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## Supporting school counselor's multicultural self-efficacy development through Hip Hop based coursework

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### ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods single-subject design study explored the impact of Hip Hop based counselor education coursework on school counseling master's student's multicultural competence development. In this study, students were trained in using a Hip Hop mixtape-making model for group work, and then facilitated small-groups during their internships. Analysis of repeated survey measures and two focus groups detail the impact of this novel training program on the participants' development and offer implications for research and practice.

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Cultural competence;  
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The counseling profession has long vowed to train school counselors (SCs) who are adequately prepared to work with diverse clientele. Our national organizations in counseling have established standards/guidelines (Ratts et al., 2016), codes of ethics (ACA, 2014), and made public position statements (American SC Association, 2021) which affirm this commitment. During this critical time where national conversations center on how racist school systems threaten the lives of Black and Brown youth, it is imperative that multicultural (MC) and social justice (SJ), and anti-racist competency development pervade graduate-level coursework, to ensure SCs can support Black and Brown youth in authentically processing their lived experiences (Barden et al., 2017; Ieva et al., 2021). However, SCs significantly differ in their perceived MC competence (Dameron et al., 2020), and culturally responsive approaches are seldomly used with Black youth (Jones et al., 2020).

Amidst lacking access to adequate professionals, Black and Brown youth have called on various community-defined practices (i.e. Hip Hop open mic, block parties, etc.) to serve as cathartic spaces where they can express difficult thoughts and feelings and find support and validation (Emdin et al., 2016). An SC framework called Hip Hop and Spoken Word Therapy (HHSWT) builds on this reality, infusing already-existing Hip Hop cultural practices to unveil a culturally responsive counseling process where youth write, record, and perform emotionally themed Hip Hop music (Levy, 2021). While effective in supporting youth's social and emotional development, the purpose of this study was to assess the MC competence development of SC students who were introduced to experiential HHSWT counselor education coursework.

### **Hip Hop in SC practice**

Each strand of HHSWT applies hip hop community-defined practice to the counseling processes. For example, lyric writing is used as a narrative therapy-rooted approach where youth write emotionally-themed rhymes (Levy, 2021). Collaboration as role-play places youth in pairs to co-create a Hip Hop song about a shared emotional experience, allowing youth to collectively process and share insights. In small-group work, lyric writing and collaboration as role-play can increase youth's emotional-awareness, and stress-coping skill development (Levy, 2019). SCs have used HHSWT in the design of culturally responsive counseling environments, where youth co-construct physical school environments where they feel comfortable evoking emotion (Levy, 2020). HHSWT positions youth to tell their stories as counter-narratives, resisting the minimization of their identities, and facilitates strong rapport (Kobin & Tyson, 2006; Levy & Adjapong, 2020).

HHSWT also promotes mixtape making, where youth identify an issue they deem relevant to their lives and then embark on a group-counseling process to research their theme, and then digest, write, record, and disseminate their findings. This model has supported a decrease in stress, anxiety and depression symptoms (Levy & Travis, 2020). An additional study evaluated HHSWT training as a professional development for practicing SCs, where they analyzed popular Hip Hop songs, engaged in mock-counseling sessions embodying student-written Hip Hop lyrics, and created their own song. Results found participants found a fervor to learn more from their students to further develop their MC counseling practice (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2021). While a deluge of research has assessed the impact of Hip Hop interventions on youth outcomes, and a single study on professional development outcomes, no studies explore how Hip Hop practices can be used in the training of culturally competent pre-service SCs. This study seeks to address this gap in the research specifically by introducing pre-service SCs to the Levy and Travis (2020) mixtape-making model.

### **HHSWT and development of multicultural competence in SCs**

Counselors need the skills and awareness to combat systems of social injustice, oppression, privilege, and discrimination facing the communities they serve (Crethar et al., 2008). Sue et al. (1992) defined MC competence as "a counselor's knowledge of different racial and cultural groups, awareness of personal attitudes/beliefs, and ability to use appropriate counseling skills when working with a diverse range of cultural groups" (p. 43). Other scholars task SCs with deepening understandings of their own culture, as well as their clients,' as a prerequisite for using culturally responsive and decolonized approaches and processing the intersectionalities of youth's identities (Singh et al., 2020). In schools, MC competence is uniquely important in advocating for Black and Brown youth's academic, cultural, and linguistic needs (Morrison & Bryan, 2014) and in combating racist systems that minimize identities (Emdin, 2021).

At the community level, Hip Hop practices like mixtape making have historically functioned as a pathway for individuals to challenge systems of oppression, and give voice to often underrepresented stories and identities (Ball, 2011). HHSWT has been described as a decolonized approach that positions youth as experts and enables counselors to integrate youths' cultural practices into their work (Levy et al., 2018). Hip-hop cultural practices like

*keeping it real* demands individuals do self-work necessary to authentically present their identity (Love, 2016). Performance of Hip Hop is not required to be authentic (Kruse, 2016) but practitioners must unpack stereotypical perceptions of Hip Hop and to see/hear it as youth's expression of their lived experiences (Levy, 2020). This is particularly true for White SCs, who are fed problematic depictions of Hip Hop culture, prior to their attempt to utilize it in counseling (Levy, 2021). These calls from Hip Hop scholars are aligned with the primary focus of MC competence development in graduate counseling students, which include the cultivation of awareness and knowledge of one's attitudes, values, beliefs, and biases, and the skills to offer culturally responsive approaches and challenge systems of oppression (Ratts et al., 2016). Like authenticity in Hip Hop, higher knowledge of one's racial identity (Johnson & Jackson Williams, 2015) and self-efficacy in counseling skills (Matthews et al., 2018) predict greater MC competence. As a tool, Hip Hop is a medium through which SCs can discuss social injustices with Black youth (Washington, 2018), foster a critical consciousness in developing counter-narratives (Graves et al., 2020), and becoming agents of change (Anyiwo et al., 2021). Calls for the intersections of MC competence, SJ advocacy, and challenging racist school systems are present in SC education literature (Leva et al., 2021; Motulsky et al., 2014), however, no research has examined hip hop in SC education training curriculum to promote the development of these competencies.

### **Counselor education curriculum**

Unsurprisingly, more training that one receives in their SC program is significantly associated with greater MC competence and knowledge (Gonzalez-Voller et al., 2020; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). To address gaps in MC skill development (Hill et al., 2013) graduate coursework remains one of the most promising avenues (Collins et al., 2015). Culturally relevant immersion experiences are recommended (Johnson & Jackson Williams, 2015). Allowing MC competence development to become a part of traditional lecture coursework, counseling skills classes, and practicum/internship enables MC, SJ, and anti-racist skill development to occur via role-playing, experiential activities, group work, fieldwork, reflection papers, and self- and group-reflection (Decker et al., 2016; Sheely-Moore & Kooyman, 2011; Wilczenski et al., 2011). Hays (2020) also calls for humility development, where SC students grapple with the role culture places in their lives and the lives of their clients. While there is certainly evidence of the use of Hip Hop approaches in direct work with young people, studies exploring Hip Hop pedagogy with pre-service teachers are most prominent (Akom, 2009; Rose, 2018), communicating a need to explore Hip Hop coursework across school counseling graduate programs.

### **Cultural immersion**

Considering Hip Hop in SC coursework design, MC competence might be fostered through immersive curriculum. A promising approach is digital storytelling, where students interview individuals from cultures other than their own to then co-create digital stories (Parikh-Fox et al., 2020). Digital storytelling in counseling coursework amplifies the voices of cultures that are either stereotyped or minimized, and bolsters cultural competency (Parikh-Fox et al., 2020). Creative and immersive counseling processes can

decolonize traditional counseling practices, by pushing students to consider culturally responsive approaches for diverse youth clientele (Hays, 2020). In didactic or experiential immersive activities like interviews, or racial identity auto-biographies, graduate students can address and process their own privilege (Estrada et al., 2013; Torino, 2015), learn social justice advocacy (Luu & Inman, 2018). In HHSWT, mixtape making is akin to digital storytelling in that youth engage in the collection and digestion of research around issues impacting their lives, to construct and disseminate stories through digital projects (Hip Hop songs, music videos, album artwork; Levy & Travis, 2020).

Cook et al. (2020) and Smith et al. (2014) found that SC practicum students could use various music and arts-based approaches (including Hip Hop) in small-groups with high school youth, and gather knowledge in using culturally responsive and socially congruent approaches. Given that Hip Hop leverages creativity to share counter-narratives, it is reasonable to engage graduate students in the construction of Hip Hop art during their coursework to explore self-exploration and attunement to social injustices. Hip Hop mixtape making as digital action research holds the potential to become immersive SC coursework that propels students' understanding of different cultures, ways of knowing and being, and MC competence.

## Purpose of the study

The purpose of this mixed-methods single-subject design study was to assess the impact of innovative Hip Hop counselor education coursework on pre-service SCs' multicultural self-efficacy. This project will build on previous research suggesting a need for immersive counselor education towards cultural competence by evaluating the impact of HHSWT coursework via two research questions:

- (1) How have pre-service SCs changed in their multicultural self-efficacy as a result of the HHSWT coursework?
- (2) When analyzing pre-service SCs' reflections on this experience, what evidence suggests that involvement in the HHSWT coursework supported their development?

In relation to the first question, we deployed a single-subject design including multiple measurements of the School Counselor Multicultural Self-Efficacy Scale (SCMSE; Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008), used as a quantitative assessment of MC competence for SCs. In relation to the second question, a qualitative analysis (Hays, 2020) of two focus group interviews during the coursework further examined SCs development.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants in the current study included 3 female-identifying pre-service SCs enrolled in a SC master's program, who were all in their second year and completing virtual internship experiences in New York City schools. The PI in this study is the director of the SC program in which the participants were enrolled, and sent an email out to all second-year students requesting volunteers for this study. Participation would require students

to meet virtually with the PI, outside of class time, for training and supervision in the use of Hip Hop counseling practices at their internship site. Three students volunteered to participate. Participant 1 was 26 year old and identified as a White woman. Participant 2 was 26 years old, and identified as a biracial (White and Asian) woman. Participant 3 was 24 years old and identified as a White woman. This study explored the impact of coursework that contained two distinct interventions (training and facilitation phases) on SC student's development. The training phase was a series of experiential sessions where students learned the theoretical skills associated with mixtape making, and engaged in experiential processes to understand it practically. Next, during the facilitation phase, SC student's ran hip-hop small groups at their internship sites.

## **Procedure**

The researcher received IRB approval from their institution prior to the start of this study. As a recruitment measure, an email message was sent to an active SC student listserv within the graduate program at the college where this study took place. A total of three students consented to participate. This mixed-methods single-subject design study followed an A<sup>1</sup> B<sup>1</sup> A<sup>2</sup> B<sup>2</sup> structure (Byiers et al., 2012), lasting from October 2020 to April 2021. The phases were as follows: *Baseline One* (A<sup>1</sup>) during October 2020, *Training Phase* (B<sup>1</sup>) during November 2020, *Baseline Two* (A<sup>2</sup>) during December 2020, and then *Small-Group Facilitation Phase* (B<sup>2</sup>) from January 2021-May 2021. During *Baseline One* (A<sup>1</sup>), the researcher administered an online qualtrics survey twice. During *Training* (B<sup>1</sup>) the PI administered the survey twice, and participants engaged in a post-training focus group. During *Baseline Two* (A<sup>2</sup>), the PI administered the survey twice. During *Facilitation* (B<sup>2</sup>) the PI administered the survey three times, participants attended ongoing consultation/supervision groups, and engaged in a post-facilitation focus group. Each online survey administration took participants 15 minutes to complete, and each focus group ran for a total of 90 minutes. The online survey contained the SCMSE, as well as brief demographic and background information which asked participants for their age, race, ethnicity, and gender.

## **Hip hop and SC education curriculum**

The Levy and Travis (2020) model informed the development of the coursework. The mixtape model follows a series of stages, including: *Identifying Action Mixtape Area of Interest*, *Researching Mixtape Content*, *Discussing and Digesting Findings*, *Developing a Tracklist*, *Planning the Recording and Release of Mixtape*, and *Evaluating the Mixtape Process and Responses to Release*. Mixtape-making participants are leaders in developing a multimodal final project (songs, videos, and/or album artwork) that is disseminated via a listening party or showcase (Levy & Travis, 2020). The mixtape-making model was used as an experiential group work process during the training phase, and the guide the SCs direct facilitation of small-groups.

*Baseline One and the Training Phase.* Throughout *Baseline One* (A1), students met for two one-hour sessions reviewing the theoretical foundation and practical implications of HHSWT with the PI. This introductory period was to allow participants to ask questions about the study, and to develop some foundational understanding, while allowing time for multiple baseline measurements. The *Training Phase* (B1) consisted of 4 one-hour

sessions, weekly. Following the immersive mixtape model, various activities supported participants in identifying a theme to write about, researching and writing a chorus to their song, writing a verse for their song, and then recording their song and making album artwork. For example, an artist notebook allowed reflection and dialogue about the pre-service counselors interests, thoughts about Hip Hop, and potential song topic to write about. Choosing to write about racial inequities, the PI took the group through analyzing a song by artist J. Cole called *Neighbors* where he raps about experiencing racial trauma after moving into an affluent and mostly-White suburban neighborhood as a Black man. This song was listened to, and discussed, as a means of gathering research for students to write a song about racial inequities. Through this exercise, and those of the like, graduate students also practiced actively listening to Hip Hop songs for underlying emotional and cognitive content that could then be discussed in sessions. Each of the baseline and training phases sessions were held virtually via zoom. Participants were introduced to an online song recording software, Soundtrap, that was used to write and then collectively record their song. Throughout this experiential training, the researcher treated participants as group-members, allowing them to become familiar with the Hip Hop small-group process. At the start of each session, however, the facilitator described the curriculum and how it corresponded with the mixtape model. At the conclusion of each session, the PI described his noticings about the group process, and allowed the participants to ask questions about group-lesson structure, how it was facilitated, and contemplate facilitating future hip hop youth-groups.

*Baseline Two and Small-Group Facilitation Phase.* During *Baseline Two*, the researcher met with students twice across the month in which they again reviewed the mixtape model and process theoretically and as a curricular guide for the small-group work, and troubleshooted logistics for facilitation including: length of sessions, frequency of group meetings, participant recruitment, norms/rituals, etc. The final stage of the study included the *Small-Group Facilitation Phase* (B2), where students were to meet with their small-groups of youth at their internship sites for 12 weeks. During facilitation, graduate students would take youth through an iterative mixtape process where they created a medley of Hip Hop songs about topics of importance to them. While students met with youth weekly, they met with the researcher bi-weekly (outside of their other classes) for supervision where they processed their group work. The small-group facilitation concluded with a virtual youth-showcase that allowed the graduate student facilitators and youth to convene and share-out their small-group projects. While all participants engaged in the training phase, due to logistical barriers in schools during COVID-19, only one participant (Participant A) was able to run a Hip Hop group during the facilitation phase. Regardless, Participants B and C attended all supervision sessions and completed each survey assessment and focus group during the facilitation phase.

### ***Instruments***

Data collection in the study occurred in the form of an online survey that was administered a total of 9 times (*Baseline One* – 2 times, *Training Phase* – 2 times, *Baseline Two* – 2 times, *Small-Group Facilitation Phase* – 3 times). Two rounds of focus group data were also collected after the training phase, and again after the small-group facilitation phase.



### *SCs multicultural self-efficacy scale*

Holcomb-McCoy et al. (2008) developed SCMSE as a 52-item measure where participants rate how well they perform a given task. Using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not well at all) to 7 (very well), participants respond to items like “I can assess my own racial/ethnic identity development in order to enhance my counseling.” and “I can identify when a counseling approach is culturally inappropriate for a specific student.” The SCMSE was validated globally with a coefficient alpha of 0.93. In the current study, the Cronbach’s alphas for the SCMSE total scores at each of the 9 timepoints were good, ranging from .93 to .99.

## *Data analysis*

### *Quantitative analysis*

To evaluate the role of HHSWT coursework on SC trainees’ multicultural self-efficacy development, an ABAB single-subject design was employed. Results were analyzed visually using the conservative dual criteria (Fisher et al., 2003) and by calculating the Percent of Non-overlapping Data (PND; Alresheed et al., 2013; Parker & Hagan-Burke, 2007) between the baseline and intervention phases. The Percent of All Non-overlapping Data could not be considered as we did not meet the minimum 20 data points requirement (Alresheed et al., 2013).

Based on trainees’ multicultural self-efficacy scores across the four phases (A1, B1, A2, B2), we visually analyzed score changes across baseline and intervention phases by creating a graph with multicultural self-efficacy score on the y-axis across time as recommended in the literature (Dixon et al., 2009). On the graphs, we plotted the true trend (i.e. slope; average change in mc scores) and the mean line (i.e. average mc score) for each phase (e.g. phase of A of the ABAB design). These lines were used as an objective criterion to compare the phases.

Complementing the visual analysis, following Alresheed et al. (2013), we calculated the PND, which is the most commonly reported and best-known metric to assess overlapping data between phases. Phi coefficient with a corresponding *p*-value that represents the extent to which the baseline MC data overlaps with the intervention phase. The PND was calculated by dividing the number of intervention phase data points that exceed the highest baseline phase data point by the total number of data points in the intervention phase. This ratio was multiplied by 100 to generate a percentage (range = 0–100). We calculated the PND for each baseline-intervention pairing (A1 to B1 and then A2 to B2). The PND values were used to aid the analysis of the effectiveness of the HHSWT coursework. A PND range of 70–90% suggests a fairly effective treatment while a PND of more than 90% reflects high effectiveness (Alresheed et al., 2013).

### *Qualitative analysis*

The qualitative data in this study were in the form of two audio-recorded focus group interviews after both the training and facilitation phases. Participants met with the researcher on zoom for each 90-minute focus group, following an interview script in accordance with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009). IPA was selected by the PI as an approach to action research that allows researchers to play a role in guiding a process that leads to the development of theoretical and practical



knowledge (Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007). Smith et al. (2009) posit there is no clear definition for sample size, Clarke (2010) stated a sample size of three is standard in IPA studies Masters students. IPA is inherently a subjective phenomenological approach that allows researchers to collect and assess reflections from participants, with the goal of understanding their meaning (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA is found to facilitate understanding of the participants' world and subjective experiences, typically as they relate to a specific event or phenomenon common to all participants being interviewed (Chapman & Smith, 2002). To remain in compliance with IPA, and to position the graduate students as the leaders of the focus group discussions, the researchers developed a malleable semi-structured interview guide to use in their facilitation (Smith et al., 2009). Using the script as a guide, the facilitators and the participants were allowed to ask follow-up questions to support the processing of the experience. Given that the focus groups occurred via zoom, these sessions were audio recorded, downloaded, and transcribed prior to data analysis.

IPA data analysis sought to illuminate the meaning behind the graduate students' comments during the focus groups. IPA details a series of steps for data analysis that the researchers followed. First, two researchers downloaded the transcriptions into separate word documents, read and re-read the contents, and engaged in their own identification of codes that signified meaning (codes; Smith et al., 2009). Then, all codes were placed beneath lower-order themes that used a descriptive word or short phrase to the common meaning between the codes. All codes sat beneath lower-order themes which were finally grouped beneath high-order themes (Saldana, 2013). While each researcher engaged in this process alone to generate meaning of the graduate students' experience in the program, they eventually met together to reconcile differences in their findings and mutually decide on a singular list of themes. Much deliberation took place to finalize the title of lower-order and higher-order themes to represent the complexities of the codes that sat within them.

*Research Team and Trustworthiness.* The research team included two counselor educators. The lead author identifies as a White man who recognizes his privilege as a researcher, cisheteromascuine man, a pre-service SC supervisor, and interventionist in this study. He holds a range of prior experience as a SC, specializing in the use of Hip Hop-based counseling practices to support student development, as well as the writing of his own Hip Hop music as a cathartic outlet. The second author is a heterosexual cisgender Korean man who was trained in counseling psychology and currently works as an assistant professor at an R1 institution. He recognizes his privilege as a professor, and a cisheteromascuine man. He holds experience on culturally-informed and anti-racist practices in counseling.

The research team used various trustworthiness strategies identified as important for improving the credibility and reliability of the data (Hays & Singh, 2011). As a reflexivity practice while using IPA, the researchers acknowledged the importance of circumventing biases through constant self-reflection. This meant the PI recognized their privileged position as a White researcher as they simultaneously sought to elevate the voices of the pre-service SCs' perspectives and experiences. All members of the research team also practiced bracketing – putting aside their prior beliefs about the study phenomena prior to engaging with the data (Carpenter, 2007). Specifically, the researchers used a reflexive diary to record thoughts, feelings, and biases regarding how the research process was

impacting them, their reactions to participants, and anticipated findings (Hays & Singh, 2011). While there are risks associated with having the PI function as the interventionist in an IPA study, this prolonged engagement between the PI and the participants can support the cultivation of trust necessary to gather authentic perceptions of participants' experiences (Hays & Singh, 2011). Additionally, the lead researcher turned to a fellow counselor educator (who had not been a part of this program in any capacity) to serve as an auditor (Patton, 2015). This auditor role required the third party to review the work of their colleagues with the goal of highlighting any missing codes or themes within the analysis, increasing rigor/agreement in the final list of themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The first two authors met, reviewed the feedback from the auditor and made changes to confirm a final list of themes. Through the aforementioned processes, the researchers believe trustworthiness was achieved consistent with standards in qualitative inquiry (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

## Results

### Quantitative analysis

A series of survey measures were analyzed for Participants A, B and C individually. Preliminary descriptive statistics of the phase scores for the three participants are listed in Table 1. A preliminary independent t-test revealed that participant A had significantly higher Training phase scores than Participant B,  $t(2) = 23.48, p = .002$ , and Participant C,  $t(2) = 11.62, p = .007$ . Participant A also had significantly higher Facilitation phase scores than Participant B,  $t(2) = 12.12, p < .001$ , and Participant C,  $t(2) = 6.99, p = .002$ . Participant C had significantly higher Training phase scores than participant B,  $t(2) = 12.94, p = .006$ , but the Facilitation phase scores did not significantly differ between participants B and C,  $t(2) = .68, p = .536$ .

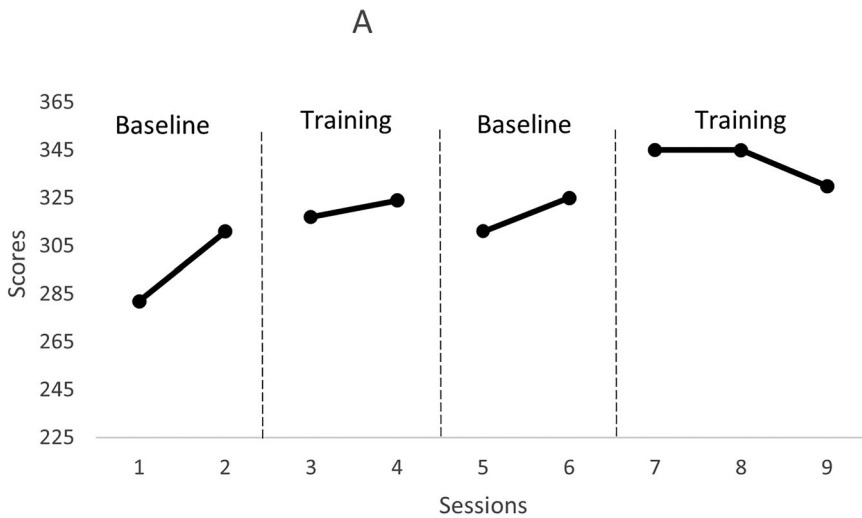
### Visual analysis and PND

Specifically, regarding the first research question, we asked, *How have pre-service SCs changed in their multicultural self-efficacy as a result of the HHSWT coursework?* As seen in Figure 1, participant A's MC scores increased from baseline 1 to training phase and there were no overlapping data points between the two phases. The PND was 100% suggesting that the training was highly effective. Participant A's MC scores also increased

**Table 1.** Descriptive summary of the phase scores.

Statistics	A	B	C
Phase scores	A1: 282, 311 B1: 317, 324 A2: 311, 325 B2: 345, 345, 330	A1: 231, 170 B1: 237, 238 A2: 240, 233 B2: 280, 279, 278	A1: 264, 252 B1: 268, 273 A2: 271, 295 B2: 295, 273, 282
Number of scores	9	9	9
SDs	19.35	34.52	14.02
Phase means	A1: 296.5 B1: 347.5 A2: 318 B2: 340	A1: 200.5 B1: 237.5 A2: 236.5 B2: 279	A1: 258 B1: 270.5 A2: 283 B2: 283.3

Note. A1 = baseline 1; B1 = Training phase; A2 = baseline 2; B2 = Facilitation Phase.

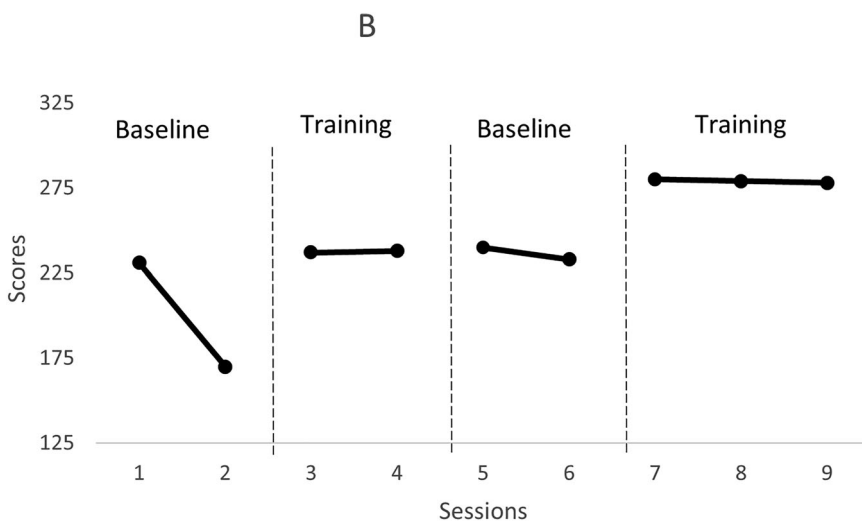


**Figure 1.** Multicultural competence scores by session for A ( $N = 9$ ).

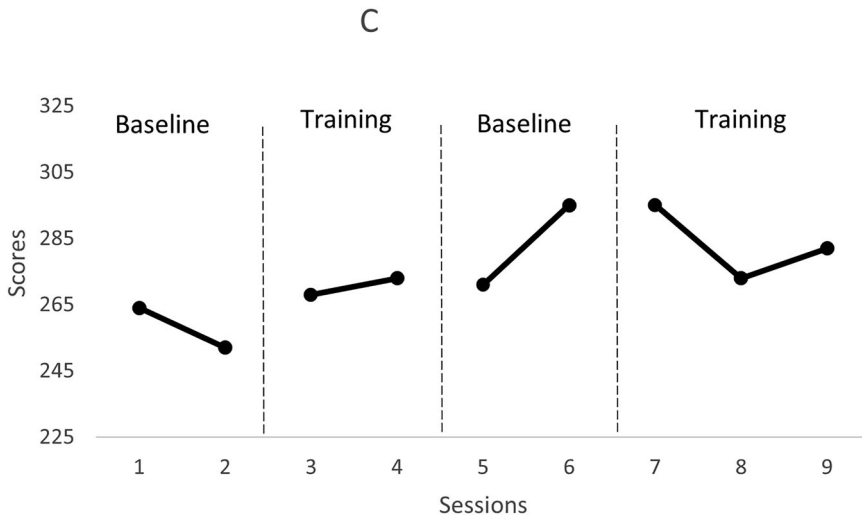
from baseline 2 to facilitation phase. The PND was again 100%, suggesting that the facilitation phase was also highly effective.

As seen in [Figure 2](#), participant B's MC scores increased from baseline 1 to training phase but the training phase scores were only a little higher than the highest baseline 1 score. Regardless, the PND was 100% suggesting that the training was highly effective. Participant B's MC scores also increased from baseline 2 to the facilitation phase. The PND was again 100%, suggesting that the second facilitation phase was also highly effective.

As seen in [Figure 3](#), participant C's MC scores increased from baseline 1 to the training phase. The PND was 100% suggesting that the training was highly effective. Conversely,



**Figure 2.** Multicultural competence scores by session for B ( $N = 9$ ).



**Figure 3.** Multicultural competence scores by session for C ( $N = 9$ ).

participant C's MC scores did not increase from baseline 2 to the facilitation phase. All of the facilitation phase scores were below the highest baseline 2 data point. The PND was 0%, suggesting that the facilitation phase was not effective at all.

### Qualitative analysis

An interpretive phenomenological analysis post-training and post-facilitation focus group data answered the second research question, *When analyzing pre-service SCs' reflections on this experience, what evidence suggests that involvement in the HHSWT coursework supported their development?* The results are described within this section, by research question, organized by higher and lower-order themes. Through data analysis the post-training focus groups with all 3 graduate student participants, the following higher-order themes and respective lower-order themes emerged: (1) Competence through Experiential Learning (containing the lower-order themes of *Shifting Power Dynamics*, *Facilitating Racial/Cultural Dialogues*, and *Developing Relationships*). Next, when analysing the post-facilitation focus group with the same 3 graduate students, one higher-order theme and respective lower-order themes emerged: (2) Implementing a Hip Hop Group Process (containing the lower-order themes of *Comfort with Difficult Dialogues*, *Understanding Hip Hop as Culturally Relevant*, *Advocacy Skills*, *Belief in Utility*, and *Needing More Experience*). Each theme is explained, as well as any lower-order themes, and graduate student quotes illustrate the findings.

#### Competence through experiential learning

Data analysis of graduate student focus groups post-training intervention resulted in the emergence of the first higher-order theme, Competence through Experiential Learning. This higher-order theme describes myriad ways in which the training phase impacted the graduate students' MC self-efficacy development, and was composed of two lower-order themes: (a) *Shifting Power Dynamics*, and (b) *Facilitating Racial/Cultural Dialogues*.

*Shifting power dynamics.* Quotes that fell within the *shifting power dynamics* lower-order theme suggested that by working through the mixtape model as a participant, graduate students understood the importance of allowing group members to guide the process. This shift away from having group facilitators hold the power of directing the group was present in a statement by Participant B who said, "So I feel as though the training has really helped me be more confident in allowing the students to really be the ones to drive group work and really let them be the people that are in charge." Then, Participant A concurred in the following statement:

For me, when I was first beginning this, I was more focused on me and how I would do facilitating such a group. And now, like [Participant B] said, I've learned it's not really about me. The focus is on them, and I just am there to help them along, and I feel more confident that I can do that now.

Both of these statements, in addition to others, illustrate that through experientially being a group member in the mixtape model process, graduate students valued having the ability to drive their group forward. Consequently, they communicated that working to shift power to youth in their future groups was essential.

*Facilitating racial/cultural dialogues.* A second lower-order theme, *facilitating racial/cultural dialogues* indicated that engaging in the mixtape model training as a group participant supported graduate students in broaching difficult conversations around racial identity, racial injustice, and cultural differences. Specifically, the students pointed to mixtape model activities that functioned as comfortable springboards into seemingly intimidating conversations about race and racial identity. Participant A described this process well in the following statement:

What I did notice, which I knew before, but it just kind of highlighted it for me, is listening to J Cole and listening to our groups versus it's like I can ... I recognize my privilege, I can't rap about so many things, I haven't had some ... A lot of personal struggles that other people have, and a lot of that J Cole song and a lot of people rap about racial injustice and their personal experiences with it, and I am privileged enough to say, I can't do that.

*Developing relationships.* The third lower-order theme, *developing relationships* contained quotes that described the rapport graduate students built with each other during their experiential training coursework. This is distinct from developing relationships with students and pertains to the impact of the mixtape model process, in graduate coursework, on the development of group dynamics. A quote from Participant C highlighted this rapport:

Well, I know we came into this. We didn't really know each other, all of us. And it's over Zoom, too, so that was a challenge, I think. And we're getting kind of vulnerable in sharing things. And yeah, maybe I could see [future students] being more open to sharing what they think and suggestions.

This quote evidences that participating in the mixtape model allowed for participants to be vulnerable, reach each other, develop stronger relationships, and believe that the process could have a similar impact on their future students. Participants were also impressed this process could unfold virtually. Participant A shared similar feedback saying, "hip hop can bring so many people together, and I've appreciated it through this work ... So of course, I think that's gonna bring me closer to my students, when they have that space in a school to talk about themselves."

### *Developing hip hop facilitation skills and knowledge*

Data analysis of post-facilitation focus groups also resulted in the emergence of the second higher-order theme of Developing Hip Hop Facilitation Skills and Knowledge. This higher-order theme describes how participating in the facilitation intervention (including running youth groups and attending ongoing supervision sessions) influenced graduate students multicultural competence development, and included the lower-order themes of: (a) Comfort with Difficult Dialogues, (b) Understanding Hip Hop as Culturally Relevant, (c) Advocacy Skills, (d) Belief in Utility, and (e) Needing More Experience.

*Comfort with difficult conversations.* The first lower-order theme of *comfort with difficult conversations* describes how graduate students continued to grow in their willingness and ability to talk about race and racism throughout the facilitation phase. When discussing their growth throughout the year, and how they reported that growth on the SCMSE, Participant B student stated:

I think for me, the biggest change is just the comfortability or just being more comfortable even talking about race and racism to begin with. I think maybe in the past before doing this work, I maybe struggled with the right terminology and the right way to phrase things.

Participating in ongoing supervision sessions throughout the year allowed Participant B to acquire better vocabulary and comfort discussing race and racism – even without the experience of facilitating a group. However, also commenting on their ability to navigate hard conversations in direct small-group facilitation, Participant A stated:

there was times where it was like three weeks there, where something happened, right before I ran the group, or during the inauguration of Biden, and the riots at the Capitol, and I remember those being the most challenging points, because I didn't feel like I was competent enough, especially in the moment, to be leading a discussion about these things, but then on the other hand, I gained a lot of experience, being out of my comfort zone, which I know is very necessary.

Here we see that facilitation of groups during internship allowed Participant A to develop MC competence in the real-time processing of a national crisis.

*Understanding Hip Hop as culturally relevant.* The second lower-order theme, *application of culturally relevant approaches* contained quotes that signified practical and culturally responsive strategies students gleaned from the facilitation phase. Participant C described the utility of Hip Hop as a creative outlet that lets students work through issues impacting their lives, on their own terms:

It was great learning how this is used to not only work with students of any background that can really implement some form of creativity into what they want to talk about, or this is a way to have students discuss about social justice issues, or even just about their lives, and they're ... Or using this way to kind of navigate through their mental health is a very refreshing way to do this work.

Additionally, Participant B talked about Hip Hop being an alternative approach to talk therapy that would allow you to have fun and express themselves in ways they might not otherwise. Specifically, they said:

I will say using hip hop and other forms of art and artistic expression in counseling, which I think is going to be amazing because kids definitely don't always respond well to the very

traditional, we're just gonna sit and talk, we're gonna do all the traditional counseling things, but they will respond really well to a fun project like this.

*Advocacy skills.* The third lower-order theme illuminated various *advocacy skills* that graduate students developed during the facilitation phase. Participant A spoke about how they now could use their prior facilitation experience to advocate for continued use of this approach:

in a school that I'm working at, I wanna make this happen and I'm receiving pushback, I can fight for it. I've been through this process, I've seen how beneficial it is all around. I can even use my experience. I can tell them, Hey, this really worked with the kids I worked with, and especially during a pandemic and sell it.

Reflecting on their frustration and general lack of understanding about pushback they received from administration, Participant B said:

We're trying to be anti-racist. We're trying to be a very diverse school and inclusive, but if we're not allowing to bring in these different types of approaches to working with students that could help them out or bring a little bit of something into the table then compared to the traditional kind of counseling to where some students may feel a bit uncomfortable in the traditional sense, it's just like ... why would we not want to bring that in?

While hard to articulate, Participant B appears to be aware of how this approach aligns with her school's proclaimed mission, and notes her school's failure to stand for what they represent.

*Belief in utility.* The fourth lower-order theme, *belief in utility*, was composed of comments from graduates describing how and why they believed in the use of Hip Hop-based approaches in practice. Considering their small-group facilitation, Participant A described a powerful moment in group that made them believe this approach was valuable:

after the riots, and after the inauguration that the group of four showed up to a meeting with a whole poem, I guess it was. And it just felt like ... Out of nowhere, I wasn't expecting to write that much, but from ... They were reminiscing on the culmination of four terrible years. They wrote out this whole long thing which they didn't end up using as their final piece. But that ... I remember feeling like, wow, this is working. I just wasn't expecting them to come back with that. And on that topic too.

While Participant B did not facilitate a group, they did converse with educators about this approach and received positive feedback which helped them believe in its utility:

I think just getting to talk to folks from different school environments and seeing that there are people that are super-receptive to [Hip Hop in school counseling] out there has been really encouraging also, and it has encouraged me to just continue to, you know, bring my ideas to the forefront.

*Need more experience.* The fifth lower-order theme showcased how all participants, regardless of their direct facilitation experience, felt they *needed more experience* to develop in MC competence. Participant C put this plainly when they described taking repeated measures of the SCMSE, "there are just certain aspects of my skills that I need to kind of, either get more experience seeing where I am, or just how to improve on those things a bit more." Building on this same feeling, Participant A said:

I didn't have to call out any colleagues on any racist actions. I didn't have to use data to support what I was doing, but I feel like I could, like using ... I didn't measure anything,



but if I run the group later, I could do something like, a survey before, and after, and then use that, to show administration that the group works. So in that way, yeah. I have to put myself in these situations later, to be able to really tell if I could do it.

## Discussion

Overall, the findings of this study are encouraging for the use of HHSWT in graduate coursework. Results of the current study indicated the training phase of the HHSWT course offering was highly effective in supporting all participants MC competence development. Existing counselor education coursework recommends the development of MC competence be offered through lectures, learning counseling skills, role-playing, experiential activities, and group-reflection (Decker et al., 2016; Sheely-Moore & Kooyman, 2011; Wilzenski et al., 2011). In support of this research, the training phase in the current study tasked participants with similar activities and proved highly effective in aiding graduate student MC development. These activities included learning about the theoretical underpinnings of HHSWT through lecture, practicing active listening, and the use of microskills through listening to and discussing the emotional and cognitive content behind Hip Hop lyrics. As a culturally-bound process, training immersed participants in experiential mixtape making where they collaborated on a Hip Hop song and album artwork about a shared emotional experience. Much existing research on digital storytelling, mixtape making as a cultural immersion activity in counselor education coursework holds promise in furthering student's MC development (Parikh-Foxx et al., 2020). The qualitative findings offer further evidence that the training functioned as experiential learning that bolstered competence. Similar to prior counselor education research (Keum et al., 2021), the current study found that Hip Hop action research in graduate coursework can also allow students to understand the need to deconstruct power dynamics to let youth lead group work, and to gather an increased comfort in discussing race and racism in schooling. Additionally, the participants believed in Hip Hop as a mechanism that can support their relationship development with peers and with future clients (Kobin & Tyson, 2006).

However, during the facilitation phase of the current study Participant A experienced more significant development than Participants B and C. As noted within the methodology, while all participants continued to engage in the facilitation phase (through ongoing supervision and attempting to run Hip Hop small-groups during their internships), only Participant A was successful in administering a Hip Hop small-group. This distinction is important and aids prior claims that the combination of didactic pedagogical practices with experiential learning will further MC competence development (Torino, 2015), specifically during internship coursework (Collins et al., 2015). In essence, while there are notable benefits for all participants (specifically within the training), facilitation allowed Participant A the opportunity to further their development through the implementation of Hip Hop mixtape making as action research with youth (Cook et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2014) in ways that Participants B and C could not. For example, the facilitation phase increased Participant A's exposure to experiential learning through the opportunity to lead a Hip Hop small-group, and counselor education literature indicates more training can lead to more MC competence development (Gonzalez-Voller et al., 2020). Also, Participant A had unique opportunities to self-reflect on their counseling skill self-efficacy efficacy, and process their privilege and the impact of their racial

identity and cultural background/worldviews on the counseling process, which both predict greater MC competence (Estrada et al., 2013; Johnson & Jackson Williams, 2015; Matthews et al., 2018).

The lack of facilitation experience for all participants is not necessarily a fault of the HHSWT coursework, which provided ongoing support and supervision to all participants as they tried to convince their administration to allow their small-groups to run. In fact, the qualitative findings of this study suggest that through running or attempting to run groups at their schools, participants developed advocacy skills that could aid them in the eventual facilitation of Hip Hop groups as SCs. This is promising and suggestive of HHSWT's effectiveness as culturally responsive graduate coursework that spurs social justice advocacy in counselors (Hays, 2020; Luu & Inman, 2018). Given the impact of group reflection on MC competence development (Collins et al., 2015), it is possible that engaging in on-going discussion about facilitation struggles and successes together as a group allowed all participants to continue their development at some level. SCs are required to challenge racist policies in schools that prevent their use of culturally responsive interventions (Leva et al., 2021; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018), and the facilitation phase certainly offered participants a glimpse into the very real struggles school counselors face when attempting to engage in anti-racist work.

Regardless of individual experiences within the facilitation phase, the qualitative findings indicated that all participants developed increased comfort discussing race, racism, and their racial identities in group dialogue. This finding is synonymous with research showing that cohesion and social justice norms can have a positive impact on trainees' individual SJ/MC development (Keum et al., 2021, in press; Keum & Miller, 2020). The group format of these discussions likely helped trainees' develop a collective identity around social justice and race-related issues. Qualitative findings further indicate participants also found increased beliefs in the use of Hip Hop as a culturally relevant tactic to engage students (Levy, 2021), as a decolonial approach that transcends traditional talk therapy (Singh et al., 2020), and one that offers opportunities for youth to share their counter-narratives and challenge systems of racism (Anyiwo et al., 2021; Graves et al., 2020). Lastly, despite the myriad of gains, participants felt they needed more opportunities to continue to cultivate skills (Gonzalez-Voller et al., 2020; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). In sum, building on the use of HHSWT in direct SC practice with young people (Levy, 2021), this study encourages the further exploration of the HHSWT coursework in SC graduate coursework.

### ***Limitations and implications for research***

Despite the strengths of the study utilizing both quantitative and qualitative evidence to document the effectiveness of HHSWT training, there are several noteworthy limitations that inform future research. First, given that we used a single-subject design, our sample is limited and the findings cannot be generalized. The significance of HHSWT in developing MC may be an important preliminary evidence and it must be replicated in future longitudinal and intervention studies that incorporate a larger, more representative, and more diverse sample of counselor trainees. For instance, the majority of our samples were White women and the training would need to be examined for other genders and across other racial minority groups (e.g. Black, Latinx, Native, etc.). In doing so, greater attention must

be paid toward the power dynamics within the HHSWT process wherein White trainees must critically explore their White privileges whereas racial minority trainees must be validated for speaking to issues that largely reflect the everyday reality of oppression they may be experiencing in the society. Furthermore, the quantitative data was collected with a self-report survey which could introduce social desirability bias. Hence, it may be important for future studies to incorporate a more objective rating of their MC development, such as having trained coders rate the multicultural development of the trainees based on the recording of their facilitation sessions.

Second, the current study did not have a specific control group to compare the significance of the training. While participants B and C unexpectedly provided some control as to the importance of actual facilitation, future studies should incorporate a larger randomized sampling to assess the degree of effectiveness for HHSWT training in comparison to a control group (general MC training or no training).

Third, there are some subjective aspects of the training that limits generalizability such as instructor effect and trainees' interests in HHSWT. By design, the instructor in the study was an expert and versed in HHSWT. Trainees were also interested in HHSWT and self-selected into the training. This begs the question of how HHSWT would fare in developing MC competency for trainees for instructors who are not as versed or knowledgeable in HHSWT and trainees who might have differing views and preferences toward MC development (e.g. colorblind racial attitudes, critical consciousness). Hence, future studies would need to test the effectiveness of HHSWT across a range of interests, experiences, and beliefs toward Hip Hop and MC development, as well as its potential for general dissemination.

Fourth, the assessment of MC competence was limited to a single measure in this study. It would be important for future studies to consider a wider array of outcomes that are not solely based on SC's MC self-efficacy. Other outcomes such as ethnocultural empathy, critical consciousness, and social justice attitudes could be considered to assess other dimensions of MC-related development. Beyond MC, more contemporary frameworks such as anti-racism and decolonization praxis should be considered to assess how HHSWT could help develop anti-racist and decolonization perspectives in counselor education.

### ***Implications for practice and conclusion***

This study offers multiple practical implications for counselor educators. First, counselors educators should be encouraged to offer lectures, reading, and didactic and experiential coursework rooted in Hip Hop and SC literature. The use of these approaches in graduate programs can support student's MC competence development. Second, the HHSWT coursework holds promise as a mechanism to introduce anti-racist or anti-oppression frameworks to students, particularly to make sense of how to challenge racist school systems. Third, the integration of the HHSWT coursework within the SC graduate curriculum can support students in fostering youth voice and action research. Given the benefits of Hip Hop small-group facilitation during graduate preparation, SC educators are encouraged to preemptively form partnerships with schools/site-supervisors that will allow internships to facilitate Hip Hop groups with ease. The current study builds on prior literature (Akorn, 2009; Rose, 2018) to mark the first attempt, albeit with a small sample, to

assess the use of Hip Hop based coursework on pre-service SCs MC development. The results are encouraging and, ultimately, should push counselor educators to continue exploring the utility of HHSWT in counselor education research and practice.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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