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Special Issue: Ensuring a Combined Educator-Counselor Identity: A Critical Examination of School Counselor Training

The Evaluation of a Hip-Hop and School Counselor Education Course

Ian P. Levy ⓘ , James P. Norris ⓘ , LaNita Jefferson

Abstract

The training of future school counselors to integrate school-based mental health resources has never been as important within a climate where U.S. schools replicate the racial violence and fear seen nationally, at the expense of well-being. Fostering multicultural counseling competencies in school counselors are critical in order to address the challenges that historically marginalized and culturally diverse individuals, groups, and communities face. This study assesses the impact of a hip-hop–based school counselor education course on the development of graduate students' multicultural competence. Results from qualitative analyses of course assignments indicate that through their participation in the course graduate school counseling students learned culturally responsive clinical skills, such as the use of hip-hop lyrics in session, the facilitation of hip-hop groups, and the use of varied hip-hop group activities. Additionally, pre- and post-course surveys show positive changes in students' multicultural self-efficacy.

Significance to the Public

This study reveals graduate school counseling students who participated in a hip-hop and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) course learned culturally responsive clinical skills and showed positive changes in multicultural self-efficacy.

Keywords: hip-hop, counselor education, educator-counselor, culturally responsive, cultural competence

Young people in the United States are experiencing mental health concerns at a frightening rate (U.S. Surgeon General, 2021), many of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022; Hillis et al., 2021, 2022). For example, 2021 reports suggest there was a 51% increase in suicide attempts among adolescent girls and a 4% rise among adolescent boys compared to 2019 (U.S. Surgeon General, 2021). Adding to this reality is a national climate of fear, rooted in racial violence, concerns for safety, and racial battle fatigue, which have an adverse impact on the mental health and wellness of Black youth (Bernard et al., 2021). The rightful movements to address racial inequities and the mental health of Black people have been threatened by politicians and right-wing organizations that criticize curriculum (Curtis et al., 2021) and attack individual counselors and educators advocating for liberatory mental health practices (Parents Defending Education, 2022).

As a method for combating oppression in support of mental health outcomes, Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) has emerged as a school counseling (SC) approach where youth and adults partner as coresearchers in the identification of a social ill that they work to address through creative projects (Cook & Krueger-Henney, 2017; Smith et al., 2014). Preparing school counselors in training (SCITs) to integrate school-based mental health resources has never been as important (Duong et al., 2021), with the climate in U.S. schools replicating the racial violence and fear that exists nationally, at the expense of well-being (Love, 2023). As an innovative response, a recent article highlighted the potential for SCs to engage in

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hip-hop interventions (creating hip-hop songs and/or podcasting as advocacy) as YPAR to bolster youth's well-being and combat systemic oppression (Levy et al., 2023).

Despite the calls for increased services in response to the alarming mental health concerns, evidence suggests SCs are ill-prepared to integrate the culturally responsive and antiracist practices needed to foster youth's wellness and development (Holcomb-McCoy, 2021). Fostering multicultural counseling competencies (Ratts et al., 2016; Sue et al., 1992) in SCITs is an essential skill needed to address the challenges that historically marginalized and culturally diverse individuals, groups, and communities face (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021), and innovations in the field of counselor education are desperately needed. This study will assess the impact of a hip-hop, YPAR course and SCITs' MSJCC development through a culturally responsive participatory action research process.

Counselor Education Coursework

When training future counselors to provide culturally relevant service to diverse communities, many counselor educators look to the Multicultural Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2004). The MSJCC established "developmental layers that lead to multicultural and social justice competence: (a) counselor self-awareness, (b) client worldview, (c) counseling relationship, and (d) counseling and advocacy interventions" (Ratts et al., 2016, p. 3). These competence areas provide attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action for counselors-in-training (Brooks & Babel, 2022; Ratts, et al., 2016). Moreover, when counselor educators integrate the MSJCCs into their teaching, it encourages SCITs to engage in a process of continual learning and development of cultural humility (Hook et al., 2013). While the MSJCCs have been the method of addressing or understanding cultural differences, they have been critiqued for falling short of meeting the needs of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities (Norris et al., 2023). In response, counselor educators are encouraged to integrate creativity with multicultural counseling

competencies within counselor training to best prepare future counselors to broach issues of race, equity, and social justice (Norris et al., 2023).

Hip-Hop and School Counselor Competency Development

There are many different ways that counselor educators can integrate creativity in SCIT courses; one approach that can be used is hip-hop as a pathway to understand culture. Hip-hop in the counseling profession connects to the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) because it provides multiple ways to capture individuals' lived experiences and facilitates a cultural sensitivity in the counseling process (Levy et al., 2018). Hip-hop is an expressive and experiential way to live the MSJCCs when training SCs or working with youth. Therefore, counselor educators can integrate hip-hop in SC training through expressive writing, experiential learning, and improvisation. Including expressive writing activities like poetry, which is a form of hip-hop, in your supervision practice can enhance supervisees' empathy toward their client and provide a deeper awareness of different perspectives (Bowman, 2003; Gass & Gillis, 2010; Lahad, 2000; McNichols & Witt, 2018; Stark et al., 2011).

Additionally, offering SCITs role-playing, experiential activities, group work, fieldwork, reflection papers, and self- and group-reflection in their counselor education coursework (Decker et al., 2016; Sheely-Moore & Kooyman, 2011) provides students with the necessary tools and awareness to address issues around equity. By combining the MSJCC framework with hip-hop–related SC methods, such as analyzing and creating lyrics, students can be social justice change agents in their school and community (Anyiwo et al., 2021; Washington, 2018, 2021). Therefore, hip-hop can be a conduit for school counselors to engage in preventive strategies that create equitable environments for students.

Hip-Hop and the Educator-Counselor Identity

In training future counselors, we believe the school counselor's presence, as both an educator and counselor (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2021a), puts them in a unique position to leverage hip-hop–based SC interventions to partner with youth toward systemic change. The school counselor's dialogical skills and attunement to group dynamics, as well as knowledge and ability to work across various educational tasks (i.e., small-group and individual counseling, classroom instruction, collaboration, consultation, appraisal and advisement, referrals, and leadership and advocacy), allow them to use hip-hop and SC interventions across school environments to support youth's academic, social/emotional, and career development. However, as an extension, we suggest SCs must not only understand how hip-hop–based practices are used within group and individual settings, but how hip-hop interventions can be applied through all preventative educational tasks toward socially just student development and wellness.

Therefore, we turn to Hip-Hop Spoken Word Therapy (HHSWT) as an SC approach that is evidenced across myriad educator-counselor responsibilities. HHSWT focuses on helping individuals express their emotional experiences through mixtapes they write, record, and perform, to guide the counseling process, documented as increasing youth's self-awareness, coping skills, catharsis, self-reflection, and self-image (Levy, 2019). In small-group counseling, HHSWT can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression and boost the cultural relevance of the group process (Levy & Travis, 2020). As a school-wide intervention, hip-hop studio creation in schools can foster a sense of comfort and belonging amongst students (Levy & Adjapong, 2020) and function as physical environments for creating songs as social justice advocacy (Levy & Wong, 2022). There is evidence that supports the use of hip-hop in SC practice, minimal scholarships exist detailing approaches to support SCs in developing the requisite competencies to implement said practices. Thus, the current study aims to offer a mixed-methods

evaluation of a formal hip-hop and SC course to assess its impact on students' multicultural self-efficacy development.

Hip-Hop Practices in Counselor Education Classrooms

When considering best practices in counselor education and hip-hop, we should refer to some of the limited scholarship on hip-hop coursework in counselor education programs. Levy and Keum (2023) integrated a HHSWT and YPAR–based framework with SCIT coursework to teach them anti-racist or anti-oppression counseling skills and to supervise their implementation of a small-group curriculum with youth. When infusing hip-hop into lectures, readings, and didactic and experiential coursework, Levy and Keum (2023) noted increases in SCITs' multicultural competence development. Drawing on an interdisciplinary framework, Norris et al. (2023) advocated for the merging of hip-hop and Black studies for counselor educators to give voice to the unjust experiences in the Black community. Hip-hop provides pathways for educators and counselors to "create healing, understanding, and meaning for BIPOC-identified males regarding their social-emotional experience" (p. 21). Lastly, Levy and Lemberger-Truelove (2021b) evaluated a hip-hop professional development series where practicing SCs learned to analyze hip-hop song lyrics, practiced hip-hop counseling skills in dyads, and collaborated on their own song creation. This training helped reaffirm SCs' humanistic counseling skills, and allowed them to consider new and culturally relevant methods for working with youth. While there is some evidence that hip-hop approaches support the professional development of counselors, more exploration is necessary

Purpose of the Study

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the impact of a hip-hop-based school counselor education course (EDUG 913) on the development of graduate students' multicultural competence. Utilizing qualitative data, in the form of graduate

student journals in addition to a pre- and post-course survey, we sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students believe EDUG 913 impacted their counseling, both theoretically and practically?

2. How did EDUG 913 impact school counselor multicultural self-efficacy?

Method

Participants

The researchers used purposive criteria sampling to recruit participants for this study. Participants (N = 7) were volunteers from a hip-hop–based school counselor education course, titled EDUG 913: Hip Hop and SC Praxis, taught in a private college in the New York City metropolitan area. Participants identified as male (n = 2), female (n = 5), Black or African American (n = 5), White (n = 1), and Hispanic (n = 1). The participants took this course to satisfy an elective requirement in their SC grade program; a majority were in their first semester of the program (n = 5) and the remaining students (n = 2) were in their fourth semester of the program.

Procedure: A Hip-Hop and SC Course Curriculum

EDUG 913 is an experiential and immersive school counselor education course designed and instructed by the lead author. As an elective course offering, students learn hip-hop and SC theory, practice individual and group counseling skills, and engage in direct facilitation under supervision. The 15-week course curriculum is constructed to teach students how to apply a counseling model within education contexts, and to foster their MSJCC development.

Hip-Hop and Counseling Theory

During the opening weeks of the course, students were introduced to the history of hip-hop culture in the Bronx, New York, in addition to the origins of Hip-Hop Therapy (HHT). Through a review of hip-hop culture itself, students learned how people living in the Bronx in the 1970s created a culture to both combat social ills and offer opportunities for healing and development outside of formalized institutions (Chang, 2005). Through a review of HHT literature, students examined the different ways social workers, music therapists, and psychologists have integrated hip-hop practices into their work, to set the groundwork for the introduction of hip-hop and SC theory and practice. As educator-counselors, students must learn how SCs lean on hip-hop and counseling skills to engage in educational tasks in school environments that are preventative, and promote wellness, social justice, and development for the youth they serve. The opening readings, lectures, and class discussions laid a foundation for the main course reading, *Hip Hop and Spoken Word Therapy in School Counseling* (Levy, 2021), a monograph that explores a series of hip-hop and SC intervention studies.

Hip-Hop–Based Individual and Group Counseling Skills

The theory reviewed during the opening weeks was concretized, in-part, through the teaching and practicing of individual hip-hop counseling skills. Students learned to identify underlying emotions and cognitions in hip-hop lyrics, in order to effectively use microskills in response to songs youth listen to and/or create. Class sessions included large-group activities, where the class engaged in an analysis of popular hip-hop songs to identify emotions and cognitions, and to conceptualize the artist's mental/emotional state. Additionally, students were offered two opportunities to engage in dyads. For the first dyad, students were given segments of hip-hop songs to use as content for a mock counseling session. In a second dyad, students wrote their own lyrics about a personal experience and used them as content for their mock sessions.

Following the Levy and Keum (2023) framework, students participated in a hip-hop and

YPAR counseling group led by the course professor. Across four class sessions, students identified an advocacy issue facing youth in schools, researched that issue, wrote and recorded a song around that issue, and then presented their project in a final-group listening party. A crucial goal of the course is to expose students to immersive hip-hop cultural activities, in an attempt to simulate attending formal hip-hop events. Therefore, two of these sessions included guest lectures/workshops from hip-hop artists, to support the creation of the students' songs, which they then recorded inside of a make-shift recording studio in the course professor's office. For each of the dyads and group process sessions, students completed post-class journal reflections.

Small-Group Facilitation

For the final 5 weeks of the course, the graduate students visited a local Title 1 high school in the Bronx, New York, to facilitate the same hip-hop and YPAR group counseling process they previously used in class activities. The lead author of this study had a prior relationship with this high school, having worked there as a school counselor utilizing hip-hop and counseling methods. While the demographic information for the youth who participated in the small-group–sessions was not collected by the lead author (given the focus of the study on the graduate students' development) the demographics for the school suggest the student body is 50% Hispanic or Latinx, 45% Black, 2% Native American, 1% Asian, and 1% White.

For five consecutive weeks, students co-facilitated 1-hour sessions, followed by a 30-minute supervision with their course professor. For each session, the graduate students were divided into co-facilitation pairs and worked with small groups of high school–aged youth as they created a hip-hop song. Specifically, the graduate students co-facilitated three separate small groups of four students each, which ran simultaneously in adjacent rooms. Each small group had an opportunity to identify a song theme and engage in research, lyric writing, and recording. The graduate students

continued to journal about their experiences after each session.

Data Collection and Analysis

With the goal of assessing graduate students' development of MSJCCs, data in this study were collected via course assignments and a pre- and post-course survey. Data collected were largely qualitative, involving the analysis of 10 student journal reflections following the experiential course activities (dyads, in-class group work, and youth facilitation). An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used for the student journal entries (Smith et al., 2009). A survey measuring students' SC multicultural self-efficacy (SCMSE; Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008) was also administered. SPSS was used to conduct descriptive statistics only, given the small sample size, to help make sense of the qualitative data analysis.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

For this study, the researchers selected IPA because it helps to reveal how participants make meaning of their experiences in social contexts (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is a subjective approach that treats participants' reflections as the data, seeking to make sense of their experience and to produce quantifiable themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The purpose of IPA in this study was to illuminate the meaning behind the student journal entries during the experiential learning components of this course. Therefore, IPA, typically used to explore a shared experience, is an ideal methodology to generate understanding of the participants' world and subjective experiences (Chapman & Smith, 2002).

Following IPA, the first two researchers downloaded all journal entries into separate Microsoft Word documents, read and reread the contents, and engaged in their own identification of codes that signified meaning (Smith et al., 2009). Then, all codes were placed beneath lower-order themes that used a descriptive word or short phrase as a common meaning between the codes, and were

finally grouped beneath high-order themes (Saldaña, 2013). While each researcher engaged in this process alone to generate meaning from the graduate students' experiences in EDUG 913, they eventually met together to reconcile differences in their findings and mutually decide on a singular list of themes. Much deliberation occurred to finalize lower-order and higher-order themes that represented the codes that sat within them. Once this list was solidified, the first two authors shared their list of themes with the third author for an audit.

Positionality and Trustworthiness

The researcher team employed numerous trustworthiness strategies identified to improve 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 authors needed to reflect upon their multiple and varied positions, roles, and identities that are inextricably related to hip-hop–based research, specifically as it relates to utilizing hip-hop as pedagogy and counseling. The authors of this article are three counselor educators: an associate professor specializing in SC, and two assistant professors specializing in clinical mental health counseling. The lead author, who was the course instructor for EDUG 913, identifies as a White, cishet man who maintains consistent reflection on his privilege as a researcher, as well as how his experience as a hip-hop artist and school counselor impact his appraisal of study results. The second author identifies as a Black man who is intentional about using his research and platform to create change. The third author identifies as a Black woman who implements and evaluates hip-hop interventions as a clinician and scholar. All three authors have several years of experience training counselors and share a commitment, as practitioners and researchers in schools and community centers, to amplify hip-hop–based practices and the voices of the young people they serve.

To support reflections on their positionality, the researchers 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 researchers function as the interventionists in an IPA study, this prolonged engagement between the lead researcher 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 two fellow counselor educators (who had not been a part of EDUG 913) to serve as authors and an auditor (Patton, 2015). As a third party, the auditor worked with the first two authors 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

The results of this study are organized by research questions. The first research question contains results from the qualitative analysis of the graduate students' journal entries during EDUG 913. The pre- and post-course survey results address the second research question.

Research Question No. 1

The first research question was answered by three themes, containing a total of nine subthemes (see Table 1). The first theme, *working with lyrics*, contained four subthemes: *analysis for conversations, writing for authentic reflection and expression, embracing vulnerability while sharing music*, and *a student-led group process.* The second

Table 1

A Numerical Count of Participant Comments by Higher (H) and Lower (L) Order Theme

Theme 1	N	Theme 2	N	Theme 3	N
Working With Lyrics (H)	*28*	*Relationship Building (H)*	*14*	*Hip-Hop Activities (H)*	*20*
Analysis for Conversations (L)	8	Appreciating Culture (L)	7	Artist Profile (L)	5
Writing for Authentic Reflection and Expression (L)	6	Culturally Responsive Rapport (L)	7	Beats and Rhymes (L)	7
Sharing and Recording for Development (L)	6			Hook Creation (L)	8
Student-Led Group Process (L)	8				

theme, *relationship building*, contained two subthemes: *appreciating culture* and *culturally relevant rapport*. The third theme, *hip-hop activities*, contained three subthemes: *artist profile, beats and rhymes*, and *hook creations.* Pseudonyms (Student A, Student B …) are used to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

The first theme, *working with lyrics*, was composed of journal entries detailing how graduate students learned to integrate lyrics into the counseling process. The first lower-order theme, *analysis for conversations,* specifically described the ways counselors can use hip-hop lyrics as prompts for counseling dialogue. For example, when reflecting on their practical application of an experiential course activity, Student F stated, "Something that I see myself putting to practice was the analysis of the lyrics. As it proved to be in the past, the lyric discussion sparked a conversation among the group on judgment and time." Student F was struck by the utility of song analysis to evoke counseling dialogue and vowed to use it in their practice. Relatedly, Student C stated:

> When we listened to the J-Cole song, digested the lyrics as a group and allowed the students to break down parts of the song that resonated with them was profound. Especially the moments where the students related to what the artist was saying about the world, life, judgements and expectations.

In this quote, Student C is reflecting on their time facilitating small groups at the local high school, where they found that young people were ready and willing to draw connections between their lived experiences and the lyrics J. Cole had written about his own life.

The second lower-order theme was *writing for authentic reflection and expression,* containing statements that spoke to the cathartic power of creating one's own lyrics. Student A wrote about their own experience constructing lyrics during a class session. They commented, "I see a lot of positives of doing therapy this way. This could be a way to express yourself, vent frustration with any or everything, tell your story, help someone in need, open their eyes to art and advocate." After engaging in their own lyric writing, Student A was inspired by their ability to emote publicly, listen/to help their peers, and use their life experiences as a tool for advocacy. When considering facilitation with young people, Student B wrote:

> Reflection was a major element in this session. Every student made the conscious effort to ponder what they wanted the message of their verse to be. This reflection had each of them in an introspective state of mind thinking of past experiences relating to the song topic and how they felt after those experiences. Hip hop creates a space for youth to speak, vent, process and grow.

Student B described how students identified a shared emotion to write about, pinpointing a past experience to construct lyrics around. This movement from introspection to group sharing evidenced the utilization of hip-hop lyric writing for authentic reflection and expression.

The students also noted the sharing and recording of lyrics was particularly beneficial to the counseling process, in the lower-order theme, *embracing vulnerability while sharing music.* Thinking about their time reciting lyrics in class, Student D wrote:

> The powerful moment for me during this class time was when we got the space to share our individual verses in the group circle. That moment possessed a therapy type energy because I poured out my emotional distress in that verse. It was a very therapeutic moment and it made me think about how long I have carried some burdens on my shoulders and the awareness that I am still carrying those same past burdens today.

In this statement, Student D helps distinguish between writing and performing lyrics. The act of sharing lyrics with their peers helped them release some emotional distress they hadn't necessarily realized they'd still been carrying. Sharing with their peers offered Student D firsthand experience with the healing power of expressing vulnerabilities through hip-hop. Then, after recording, Student C journaled:

> Recording those few lines and hearing it played back was fun. I am one of those people that find it very difficult to be vulnerable around others. The activity we engaged in for class required everyone to embrace different aspects of themselves and allow ourselves permission to feel silly, fun, open and authentically connected to our emotions. That was tough for me to do because I am still getting comfortable with everyone within the group. However, I allowed myself to trust my group members and to trust the process enough so I can open up to the group and connect to my emotions in this open intimate space.

During the course, students were offered a chance to use a recording booth constructed in the instructors office to record a class song. It is this act of recording that allowed Student C to work through some discomfort and learn to express and embrace vulnerability with their peers.

With regard to the third sub-theme, *student-led group process*, students reported writing lyrics together in a group environment taught them how hip-hop counseling invites this process. Specifically, Student E commented:

> The practice is self-sufficient. The structure of making the mixtape is in place but the creative product comes from the students. The mixtape is the students' ideas, feelings emotions and experiences. In counseling, giving the students a course to make decisions for themselves leads them to self-actualization. This is more meaningful and provides them more self-worth as opposed to giving them the answer or telling them what to do.

In this journal entry, Student E contemplated how the organic nature of hip-hop mixtape making (the collective creation of songs around shared emotional themes) allowed students to guide the counseling process. Quite simply, Student E saw in real time the value in offering counseling interventions that allow students to create freely based on their emotions, ideas, and feelings, without being told what or how to be in a group. Similarly, Student B suggested:

> The group ran itself today. The directions were given, and the students did the rest… Their excitement and sharing of ideas appeared and I enjoyed being a witness to that cohesion. It reminded me of the group that I participated in last semester. Dr. Levy, you previously stated that a good group runs itself, and today was that day.

Comparing their experiences in prior group counseling course sessions to their small-group facilitation with youth, Student B witnessed cohesion occur organically within a hip-hop group where youth tapped into shared excitement and shared ideas with each other.

The second theme, *relationship building*, was composed of student writing that illustrated how hip-hop culture was a medium for building rapport with youth. The first lower-order theme, *appreciating culture,* detailed ways students felt thankful for hip-hop, as it offered a platform to

engage in congruent counseling with youth. Student F reflected on their own identification with hip-hop, and how small-group facilitation enabled a connection with their community as a school counselor. She wrote:

> The facilitation sessions made me feel happy and active within my community. I was honored and greatly enjoyed being in this space with the youth in my community with the intent to support their self-expression through a tool that is quite popular and often overlooked, music.

For Student F, they experienced their own congruence while leading groups, and a sense of pride about their position to support youth's self-expression through a music and culture that they love. Another student (Student D) who may have not had as many personal connections with hip-hop, commented on how important they felt hip-hop was for ushering in opportunities for youth's authentic self-reflection. Student D commented:

> Hip Hop allowed me to understand the importance of encouraging youth to express their true self to others rather than just fitting in with a crowd as it relates to their race, culture, neighborhoods, gender, and sexuality. We explored this by comparing Hip Hop artists, evaluating which ones embrace their upbringing and which one's struggle with this form of authenticity.

Within this quote is also an indication that Student D worked with youth to discuss how to construct lyrics that spoke to their life experiences, as well as the struggles that emerge with this type of reflection. Overall, students appreciated how hip-hop culture organically opened the door for autonomous dialoguing with youth, a prerequisite for developing therapeutic relationships.

The second lower-order theme for relationship building was *culturally responsive rapport*, where students spoke about hip-hop as a culturally-bound approach for cultivating strong relationships with youth. For example, Student C witnessed how hip-hop and counseling approaches helped Student D form a cross-cultural relationship. Specifically, Student C stated:

I also appreciated the role that each of my classmates played but I must say it was great to witness Student D in that space. Although learning about Hip Hop in depth the way we did in this course, most of us look like the youth we worked with, so it's a bit easier to connect with them. I commend her courage to get outside of her comfort zone in this space. The change we want to see would come much faster if more white people were like this honestly. So I love to see it!

In this statement, Student C was impressed by Student D's ability to learn about a culture other than their own and use it in practice to step outside of her comfort zone and forge a relationship with a particular young person. Similarly, Student A wrote about an experience where Student F self-disclosed some of their own hip-hop lyrics during small-group facilitation to offer youth encouragement in their own lyric writing. Student A's journal entry read:

> I would like to give Student F a shoutout for speaking up on relatable experiences and self-disclosing to the students. Her words were received, and I have hope that this can inspire the students to be more vulnerable with their lyric writing for homework over the weekend as they finalize ideas for the class hook and individual bars. Student F's disclosure reminded me of the importance of students, especially at that age level, knowing us authentically so they too can disclose and build trust.

In this instance, students in the course watched Student F take a risk in sharing their story with youth as a means of encouraging youth to tap into their own authentic stories when writing lyrics between sessions. This offered students insight into hip-hop's ability to aid self-disclosure and authentic expression (for counselors and students) toward developing relationships.

Within the third and final theme, *hip-hop activities*, student quotes describe the impact of various experimental hip-hop exercises during the course on their development as practitioners. This began with the *artist profile,* a journaling exercise

in which students created and then shared a list of various characteristics that define who they are as artists. After engaging in the artist profile exercise, Student A mentioned:

> This is a great ice breaker and shows what the students have in common as well as what they can use to complete the project. Everyone read their profile individually while the group leader jots down the similarities that were mentioned. The group leader put the commonalities up on the board that way the students can see what they have in common. From there questions were asked as to what would be the main topic of their project. We wrapped up afterwards. This is a good structure to get students to participate in topics most would like or could join in.

In the process, Student A found the artist profile helpful in identifying shared emotions within the group, as well as a singular topic that they could use for their group song/project. Student A felt that the activity helped the group share, and would be a useful tool in their work as a school counselor. On a more personal level, Student C wrote:

> The experience of creating our individual artist profile was powerful for me. It made me feel creative and respected in that I was being given the opportunity to express my interests. It made me feel heard in that my professor wanted to genuinely know what I enjoyed and how I felt.

From a group dynamic perspective, the artist profile activity enabled Student C to feel heard and respected by the group and group leader (professor). In all, students found the artist profile both personally and professionally valuable as a hip-hop counseling activity.

The second lower-order theme, *beats and rhymes,* was composed of comments about the group activity of selecting a beat to write rhymes over. Students reflected on the collective choosing of an instrumental beat as a canvas to engage in self-analysis, and to identify and write about similarities with peers. Speaking about beat selection, Student G wrote:

> Choosing a theme, as well as a beat or song, for a small group, will allow students to recognize their similarities. My thought is that the beat or song that is collectively chosen, can be played when the students enter the space to remind them of the solidarity that they share with their group members. Later in the group, I could throw that beat or instrumental on and just have students self-reflect through journaling, drawing, or discussing with one another their feelings on a certain topic.

For Student E, finding a beat was not only an important step to follow the artist profile (topic identification), but allowed students to form a community. Once the beat was found, it could be used in later group sessions to prompt the group to continue exploring this shared theme. Regarding the writing of their verse over a beat, Student F commented on the support they received from the course professor:

> We are all going to contribute personally to our own struggles, allowing the audience to connect to each of our individual journeys. The verse brainstorming activity was a strong reflective moment for me, as I was honest with myself on my own mental health journey. Although I am still thinking on how my lyrics will flow, I am grateful to have an opportunity to share a piece of my story with others through Hip Hop.

Student F illustrates how the movement from identifying a topic through the artist profile, finding a beat to match that theme, and then brainstorming a verse about their life experience to write to that beat supported their sharing of their story with their peers. It is clear that students understood the value of beats and rhymes as hip-hop counseling activities.

The third lower-order was the hip-hop activity of *hook creation.* Student quotes explain their experiences writing a hook, also known as a chorus, which is distinct from writing a verse as it is a collective written refrain that should communicate the song topic and set a foundation for each student to share their stories via individual verses. Student B identified the hook activity that helped them build

community, writing, "I genuinely enjoyed the moment where our class got to create the hook/chorus because it provided us the space to connect and agree on our level of comfortability and how we wanted the hook to sound like." Similarly, Student G wrote*:*

> I loved this group activity as a form of all us sharing our voices and our stories through the creation of the hook. We all sounded different from each other for different reasons that I believe revolves around our own individual stories/pain/emotions. It was a very cathartic experience.

As the class came together to write and recite the hook, Student B and G both identified the sense of belonging and emotional release they were able to access. Additionally, the hook creation process helped the group build consensus about the topic and the song structure, supporting each individual's ability to share their narratives.

Research Question No. 2

The final research question assessed the impact of EDUG 913 on SCITs' multicultural self-efficacy. Students in EDUG 913 (N = 7) reported a mean score increase from pre- to post-course on the global mean score, and all subscores on the SCMSE scale. Specifically, students reported an increase in SCMSE global mean score from pre-course (M = 241.14, SD = 51.83) to post-course (M = 313.71, SD = 37.67), which was statistically significant, t = -7.391, p <.01. For the knowledge of multicultural concepts, students reported an increase from a pre-course mean score of 59.14 (SD = 15.53) to a post-course mean score of 79.14 (SD = 6.38), which was statistically significant, t = -4.810, p <.01. Results for using data for systemic change showed that a mean score of 33.86 (SD = 10.61) at pre-course increased to 49.57 (SD = 9.01) post-course, which was statistically significant, t = -5.070, p <.01. The pre-course mean score for developing cross cultural relationships (M = 40.00, SD = 4.47) also saw an increase mean score post-course (M = 46.71, SD = 3.59). Results of a paired t-test indicated this was also statistically significant, t = -6.068, p <.01.

Results indicated a statistically significant increase in students' multicultural counseling awareness from pre-course (M = 45.71, SD = 8.18) to post-course (M = 56.86, SD = 4.45), t = -5.841, p <.01. Results show a statistically significant increase in students' multicultural assessment from pre-course (M = 30.00, SD = 8.95) to post-course (M = 41.14, SD = 4.76), t = -6.563, p <.01. Finally, students reported an increase in application of racial and cultural knowledge to practice from pre-course (M = 27.57, SD = 7.81) to post-course (M = 33.71, SD = 8.30), which was statistically significant, t = -13.377, p <.01.

Discussion

In the current study, analysis of student journals found that EDUG 913 supported students in learning culturally responsive clinical skills, such as the use of hip-hop lyrics in session, the facilitation of hip-hop groups, and the use of varied hip-hop group activities. These results support the claim that hip-hop–based activities and group work can function as culturally adapted experiential counselor education coursework (Decker et al., 2016; Sheely-Moore & Kooyman, 2011). Aligned with prior hip-hop research on counselors' training and continued development, results indicated that the practicing of hip-hop lyric–based active listening may aid cultural competence development in graduate students (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2021b). Further hip-hop groups can serve as a PAR/YPAR process for students that impacts their multiculturally self-efficacy (Cook et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2014). The qualitative findings are bolstered by the pre-post survey results, which show significant positive changes in students' knowledge of multicultural concepts and application of racial and cultural knowledge to practice.

Analysis of journals also showed students were able to form strong relationships with youth via hip-hop practices. Students reported a deeper appreciation of hip-hop culture, and expressed gratitude for the vulnerability and authenticity their peers demonstrated while working with youth. In

conjunction with survey data findings highlighting significant positive changes in cross-cultural relationships and multicultural self-awareness, these data suggest hip-hop and SC coursework may allow opportunities for graduate students to hone their cultural humility (Hays, 2020). This finding adds to existing research showing hip-hop practices allow counselors to be seen as relatable, having a positive impact on the therapeutic relationships (Norris et al., 2023).

Students' reflections on their experience in EDUG 913 validate Levy and Keum's (2023) conclusion that following a curricular sequence of teaching hip-hop and counseling theory, individual hip-hop counseling skills, group work counseling skills, and then supervising direct facilitation can support multicultural self-efficacy development in graduate students. In the current study, students learned how they could use hip-hop and counseling activities (the artist profile, beats and rhymes, and hook creation) to not only engage in individual and group work with youth, but to assist youth using song writing to identify and challenge systemic barriers to their own development. These findings are consistent with the desired MSJCC outcomes of self-awareness, understanding a client's worldview, advocacy, and relational skills (Ratts et al., 2016). Teaching SCITs to leverage preventative and developmental hip-hop interventions that support youth's wellness, and activate them as agents of social change, also helps to concretize their educator-counselor identity (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2021a).

Limitations

There are a few limitations that exist within this study. The smallness of the sample size hindered the authors ability to engage in more than paired t-tests to explore the survey data. While this data was helpful in triangulating the qualitative findings, a larger sample size would have offered more insight into the impact of EDUG 913 on the graduate students' development. There are also concerns about replicability, as the course instructor had a nuanced understanding of hip-hop and counseling interventions, access to a make-shift recording

student, and relationships with local hip-hop artists who offered guest lectures/workshops.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations for research and practice can be gleaned from this study. Future researchers should explore the reliability of this course with a larger sample size, perhaps by having SCITs implement hip-hop groups during their internships. Collaborations between counselor educators could allow for the implementation and evaluation of simultaneous sections of a hip-hop course to run across multiple institutions. To even further examine students' ability to internalize the educator-counselor identity, the youth facilitation component of future hip-hop courses should involve implementing educational tasks beyond group work and consider youth's academic and post-secondary development.

There are also more general take-aways for school counselor educators that extend beyond hip-hop itself. EDUG 913 followed a YPAR model for in-class group work, inclusive of a number of visits to a school/community space for supervised training. Experiential coursework like this, particularly rooted in the expressive arts, should be further explored within school counselor education. Additionally, a unique characteristic of EDUG 913 was designed to explore the culture and community-defined practices of young people surrounding the community (i.e., inviting guest artists to host workshops on DJing, emceeing, visual design, etc.). Drawing from this, school counselor educators looking to design similar coursework should learn about the youth culture and community their graduate program is situated within, and actively form partnerships with community members to build out innovative practices.

Conclusion

The counseling profession has long vowed to develop multicultural counseling competencies in SCs, but there is a need for innovation in counselor

education curriculum to accomplish this endeavor. This study reviewed the effectiveness of a hip-hop and SC course as culturally responsive intervention, finding it particularly beneficial in improving SCITs' multicultural competence. We are hopeful that this study encourages the field of counselor education to integrate creative and culturally sensitive course curriculum into programs, such as new theory, experiential class exercises, and the supervision of direct practice for SCITs. Moreover, coursework should teach SCITs to implement preventative and socially just practices that will enhance students' wellness and holistic development.

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