this approach to enhance their learning; however, every institution has a different culture which might respond differently to the use of such techniques. It will be vital to see this approach generalized in different counseling programs and with varying demographics of students. Additionally, due to the relational nature of the framework, much of the connection depends on the educator's approach, which cannot be quantified, and student participation relies on their ability to engage in self-reporting.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Administrative buy-in when implementing relational andragogy is paramount to its success within classrooms. Advocating for its implementation across faculty and curriculum allows for a cohesive culture, ensuring students understand expectations, particularly when navigating sociopolitical crises.

A future direction for research, as mentioned above, would be a longitudinal study to determine the long-term effects of a mutually supportive learning environment on counselors' personal and professional development. Another interesting area for research would explore specific dispositional skills that promote success when building a relational educational environment.

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Appendix A: Sample Rubric

This rubric may be used as a guide for counselor educators to reflect on student growth throughout the semester and to support counselor educators' consultation related to the intervention. Its purpose is to encourage curiosity related to the relational function of the classroom, the students' professional and personal development, and the processing of sociopolitical events. Although it is intended for use by the counselor educator, many may find it helpful to adapt elements of the rubric to provide an opportunity for students to self-assess their engagement in the course in addition to their professional and personal development

Targets	Novice	Developing	Exemplary
Depth of Critical Reflection	Student focused on “safe” or surface-level observations. Student exhibited great difficulty in reflecting on the impact of geopolitical stressors on potential clients, or how their emotional response may affect the client. Avoids personal risk or acknowledging “not knowing.” Reflection is purely intellectual or objective. Student may require additional support in trusting the learning environment.	Student shared emotional responses, but appears to struggle to connect them to professional/personal growth. Begins to lean into discomfort with some hesitation. Student may exhibit a wide range of emotions, but have difficulty connecting these to the learning environment. Student may require additional follow-up to ensure a regulated emotional state.	Openly acknowledged emotional activation and used vulnerability as a tool for learning. Student fully embraces “not knowing” as a space of growth. Student may require continued connection between their lived experiences and vulnerability to their professional development, as well as more opportunities to engage with this type of learning.
Integration of Sociopolitical Context	Mentions events as external facts or news with little connection to the counseling room or personal wellness. Student may identify a lack of knowledge about events as they occur, either from disinterest or from self-preservation.	Expresses personal distress or empathy regarding events, but may not entirely see the relevance of sociopolitical events on clients’ presentation. Student may require additional support in viewing the connection intentionally. Has awareness of avoidance for self-preservation.	Critically integrates how systemic injustice and sociopolitical stress directly impact the counselor-client relationship and accessibility of services. Students also connect to their own difficulty maintaining presence as a counselor during these times. Students may require mentorship regarding balancing their responses and maintaining presence for their client.
Application of Relational Skills	Views the instructor and peers as sources of information only. Communication is transactional and avoids emotional depth. Educators encouraged to be curious if the absence of these skills are indicative of an emotional response, or if there are skills that may need additional support.	Recognizes the importance of a supportive environment. Shows mutual empathy, but may wait for others to indicate safety/permission to be authentic.	Actively supports growth-fostering relationships. Demonstrates mutuality by valuing the lived experience of their peers as primary sources of knowledge. Recognizes the impact of events on the experiences of clients, and the unavoidable nature of their presence in the counseling room.
Professional Identity Development	Identifies counselor roles rigidly. Struggles to see the intersection of counselor identity, personhood, and sociopolitical stress. May need mentorship regarding the ways in which these roles may overlap and conflict with professional duties.	Identifies developmentally appropriate concerns (e.g., burnout, compassion fatigue). Shows emerging awareness of the need for self-care amid sociopolitical stress to maintain abilities as a counselor. May benefit from continued support in connecting their personal experiences to their professional experiences.	Articulates a clear, nuanced identity that balances professional boundaries with authenticity. Views advocacy and relational resilience as not only ethical requirements, but as core to their counselor identity. Educators encourage to prioritize supporting this through educational opportunities, professional development organizations, and continued discussion.

Abolitionist Dreaming in Counselor Education

Gaps exist in preparing counselors to address matters of police violence that may impact clients, particularly from marginalized populations. Developing an abolitionist praxis may enhance and reshape counselors' practical experiences toward supporting client wellness and safety as it relates to survivors and those vulnerable to police violence. This teaching brief proposes the abolitionist dreaming activity rooted in abolitionist andragogy to support counselor development of strategies for responding to harm, violence, and oppression without resorting to policing and tools of the prison-industrial complex.

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Introduction

Police violence refers to any use of force from a law enforcement officer and its subsequent physical, emotional, and psychological impact (Green & Evans, 2021; Green & Sperandio, 2024). Police violence can be enacted via various forms of law enforcement officers that include, but are not limited to, local and state police, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Federal Bureau of Investigation officers. Despite prevalent discourse and activism against police violence, databases that track police violence have observed a trend of increasing police violence over the past decade (Mapping Police Violence, 2025; The Washington Post, 2024). Moreover, emerging ongoing research has demonstrated that direct and vicarious exposure to police violence contributes to negative mental health outcomes and psychological distress, such as symptoms of anxiety, depression, suicide attempts, traumatic stress, and substance use (Bor et al., 2018; Geller et al., 2014; Green et al., 2024; Motley et al., 2022). Such mental health outcomes highlight the imperative for counselor training in responding to instances of police violence to combat its impact and systemic roots.

RELEVANT RESEARCH AND LITERATURE SUPPORT

While police violence in contemporary literature is often associated with the history of targeting Black Americans dating back to the Transatlantic Slave trade and the institution of chattel slavery, other marginalized populations have unique histories of oppression enforced by law enforcement officers that are important to note. For example, police violence has been used to target Asian immigrant communities and Indigenous people under the guise of “frontier justice” in the colonial expansion on Turtle Island (Hinnershitz, 2023). Regarding substance use, those who use may directly and vicariously experience increased police violence (Park et al., 2019). Additionally, the LGBTQIA+ community, notably transgender people, may experience disproportionate police violence (Grasso et al., 2024). As it relates to gender-based and sexual violence, police have a notorious reputation for perpetrating violence, protecting perpetrators, and neglecting survivors’ needs, particularly among racialized and trans women (Ritchie, 2017). For example, out of every 1,000 perpetrators of sexual assault, only 50 perpetrators experience arrest, and only 25 experience incarceration (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, n.d.). Moreover, without persistent activism for survivors, police and carceral systems may neglect to respond to political leaders and other law enforcement officers, such as was the case with Daniel Holtzclaw’s rape and sexual assault of eight women and Donald Trump becoming President again in 2024 despite several allegations of rape and sexual violence and being found guilty of sexual abuse (Domonoske, 2016; Neumeister et al., 2023; Ritchie, 2017). Taken together, this counternarrative to policing highlights that police often do not provide collective safety and are often the purveyors of systemic oppression and violence.

Abolitionist Praxis

Counselor educators may find an abolitionist praxis particularly relevant toward preparing counselors in training (CIT) to address police violence. Abolition is an anti-oppressive theory and praxis with the political vision of eliminating the prison-industrial complex (PIC), such as policing and prisons (Critical Resistance, n.d.; Green & Sperandio, 2024). Abolitionist praxis takes this vision due to its framing that the institutions and tools of the PIC are used to reinforce and protect the power of oppressive systems by targeting marginalized populations while criminalizing and punishing dissent (Critical Resistance, n.d.). Moreover, abolition conceptualizes the etiology of violence under pervasive oppressive systems as functioning to enact and maintain oppressive systems (Green & Sperandio, 2024; Kaba & Ritchie, 2022). Thus, abolitionist praxis calls for a dismantling of the PIC, the oppressive systems that it protects, and the tools used by the PIC while simultaneously working to build a future that values collective safety, healing, accountability, and transformative justice (Critical Resistance, n.d.; Green & Sperandio, 2024; Kaba & Ritchie, 2022).

RATIONALE AND KNOWLEDGE GAP

Despite histories of community knowledge and emerging research that highlight a counternarrative to the functioning of the PIC, research on counselor competence related to police violence demonstrates significant gaps in counselor preparation (Green & Evans, 2021). Notably, Green and Evans (2021) found that most counselors have not received training in clinical (83%) and advocacy (77.5%) skills despite 68% of their participants identifying having worked with clients with police violence experiences. As a result, counselors are likely underprepared to support clients with a critical understanding of police violence and the functioning of the PIC.

Emerging literature has begun to share abolitionist practices and insight relevant to counselors. For example, Drustrup et al. (2023) provide insight into safety planning that may help mitigate the harm via policing and psychiatric carceral settings on clients in crisis. Drake et al. (2024) offers insight on abolition as it relates to school counseling, which may support counselors in divesting from the PIC via engagement in soft policing and collaboration with school resource officers that enable the school-to-prison pipeline. Lastly, Green and Sperandio (2024) offer insight into applying abolition to substance use clients who are targeted with anti-drug policing. Despite these critical emerging works, there are numerous gaps as it relates to educational tools to support counselors in learning to engage in the work of dreaming and building abolitionist futures as counselors.

ADDRESSING THE KNOWLEDGE GAP: ABOLITIONIST ANDRAGOGY

Dozono (2022) identifies several pedagogical aims for teaching abolition to youth that shape an andragogy of abolition. Notably, nondisposability, the idea that no one deserves to be discarded, and centering the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized are central to teaching abolition (Dozono, 2022). Additionally, teaching abolition must counter de facto

acceptance of authority in educational settings that mimic unquestioning obedience and assimilation to law enforcement. Building upon Dozono's (2022) pedagogical approach to abolition that positions the instructor as taking a guiding stance, an andragogy of abolition emphasizes guiding students toward abolitionist praxis and away from internalized carceral logics—attitudes and beliefs used to justify and legitimize the existence and functioning of the PIC. This is necessary for engaging students in reimagining a world that does not rely on the PIC as a strategy to combat police violence.

Description of Teaching Instructional Strategy

The abolitionist dreaming activity was developed in response to observed challenges and tension experienced from internalizing carceral logic when teaching about police violence and abolitionist praxis. Drawing from Kelley's (2002) concept of freedom dreaming, the abolitionist dreaming activity encourages students to dream and construct worlds beyond the functioning of oppressive systems. Specifically, this activity supports CITs in developing intervention, advocacy, and leadership strategies to address community violence without the use of the PIC or policing behaviors. The abolitionist dreaming activity has two learning outcomes: (1) critically examine the functioning of the PIC and (2) develop alternative strategies to policing and carcerality for responding to and preventing community violence.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY AND APPLICATION TO COUNSELOR EDUCATION

The following outline for the abolitionist dreaming activity was developed as an exercise in the final week of a 15-week multicultural counseling course but may be adapted to fit other courses or class structures.

Preparation

Prior to initiating the activity, it is essential that both the instructor and students prepare themselves by building critical consciousness on police violence, the PIC, and abolitionist praxis. This preparation may include a variety of approaches such as completing selected readings beforehand or watching an assigned documentary. Ideally, this preparation should occur before engaging students in didactic and discussion-based learning on police violence and the core principles of abolition. During in-class instruction, the instructor should encourage student-directed learning via a guiding stance by redirecting questions aimed at the instructor toward the CIT, their peers, or assigned course resources. This may promote deeper learning of core ideas that will be applied during the activity.

Abolitionist Dreaming Activity

Divide students into groups, preferably via random assignment to promote diversity and inclusion across cultural identities. Assign each group a case vignette related to client experiences of harm, community violence, or oppression that typically result in relying on the PIC (e.g., intimate partner violence, hate crimes, theft, sexual violence, school shootings, etc.).

Adapting the miracle question (Berg & Dolan, 2001), instruct CITs to close their eyes and that upon opening them, the PIC and all policing systems have magically disappeared. Moreover, inform CITs and group members that they have been tasked as leaders to develop a new community. The first duty of the group is to develop a plan for responding to the case vignette in ways that embody the values of an abolitionist praxis for collective safety, justice, healing, and accountability. Moreover, inform students that they have full creative license in developing their new community, to include borrowing from existing structures and developing brand new practices and systems. Next, instruct groups that there is only one rule: they cannot replicate or reinvent the PIC or policing practices. Lastly, task each group member to hold each other accountable toward committing to this rule.

Allow groups 5 to 10 minutes to process on their own. Afterwards, circulate through each group to affirm progress, provide feedback to support application of an abolitionist praxis, invite exploration toward centering the needs of survivors, vulnerable groups, and marginalized communities, and offer redirection when group members begin to knowingly or unknowingly replicate the PIC. Allow CITs at least 30 minutes in total to complete the activity.

Discuss and Debrief

Have CITs share their case vignette and their groups' developed response with the entire class. Allow other groups to critically ask questions and provide feedback. Encourage CITs to discuss their process in developing their response, adhering to the one rule of the assignment, and in applying the values of an abolitionist praxis. Lastly, spend time debriefing with students to offer space for students to share their emotions and authentic experiences of the impact of the activity. Instructors can emphasize challenges experienced, resolution to challenges, what was learned from the experience, and what they will carry with them beyond the activity during the debrief.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

While the abolitionist dreaming activity supports application of several foundational ethical principles and codes offered by the American Counseling Association and the American School Counselor Association, attention to ethical concerns is needed. First, discussion and experiential learning on abolition that uses problem-based learning may activate prior knowledge and feelings of frustration and discomfort from CITs (Young & Hundley, 2013). While this is an important part of the process of deconstructing internalized carceral logics, instructors should be aware of the potential for this to spark conflict between CITs and toward the instructor. Thus, adequate time should be set aside for debriefing with students and to work toward

resolving any lingering tension from the activity. Moreover, the abolitionist dreaming activity requires CITs to apply acquired abstract knowledge that can evoke biases, microaggressions, or other harmful and marginalizing behaviors. Thus, instructors should remind students of preexisting norms to prevent unproductive conflict from disrupting the activity or causing harm, particularly to marginalized CITs. For example, international students and immigrant CITs may face heightened vulnerability to harm in discussions that may relate to the racist and xenophobic scapegoating of these populations as “criminal” to legitimize policing through Immigration and Customs Enforcement. In such situations, it is the instructor’s responsibility to disrupt and deconstruct carceral logic that would exclude vulnerable student populations from full participation. During the abolitionist dreaming activity, an instructor might specifically address here-and-now group dynamics with CITs by redirecting them to apply the activity to manage emerging conflict and harm. Instructors might find it valuable to involve advanced graduate students (e.g., doctoral students) to support the activity and reduce unproductive conflict and harm, especially when multiple groups of CITs are engaged in the activity.

While these ethical considerations warrant additional attention, it should also be noted that such situations can allow for modeling and applying abolitionist praxis with CITs. For example, if CITs were to harm a peer during the activity, the instructor could facilitate a restorative justice intervention to promote accountability for harm and its impact. Drawing from Cullors’ (2021) abolitionist framing and insight on accountability, an instructor might directly work with a CIT who has caused harm to (1) acknowledge their harm and its impact on others, (2) enhance their critical consciousness toward understanding the function of oppressive systems in the harm caused, (3) engage in transformative internal and external change to grow beyond their current enactment of harm via oppression, and (4) if and when applicable, engage in repair and making amends with those harmed to support reestablishing relational safety. In modeling this, instructors may support CITs in normalizing the inevitability of causing harm due to the pervasive nature of oppressive systems and the reality of internalizing them while also demonstrating the utility of non-punitive ways to reestablish ruptured safety as an alternative to punishment- and compliance-focused interventions.

REFLEXIVITY AND INTRAPERSONAL AWARENESS

CIT requests for instructor expertise can create pressure on instructors to operate in an expert role and may prove challenging, especially when privilege and marginalization exist between instructors and CITs. Distinguishing between the appropriate time for instructor expertise and student-directed learning can be difficult and highlights the reality that the instructor brings their cultural identity and prior knowledge, experience, and feelings into the activity. For example, as a Black man, I (first author) may feel inclined to offer a racialized lens to view the PIC upon CIT request while experiencing limitations in requests for perspectives on sexual and gender-based violence that are not salient to my lived experiences. I recommend that instructors adequately prepare themselves through their own process of reflexivity as they learn about abolitionist praxis to avoid being caught off guard by student questions.

This reflexivity may help in identifying disingenuous questions, which may be less receptive to instructor directiveness with expertise and lived experience, from genuine ones.

For example, in my (first author) experience of using the abolitionist dreaming activity, it is common to receive questions such as, “what do we do about people who commit sexual violence?” where a CIT’s question may not be genuinely interested in identifying solutions to sexual violence and may instead be the product of discomfort rooted in a belief that the PIC protects against sexual violence. In this circumstance, if I fail to recognize the embedded carceral logic (e.g., “police keep people safe from sexual violence”) I may directly respond with expertise to offer a solution for sexual violence that may inevitably reflect my privilege from a system of cisheteropatriarchy. Solutions I generate from my positionality for students can be debated, result in harm rooted in patriarchy, and diverge from the goal of identifying non-carceral strategies for collective safety. Instead, a guiding stance by redirecting CITs may prevent this dynamic. Examples of redirecting questions may include, “What is needed to create safety from sexual violence?”, “Based on existing data and lived experiences of survivors and advocates, what are effective ways of stopping and preventing sexual violence?”, “What are the root causes of sexual violence that we must address?”, or “What do survivors and those vulnerable to sexual violence need to experience safety and protection from it?” Given the challenges instructors may face in guiding CITs, we encourage instructors, especially those early in pursuing an abolitionist praxis, to consider connecting with other abolitionists for community support and processing to enhance reflexivity and preparation for the activity.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Suggested resources for the preparatory phase of implementing the abolitionist dreaming activity include materials that emphasize a practical application of an abolitionist praxis beyond building knowledge of theory. While there are currently limited resources specific to the counseling profession, existing works serve as a starting point. Moreover, written works and media beyond the canon of counseling literature may also be useful for enhancing student and instructor knowledge of abolitionist praxis. Useful articles specific to clinical mental health and school counseling include those referenced earlier: *Decentering the use of police: An abolitionist approach to safety planning in psychotherapy* (Drustup et al., 2023), *Toward the end of school counseling: Visionary possibilities for counselors to build and practice abolition in education* (Drake et al., 2024), and *Abolitionist praxis for substance use clients who experience anti-drug policing* (Green & Sperandio, 2024). Relevant documentaries might also include *13th* (DuVernay, 2016) and *Reimagining safety* (Solomon, 2023). Useful books for CIT or instructor learning may include *No more police* (Kaba & Ritchie, 2022), *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* (Davis et al., 2022), *Are prisons obsolete?* (Davis, 2003), and *We do this ‘til we free us* (Kaba, 2021). Next, the *Abolitionist Perspectives in Social Work Journal* may offer abolition-focused articles that counselors can apply to their professional identity and contexts. Lastly, an accompanying worksheet to support self-directed learning during the activity is provided in Appendix A.

EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS

Evaluation of the effectiveness and impact should take a three-pronged approach: student self-evaluation, instructor evaluation of students, and instructor self-evaluation. First, instructors can support student self-evaluation of learning from the activity. This can occur via embedding reflective questions into the activity debriefing or by assigning written reflective prompts following the activity. Next, instructors might evaluate the effectiveness of student progress toward learning outcomes. This may be achieved through instructor observation of student discussion during the activity and in written reflections related to the activity. Specifically, instructors might observe for the presence of carceral logic and abolitionist solutions in student responses to determine the degree to which students have grasped and applied core ideas of an abolitionist praxis. Lastly, instructors can engage in reflection over their implementation and utilization of abolitionist andragogy. Specifically, instructors might evaluate challenges and successes in facilitating the activity in alignment with abolitionist praxis and andragogy.

ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND METHODS

Instructors may consider quantitative and qualitative means of evaluation via a pre-post design. Specifically, such an assessment should focus on determining if critical consciousness related to the PIC has occurred during and after the activity. For quantitative assessment, an instrument such as the *Attitudes Toward Police Legitimacy Scale Short Form* (APLS-SF) might be used to measure individual sense of approval of policing and police legitimacy (Reynolds, 2023). This 11-item tool can be used as a metric alongside instructor observation to evaluate changes in attitudes. Likewise, the *Carceral Justification Scale* (CJS) could be used to measure CIT attitudes of support of prisons and jails (Brock-Petroshius & Keum, 2024). A decrease in scores on the APLS-SF and CJS in pre-post score comparisons might support the conclusion that greater critical consciousness toward abolitionist attitudes has occurred. Instructors may consider the feasibility of alternative data collection and methodological choices to reduce potential bias. Toward that end, instructors who have the ability may consider using experimental or quasi-experimental designs paired with the use of analysis of covariance to adjust for variance in ways that strengthen conclusions regarding observed changes in abolitionist thoughts and attitudes. It should be noted that quantitative changes in attitudes are important data, but they may not translate into the development of social justice action and skills. Thus, qualitative methodologies and analyses should complement quantitative data analysis for assessing the impact of the abolitionist dreaming activity.

Qualitatively, instructors might compare observations in class and through written and reflective assignments related to policing and the PIC to compare before, during, and after the activity to assess needs for changes and areas for revision during future implementation alongside effectiveness of the activity. Specifically, evidence of effectiveness might entail emerging themes pertaining to abolitionist praxis, such as application of collective safety in work with clients and students, recognition and critique of oppressive systems in the practice of counseling, constructing non-carceral mechanisms for justice and accountability,

serving as evidence of success with the activity. A variety of qualitative methodologies may be worthwhile to consider in evaluating the effectiveness of the activity along with instructor and CIT experiences. For example, a phenomenological approach might emphasize student lived experiences of learning through engaging in the activity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, a grounded theory process of evaluation might take an inductive approach of generating theory on CIT's learning abolition and process of deconstructing carceral logic from engagement in the activity (Hays & Singh, 2012). Given the emphasis on collaboration between researchers and participants in solving community and social problems (Hays & Singh, 2012), instructors may consider the feasibility of using participatory action research as a methodological approach for evaluating the effectiveness of the abolitionist dreaming activity and achieving deeper levels of learning in their application of knowledge and insight from the activity. Irrespective of the chosen methodology for evaluation, it is essential that instructors integrate feedback collected to refine subsequent implementation of the abolitionist dreaming activity in their respective courses and educational settings. This iterative approach of moving from theory, practice, evaluation, reflection, and integration of new knowledge into developing theory ensures instructors participate in the process of developing abolitionist praxis being taught to CITs.

Discussion and Implications

As a result of engaging in the abolitionist dreaming activity, CITs will develop greater skill in critically reflecting on their growing professional identity and its role within the PIC. Moreover, the activity will promote greater skill in developing abolitionist counseling and advocacy strategies in their professional roles. As a result, the abolitionist dreaming activity may help address the knowledge and skill gap as it relates to advocating to reduce occurrences of police violence, particularly toward vulnerable and marginalized populations.

LIMITATIONS

While the abolitionist dreaming activity may promote greater critical consciousness and creativity beyond the reliance on the PIC as CITs, the activity does not guarantee the application of what is learned from the activity to real-world contexts. Moreover, the counseling field is embedded within and reflective of interlocking oppressive systems rather than being the exception to them (Green, 2024; Thacker & Barrio Minton, 2021). Thus, counselors in training may experience barriers, limitations, and frustration during the activity and application of any learning from it if the CIT has not and is unwilling to critically analyze the counseling profession's enmeshment with the PIC. Moreover, beyond the classroom, CITs may be targeted with carceral responses if their out-of-class application of learning from the abolitionist dreaming activity disrupts the status quo in practicum and internship placements or in future employment. In

observation of these potential experiences, it is important for instructors to inform CITs of the reality of the functioning of the PIC, oppressive systems, and the embeddedness of the counseling profession in it.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Despite the abolitionist dreaming activity being grounded in abolitionist theory and andragogy, there has been no evaluation of it and its effectiveness on CITs beyond the authors' initial observation and evaluation. Thus, future research might focus on evaluating the activity, its strengths, and limitations with CITs and practicing counselors. Moreover, since this activity was developed in the context of a multicultural counseling class, counselor educators may find the activity easily applicable to this course. It may also be worthwhile to explore and envision how the activity may be modified to fit within other courses and educational contexts. For example, the abolitionist dreaming activity might be implemented in an ethics course by integrating core ethical dilemmas into case vignettes.

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Appendix A: Abolitionist Dreaming Activity Worksheet

ABOLITIONIST DREAMING ACTIVITY

Instructions: Imagine that when you woke up, the prison-industrial complex, its institutions, and its practices of policing no longer existed. You are selected with a group of others as leaders to respond to harm and violence in your community. Using what you've learned about abolition, develop methods for accountability, healing, and justice to your case vignette. **One rule: no use of police or policing practices.** Things to consider:

Vulnerable populations:

- Identify populations most likely to experience or be targeted with the specific harm in the case vignette.
- Identify populations that are vulnerable or often neglected related to the harm.

Impact of harm:

- Identify and describe the direct and vicarious harm and its impact on those who experience it and are vulnerable to it.

Root cause analysis:

- Identify the factors and root causes of harm & safety violations. Consider the following domains:
 - Individual: *What factors associated with the individual(s) contribute to harm?*
 - Community: *What factors associated with community context contribute to harm?*
 - Institutional, systemic, and cultural: *What factors associated with systems, institutions, and broader cultural context contribute to harm?*

Safety & Justice Needs. *Remember to think across social and cultural identities:*

- Identify safety needs for those impacted and vulnerable to the specific harm.
- Identify the healing and repair needs of those harmed and vulnerable.
- Identify the justice needs of those harmed and vulnerable.
- Brainstorm ways to foster safety, healing, and justice for those harmed through counseling and advocacy.

Accountability:

- Apply your root cause analysis to conceptualize how those who caused the harm, came to enact it.
- Brainstorm methods of accountability for harm caused. *Remember to be survivor focused.*
- Brainstorm transformations needed from systems, society, and culture to prevent future harm. *How would you restructure things to eliminate and/or prevent harm?*

Using Activism to Transform Sociopolitical Crises in Counselor Education

In the following brief, we introduce a three-part trauma-informed and social justice-framed activity called Reflective Activism in Counseling Practice. The activity guides students through (a) reflective expression, exploring positionality through creativity, (b) a critical-action project, analyzing systems and translating critique into an activism project, and (c) collective engagement, sharing work through nontraditional formats, like gallery walks, dialogue circles, and collaborative art. This work is grounded in American Counseling Association (ACA) ethical standards (2014) and advocacy competencies (Lewis et al., 2003), and positions counselor education and training as an active, healing-centered process that validates students' experiences while preparing them to resist neutrality in the face of oppression.

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Introduction

Counseling students do not arrive at educational spaces as blank canvases. They bring with them lived experiences and a clear awareness of today's crises, including mass deportations, anti-trans legislation, attacks on reproductive rights, and ongoing global violence. When counselor educators present the classroom as an apolitical or neutral space, they risk deepening students' sense of despair, further marginalizing students whose identities and experiences are directly shaped by sociopolitical forces (Walker, 2018). In this way, neutrality functions not as impartiality but as complicity (Watson, 2019), reinforcing systemic harm.

Because counseling students are already navigating sociopolitical realities and systemic inequities that affect their well-being, a trauma-informed lens is required to meet their needs (Bitanhirwe & Imad, 2023). Such an approach helps educators recognize how these forces shape both classroom learning and the ways students will eventually engage with clients. Pedagogical practices that integrate activism with trauma-informed principles can create learning environments that prepare students for professional practice while minimizing the risk of retraumatization (Carello & Butler, 2015). Furthermore, by preparing students to engage critically with sociopolitical crises, counselor educators reject false neutrality and fulfill their ethical mandate to advance social justice.

How Traditional Counseling Curricula Can Silence Context and Disempower Students

Traditional counseling curricula often unintentionally marginalize students by minimizing the cultural, historical, and systemic realities that shape their lives (Goodman et al., 2015; Marsella & Pedersen, 2004). Rooted in dominant Eurocentric epistemologies such as individualism, rationalism, and empiricism, counselor education frequently privileges individual adjustment over structural critique, encouraging students to help clients adapt to systems that may perpetuate racism, poverty, migration stress, and other forms of oppression (Marsella & Pedersen, 2004). This narrow orientation reflects what Wrenn (1962) termed cultural encapsulation, in which counseling defines reality through a single dominant cultural lens, while disregarding alternative worldviews. As a result, students are insufficiently prepared to recognize cultural and systemic inequities (Marsella & Pederson, 2004). For students already attuned to these inequities, counselor education may feel disconnected from both their lived realities and those of the clients they hope to serve.

These limitations are reinforced by pedagogical methods that privilege passivity over critical engagement. Many counseling programs continue to rely on a banking model of teaching

(Freire, 2000), in which students are expected to absorb and reproduce information rather than critique it (Goodman et al., 2014). Within this framework, multiculturalism and social justice discourse are often isolated into a single course or Activity, signaling that diversity is supplemental rather than foundational (Dameron et al., 2020). Although frameworks, such as the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competence (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2016), remain central to the field, they can leave students underprepared to recognize subtler forms of oppression, including microaggressions, heteronormativity, and unexamined privilege that shape both their own experiences and those of their future clients (Goodman et al., 2014). Even contemporary moves toward inclusive risk reinforce assimilation by privileging neutrality, efficiency, and dominant forms of knowledge while marginalizing cultural perspectives that challenge existing systems (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2022).

These concerns become especially urgent in the current political and social climate, where global crises, discrimination, and political conflict directly affect students' lives. Yet counselor education often continues to emphasize individual coping while leaving systemic inequities unnamed, contributing to distress, disengagement, and silence within the classroom (MindSet Safety Management, 2024; U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Increasing restrictions on discussions of race, gender, sexuality, and oppression further narrow opportunities for critical dialogue, silencing the very perspectives students most need to be validated (Habteselasse & LaFrance, 2025). To address these challenges, counselor education must be reimagined through trauma-informed pedagogy and reflective activism. Together, these approaches center students' needs by providing spaces where they can process the weight of the world around them, find agency amid harm, and cultivate strength, resilience, and insight that will sustain both their personal lives and their future work with clients.

Introducing a Framework for Reflective Activism in Counselor Education

Counselor education is not only about developing clinical competence but also about shaping professionals who can navigate the intersections of systemic oppression, personal identity, and client care. When counselor education focuses exclusively on skills and knowledge, it risks overlooking how oppression shapes both clients' lived experiences and counselors' professional development (Ratts et al., 2016; Sharma & Hipolito-Delgado, 2021). To address this gap, we propose a framework that utilizes reflective activism as the core of activity design. Reflective activism integrates critical self-examination with action, encouraging students to engage in sociopolitical issues while also examining their own assumptions, identities, and responsibilities within systems of power (Buluk & Carnicelli, 2015). In this way, classroom teaching becomes a deliberate and necessary act of preparing counselors to respond with courage, intentionality, and compassion in a polarized world.

Within counselor education, reflective activism aligns closely with trauma-informed and action-based pedagogy (Boluk & Carnicelli, 2015). Trauma-informed pedagogy acknowledges the impact of systemic and political violence on students' well-being. At the same time, action-based learning creates opportunities for them to confront and analyze these realities rather than adjust to them uncritically. Together, they align with reflective activism to resist silencing, validate diverse ways of knowing, and empower students to connect personal growth with advocacy and systemic change. DeBlaere et al. (2014) demonstrated how multiple forms of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, and heterosexism) contribute to psychological distress, underscoring that oppression is not an abstract concept but a lived experience with tangible psychological consequences. Their findings further suggest that resilience can buffer the effects of discrimination, reframing resilience as a process of transforming harm into agency. Classroom practices such as reflective journaling with identity papers or structuring discussions that invite students to analyze systemic inequities can support this process by helping students connect personal experiences to broader sociopolitical contexts.

Activism itself can function as a healing and growth-oriented practice (Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). For example, Strauss Swanson and Szymanski (2020) found that activism helped survivors of sexual assault move from silence and shame to agency, finding voice and meaning in ways that foster both individual and collective transformation. Participants described healing through challenging rape culture, educating others, and participating in movements. One of them is #MeToo, the survivor-support movement founded by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 and amplified into a global hashtag in 2017. These experiences fostered validation, solidarity, leadership, empathy, and self-worth. These findings position reflective activism not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a model for ethical counseling practice. By integrating reflection, advocacy, and trauma-informed engagement into the classroom, counselor educators can prepare students to respond to clients and communities with greater critical awareness, compassion, and commitment to social justice. Taken together, reflective activism represents both a healing practice and an educational strategy.

AUTHOR REFLEXIVITY

As counselor educators, we approach this work from our own situated positions. The first author identifies as a White settler in the United States with middle-class, able-bodied, and cisgender privilege; her neurodivergent identity has served as an invitation to embrace imperfection and messiness as practices of anti-violence and resistance to institutionally perpetuated harm. Her work bridges the worlds of counseling and anti-violence activism, responding to relational violence by working with people who have experienced abuse as well as those who engage in abusive behaviors. The second author identifies as a white, queer, cisgender, non-disabled man. His work centers on advocacy for and with clients and students with non-dominant affective and gender identities, and values modeling challenging discourse in counselor education classrooms. We recognize that our investment in this framework stems from our encounters with sociopolitical realities across many roles: as educators navigating

increasingly politicized academic spaces, as clinicians witnessing systemic harm to clients, and as individuals holding both privilege and marginalization in complex, intersecting ways.

GROUNDING IN TRAUMA-INFORMED PEDAGOGY

While activism can catalyze healing and transformation, it also draws attention to the realities that students bring into the classroom. When educators introduce topics such as violence, oppression, and trauma, students may not simply be analyzing theory but re-encountering personal or communal wounds. For many, academic spaces can therefore become sites of re-traumatization (Bitanirwe & Imad, 2023). Bitanirwe and Imad (2023) contended that trauma-informed pedagogy cannot be treated as optional or peripheral but is an ethical imperative, as universities are charged with safeguarding student dignity, well-being, and equitable access to learning; given the nature of academic content, educators must prioritize safety, inclusion, and empowerment alongside intellectual rigor.

Trauma-informed pedagogy reframes the role of faculty from being mere content deliverers to becoming partners in learning. Rather than functioning as gatekeepers of information, professors are positioned as co-regulators whose presence and empathy help students navigate distress and stay engaged. In this way, faculty do more than teach; they model resilience by demonstrating balance, practicing self- and collective care, and showing appropriate vulnerability. Moreover, when professors share their own challenges, they normalize the idea that resilience is not innate but cultivated, offering students a realistic and hopeful model (Arbour et al., 2024).

The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) positions advocacy and social justice as core professional values, emphasizing counselors' responsibility to advocate for clients (ACA, 2014, A.7.a), support student welfare (ACA, 2014, F.8.a), and to infuse cultural discourse into education (ACA, 2014, F.7.c). Similarly, the ACA Advocacy Competencies (ACA, 2018) frame advocacy as central to counselor identity by encouraging practitioners to address systemic barriers across individual, community, and policy levels. Within this ethical framework, activism can be understood not only as a professional responsibility but also as a healing practice. Because many counseling students carry the effects of systemic harm through lived experience, vicarious exposure, or work with marginalized communities, unaddressed social realities can contribute to overwhelm, disengagement, or retraumatization in the classroom. Integrating reflective activism into pedagogy creates opportunities for students to process these experiences through critical dialogue, transforming emotional burden into meaning-making, empowerment, and purposeful advocacy.

Description of the Activity

Title: *Reflective Activism in Counseling Practice*

Introduction

This activity is designed to intentionally engage students in current sociopolitical reflection while cultivating counselor identities grounded in trauma-informed practice and reflective activism. As future counselors, students will encounter clients whose lives are deeply shaped by systemic inequities and political realities. Neutrality in these contexts is not neutral; it risks complicity with oppression. By engaging in this work, students will critically examine their own positionality, reflect on systemic patterns across institutions, and channel that awareness into creative, activist-oriented action. The final stage emphasizes collective engagement, sharing projects in relational, nontraditional formats that prioritize dialogue, healing, and mutual reflection.

Benefits

Engaging in this activity offers several potential benefits. Students may deepen their self-awareness by exploring how their identities, privileges, and vulnerabilities intersect with sociopolitical realities. They may experience professional growth as they practice integrating advocacy and activism into their counselor identity, in alignment with ACA ethics and competencies. By engaging in collective dialogue, students can experience solidarity and validation, strengthening community connection and shared meaning-making. Just as importantly, the flexible, creative format encourages expression through art, storytelling, or multimedia approaches that resist traditional academic constraints and allow for more authentic voices to emerge.

Risks

At the same time, this work carries potential risks. Because it engages with real-world crises such as racism, anti-trans violence, and deportations, students may experience emotional distress or find that personal or collective trauma surfaces in unexpected ways. Sharing creative or personal reflections may feel vulnerable, even in nontraditional, community-based formats. Classroom dialogue may reveal power dynamics surrounding differences in privilege, identity, or lived experiences. Students may also experience activism fatigue, as advocacy can be emotionally taxing without adequate self-care and community support. Finally, marginalized students may face the risk of tokenization, feeling pressured to speak from identity rather than choice.

To mitigate these risks, the activity emphasizes choice and agency at every stage: students select the modality of their reflection, the scope of their activism project, and the format of community engagement. Faculty should provide content warnings, grounding practices, and

structured peer support to minimize retraumatization and offer private submission options for those who find sharing publicly unsafe.

Learning Activity Components

The learning activity unfolds across three interconnected stages that center on reflection, systemic critique, activism, and collective engagement in relation to a current sociopolitical issue that they will carry through each stage of the Activity. In Part I, students begin with reflective expression by exploring their identities, lived experiences, and positionality in relation to a current sociopolitical issue. Rather than prioritizing disclosure, the activity emphasizes choiceful, authentic self-expression through creative modalities such as collage, painting, digital art, storytelling, poetry, music, movement, podcast-style recordings, and short videos. Students are encouraged to reflect on how the issue intersects with their own lives, communities, values, and developing identities as counselors. This stage invites students to consider the emotions, tensions, and areas of growth that emerge as they examine themselves in relation to broader social and political realities, while validating lived experience as a meaningful source of knowledge and insight.

In Part II, students engage in a critical-action project that combines systemic analysis with intentional activism. Building on the issue they explored in Part I, students combine systemic analysis with intentional activism. They examine how institutions such as education, healthcare, media, religion, or government perpetuate, ignore, or distort that issue. They are encouraged to analyze how silence, neutrality, or “business as usual” can reinforce inequity and marginalization, while considering whose voices and ways of knowing are validated or dismissed. Students then translate this critique into a small but meaningful activism project aligned with their identities and values. Examples may include creating a zine or infographic, recording a podcast episode, facilitating a dialogue circle, developing a community resource toolkit, or contributing to collective storytelling or art projects. Rather than producing a formal academic paper, students briefly document their process, challenges, and learning through flexible formats such as visual journals, audio reflections, or illustrated notes.

In Part III, students share their work with peers in their class cohort through collective engagement practices that emphasize community dialogue and shared meaning-making rather than performance or evaluation anxiety. Instead of a traditional presentation, students participate in interactive formats such as gallery walks, dialogue circles, living libraries, collective murals, or resource exchanges. For example, students may display artwork, infographics, or QR-linked resources for peers to explore and respond to, engage classmates in small-group discussions about their projects, or contribute pieces of their work to a larger collaborative mural representing the cohort’s collective reflections. Some students may also create take-away materials such as mini-zines, reflection cards, or digital resources that classmates can use beyond the course. Together, these activities encourage collective witnessing, foster deeper

dialogue, and reinforce the connection between personal reflection, systemic awareness, and advocacy-oriented action.

Application to Counselor Education and Ethical Considerations

To apply this activity within counselor education, it is essential to recognize the multidimensional realities that students bring into the classroom. Indeed, students arrive as whole people who bring lived experiences, cultural identities, and an awareness of ongoing sociopolitical crises. This activity addresses those realities by providing a structured opportunity for students to reflect on how sociopolitical forces shape both their personal lives and their professional formation.

This activity embodies the principles outlined in the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), which identifies advocacy, social justice, and honoring diversity as core professional values. By engaging students in reflective activism, the activity supports student well-being by embedding trauma-informed practices and helping future counselors recognize systemic barriers and advocate in ways that are congruent with their ethical identity. Ultimately, this activity positions counselor education as an active, justice-oriented process rather than a neutral transmission of knowledge.

IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

For this activity to succeed, counselor educators must approach implementation with intentional scaffolding and trauma-informed pedagogy beginning on the first day of class (or before). Faculty can support students by providing clear guidance and multiple flexible options for expression, allowing each student to select modalities that feel safe and authentic. Because the material may trigger strong emotions or resurface trauma, it is essential to implement class check-ins, provide options for anonymous feedback (e.g., Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics), and offer structured peer support before and after engagement activities.

Faculty modeling is also key. When educators share their experiences navigating sociopolitical realities and advocating in professional contexts, they normalize vulnerability and demonstrate resilience. Partnerships with campus or community organizations can deepen the activism component, creating opportunities for authentic engagement beyond the classroom. Finally, faculty should consistently highlight self-care and community-care practices, reinforcing that reflective activism is not only a professional responsibility but also a protective strategy against burnout and compassion fatigue.

NAVIGATING RESTRICTIVE CONTEXTS

Counselor educators implementing this activity must attend to the realities of varied institutional and political climates. In states or universities where social justice activism, diversity discussions, or advocacy are discouraged or explicitly restricted by policy, both students and faculty face genuine risks, including professional consequences, surveillance, or retaliation. To prioritize student safety, educators should offer anonymity for reflective components, including the option to submit work privately to the instructor rather than in public or group formats. The activity may be adapted to emphasize internal reflection and professional identity development, or client-centered advocacy resources when public activism is not feasible, preserving the activity's core learning goals while remaining responsive to context.

At the same time, responsibility for justice-oriented counselor education cannot rest solely on individual faculty members. Leadership in higher education fundamentally shapes not only which practices are encouraged but also which conversations are implicitly permitted or discouraged within the classroom (Phillips & Hammond, 2023). When academic leadership fails to engage actively, it not only hinders classroom practice but also signals to faculty that addressing current events, systemic oppression, or sociopolitical factors affecting students may be professionally unsafe. Thus, the capacity to implement trauma-informed, justice-oriented counselor education depends on leadership that centers the needs of the profession and the students it serves rather than on institutional risk aversion.

EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS

Evaluating this activity is best approached through a competency-based framework rather than traditional grading metrics rooted in colonized educational systems. Because the purpose of reflective activism is to foster self-awareness, systemic understanding, and agency, assessment should emphasize students' willingness to engage in reflection and critical self-examination. A tiered model (e.g., below competency, competency, intermediate competency, and advanced competency) allows faculty to evaluate growth along a developmental continuum rather than through binary measures of success or failure.

This approach shifts evaluation away from traditional performance metrics and toward developmental growth and improvement. It acknowledges that students enter counselor education at different stages in their sociopolitical and cultural awareness, and that the objective measure of effectiveness lies in their willingness to engage, capacity for reflection, and progress along the continuum of development (For more information on competency-based frameworks, see Fischer & Fischer, 2024; Townsley & Schmid, 2020; Wambui, 2024).

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELOR EDUCATION / FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This activity has significant implications for counselor education, as it challenges programs to cultivate critical consciousness as a practice. It reframes the classroom as a relational,

justice-oriented space where advocacy, activism, and healing are interwoven with professional training. Future directions could include expanding the project into a semester- or term-long portfolio, in which students engage with multiple sociopolitical issues over time, allowing for deeper exploration and sustained activism. Partnering with community organizations could further embed the activism component, extending the impact beyond academic settings and creating opportunities for real-world advocacy.

The activity also holds potential for cross-disciplinary collaboration with fields such as social work, education, or public health, broadening institutional critique and supporting interdisciplinary approaches to justice.

LIMITATIONS

While this activity offers meaningful opportunities, it is not without limitations. Because it engages with real-world sociopolitical crises, some students may experience emotional distress or find that personal and collective trauma surfaces in ways that are difficult to manage within an academic course. Institutional contexts may also limit what can be openly discussed; in restrictive political climates, both students and faculty may encounter pushback when addressing controversial or politically charged topics. The activity's nontraditional, creative design, while inclusive, may challenge students more familiar with conventional academic structures and require additional scaffolding and clarity from faculty. Furthermore, evaluating diverse modalities of expression (e.g., art, storytelling, and advocacy projects) can pose challenges to maintaining consistent grading, requiring faculty to be particularly attentive to equity and transparency. Finally, there remains the risk of activism fatigue or tokenization, particularly for marginalized students who may already be carrying disproportionate advocacy burdens. These limitations underscore the importance of ongoing faculty support, institutional advocacy, and a commitment to trauma-informed, student-centered pedagogy. We also want to be direct: where this assignment could realistically threaten a faculty member's job, safety, or immigration status, full implementation is not an ethical obligation. Faculty may legitimately adapt it heavily, defer it, or decline it. Choosing self-protection in the face of a genuine threat is not a failure of advocacy; remaining in the profession is itself a precondition for sustained advocacy.

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Teaching with Aloha

A Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Framework

Counselor educators are teaching in increasingly complex social environments. As policies continue to evolve, teaching often feels unsteady, especially among heightened levels of stress within graduate programs. Unsettling environments can be *mālama* (Hawaiian for “to care for, sustain”) through intentional pedagogical approaches that foster belonging and well-being in teaching practices. This article presents practices in teaching with aloha, a culturally responsive pedagogical approach grounded in Hawai‘i’s *Nā Hopena A‘o* (HĀ) framework. This framework offers support to counselor education preparation programs, serving as a model for designing and cultivating counselor resilience, relational competence, and professional dispositions that directly strengthen the counseling field.

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Introduction

Let's begin by asking "What is the practice of Aloha?" Within Native Hawaiian worldviews, aloha is not simply a greeting or expression of kindness, but a deeply relational cultural practice grounded in reciprocity, humility, compassion, interconnectedness, and collective responsibility (Lloyd et al., 2025; Miyose, 2024; Aloha Spirit, 2025). Aloha reflects an ethical way of being that emphasizes relational accountability among people, communities, and the living world, while fostering harmony, dignity, and mutual care (Lloyd et al., 2025; Miyose, 2024; Aloha Spirit, 2025). Contemporary, Native Hawaiian scholarship further positions aloha as a culturally grounded framework for sustaining well-being, relational balance, and community resilience amid ongoing sociopolitical and colonial challenges (Lloyd et al., 2025; Miyose, 2024; Salzer, 2025). In this manuscript, teaching with aloha is not conceptualized as performative niceness but as a culturally grounded relational ethic and anti-oppressive educational practice that centers reciprocal responsibility, humanization, cultural humility, and collective care within counselor education.

Grounded in these principles, teaching with aloha offers counselor educators a relational and culturally responsive pedagogical framework for fostering connection, belonging, and ethical engagement within increasingly complex sociopolitical educational contexts. Counselor educators are increasingly teaching within sociopolitical contexts shaped by shifting policies, instructional restrictions, political polarization, and even heightened limitations of curriculum. As a result, emotional stress may intensify throughout counseling program coursework, clinical training, and supervision experiences, increasing the risk of burnout among counselor educators and counselors-in-training (Harrichand et al., 2021; Myers et al., 2016). Research consistently demonstrates that counselor educators experience elevated levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout, which may diminish relational presence, wellness, professional effectiveness, and advocacy while influencing the preparation of future counselors (Friesema & Bradley, 2022; Harrichand et al., 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Myers et al., 2016), which can influence counseling services, having implications that extend well beyond the classroom. In this context, centering connection and care emerges as essential to counselor preparation practices. Counselor educators may benefit from pedagogical frameworks that intentionally cultivate community, relational accountability, cultural humility, emotional safety, and collective care. Teaching with aloha offers one culturally grounded approach for fostering humanizing, relational, and justice-oriented counselor education practices during challenging sociopolitical times.

This relational orientation is consistent with emerging scholarship from Hawai'i demonstrating that Native Hawaiian values can meaningfully inform educator preparation through culturally responsive assessment, professional disposition development, and institutional practices grounded in relationship rather than compliance (Simpson Steele et al., 2025; Simpson Steele et al., 2026).

Reflexivity and Positionality Statement

As a counselor educator at an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) in Hawai'i, my teaching is informed by relational, cultural, and place-based values in this context. While I do not position myself as a Native Hawaiian cultural expert, this framework emerged through sustained engagement with Native Hawaiian values, mentorship, community learning, and ongoing reflection.

Teaching with aloha is not intended to appropriate or universalize Native Hawaiian knowledge systems. Rather, it explores how relational principles rooted in aloha may inform more humanizing and culturally responsive pedagogies in counselor education. This work is grounded in commitments to relational ethics, reciprocity, and cultural humility, with recognition that engagement with these teachings requires ongoing learning, accountability, and respect for the communities from which they emerge. This perspective aligns with recent equity-minded scholarship emphasizing that Native Hawaiian values are most appropriately engaged through sustained relationship, community partnership, and culturally responsive institutional practices rather than as decontextualized instructional strategies (Hook et al., 2014; Simpson Steele et al., 2025; Simpson Steele et al., 2026; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998).

Description of Teaching Innovation

Despite longstanding attention to multicultural and social justice competencies in counselor education (Ratts et al., 2016), few publications describe how counselor educators are navigating sociopolitical tension through culturally grounded, place-based pedagogies. Calls to decolonize counselor education highlight the need for approaches that move beyond individualistic, compliance-driven models toward relational, culturally sustaining ways of teaching (Gorski & Goodman, 2015; Stockton, 2025). Similar calls have emerged within assessment scholarship, where professional dispositions are increasingly conceptualized as developmental, relational, and context-responsive rather than static competencies (Simpson Steele et al., 2026). Still, practical guidance for implementing such approaches remains limited.

This Teaching Practice Brief addresses this gap by presenting teaching with aloha, an equity minded pedagogical approach grounded in Nā Hopena A'o (HĀ) (Hawai'i State Department of Education [HIDOE], 2015). The HĀ framework (HIDOE, 2015) provides a culturally grounded foundation shared within the P-12 public school settings across the state of Hawai'i that complements teaching with aloha in higher education. The HĀ outcomes mirror the values emphasized in the education with aloha approach (Tibbetts et al., 2007) and extend naturally into counselor education preparation programs committed to place-based and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Teaching with aloha can be framed as an adaptation of HĀ principles

within counselor education, supporting holistic student development, ethical practice, and relational well-being. In sociopolitical climates marked by division, fear, and institutional pressure, teaching with aloha may function as a humanizing pedagogical stance that centers dignity, interconnectedness, and relational care. Drawing on lived teaching practice in a graduate school counseling program in Hawai‘i, the teaching practices illustrated here share how culturally grounded strategies can support student well-being, professional identity formation, and resilience amid challenging sociopolitical times.

TEACHING WITH ALOHA CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Teaching with aloha is informed by education with aloha, a strengths-based educational approach emphasizing cultural strengths, relational pedagogy, and collective responsibility (Tibbetts et al., 2007). Rather than focusing on deficits, education with aloha centers belonging, care, and high expectations as foundational to student engagement and development. Teaching with aloha extends this emphasis from the general P-12 educational setting into counselor education by recognizing graduate students’ cultural, relational, and experiential assets through the prioritization of growth, reflection, and relational accountability over standard evaluation practices. This developmental orientation parallels the Ho‘oulu framework, which conceptualizes professional dispositions as relational capacities cultivated through mentorship, reflection, and culturally grounded educational experiences rather than traits to be merely evaluated (Simpson Steele et al., 2026).

Teaching with aloha aligns closely with emerging scholarship on creative and relational pedagogies in counselor education. Baker et al. (2026) argued that creative teaching practices in counselor education foster deeper engagement, reflexivity, and meaning making, particularly when educators attend to relational processes, embodied learning, and contextual responsiveness. The concept of teaching with aloha similarly centers relationship, presence, and responsiveness, positioning learning as a co-constructed process grounded in connection rather than imparting knowledge.

Guillory-Lacy (2025) further supported this orientation by demonstrating how talking circles function as relational pedagogical spaces that decenter hierarchical authority and honor collective knowledge. These practices resonate with Hawaiian concepts of pilina (connection) and ‘ohana (family) learning, reinforcing teaching with aloha as a pedagogy that privileges relational safety, shared voice, and communal accountability.

NĀ HOPENA A’O (HĀ) AS PEDAGOGICAL COMPASS

Grounding pedagogy in local values can offer both stability and purpose. Teaching with aloha means creating a classroom community guided by Hawai‘i’s Nā Hopena A’o (HĀ) framework, a holistic model that centers Belonging, Responsibility, Excellence, Aloha, Total Well-Being, and Hawai‘i. The HĀ framework, originally developed by the Hawai‘i Department of Education (DOE) in 2015 and adopted statewide in 2016 (HIDOE, 2025), was established to strengthen

the HI DOE's mission to provide a public education system that honors Hawaiian identity, language, and culture while tuning into the success and well-being of all students. The HĀ framework is not used as a curriculum but rather as a grounding lens and values-based structure to promote connection and identity through practices in leadership and teaching to foster pilina (connection), and relationships.

The HĀ framework is stated as “a framework for the Department [of Education] to develop in its employees and students the skills, behaviors and dispositions that are reminiscent of Hawai'i's unique context and to honor the qualities and values of the indigenous language and culture of Hawai'i” (HIDOE, 2015, para. 2). The idea of teaching with aloha can extend to environments and contexts outside of Hawai'i by incorporating place-based standards, striving to be both a pedagogical stance and a wellness practice to help guide how counselor educators design, lead, hold space, and practice kākō'o (support), and offering mentorship and professional modeling in counselor education courses. HĀ functions as a pedagogical compass guiding classroom norms, relational practices, and approaches to professional dispositions. Recent work has further demonstrated how HĀ-informed values can extend beyond curriculum to shape assessment design, faculty relationships, and institutional culture, reinforcing the importance of culturally grounded systems that foster belonging, reflection, and professional growth (Kelly et al., in press; Simpson Steele et al., 2026). Anchoring an aloha-based teaching pedagogy at the graduate level models shared values, stability, and collective grounding during periods of sociopolitical stress, while aligning with the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (ASCA, 2025a) and the ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) used within counselor education programs including competencies of ethics, multicultural responsiveness, and wellness.

With the increasingly complex sociopolitical context across the nation today, educators are navigating evolving policy landscapes, contested public discourse surrounding identity and equity, and growing constraints on classroom dialogue, all of which may contribute to educator stress, emotional fatigue, and uncertainty within graduate learning environments (Goodman et al., 2020; Gorski & Goodman, 2015; Lewis et al., 2003; Ratts et al., 2016; CACREP, 2021). Rather than responding to sociopolitical tension through avoidance or disengagement, teaching with aloha encourages relational accountability, community care, and culturally responsive dialogue. In the state of Hawai'i, these broader national challenges intersect with the state's unique cultural, historical, and geographic context. Counselor educators and school counselors-in-training may be navigating the ongoing impacts of colonization on Native Hawaiian communities, persistent educational and health inequities, the high cost of living, geographic isolation across island communities, and the responsibility of serving culturally and linguistically diverse students while honoring place-based ways of knowing and learning. These realities often coexist with broader national conversations surrounding identity, equity, and educational policy, shaping both educator and student well-being. Teaching with aloha reflects a philosophy of education that is relational, place-based, and centered on the holistic flourishing of learners. In counselor education, it can offer a powerful anchor for cultivating belonging and resilience, serving as a stabilizing and ethical compass for teaching and mentoring. Its ethical foundation lies in intentionally fostering learning environments that

uphold students' dignity, promote beneficence, honor cultural humility, encourage relational accountability, and support the well-being of individuals and communities in ways that are consistent with the ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014), multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (Ratts et al., 2016), the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2022), and counselor educators' responsibilities to model ethical and culturally responsive professional practice.

Each component of the HĀ framework: Belonging, Responsibility, Excellence, Aloha, Total Well-Being, and Hawai'i, can be intentionally embedded in counselor education pedagogy as seen in Table A1, Integration of HĀ Elements in Counselor Education: Teaching Focus, Practices, and Student Outcomes. During periods of sociopolitical uncertainty, these HĀ values provide students with a shared language for navigating tension, emotional reactivity, and professional responsibility.

Examples of Teaching Strategies

An educator using teaching with aloha may facilitate difficult classroom conversations regarding race, identity, legislation, or educational inequities through practices emphasizing humility, listening, mutual respect, and relational responsibility rather than debate-oriented engagement.

HĀ CIRCLES

HĀ circles are structured, relational dialogue spaces intentionally used at the beginning of courses, during periods of heightened sociopolitical stress, or following challenging or emotionally charged discussions. Grounded in shared values, these circles emphasize deep listening, mutual respect, and relational accountability. Implementation typically includes an initial grounding or centering activity, explicit naming of relevant HĀ values to frame the dialogue, opportunities for voluntary reflection or sharing, and a collective closure that supports integration and return to learning. By modeling relational practices central to the counseling profession, HĀ circles can help foster psychological safety, strengthen cohort cohesion, and reinforce expectations for ethical presence and community responsibility within counselor preparation programs. These relational structures are also consistent with Sense of Community theory, which emphasizes membership, shared influence, integration of needs, and emotional connection as foundational to meaningful learning communities (Kelly et al., in press).

Example. In a graduate-level counseling course, a HĀ circle may be used at the beginning of class following a week of politically charged educational policy changes. Students are invited into a structured opening grounding practice (e.g., breathwork or silent reflection), followed

by a prompt such as, “What value from HĀ feels most needed for you this week in your role as a developing counselor?” Students may share voluntarily using a talking piece (in-person) or turn-taking structure (virtually) while others listen without interruption. The instructor closes the circle by naming shared themes, reinforcing pilina (connection), and inviting students to identify one relational or self-care action they will carry into their academic work, professional interactions, or future counseling practice.

The HĀ circle activity aligns with key counselor education professional dispositions and directly supports the development of competencies outlined in the *2024 CACREP Standards* (CACREP, 2024), particularly in areas of professional counseling orientation and ethical practice (Section 3.A.), social and cultural diversity (Section 3.B.), and counseling and helping relationships (Section 3.E.; CACREP, 2024). The HĀ circle also corresponds with dispositional domains assessed through the Professional Dispositions Competency Assessment Revised (PDCA-R), including interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, self-awareness, ethical and professional conduct, and openness to feedback (Garner et al., 2020).

During periods of collective grief, political uncertainty, or community trauma, educators may apply teaching with aloha by prioritizing connection, flexibility, emotional presence, and culturally responsive care within classroom interactions.

RELATIONAL RITUALS AND CHECK-INS

Relational rituals and brief check-ins are intentionally embedded throughout courses across the counseling curriculum and program semesters to support students’ nervous system regulation, emotional presence, and relational safety. Drawing from trauma-informed educational principles (Carello & Butler, 2015), these rituals and check-ins include predictable opening routines that orient students to the learning space, reflective pauses during emotionally intensive content, and closing acknowledgments that honor collective effort and shared responsibility. Check-ins may take verbal, written, or somatic forms, offering students multiple avenues to express readiness, an emotional state, or learning needs while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. Over time, these rituals may cultivate consistency, trust, and relational attunement, reinforcing learning environments where students feel supported, grounded, and more fully able to engage in both personal and professional growth.

Example. In a graduate counseling course delivered online or in-person, each class session begins with a structured relational check-in using a consistent prompt such as, “On a scale of 1–5, where is your energy and presence today as you enter this learning space?” Students respond verbally in round-robin format or through a Zoom function, if attendance is online. The instructor acknowledges patterns without requiring explanation, normalizing fluctuation in emotional availability while maintaining professional boundaries. During emotionally intensive topics (e.g., suicide prevention, school violence, or systemic inequities), a brief mid-class pause is incorporated where students are invited to silently reflect, stretch, or jot down reactions in a private journal. The class session closes with a grounding acknowledgment of shared effort and a brief reflective prompt such as, “What is one word you are taking with you from today’s class?”

These relational rituals intentionally cultivate counselor self-awareness, emotional regulation, reflective practice, and professional presence; foundational capacities for ethical and effective counseling relationships. They directly support the 2024 CACREP Standards related to Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice, particularly Standard 3.A.10 (ethical standards and ethical decision-making) and Standard 3.A.11 (self-care, self-awareness, and self-evaluation strategies for ethical and effective practice), while also reinforcing the integration of diversity, equity, inclusion, critical thinking, and culturally sustaining practices throughout counselor preparation (CACREP, 2024). In addition, these practices foster professional dispositions reflected in the Professional Dispositions Competency Assessment–Revised (PDCA-R), including self-awareness, interpersonal skills, ethical and professional conduct, cultural sensitivity, and openness to feedback (Garner et al., 2020).

LETTERS OF ALOHA

Teaching with aloha may support students from historically marginalized communities by intentionally affirming cultural identity, honoring lived experience, and fostering relational safety within counselor preparation programs. Letters of aloha are narrative-based reflective practices offered to students at key points in the semester, particularly during periods of heightened academic, professional, or sociopolitical stress. Rather than functioning solely as evaluative feedback, these letters center affirmation, meaning-making, and relational presence by inviting students to reflect on their growth, cultural assets, relational engagement, and emerging professional identity through the Nā Hopena A’o (HĀ) framework. The practice positions reflection as a dialogical and compassionate process that supports counselor identity development while maintaining appropriate academic and professional boundaries.

Example. In a graduate-level practicum or internship course, the instructor provides a mid-semester “Letter of Aloha” to each student following site supervisor feedback submissions and reflective journal entries. Rather than focusing solely on students’ performance evaluation, the letter highlights their observed strengths, such as relational presence with clients/students, ethical decision-making in challenging situations, and growth in cultural responsiveness. The instructor intentionally integrates HĀ domains (e.g., belonging, responsibility, and total well-being), naming specific examples, such as how a student demonstrated pilina (connection) by building trust with a school site team or showed ha’awina no’ono’o (reflective learning) through reflective supervision engagement.

Students are then invited to respond to the letter with a brief reflective reply (written or recorded), identifying how the letter affirms their developing professional identity and where they see continued growth. This exchange is positioned as developmental rather than evaluative, reinforcing relational accountability, professional formation, and cultural humility within counselor preparation. Framing feedback as an ongoing relational dialogue rather than a summative evaluation reflects contemporary approaches to culturally responsive assessment that emphasize growth, reflection, and reciprocal faculty-student relationships (Kelly et al., in press; Simpson Steele et al., 2026).

ASCA NATIONAL MODEL AND HĀ FRAMEWORK LESSON PLAN

At my university, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) national model lesson plan assignment was designed to support counselor-in-training integration of culturally responsive pedagogy, professional standards, and place-based values within comprehensive school counseling practice by incorporating the HĀ framework intentionally within the lesson plan. Students developed a classroom, unit, or small-group guidance lesson aligned with the “ASCA National Model[®]: A Framework for School Counseling Programs” (5th ed.; ASCA, 2025b) and “ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards: and Competencies” (ASCA, 2025a) while intentionally incorporating the Nā Hopena A’o (HĀ) framework. Lesson plans were tailored to specific P–12 grade levels and identified student needs, requiring students to demonstrate developmental appropriateness, cultural responsiveness, and alignment with state and national educational standards.

Example. In a graduate school counseling course, a student designs a 6th-grade classroom guidance lesson focused on “Navigating Stress and Building Support Systems.” The lesson is aligned with the “ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success” (ASCA, 2025c) and explicitly integrates HĀ domains, such as belonging (belonging to supportive peer networks), responsibility (help-seeking behaviors), and total well-being (emotional regulation strategies). The lesson begins with a brief grounding activity and introduces the concept of pilina (connection) by helping sixth-grade students identify trusted adults and peer supports within their school community.

Elementary students engage in a small-group activity where they map their support systems using a “circle of care” worksheet followed by a reflective closing prompt asking students to identify one strategy they can use when feeling overwhelmed. In the course context, the graduate student is also required to submit a reflective commentary explaining how HĀ influenced their lesson design decisions, including how relational safety, cultural responsiveness, and developmental appropriateness were considered in planning instruction for diverse learners.

Evaluation of Effectiveness

The effectiveness of teaching with aloha has been evaluated across multiple semesters through informal and formative indicators, including student reflective feedback, course evaluations, and observed cohort engagement. Students have reported increased feelings of belonging, emotional safety, and connection to peers and faculty. Faculty observations indicate enhanced student participation, mutual support within cohorts, and greater willingness to engage in difficult sociopolitical conversations. While these indicators are not causal, they align with literature suggesting that relational, culturally grounded pedagogies support engagement and resilience in counselor education (Carello & Butler, 2015; Friesema & Bradley, 2022).

TEACHING WITH ALOHA: PRACTICE OUTCOMES

Across reflective practices, including the “Letters of Aloha” activity, students reported outcomes related to emotional regulation, professional clarity, and relational connection. Students frequently described reduced anxiety and increased capacity to pause, reflect, and engage intentionally during periods of academic and sociopolitical stress. Students’ reflections indicated greater clarity of purpose and alignment with professional values, with students articulating renewed commitment to counseling grounded in responsibility, compassion, and service.

Common themes also included increased awareness of the importance of relational support and cultural grounding. Students highlighted *pilina* (connection) and *kāko’o* (support) as essential to sustaining well-being and professional presence, while reflections demonstrated integration of place-based values and growing cultural humility. Collectively, these outcomes suggest that teaching with aloha-informed practices support counselor identity development, emotional presence, and values integration within counselor preparation.

ASCA LESSON PLAN HĀ FRAMEWORK: ASSIGNMENT OUTCOMES

Review of the “ASCA National Model” lesson plans revealed consistent integration of counseling standards with culturally grounded values. School counseling students demonstrated the ability to align “ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors” standards with HĀ principles, using belonging, responsibility, and well-being as organizing frameworks for lesson objectives rather than as additive elements.

Lesson designs emphasized P-12 student engagement, relational safety, and developmental appropriateness, frequently incorporating interactive activities, opportunities for student voice, and attention to classroom climate. School counseling students also demonstrated increased competence in articulating participation data, outcome indicators, and follow-up plans, reflecting growing confidence in accountability within school counseling practice. Reflective components further indicated strengthening professional identity and ethical awareness, particularly in designing counseling lessons responsive to Hawai’i’s cultural and community contexts.

MID-AND END-OF-SEMESTER FEEDBACK AS RELATIONAL AND RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

Mid- and end-of-semester feedback informed the practice of teaching with aloha by highlighting how instructional strategies affected graduate students’ learning and relational presence. Students identified interactive, relational approaches, such as small-group discussions, in-class dialogue, practical assignments, structured reviews, and organized materials as most supportive, fostering clarity, engagement, and confidence when tied to real-world counseling practice.

Challenges in implementing the instructional framework (e.g., HĀ-aligned pedagogical practices) in the course led the instructor to make intentional adjustments to support graduate school counseling students’ voice and engagement. teaching prompted intentional adjustments

to support student voice and engagement. The instructor restructured class sessions into 3–4 segments (approximately 30–40 minutes each) to better balance content delivery with discussion, reflection, and application. To enhance engagement, the instructor incorporated brief relational and mindfulness activities, facilitated guided discussions in whole-class and breakout group formats, and created structured opportunities for students to brainstorm ideas, share questions and reflections from readings, and connect course content to their professional practice as emerging school counselors. The instructor also used formative assessments, online interactive tools (e.g., polls, chat responses, exit tickets), and applied case and video analyses to reinforce learning and promote reflective practice. These instructional adaptations highlighted key concepts, scaffolded student learning, and fostered relational presence while ensuring multiple avenues for graduate students to engage meaningfully with course material.

Student feedback from graduate school counseling (SC) students at both mid-semester and end-of-semester points highlighted several recommendations for strengthening engagement and learning. Students emphasized the importance of more consistent class structures, clearer connections between assigned readings and in-class content, additional scaffolding of complex concepts, culturally grounded examples, and more structured opportunities for reflection. Students also noted that relational safety, attention to nervous system regulation, and responsive teaching practices supported their engagement and learning process.

The instructor used this feedback as an ongoing relational feedback loop to adjust instruction in real time. This process demonstrated teaching with aloha as an adaptive and culturally responsive practice that centers graduate students' voices, supports relational presence, and fosters shared accountability for learning. These iterative adjustments strengthened content integration, deepened reflective dialogue, and enhanced students' ability to apply course concepts in practical, professional contexts.

Assessment Tools and Methods Used

The HĀ framework aligns strongly with the goals of counselor education, including the preparation of culturally responsive, ethically grounded, and developmentally competent school counselors who can promote student academic, social-emotional, and career development while engaging in systemic advocacy and equity-focused practice. Within school counselor education specifically, these aims are reflected in the “ASCA National Model’s” emphasis on social-emotional learning, equity, and systemic awareness (ASCA, 2025b). Using HĀ as a pedagogical compass reminds both faculty and students that education is inseparable from culture, relationship, and community; it is the practice of breathing together. By intentionally embedding each HĀ element into counseling pedagogy, faculty and supervisors guide students toward professional dispositions that are culturally responsive, ethically grounded, and developmentally cultivated.

‘ŌHI‘A LEHUA AS A DISPOSITIONAL GROWTH FRAMEWORK

He lā‘au kū ho‘okahi, he lehua no Ka‘ala. [A lone tree, a lehua of Ka‘ala].

This ‘*Ōlelo No‘eau* (proverb) is an expression of admiration for an outstanding person, unequaled in beauty, wisdom, or skill. This comes with practice and reflection over time. Teaching with aloha reframes dispositional assessment as relational and developmental. This conceptualization builds upon the Ho‘oulu framework developed within the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa College of Education, which positions professional dispositions as context-responsive, culturally grounded, and developmental processes supported through mentoring, reflection, and community (Simpson Steele et al., 2026). Drawing on the ‘ōhi‘a lehua as an Indigenous metaphor, dispositional indicators are dynamic and context responsive. Changes in engagement are interpreted as invitations for connection and growth rather than immediate concern. Through intentional pedagogical design, including structured feedback, guided reflection, and scaffolded learning experiences, students are supported in enacting both relational and ethical competencies.

In the College of Education at University of Hawai‘i Mānoa, across graduate and undergraduate programs, professional growth is described through the stages of the ‘ōhi‘a lehua (*Metrosideros polymorpha*), which is one of the most iconic and culturally significant plants in Hawai‘i. As seen in Figure A1, this floral representation embodies school counselor candidates’ dispositional growth as they develop into professionals who exhibit the characteristics of an outstanding school counselor. Figure A1 is intended as pedagogical sense-making tools rather than prescriptive assessment instruments to support relational and culturally responsive teaching in counselor education.

To operationalize these dispositions, the dispositional Assessment D: ‘Ōhi‘a Lehua Tool was developed as a visual and reflective guide for professional growth. This tool offers a developmental model for counselor education students, just as the lehua tree progresses from seed to full bloom, candidates advance from early promise to professional excellence by cultivating the values and dispositions embedded in the HĀ framework.

The metaphor of the ‘ōhi‘a lehua tree not only illustrates stages of professional dispositional growth but also reinforces the cultural and place-based values of Hawai‘i, providing a tangible and meaningful representation of the abstract qualities fostered by the HĀ framework. Counselors-in-training progress intentionally through stages, from ‘*Ano‘ano* (seed) to *Hōpoe* (full bloom), through practice, reflection, feedback, and mentorship (*kāko‘o*). This integration ensures that dispositional development is holistic, culturally grounded, and aligned with the program’s philosophy of teaching with aloha. As captured by the Hawaiian proverb, “*He lā‘au kū ho‘okahi, he lehua no Ka‘ala*” (“A lone tree, a lehua of Ka‘ala”), professional excellence in counseling emerges over time through deliberate cultivation of values, reflection, and relational practice, echoing the growth of the ‘Ōhi‘a lehua in Hawai‘i’s unique landscape.

From a teaching with aloha perspective, dispositional gate checks function as developmental waypoints rather than endpoints. Each gate offers an opportunity for students to receive

feedback, reflect on their growth, and recommit to professional values that ultimately shape their work with children and adolescents. Teaching with Aloha does not negate the necessity of gatekeeping decisions. Rather, it emphasizes that even when remediation or dismissal is required, the process can be carried out with transparency, compassion, and respect for dignity, values central to ethical counseling practice.

School counseling candidates in the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa College of Education are assessed at admission and at multiple points throughout their program to ensure growth in professional dispositions essential to effective, ethical, and culturally responsive school counseling. Figure A1 (see Appendix A), illustrates professional dispositions as a context-responsive process rather than a linear progression., and it reflects both the professional standards of the field and values rooted in Hawai'i's cultural context, including the following:

- kuleana: right, privilege, concern, responsibility
- pilina: relationship, connection
- alu like: striving together, to cooperate
- ha'awina no'ono'o: thought, reflection
- aloha 'aina: love of the land and its people

In addition to these core cultural values, dispositions are assessed using the Professional Disposition Competency Assessment, Revised (PDCA-R) (Garner et al., 2020), which evaluates competencies, such as conscientiousness, cooperativeness, coping and self-care, critical thinking, cultural sensitivity, emotional stability, honesty, interpersonal skills, ethical and professional conduct, moral reasoning, openness, and self-awareness. The PDCA-R is structurally necessary, as it is a research-informed assessment process, where the 'ōhi'a lehua dispositions support the concept of teaching with aloha as a relationally transformative concept to apply to dispositional assessment processes. These dispositions are understood as developmental capacities and not as static traits, capacities cultivated through reflective practice, relational engagement, and guided mentorship.

Discussion and Implications

Teaching with Aloha offers a Hawaiian specific context for counselor educators to consider a culturally grounded approach for navigating teaching in challenging sociopolitical times. By centering care, belonging, and relational accountability, these practices support counselor resilience and ethical professional identity development, with implications for downstream counseling services. Collectively, this work contributes to a growing body of scholarship demonstrating that Native Hawaiian values can inform pedagogy, assessment, professional dispositions, and institutional culture within educator preparation programs (Kelly et al., in press; Simpson Steele et al., 2025, 2026).

Meaningful engagement with teaching with aloha requires ongoing learning, cultural humility, relational accountability, and sustained connection to local communities, educators, and place-based practices. Counselor educators interested in culturally sustaining and relational pedagogies may benefit from engaging with professional learning communities, Indigenous and Pacific-centered educational organizations, and place-based educational initiatives within Hawai'i and beyond. The resources provided in Appendix B are offered as starting points for continued learning rather than definitive representations of Native Hawaiian knowledge or practice.

Adoption of this model can be customized to reflect specific places of learning and the contexts of those served in counselor education programs. A personalized place-based framework can support students from diverse backgrounds across a range of learning environments, from core coursework to experiential supervision groups. This brief is limited by its focus on a single institutional and cultural context. Future research could explore the adaptation of values-based, place-responsive pedagogies in other regions and counselor education settings. While teaching with aloha is rooted in Hawai'i, its emphasis on relational ethics and cultural grounding may be transferable when educators thoughtfully attend to local contexts and communities.

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Appendix A

TABLE A1

Integration of HĀ Elements in Counselor Education: Teaching Focus, Practices, and Student Outcomes

HĀ element	Teaching focus	Example teaching practices	Intended student outcome
Belonging	Inclusive classroom; cultural identity development	HĀ circles; opening rituals	Increased engagement; reduced isolation
Responsibility	Accountability; ethical practice	Group agreements; reflective check-ins	Professional responsibility; repair
Excellence	Continuous learning; professional growth	Narrative feedback; Letters of Aloha	Skill development without perfectionism
Aloha	Empathy; compassion; respect	Values-based dialogue; modeling care	Empathy; ethical presence
Total well-being	Wellness; self-care; resilience	Capacity check-ins; pacing	Resilience; self-regulation
Hawai'i	Place-based, culturally responsive practice	Community reflection; 'ike 'ike	Contextualized practice

Note. HĀ = Hawaiian values framework for teaching and learning. “Ho‘oponopono” (a traditional Hawaiian practice and philosophy centered on restoring balance, harmony, and right relationship) and similar culturally grounded practices can be integrated within HĀ circles or reflection activities as appropriate.

FIGURE A1**‘Ōhi‘a Lehua as a Relational Model of Professional Dispositional Growth**

‘Ano‘ano (Seed) 	‘Ōpu‘u Lehua (Flower bud) 	Mohala (Blooming) 	Hōpoe (Full bloom) 
A candidate may demonstrate prom-ise but may not have developed the shared norms and values of the profession yet. Ongoing feedback and reflection are critical for growth.	A developing candidate may practice some (but not all) shared norms and values of the profession or may do so inconsistently. Feedback and reflection nurture the growth of a developing candidate.	A proficient candidate intentionally and consistently demonstrates shared norms and values of the profession. They actively seek and respond to feedback for growth.	An advanced candidate may, on occasion, model higher standards than the shared values and norms of the profession. This demonstrates an exceptional level of commitment to go above and beyond expectations.

Note. This figure illustrates professional dispositions as a context-responsive process rather than a linear progression. Stages reflect relational and developmental states influenced by sociopolitical context and supported through faculty relationships, cohort connection, and culturally grounded pedagogical practices. The model depicted in this figure is reproduced and adapted with permission from the College of Education, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Used with permission.

Appendix B

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR CONTINUED LEARNING AND RELATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Hawai'i State Department of Education – Nā Hopena A'o (HĀ)

<https://hawaiipublicschools.org/about/na-hopena-a%CA%BBo-ha/>

The HĀ framework offers a statewide, culturally grounded approach centered on belonging, responsibility, excellence, aloha, total well-being, and Hawai'i. Educators use HĀ as a guide for relational, place-based, and culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices.

Pacific Circle Consortium (PCC)

<https://www.pacificcircleconsortium.org/>

The Pacific Circle Consortium (PCC) is an international network of educators, researchers, and community leaders focused on Indigenous education, sustainability, equity, and Pacific-centered learning. Participation in PCC conferences and collaborative initiatives may support educators seeking deeper engagement with relational, place-based, and culturally sustaining educational practices across Pacific communities.

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa College of Education

<https://coe.hawaii.edu/>

The College of Education offers opportunities for engagement in Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, multicultural, and place-based educational initiatives through coursework, community partnerships, research collaborations, and professional learning events.

Community and Place-Based Learning Opportunities Across Hawai'i

Educators may further deepen their understanding of Teaching with Aloha through participation in:

- community cultural events
- mālama 'āina (land stewardship/service) opportunities
- Indigenous and place-based education workshops
- Hawaiian language and cultural learning experiences
- local school-community partnerships
- relational engagement with educators, cultural practitioners, and community leaders across the islands

These experiences support ongoing development of cultural humility, relational accountability, and contextual responsiveness beyond traditional academic learning environments.

Additional Foundational Readings

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