A Phenomenological Exploration of School Counselors' Conceptualization and Implementation of Multicultural Competence

Jasmine Knight
Old Dominion University

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS’ CONCEPTUALIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE

By

Jasmine Knight

B.S., Old Dominion University, 2001
M.S.Ed., Old Dominion University, 2003

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY COUNSELING

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
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Approved by:

Tim Grothaus (Director)

Danica G. Hays (Methodologist)

Staci Milliken (Member)

Vivian McElhiney (Member)
ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS' CONCEPTUALIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE

Jasmine Knight
Old Dominion University, 2010
Director: Dr. Tim Grothaus

School counselors need multicultural competence to implement comprehensive school counseling programs that promote the academic achievement of all students. Prior research demonstrates that school counselors have reported high levels of multicultural competence. However, there is no evidence that this self-perceived competence translates into practice. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of how practicing professional school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence and how they implement it into their work. To explore this topic, 12 practicing school counselors from a southeastern, urban school district participated in individual interviews, focus groups, and documents reviews. A research team analyzed the data for themes and patterns, and findings were subjected to verification procedures. Three categories emerged: conceptualization of multicultural competence, implementation of multicultural competence, and improvements and incongruencies.
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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

School counselors are tasked with addressing the needs of all students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2005a). To ethically and effectively carry out this mission, school counselors need to be equipped with the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to serve increasingly diverse school communities. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) requires training in multicultural competence for school counselors and the ASCA (2004) has also incorporated multicultural standards into their code of ethics. Although various studies have assessed the self-perceived multicultural competence of school counselors (e.g., Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson & Bradley, 2005), there is no clear evidence that school counselors understand the need for multicultural competence and infuse it into their everyday practices.

Rationale

According to the United States Census Bureau (2008), people of color currently constitute approximately one third of the U.S. population and are projected to represent 54% of the population by the year 2050. By 2030, youth of color will be a numerical majority in the United States, increasing to 62% by the year 2050 (US Census Bureau, 2008). However, culture is not limited to ethnic and racial groups. Culture also includes areas such as religion, gender, socio-economic status, geography, ability, age, sexual orientation, and first language. For example, more than 13 million children currently live...
in poverty (Children’s Defense Fund, 2009) and 1.6 million children are undocumented citizens (Urban Institute, 2009). Students who are English Language Learners are the fastest growing group, currently constituting more than 10% of public schools’ census (Gollnick & Chin, 2006; Spinelli, 2008).

Despite the increase in cultural diversity there is still a serious problem facing the American education system. Academic achievement of students of color and students from low income homes has lagged significantly behind the achievement of their White, middle class or wealthy counterparts (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). For example, according to the Education Trust (2006), 59% of Black 8th grade students and 56% of Hispanic students read at a 4th grade level, compared to 25% of White students. In math, only 21% of White 8th grade students perform below basic levels, whereas, that number increases to 50% for Hispanics, and 55% for Black students. Furthermore, low income students are 6 times more likely to drop out than their higher income counterparts and students in suburban/rural communities are less likely to drop out than their urban counterparts (Bemak & Chung, 2008).

Although there are numerous factors that could contribute to these academic disparities, culture can have a significant impact on children’s performance at school (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Grothaus, Crum, & James, 2010). The American educational system has traditionally operated from a White, middle class frame of reference (Grothaus et al., 2010). As a result, students from non-dominant backgrounds and groups are placed at a distinct disadvantage. Research has shown that the achievement incongruities are “a result of environmental, historical, sociopolitical, sociocultural, and institutional factors rather than student’s capabilities” (Bemak &
Chung, 2008, p. 372). Therefore, it is not the students that need to be “fixed” but the system (Erford, House, & Martin, 2007). With this in mind, school counselors, as student advocates, can be proactive in working to reduce this gap in achievement (Bemak & Chung, 2005, 2008).

The role of the school counselor is integral to the mission of the schools (ASCA, 2005a; Erford et al., 2007). Professional school counselors (PSC’s) are charged to address the personal/social, academic, and career development needs of all students (ASCA, 2005b). School counselors are also in a unique position to advocate for students and to promote a more socially just and equitable education system (Bemak & Chung, 2008). This belief is reflected in The Transforming School Counseling Initiative, a major project focused on encouraging school counselors to take an active role as change agents in the school (Education Trust, 2009). It charges school counselors to fulfill their role as social justice advocates and not accept the inequitable status quo (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Erford et al., 2007). These sentiments are echoed in the ASCA ethical code (2004), as well as in ASCA’s position statements on cultural diversity (2009), equity for all students (2006), gender equity (2008a), and LGBTQ youth (2007).

To prepare school counselors to meet the needs of an ever changing demographic of students, CACREP has instituted multicultural training requirements for school counselor trainees (CACREP, 2009). National and state certification boards have also adjusted their requirements to include multicultural competence for school counselors (Herring, 1998). The research has generally supported the assertion that prior multicultural training has had a positive effect on the perceived multicultural competence of school counselors (Constantine, 2001a; Constantine, 2001b; Constantine et al., 2001;
Several studies have reported on the high self-perceived cultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson & Bradley, 2005) and multicultural self-efficacy of school counselors (Holcomb-McCoy, et al., 2008). As for specific components or correlates of self-perceived cultural counseling competence, researchers have found that prior coursework (Constantine, 2001a; Constantine et al., 2001; Constantine & Gushue, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines; Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005); being a person of color (Yeh & Arora, 2003); years of counseling experience (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008); espousing a eclectic/integrative theoretical orientation (Constantine, 2001b); ability to be empathic (Constantine, 2001b); and having high tolerance attitudes; and low racism attitudes (Constantine & Gushue, 2003) contributed significantly to predicting self-perceived multicultural competence.

Cultural competence remains difficult to assess (Hays, 2008). All of the studies above were based on counselors’ and counselor trainees self-report, have been quantitative in nature and sought to understand competence using a predetermined scale. For example, Holcomb-McCoy and Day-Vines (2004) found that the instrument, the Multicultural Competence Training Scale, Revised (MCCTS_R), only measured terminology, awareness, and knowledge. Skills were not addressed.
Despite the plethora of quantitative studies, there appears to be no evidence that school counselors actually practice culturally responsive services. The link between school counselors’ perceived competence and actual culturally competent practice remains elusive (Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004). Additionally, there is no clear consensus about how school counselors conceptualize cultural competence. Studies have shown that, although school counselors rate their multicultural competence as high, the amount of competence they assigned to different areas (knowledge, awareness, skills, terminology, and racial identity development) is incongruent with these high self-ratings (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001). In other words, cultural competence could be viewed as a multidimensional concept with many different layers and understandings. Further information is necessary to understand how school counselors define multicultural competence and how they incorporate this concept into their work. This study attempted to fill this gap by exploring how school counselors define multicultural competence and how they apply this concept in their effort to meet the needs of a diverse study body.

Purpose of the Study

Most studies addressing the multicultural competence of school counselors have been quantitative in nature and utilized a form of measurement where participants were limited in their response (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson & Bradley, 2005). Based on the limited construct validity of multicultural assessments, these studies have been able to demonstrate that school counselors perceive themselves as multiculturally competent but they have been unable to establish a relationship between self-reported competence and actual school counseling.
practice. These studies also fail to show how school counselors define competence and what this competence looks like in their everyday work.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe how school counselors define cultural competence and to explore how their conceptualization impacts the services they provide. This was accomplished through the use of interviews, document reviews, and focus groups to gain a broader understanding of how school counselors think about culture and incorporate these thoughts into their decision making regarding services to students and school stakeholders. The goal of this study was to increase the empirical knowledge about school counselor multicultural competence.

Research Questions

There are two research questions for the purpose of this study.

Question (1): How do school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence?

Question (2): How does their conceptualization of cultural competence influence the school counseling services they facilitate?

Overview of Methodology

Qualitative research is needed to understand how school counselors define multicultural competence and how they incorporate it into their work (Robinson-Wood, 2009). Due to the paucity of research on how school counselors conceptualize and implement multicultural competence, there is a need for further exploration in this area. Qualitative research provides an avenue in which to explore a particular topic where little information is currently available (Creswell, 2006). The current study was a phenomenological exploration of school counselors’ conceptualizations and implementation of multicultural competence. A social constructivist paradigm

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underpinned the research, as it focused on how participants construct their reality of multicultural competence theory and practice.

The phenomenon of multicultural competence was examined through the use of individual interviews, document reviews, and focus groups. Participants were 12 currently practicing professional school counselors (PSC). All 12 PSC’s were currently working in an urban school district in the southeastern region of the United States. Participants were selected from the same district in order to provide context for the study. This allowed the researcher to provide thick description of their work setting, one particular school district. Each participant participated in an individual interview, nine participated in one of three focus groups, and six provided documents for review. The addition of the document review and focus groups allowed for triangulation of data which helped to mitigate the limitation of self-report data.

A research team was chosen to assist the primary researcher with collecting, analyzing, and coding all data. The researchers also bracketed their assumptions and sought to explain the phenomena from the perspective of the participant.

Key Terminology

Key terms that will be used in this study, include: culture, ethnicity, diversity, multicultural competence, advocacy, social justice, Professional School Counselor, ASCA National Model, achievement gap, equity, oppression, racism, and discrimination. These terms have various definitions in the literature, and will be defined below.

Culture

McAuliffe (2008) defined culture as “attitudes, habits, norms, beliefs, customs, rituals, styles, and artifacts that express a group’s adaptation to its environment – that is,
ways that are shared with group members and passed on over time” (p. 8). He also stated that culture is pervasive and invisible, in that people’s behaviors are often unconsciously guided by the norms of the cultural group in which they belong. This is particularly relevant to school counseling work, as students tend to behave according to their internalized culture, which can contrast with the White, middle-class norms found in most institutions. For the purpose of this study we will use McAuliffe’s definition of culture and with regard to shared social group affiliations (e.g., religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status).

Ethnicity

Although ethnicity and culture have been used as synonymous terms in literature and popular usage, culture has a broader context which includes social affiliations. Race and ethnicity have also been used interchangeably. Race, however, is seen as a social construction which usually focuses on the physical features of people (McAuliffe, Gomez, & Grothaus, 2008). Ethnicity involves the identity of a group of people with shared customs, geographical location, and origins (McAuliffe, Kim, & Park, 2008). However, it should be noted that ethnicity is not considered a single concept. The migration and mixing of races have created a society in which many individuals identify with more than one ethnicity. For the purpose of this study, ethnicity will be defined as identified membership to a group of people who share customs, traditions, geographical location and origins.

Diversity

The United States has a long history of diversity. “Diversity refers to other individual, people differences including age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical
ability or disability, and other characteristics by which someone may prefer to self-
define” (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 43). McAuliffe (2008) summed it up as the variations
amongst people. Diversity can be seen both within and between various cultural groups.

**Multicultural Competence**

There is considerable support in the literature for the concept of three domains of
multicultural competence. These domains include (a) Awareness – understanding of
one’s own belief’s, attitudes, and culture and how this impacts counselor effectiveness,
(b) Knowledge – being able to understand the worldview of culturally different clients
and the impact that racism, oppression, and society has had on various cultural groups,
and (c) Skills – acquiring, developing, and using culturally responsive interventions and
creating culturally relevant counseling services (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; McAuliffe,
2008; Sue et al., 1982, Sue et al., 1998).

**Advocacy**

Advocacy enjoys a long standing history in the counseling profession. Field and
Baker (2004) defined advocacy as the practice of going beyond traditional, direct services
and attempting to make an impact on the people and institutions that directly impact the
lives of clients. In school counseling advocacy involves helping students and their
families by advocating for programs, services, systemic changes, and community
resources (Trusty & Brown, 2005). Advocacy also involves the empowerment of
marginalized groups or individuals. McAuliffe, Grothaus, Pare, & Winninger, (2008)
stated that “Advocacy is the act of empowering individuals or groups through actions that
increase self-efficacy, remove barriers to needed services and promote systemic change”
(p. 613).
Social Justice

There is no one universal definition for social justice. McAuliffe, Danner et al. (2008) defined it as “a societal-level commitment to equity for all groups of people” (p. 47). Holcomb-McCoy (2007) defined social justice as “the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people at every level of society” (p. 17). In other words, social justice is society’s responsibility for all groups and individuals without limitations based on observed differences. Social justice work can be seen as a professional responsibility for all counselors. For school counselors social justice involves taking action to decrease the effects of oppression on students and ensuring access and equity to all educational services (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Professional School Counselor

According to ASCA (2005b), a Professional School Counselor is defined as a professional with a master’s degree in school counseling or its equivalent, who has obtained state licensure or certification, and is trained in meeting the personal/social, academic, and career development needs of all students. For the purpose of this study, the terms professional school counselor and school counselor will be used interchangeably.

ASCA National Model

In late 2003, the ASCA National Model was introduced by the American School Counseling Association. This model encourages school counselors to become an integral part of the mission of schools. It also charges counselors to implement comprehensive, developmental programs that address the personal/social, academic, and career development needs of all students, through advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and
system change. Comprehensive school counseling programs are preventative and developmental. The national model provides a framework for the components of the program, the role of the school counselor, and the underlying philosophies of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2005a). According to the ASCA position statement (2005b) on comprehensive school counseling the national model:

- "Ensures equitable access to a rigorous education for all students"
- Identifies the knowledge and skills all students will acquire as a result of the K-12 comprehensive school counseling program
- Is delivered to all student in a systematic fashion
- Is based on data-driven decision making
- Is provided by a state-credentialed professional school counselor." (p. 5)

Using this model, PSC’s provide services to students, parents/guardians, school staff and the community through the school guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support.

Achievement Gap

Holcomb-McCoy (2007) noted that inequity in educational achievement was widespread in the United States, especially among students from different racial or ethnic groups and income levels. On many measures, such as achievement tests and placement tests, achievement of White, middle and upper class students far exceeded their culturally different counterparts. This discrepancy is the achievement gap. The achievement gap refers to the phenomenon of groups of students with the same level of ability not achieving equally in schools.

Equity vs. Equality
Equality involves all people being treated equally, without consideration of differences or unique circumstances. Within the education system this would involve all students being treated equally with no thought to how student differences, oppression, racism, systemic practices, and policies might impact student development. A school counseling program focused on equality is one that seeks to maintain the status quo and desires to strictly follow policy (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

The contrast to equality is equity. Equity involves treating students differently based on aspects of the student's culture and individual needs. A school counseling program focused on equity takes into account student differences, and includes culturally responsive services that meet the needs of all students. However, culture is not used as an excuse for not having high standards students. Instead, counselors consider how society, societal institutions, racism, oppression, and other key factors have impeded the success of a particular cultural group. Counselors then take steps to actively remove these barriers and create conditions in which all students can be successful (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

*Oppression*

Oppression involves the marginalization of certain groups of people. It is accompanied by a belief that a group of people, lacking in power, are somehow inferior or less than the group in power (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; McAuliffe, Danner, et al., 2008). Holcomb-McCoy (2007) described oppression as “a social dynamic in which certain ways of being in this world-including certain ways of identifying or being identified-are normalized or privileged while others are oppressed or marginalized.” (p.
19) Oppression has many different forms. These include: racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism.

Racism

“Racism can most simply be defined as prejudice plus power.” (McAuliffe, Gomez, & Grothaus, 2008). Racism is a form of oppression, represented by marginalizing a group of people because they are considered inferior to another group (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). According to Holcomb-McCoy (2007), racism is an important concept to address when considering the achievement gap. When income of parents is comparable, race accounts for much of the achievement gap.

Discrimination

Discrimination is defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2010) as a prejudiced act. Discrimination involves treating two stimuli that have some different element in two different ways (Merriam-Webster, 2010). In schools discrimination occurs when students are treated differently based on some aspect of their culture or background. Discrimination can be directed at an individual or a group as a whole. Culturally diverse students may potentially experience discrimination in schools (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007)

Summary

By 2030, more than half of the children in the United States will be a person of color. This will increase to 62% by the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Culture differences also abound in areas such as religion, gender, socio-economic status, geography, ability, age, sexual orientation, and first language. Despite the increase in cultural diversity, there is a serious problem facing the American education system.
Academic achievement of students of color and students from low income homes has lagged significantly behind the achievement of their White, middle class or wealthy counterparts (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Professional school counselors are also in a unique position to advocate for students and to promote a more socially just and equitable education system (Bemak & Chung, 2008). PSC’s need to be equipped with the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to serve increasingly diverse school communities. CACREP (2009) requires training in multicultural competence for school counselors and the ASCA (2004) has incorporated multicultural standards into their code of ethics. Although various studies have assessed the self-perceived multicultural competence of school counselors (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson & Bradley, 2005), there is no consensus about school counselors’ understanding of the concept of multicultural competence and how this understanding influences their everyday practices. Prior studies have not been able to demonstrate a relationship between self-perceived cultural competence and actual practice. Given the potential of qualitative research for exploratory examinations of such topics (Robinson-Wood, 2009), the aim of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore how professional school counselors conceptualize and implement multicultural competence into their school counseling practice.
Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The goal of this study was to explore how practicing school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence and how, or if, they perceive that they integrate this competence into their work. In this chapter, a review of the current literature surrounding this topic will be provided. To establish context for the study, the review begins with a snapshot of the cultural diversity found in public schools. Next, a discussion about the achievement gap and its impact on students from culturally diverse populations will be presented. A history of school counseling programs will then be offered to help the reader understand the evolution of the comprehensive school counseling program and the transformed role of the school counselor. Social justice, advocacy, and equity will be discussed as key considerations for multiculturally competent counselors and counseling programs. General multicultural counseling and education competencies will be reviewed and multicultural competencies for school counselors will be discussed. Relevant counseling and educational literature will be reviewed, as will research on the multicultural competence of school counselors in the following areas: ethical standards for practice (ASCA, 2004), the need for cultural competence in school counseling, the assessment of cultural competence, and factors that contribute to competence. It will conclude with an examination of gaps in our knowledge base about the multicultural competence of school counselors.

Diversity in Schools
The United States has a long history of diversity. The demographics of the nation have shifted and, as a result, the nation and its schools are growing even more ethnically and racially diverse. According to the United States Census Bureau (2008), people of color currently constitute approximately one third of the U.S population and are projected to represent 54% of the population by the year 2050. Within that same span of time, the Latino/Latina population is expected to double, increasing from 15 to 30%, the Black population is expected to increase from 14% to 15%, and the Asian population will grow to 9.6% from 5.1% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

This expansion of cultural diversity will also be reflected in the school system. In 2005 and 2006, White students accounted for 57% of the total enrollment in K-12 public schools. Latinos/Latinas students accounted for 20%, African-Americans 17%, Native Americans 1%, and Asians 5%. However, by the year 2030, more than half of the children in the US will belong to a group of color. By the year 2050, the population of children of color is expected to be 62% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

However, culture is not solely defined by race and ethnicity (McAuliffe, 2008) and diversity compromises many different variations among people. This includes within group variations as well as between group variations. When considering the cultural disposition of America’s schools, it is important to take into account the variety of culture and diversity that exists. Cultural groups found in schools include but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, gender, ability, socio-economic status (e.g., poor/low-income, middle class, wealthy), sexual orientation, religious or spiritual affiliations, immigration/citizenship status, geographical residence (Urban, Suburban, Rural), first
language preference, special education status, and military affiliation. All of these
groups and more are represented in the U.S. school system.

Socio-economic status has been discussed as a cultural variable. According to the
Children's Defense Fund (2009), approximately 13.3 million children, or 1 in every 6,
live in poverty. When considering how many children live in extreme poverty, the
number shifts to 1 in every 13. A family of four is considered as living in extreme
poverty when the household income is half of the official poverty line or below $10,600.
Of those students living in poverty, 13.3% are White, 34.5% are African-American, 12%
are Asian/Pacific Islander, 32.9% are American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 27.5% are
Latino/Latina (Children's Defense Fund, 2009). Students from low-income homes, as
measured by the number of students eligible to receive free or reduced lunch, accounted
for nearly half the school-age population - 42% (The Education Trust, 2009). There has
also been an interaction noted between geographical location and family income.
Students who live in inner cities, rural areas, or the south are more likely to be poor
(Children's Defense Fund, 2009).

There is clear evidence that additional cultural groups abound in public schools.
Children who are undocumented citizens account for 1.6 million U.S. students.
Furthermore, 3 million children are U.S. citizens by virtue of being born in the U.S. to
parents who are undocumented citizens (Urban Institute, 2009). Undocumented citizens
and children of undocumented citizens face social and academic barriers, and nearly 40%
live at or below the federal poverty level (Gonzalez, 2009). Between the years 2003 and
2004, 11% of all students were identified in the English as a Second Language category.
Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth account for 9% of students in schools and are a cultural group who often face discrimination, threats of violence, and academic difficulties (GLSEN, 1999). Additionally, they are at risk for physical, social, and emotional problems (Nichols, 1999). Another segment of the school census that could be considered a cultural group, students from military families, often face adjustment issues (Sack-Min, 2007; Strobino & Salvaterra, 2000). Research has demonstrated that multiple school transitions can have a negative impact on the academic and social adjustments of children. Furthermore, constant transitions to new environments may result in a lack of desire to participate in extracurricular activities and poorer grades for many military children (Strobino & Salvaterra, 2000). Military students can experience an average of six moves during their K-12 educational years (Military Child Education Coalition, 2008). It has been suggested in the research that schools with caring environments and high expectations can mitigate the effects of constant moving (Sack-Min, 2007; Strobino & Salvaterra, 2000). This group of students has unique needs that are introduced into the school environment.

The changing demographics of schools require educators and professional school counselors who are equipped to meet the needs of a diverse student body (Walker, 2006). School counselors are in a unique position within schools to facilitate the growth and development of students from various backgrounds. Professional school counselors are usually trained in multicultural competencies, and are often considered the “people expert” in their school buildings. This perception of professional school counselors
creates an opportunity to promote and advocate for the success of all students (Walker, 2006). Unfortunately, all students with equal capabilities do not achieve at the same rate (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). This will be explored in the next section as the focus shifts to a discussion of the achievement gap. This will be followed by examining the history of school counseling, the nature of comprehensive school counseling programs, and the role professional school counselors play in advocating for students and promoting social justice, access, and equity.

The Achievement Gap

The numbers presented above highlight the shifting demographics of public schools. However, they do not adequately convey how the education system is failing certain groups of students (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and The Education Trust illustrate that students from low-income homes and students from some racial/ethnic groups are outperformed by their White, middle class and wealthy peers. This discrepancy between the achievements of students with equal capabilities is known as the achievement gap (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). In this section, an exploration of the achievement gap will be presented.

According the Education Trust (2008), 35% of students in the fourth grade are performing below basic reading proficiency levels as measured by the NAEP reading exam. When these data are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, it is clear that African-American (54%), Latino (51%), and Native American (49%) lag behind their White (23%) and Asian (24%) counterparts. Math proficiency levels on the NAEP math exam show similar results in 8th grade. African American (53%), Latino (46%), and Native
American (44%) are performing below basic math proficiency levels at a rate that is disproportionate when compared to their White (19%) and Asian (18%) peers. Students from a middle class background also performed better than students from poverty on the Math NAEP assessment (NAEP, 2008). The trend continues across science proficiency levels where African American 8th grade students are significantly outperformed by White students (73% of White students scoring basic or above on the NAEP Science exam vs. 28% of Black students).

There is also evidence that shows students of color lack access and opportunity to rigorous coursework (e.g., Advance Placement [AP] courses). Students completing AP courses are able to take AP tests, and a passing grade on these exams can translate to college credit. In 2005-2006, White students accounted for the majority of AP test takers across Calculus (65%), English (62%), and Biology (61%) (Education Trust, 2009). Additionally, research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education demonstrates that the quality and intensity of a student’s high school courses is the single biggest predictor of college success (Barth, 2003).

The school dropout rate for students of color also illuminates educational gaps. In 2006, 22.1% of Hispanic students did not complete high school. This number was significantly different than their White counterparts (5.8%). Black students also dropped out of high school at a higher rate than White students (10.7%). Similar discrepancies were noted among genders. Males were more likely than females to drop out of school (10.3% vs 8.3%), and males across every ethnic group were more likely than females to not complete high school, with the exception of Black males - 9.7% vs. 11.7% of Black females dropping out of school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).
trends have been demonstrated for socio-economic status as well as geographical location and sexual orientation. Low-income students were six times more likely to drop-out as their higher income counterparts. In addition, students in suburban/rural communities were less likely to drop out than their urban counterparts. According to a national study published by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2005), 28% of gay and lesbian students dropped out of school. In 2007, the reported grade point average of gay, lesbian, and transgender youth were at least half a grade lower than other students. Furthermore, a national study found that Gay and Lesbian students reported feeling harassed (86%), unsafe while at school (60%), and had a high incidence of truancy (32%) (GLSEN, 2005).

These alarming statistics still do not tell the story for many other disenfranchised and underrepresented groups. Asian Americans are often discussed as a whole group, not taking into consideration various differences within subgroups. While Asian Americans are often seen as the “Model Minority”, groups such as Vietnamese and Pacific Islanders are not differentiated from their more successful Korean or Japanese counterparts (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). As a result, their needs may go overlooked (Kim & Park, 2008). There is little data on the educational achievement of many cultural groups, such as students belonging to multiple cultural groups (e.g. multiracial; Kenney, 1999).

Why do such gaps exist? What role does culture play? Although there are several factors responsible for the achievement gap, there are two key points to focus on for the purpose of this study. These two factors are cultural discontinuity and the dynamic involving student deficiency and systemic issues.

Cultural Discontinuity
Bemak and Chung (2008) stated that many underachieving students reported that their school experience was unchallenging, boring, and unsupportive. As one study suggested, "schooling consists of more than just reading, writing, and arithmetic, but promotes a particular worldview and way of interpreting reality" (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). Schools are primarily based on Eurocentric values, which mainly benefits students who align with these norms (Gibson, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Uehara, 2005). However, students come to school with their own cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that shape how they interact with students and teachers (Uehara, 2005). The cultural mismatch between the White, middle-class norms that permeate schools in the U.S. and the values and norms of students of color is known as cultural discontinuity. This discontinuity is further widened by the disproportionate numbers of White teachers and school counselors (Grothaus et al., 2010). These differences often cause misinterpretations of students’ behaviors, abilities, interactions, and intelligence. This discontinuity has been linked to psychological distress, depression, low mastery, and low levels of life satisfaction in children (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). Therefore, culturally diverse students would seem to benefit from advocacy efforts for and with them to fight for changes that would equitably serve students of all cultures.

**Student Deficiencies vs. Systemic Change**

Students who experience cultural discontinuity are more likely to view their academic abilities negatively (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). Misinterpretations on the part of educators also may lead to lower expectations (Gollnick & Chin, 2006; Lee, 2001) and overrepresentation of children of color in special education, discipline referrals, expulsions, and suspensions (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). Because the
student experiencing cultural discontinuity may act out or show distress, interventions are typically individualistic in nature.

However, in order to reduce the achievement gap, problems must be seen not only as student deficiencies but also as system issues (Erford et al., 2007). Instead of maintaining the status quo, counselors must address systemic factors that prevent groups of students from achieving. This means using data (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007) and examining existing policies and practices that support some groups while marginalizing others (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). As mentioned earlier, counselors are in a prime position to serve as change agents in the schools and to take steps to reduce the achievement gaps. The first steps lies in defining the role of the school counselor.

History of School Counseling

To gain a better understanding of the role of the school counselor, it is useful to explore how the field of school counseling has involved over time since its conception in the early 1900’s. The role of counselor at that time was vocational guidance. The focus was on career counseling and how to move students from school to work. Frank Parsons, “the Father of Guidance,” was at the head of this movement. His goal was to match students with occupations that would best utilize their skills and abilities. Parsons’ work was founded in the spirit of advocacy. Concerned with the plight of immigrants finding work in the rapidly growing cities, he considered how to help the disenfranchised effectively utilize their abilities (Herr & Erford, 2007; McAuliffe, Danner et al.; 2008). During this same moment in time, psychometrics was gaining in popularity and being used in the vocational guidance industry. Today’s school counselors still struggle with expectations of testing and assessments (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).
The 1920's saw the first incorporation of guidance into curriculum, with the incorporation of John Dewey's cognitive development movement. The goal of this change was to support student development. However, it was E.G. Williamson's trait and factor theory in the 1930's that first introduced a counselor centered approach to school counseling. Under this theory, school counselors were tasked with providing information to students while also influencing and motivating their actions. The roots of this theory are still evident in the teacher and principal expectations to "fix" student behavior regardless of student input or context (Herr & Erford, 2007). The 1940's brought with it the ideas and influences of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow who insisted that counselors should assist clients in the growth process and view them as people, not problems. This mode of thinking changed the way the field thought of school counselors, as the term guidance was replaced with counseling. "Following the inception of Rogers' work, the term guidance began to be replaced in the literature by counseling, within which guidance is encapsulated" (Lambie & Williamson, p. 127).

Several notable events occurred in the field of school counseling during the fifties, sixties and seventies. When the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in the late 1950's, they simultaneously boosted school counseling. It became important to increase the math and science programs in U.S. schools. Not only did the United States finally see the importance of allocating funds for school counselors in every high school, they also gave funds to colleges and Universities for school counselor preparation (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). This legislation was known as the National Defense Education Act (NDEA, 1958). However, the school counselor's role mainly involved tracking the most capable students into math and science programs (Herr & Erford, 2007).
Also notable is the founding of ASCA in 1952 and ASCA's inclusion as a division of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA, now the American Counseling Association [ACA]) in 1953 (Herr & Erford). The APGA was formed after a merger between the National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA), The American College Personnel Association, National Association of Guidance Supervisors and Counselor Trainers, and the Student Personnel Association for Teacher Education. With the advocacy efforts of these professional organizations for school counselors, more attention was given to standards, ethical guidelines, and training counselors to work in various settings (Herr & Erford, 2007). This helped to widen the view of school counseling and establish school counselors as more than just vocational counselors.

The field altered once again in 1962, when Gilbert Wrenn insisted counselors use multiple approaches to address the comprehensive needs of students. He published his report "The Counselor in a Changing World" which identified the need to consider the holistic development of students. During the 1960's, legislation developed in response to the civil rights movement and the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 designated funds to employ elementary school counselors. The needs of students from low-income homes and people with disabilities were also addressed in the Vocational Education Act Amendments of 1968. The Educational Act for All Handicapped Children (1975) extended the counselor's role into the special education services and the 1983 National Commission of Excellence in Education published Nation at Risk inspiring the testing and accountability movement that continues to shape school counseling today (Herr & Erford, 2007; Lambie & Williamson, 2004).
After the court rulings for the 1950's and civil rights legislation of the 1960's, segregation in the schools was brought to an end, and students could no longer be legally discriminated against on the basis of their race or ethnicity. Schools grew more culturally diverse and school counselors needed to be prepared to address these needs. One method for accomplishing this is by providing comprehensive, developmental school counseling programs.

**ASCA National Model**

The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) helped define the role of professional of School Counseling. "Through discussion, debate, and publication of role statements, position papers, and ethical standards, this division (ASCA) has been very influential in the direction and shape of school counseling as it is known today" (Paisley & Borders, 1995, p. 150). ASCA published the National Standards for School Counselors in 1997 bringing more uniformity and accountability to the field. ASCA defined professional school counselors and their roles as: "...certified/licensed professionals with a master’s degree or higher in school counseling or the substantial equivalent and are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students. Professional school counselors deliver a comprehensive school counseling program encouraging all students' academic, career, and personal/social development and help all students in maximizing student achievement" (ASCA, 2005a, p.2).

The ASCA model created a new vision for school counselors. One in which they not only provide responsive services, but take the role as leaders, collaborators, system change agents, and advocates for and with students. The comprehensive, developmental program moved the position of counselor away from the traditional approaches of
providing discrete services to individual students. This movement in school counseling shifted school counseling program’s purpose and focus from being an ancillary service provider for some students to an integral program to assist in the success of all students. Professional school counselors were charged to replace the question of “what do school counselors do?” with “how is student success enhanced because of the school counseling program?” (ASCA, 2005a; Erford, et al., 2007; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). The ASCA model incorporates three domains, personal/social, career development, and academic development. These domains include nine standards that indicate student learning (ASCA, 2005a; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001).

This model has been embraced not only at the national level but also by many states and school districts as well. School counselors are encouraged to strive to align their school counseling programs with the ASCA model to ensure success for all students (Bailey et al., 2007). Yet, is the Model enough to ensure success for all students? Lee (2001) argued that school counseling services need to be restructured to addressing the needs of culturally diverse students. Holcomb-McCoy (2007) also asserted that school counselors have to step beyond the model in order to effectively ensure the success of all students. Both scholars insisted that to address the diversity of needs in schools, counselors should base their programs on the foundations of social justice, advocacy, and equity. Although the national model identified the goals for advocacy, it provides little in the way of insight into the process and guidelines for practicing advocacy (Trusty & Brown, 2005).

Advocacy, Social Justice, and Equity

Advocacy
Field and Baker (2004) defined advocacy as the practice of going beyond traditional, direct services and attempting to make an impact on the people and institutions that directly impact the lives of clients. Kiselica and Robinson (2001) defined it as "indirect forms of helping that involve influencing the people and institutions that affect client’s lives" (p. 387). Most definitions for advocacy involve helping students by transforming the systems in which they live. Advocacy is a theme throughout many of the multicultural competencies and is also a method of addressing discrimination and oppression (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Advocacy also involves the empowerment of marginalized groups or individuals. McAuliffe, Grothaus, Pare, and Winninger, (2008) stated that “Advocacy is the act of empowering individuals or groups through actions that increase self-efficacy, remove barriers to needed services and promote systemic change” (p. 613).

In 2003, the American Counseling Association’s (ACA) Governing Council endorsed advocacy competencies presented by Lewis, Arnold, House, and Toporek (2002). These competencies provide a framework from which counselors can assist in impacting the world of the client at the both the micro and macro level. There are six domains within these competencies which include: (1) Client/Student Empowerment, (2) Client/Student Advocacy, (3) Community Collaboration, (4) Systems Advocacy, (5) Public Information, and (6) Social/Political Advocacy. Ratts, Dekruyf, and Chen-Hayes (2007) stated that these competencies could help professional school counselors in providing multiculturally competence services to students. They concluded that:

“In particular, the advocacy competencies can be a useful tool for school counselors because they provide a framework for conceptualizing
microlevel and macrolevel advocacy strategies. Certain situations call for direct interventions with a student; others call for advocacy on behalf of a student. Some situations call for working in classrooms, others in the community or in the political arena. A framework that focuses on both direct and indirect service is important because it acknowledges the complex interplay between students and their environment” (p. 92)

There is little research on how professional school counselors define advocacy. In a qualitative study on school counselors’ conceptualization of advocacy, Field and Baker (2004) found three themes to be dominant when counselors were asked to define advocacy: (1) Going beyond business as usual, (2) identifying specific advocacy behaviors, and (3) maintaining a focus on the student/operating from a case level. Lee (2001) suggested that the role of advocate has two foundational elements that include identifying systemic factors that prevent student success and promoting professional development for school staff that emphasizes culturally responsive education.

In order for professional school counselors to become advocates they must shift from the traditional role of counseling, consultation, and coordination and also embrace advocacy, leadership, collaboration and being a systemic change agent (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Stone & Dahir, 2007). School counselors have to be willing to step past the “nice counselor syndrome” and challenge the status quo. Bemak and Chung (2008) noted that certain obstacles prevented counselors from letting go of comfortable, traditional roles. These obstacles include: “personal fear, being labeled as a troublemaker, using apathy as a coping strategy, anxiety leading to guilt, anger that may lead to ineffective responses to injustices, a false sense of powerlessness, and personal discomfort” (p. 376).
School counselors need training and supervision to incorporate advocacy in their work (Bemak & Chung, 2005; House & Martin, 1999). They also need to develop certain advocacy skills. These skills, identified by Kiselica and Robinson (2001), are “the capacity for commitment and an appreciation for human suffering, nonverbal and verbal communication skills, the ability to maintain a multisystems perspective and to use individual, group and organizational change strategies, knowledge and use of the media, technology, and the internet, and assessment and research skill” (p. 391).

Erford et al. (2007) stated that in order for school counselors to advocate for high achievement of all students they needed to incorporate the following elements into their practice:

- Expect all students to achieve at the same levels
- Actively work to remove barriers to learning
- Teach students how to help themselves
- Teach students and families how to access support systems that encourage academic success
- Use local, regional, and national data on disparities in resources and academic achievement to promote system change
- Work collaboratively with all school personnel
- Offer staff developmental training for school personnel that promotes high expectations and high standards for all students
- Use data as a tool to challenge the deleterious effects of low-level and unchallenging courses
• Highlight accurate information that negates myths about who can and who cannot achieve success in rigorous courses

• Organize community activities to promote supportive structures for high standards for all students

• Help parents and the community organize efforts to work with schools to institute and support high standards for all children

• Work as resource brokers within the community to identify all available resources to help students succeed (pp. 8-9).

Both ASCA and the National School Counselor Training Initiative by the Education Trust have embraced the use of advocacy to promote student success (Field & Baker, 2004).

Social Justice

Social justice can be seen as placing a value on fairness and equity with regards to the rights of groups of people who are typically marginalized in society (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007). McAuliffe, Danner et al. (2008) defined social justice as society’s responsibility for all groups and individuals without limitations based on observed differences. Social justice targets the disenfranchised and marginalized groups in society. Social justice involves challenging the status quo by taking action to eliminate systemic oppression (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). It is considered by many to be an essential aspect of being multiculturally competent (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Vera, Buhin, & Shin, 2006).

Constantine et al. (2007) identified nine social justice competencies. These are:

• Knowledge of the manifestation of oppression and social inequities
• Ongoing critical reflection on issues of power, privilege, and racism
• Awareness of how personal position of power have contributed to injustice and oppression
• Questioning of inappropriate or exploitative therapeutic practices
• Knowledge of indigenous models of health and healing, to be able to implement culturally relevant interventions
• Ongoing awareness of social injustices
• Conceptualize, evaluate, and implement interventions that address the needs of marginalized populations
• Collaboration with community members and organizations
• Development of advocacy skill and systemic interventions

Holcomb-McCoy (2007) challenged school counselors to operate from a social justice perspective in order to reduce the achievement gap. She stated that “essentially, a social justice approach to school counseling is centered on reducing the effects of oppression on students and improving equity and access to educational services” (p.18). She further identified three assumptions that must underpin social justice focused school counseling programs. These include: assuming that there is an inequitable power distribution in schools, assuming individual behaviors and attitudes are affected by external sources, and assuming there has been an internalization of the attitudes that allow us to operate with systems of oppression. Lee (2001) stated that in order for professional school counselors to have social justice based programs they need to operate from two key points: (1) all students can and want to learn and (2) cultural differences should not be ignored.
When professional school counselors operate from a social justice perspective they are eschewing traditional forms of counseling practices that do not account for cultural differences among students. Social justice programs are empowerment based and focus on student strengths versus deficiencies. Counselors do not employ counseling theories without consideration for cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, professional school counselors consider students within the context of their environment and seek to eliminate any oppressive practices. Data are used to evaluate and guide counseling interventions, and services are tailored to the needs of the given population. Finally, there is a strong emphasis placed on equality and equity (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

However, operating from a social justice perspective does not mean that professional school counselors no longer provide important counseling services. Their roles are only strengthened by considering how culture, oppression, racism, sexism, heterosexism, class discrimination, and other inequitable systemic practices and policies impact their students. Holcomb-McCoy (2007) identified six key functions of social justice approach: (1) counseling and intervention planning, (2) consultation, (3) connecting schools, families, and communities, (4) collecting and utilizing data, (5) challenging bias, and (6) coordinating student services and support. Furthermore, social justice programs do not limit themselves to the need of individual students or even groups of students. By targeting systems they essentially affect the entire school community (Lee & Goodnough, 2007).

**Equity vs. Equality**

Equality involves treating all students equally without consideration of student differences or unique circumstances. On the other hand, equity involves treating students...
differently based on aspects of the student’s culture and student needs. Although ideally both are important elements of school counseling program, equity should be at the center of a social justice approach to school counseling (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Lee (2001) cited equity as one of the important concepts in promoting cultural diversity.

ASCA (2006) acknowledges equity as an integral piece of the school counseling program in their position statement on equity for all students. This statement charged professional school counselors to recognize individual and group diversity, while providing appropriate and needed supports based on student needs, and striving to hold high standards for the success of all students. Accordingly, professional school counselors promote equity by:

- Maintaining professional knowledge of the ever-changing and complex world of students’ culture
- Maintaining knowledge and skills for working in a diverse and multicultural work setting
- Informing school staff of changes regarding different groups within the community
- Promoting the development of school policies that promote equitable treatment of all students and opposing school policies that hinder equitable treatment of any student
- Promoting access to rigorous standards-based curriculum, academic courses and learning paths for college and career for all students

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• Developing plans to address over- or underrepresentation of specific groups in programs such as special education, honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate

• Creating an environment that encourages any student or group to feel comfortable to come forward with problems

However, as stated previously, the ideal mix is a school counseling program that promotes both equity and equality. PSC's should have high expectations for all students, but need to be sure to provide additional support and services as needed. For example, a professional school counselor might open the doors for more students of color to take AP exams, while providing them support in which to be successful in those classes. Additionally, equity should not be used as an excuse for low expectations, or as a reason to overlook negative behaviors (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

**Multicultural Competence in Counseling and Education**

Multicultural counseling has enjoyed much attention in the literature and continues to be the focus of much dialogue in the field of counseling. Multicultural counseling involves the integration of culturally specific awareness, knowledge, and skills into the counseling session (Arredondo et al., 1996). It has been argued in the literature that all counseling is multicultural counseling as the individual cannot and should not be removed from the cultural context in which they exist (Arredondo et al., 1996; Arredondo, 1999; Coleman, 2004; Liu & Clay, 2002; Sue et al., 1992). Other scholars have contended that there is not a need to support standards for multicultural competencies as “general” counseling already considers key individual factors (Weinrach & Thomas, 2002). However, there is evidence that clients’ view multicultural
counseling as more effective and beneficial than general counseling with no attention to cultural factors (Clemente & Collison, 2000; Coleman, 1998; Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Naijian & Dixon, 2001).

In an effort to provide standards for the field, Sue et al. (1992) published multicultural counseling competencies in both the Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development and the Journal of Counseling and Development. These competencies were developed in response to several historical, political, social, and professional factors. These factors include: the increasing diversification of the U.S. population, research models that utilized an ethnocentric and deficit oriented paradigm, issues of racism and oppression and their interaction in the counseling process, and individuals in the field identifying as multicultural counselors with no concrete standards or guidelines (Arredondo, 1999).

The foundation for the development of these competencies rested on five key premises (Arredondo, 1999). These premises were:

“(1) all counseling is cross-cultural, (2) all counseling happens in a context influenced by institutional and societal biases and norms, (3) the relationships described are primarily between a White counselor and clients of ethnic racial minority status, (4) constituencies most often marginalized and about which counselors have been least prepared to serve are from Asian, Black/African American, Latino, and Native American Heritage, and (5) counseling is a culture-bound profession” (p. 103).
Holcomb-McCoy and Chen-Hayes (2007) stated that a person who demonstrates high multicultural competence considers the impact of the cultural differences between the client and the counselor in counseling sessions. The multicultural counseling competencies presented by Sue et al. (1992) recognized that there were three dimensions of cultural competencies and three characteristics. The dimensions: beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills, have been endorsed by ACA and ASCA.

Beliefs and attitudes involve the counselor recognizing their own bias, prejudices, limitations, and attitudes. This domain proposes that the counselor who is culturally responsive understands the cultural influences on their own worldview, the cultural factors they bring into a counseling session, and any preconceived notions they have. Culturally responsive counseling would involve knowing how one’s own cultural conditioning can impact the counseling relationship (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Sue, et al., 1992).

The second dimension, knowledge, involves the counselor understanding the worldview of the culturally different client and being willing to show respect for their perspective. The culturally responsive counselor in this dimension recognizes that it is important to understand how their clients perceive the world and to refrain from passing judgments on the worldview of the client. In order to accomplish this goal, counselors must reject the “melting pot philosophy” that has permeated society and accept clients as culturally different and equally deserving (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Sue, et al., 1992).

The third dimension, skills, involves the counselors’ developing and appropriately using counseling interventions and techniques for working with culturally diverse
populations. When the goals and techniques that counselors use are aligned with the lived experiences and cultural values of their clients, counseling is at its most effective. Several studies have shown evidence for the importance of making counseling consistent with the client’s worldview (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Sue, et al, 1992).

Multicultural Competencies for School Counselors

Professional school counselors are also tasked with demonstrating multicultural counseling competencies in their professional practices. Due to the diversification of the U.S. school system and the impact of cultural factors on the achievement gap, it is important that they are able to be effective with culturally diverse populations and perform as systemic change agents. The ASCA national model holds that all school counselors are accountable for the effectiveness of their school counseling programs to meet the needs of all students (ASCA, 2005a; Erford, 2007). They recognized this as an ethical imperative and included multicultural counseling competency in the ethical standards for school counselors (2004). According to Standard E.2 Diversity, the professional school counselor:

1. Affirms the diversity of students, staff, and families.
2. Expands and develops awareness of his/her own attitudes and beliefs affecting cultural values and biases and strives to attain cultural competence.
3. Possesses knowledge and understanding about how oppression, racism, discrimination and stereotyping affects her/him personally and professionally.
4. Acquires educational, consultation and training experiences to improve awareness, knowledge, skills and effectiveness in working with diverse populations: ethnic/racial status, age, economic status, special needs, ESL or ELL, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, family type, religious/spiritual identity and appearance.

These standards emphasize the necessity for the development of a school counseling program that meets the needs of culturally diverse students. It also places multicultural competence as professional responsibility. In their position statement on Cultural Diversity (2009) ASCA stated that “Professional school counselors promote academic, career, and personal/social success for all students. Professional school counselors collaborate with stakeholders to create a school and community climate that embraces cultural diversity and helps to remove barriers that impede student success.” (p. 16). ASCA also includes cultural competence in position statements concerning equity for all students (2006), gender equity (2008a), and LGBTQ youth (2007).

Furthermore, ASCA presented school counselor competencies for PSC’s to use as a self-evaluation tool and for making professional development plans. These competencies align with the ASCA national model and incorporate multicultural competencies in the areas of foundation and delivery (ASCA, 2008b).

However, despite the attention ASCA and the counseling profession have given to multicultural competencies, there still appears to be a deficit in the field concerning the implementation of these competencies into practice (Nelson, Bustamente, Wilson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). In a study of 24 state models of developmental guidance programs
in the U.S., researchers found that little attention was given to culture and ethnic
development. In most cases the multicultural standard was described as “recognizing
differences” or “appreciating other’s differences” (MacDonald & Sink, 1999).

Professional school counselors also serve as educators. In many cases they
provide student support services, classroom guidance instruction, faculty and
parent/guardian workshops, and facilitate community involvement in schools (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). In this capacity, professional school counselors are tasked to provide
culturally sensitive education and act as multicultural leaders in their schools. Students’
possess varying learning styles based on their unique needs, skills, and experiences, and a
multiculturally competent educator has to be prepared to address all of these variations in
the classroom (Gollnick & Chinn, 2006). At times a professional school counselor may
be involved in direct instruction or function in the capacity of consultant. Either way,
they must be knowledgeable about the role of culture in the learning environment
(Grothaus et al., 2010; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

It is clear there is a need to prepare professional school counselors to work with a
culturally diverse student population and that multicultural competency is an ethical
imperative and professional responsibility. Despite the call for multicultural competence
from the counseling profession as a whole and the school counseling profession in
particular, there is still little evidence of how PSC’s conceptualize multicultural
competence and how this affects their program implementation and service delivery. The
remainder of this chapter will address the multicultural competence of school counselors.
Discussion will include what multicultural competence looks like in school counseling
programs, areas of competence, how competent professional school counselors perceive
themselves to be, and which factors contribute to their competence. Discussion will conclude with an examination of some of the gaps in our research.

School Counselors and Multicultural Competence

The demonstrated achievement gap, the diversification of American schools, and the cultural discontinuity that exists in schools for students of color and students from other oppressed groups speak to the need for professional school counselors to be multicultural competent. Adding to these concerns, Yeh and Arora (2003) reported on several studies that indicated that Whites were not as multiculturally aware or knowledgeable as their non-White counterparts, yet they still represent the majority of the counselors in the U.S.

PSC's can embrace their role as systemic change agents (Lee, 2001). Within this role, Lee recommended that counselors respond as facilitators of student development, student advocates, and promote community/family involvement. PSC's concerned with multicultural competency operate from a stance of social justice, advocacy, equity, and access for the success of all students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). They do not ignore the impact of culture, oppression, and racism on society. Nor do they base their school counseling programs on traditional, European, middle class values (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2007). Furthermore, professional school counselors should be willing to challenge the status quo and target systemic changes that give all students the opportunity to be successful (Bemak & Chung, 2005).

Holcomb-McCoy (2004) identified nine areas of multicultural competence for school counselors. These areas were part of a multicultural competence checklist designed to help professional school counselors assess their competence and receive
additional training or supervision in the areas deemed lacking. Holcomb-McCoy created these categories following a theme analysis of the multicultural issues and school counseling literature. These areas are presented here as a means of understanding how multicultural competencies can translate into the work of professional school counselors.

1. Competence in Multicultural Counseling – this area addresses school counselors’ use of culturally responsive counseling interventions and techniques when working with children and families. School counselors also need to understand the help-seeking behaviors of different cultural groups.

2. Competence in Multicultural Consultation – this area addresses school counselors’ abilities to incorporate culture into the consultation process. As student advocates, school counselors are able to share their knowledge on providing culturally responsive services for students.

3. Competence in Understanding Racism and Student Resistance – this area addresses the need for school counselors to recognize and combat racism and oppression in the school system. School counselors must also understand how the historical impact of racism will affect the willingness of certain groups of students to engage in cross-cultural interactions.

4. Competence in Understanding Racial Identity Development – this area addresses school counselor’s ability to utilize and understand racial development theories. According to ASCA (2005a), school counseling programs are comprehensive and developmental in nature. To better understand the developmental needs of all students, school counselors need a knowledge base in racial identity development.
5. Competence in Multicultural Assessment – Standardized testing is big component of the U.S. education system. School counselors need to be aware of culturally appropriate and fair testing practices. School counselors also need to be knowledgeable about multiculturally sensitive assessment.

6. Competence in Multicultural Family Counseling – School counselors must take into account the impact of culture on the family counseling process. Families are varied and diverse, and school counselors are tasked to be able to work with families from all types of backgrounds.

7. Competence in Social Advocacy – this competency speaks to the need for school counselors to be social change agents. Schools are naturally social arenas in which a multitude of societal problems can be addressed.

8. Competence in Developing School-Family-Community Partnerships – School counselors are encouraged to take a leadership role in encouraging the empowerment of all families and communities to be involved in promoting the success of all students.

9. Competence in Understanding Interpersonal Interactions – This area deals with school counselors’ ability to interact and communicate with culturally diverse clients. School counselors can promote positive interactions among faculty, students, and families.

The above competencies are presented as a framework for professional school counselors to assess their own multicultural competence. PSC’s are often considered the “people experts” in their schools and therefore need to not only have knowledge of culturally responsive practices, but also need to be able to take a leadership role within
the school (Field & Baker, 2004). One method for professional school counselors to accomplish this task is by partnering with other leaders in the school, such as school psychologist (Simcox, Nuijens, & Lee, 2006) or school administrators (Walker, 2006). This partnership would involve the stakeholders in the educational development of all students to collaborate in creating a community that can meet the challenges of educating a diverse student body (Simcox et al., 2006).

School counseling preparation programs are also charged with preparing professional school counselors to be adept at operating within culturally diverse schools. CACREP has increased the multicultural competencies for school counselors and national and state certification boards have established multicultural competency requirements for counselors (CACREP 2009; Cates, Schaeffle, Smaby, Maddux, & Lebeauf, 2007; Lewis & Hayes, 1991). However, the field still lacks a uniform method for preparing culturally responsive school counselors (Cates, et al., 2007; Herring, 1998).

Professional school counselors can increase their multicultural competence by immersing themselves professionally and personally in diverse communities, being active in the community in which their school is located, seeking multicultural training and professional development opportunities, seeking opportunities for multicultural engagement, soliciting feedback on the practice and understanding of multicultural issues, continually assessing the needs of their students, and assessing one’s own multicultural competence on a regular basis (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004, 2007; Lee, 2001; Virginia School Counselor Association, 2008). The following definition of someone with a multicultural personality gives a touchstone to measure our current status:
an individual who... embraces diversity in her or his personal life and makes active attempts to learn about other cultures and interact with culturally different people (e.g., friends, colleagues); ...possesses the ability to live and work effectively among different groups and types of people; understands the biases inherent in his or her own worldview and actively learns about alternative worldviews... and is a social activist, empowered to speak out against all forms of social injustice (e.g., racism, homophobia, sexism, ageism, domestic violence, religious stereotyping); (Ponterotto, Utsey, & Pedersen, 2006, p. 130).

However, the following questions still remain: Are professional school counselor’s multiculturally competent? If so, how does this affect their work?

Assessing Competence

There are multiple scales available to assess multicultural competence from a quantitative perspective. However, limitations to assessing multicultural competence using many of the existing scales include: lack of psychometrics and the need for more statistical procedures to support existing assessments, the measurement of different constructs, high intercorrelations on subscales within instruments, unclear constructs, issues with self-reports, and variations in individual conceptualizations of multicultural competence (Hays, 2008). Despite these challenges, researchers have attempted to assess the multicultural competence of school counselors.

In general, school counselors report high levels of multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson &
Bradley, 2005) and high levels of multicultural counseling self-efficacy (Holcomb-McCoy, et al., 2008). However there were some variations among the scales. School counselors’ rated their multicultural awareness, knowledge of terminology, and multicultural knowledge as higher than their multicultural skill and knowledge of racial identity development (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001). Yet, another study found that counselors rated themselves lower on multicultural counseling awareness, despite most of their participants having taken a multicultural counseling course in their graduate preparation program (Robinson & Bradley, 2005). These results suggest that multicultural competence needs to be reviewed a multidimensional concept (Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004).

Other research on school counselor multicultural competence focused on the factors that contributed to multicultural competence. Across most studies, prior multicultural training was demonstrated to predict high levels of self-perceived multicultural competence (Constantine, 2001a; Constantine et al., 2001; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008). However, some studies found that prior multicultural training did not have a significant effect on the self-perceived competency of school counselors (Constantine & Gainor, 2001; Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; Robinson & Bradley, 2005). One possible reason for this finding could be the lack of uniformity in school counseling preparation programs.

Other factors that contributed to school counselor multicultural competence included: being a member of a ethnic group of color (Yeh & Arora, 2003); years of experience (Holcomb-McCoy, et al., 2008); espousing an eclectic/integrative theoretical orientation versus a cognitive-behavioral or psychodynamic approach (Constantine, 2001b); high
ethnic tolerance attitudes, low Racism attitudes (Constantine & Gushee, 2003); being empathic and having high emotional intelligence (Constantine & Gainor, 2001); being a female with an independent self-construal (Constantine, 2001a); having a desire to engage in diverse social and cultural activities, and an appreciation for the impact of the diversity in others on their own cultural selves (Constantine et al., 2001). Furthermore, Constantine et al. (2001) noted that when school counselors develop their multicultural awareness and knowledge, they increased their ability to identify critical cultural variables when working with students.

_Gaps in the Research_

Despite the high self-perceived competence of school counselors, there are important limitations and gaps to consider in the research. All of the studies that exist on school counselor's multicultural competence rely heavily on self-reports. Self-report data are rife with limitations and concerns (Pope-Davis, Liu, Toporek, & Brittan-Powell, 2001). The degree to which these scores can measure actual competence has been called into question, and social desirability may lead to inflated scores (Cartwright, Daniels, & Zhang, 2008; Ridley & Kleiner, 2003). There appears to be no evidence that school counselors are actually practicing culturally responsive counseling. Another consideration is the use of several different scales to measure school counselor competency. With the lack of a clear method for assessing competence, it is difficult to identify the competencies that are being assessed.

Furthermore, there is no uniformity in the field with regards to professional school counselors' training (Herring, 1998) to prepare them to work in culturally diverse schools. There is however, clear evidence that professional school counselors
conceptualize multicultural competency as dimensional rather than as a single entity. Perceived competency in one area does not guarantee competency in another (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001). Confounding this problem is the lack of a scale that measures multicultural skills in school counseling competence (Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004). With all of these considerations, it is possible that various professional school counselors might conceptualize multicultural competence differently and have various methods for incorporating this into their work.

Examining the relationship between school counselors’ self-perceived multicultural competence and their actual practice has been suggested as a topic that needed exploration (Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004). There has also been a call in the literature to provide the field with qualitative studies that explore the multicultural competence of counselors (Robinson-Wood, 2009). Questions to consider include: how do professional school counselors define multicultural competence, what is their relationship with students of color, and which strategies and interventions do they use to serve culturally diverse populations (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004). Although quantitative studies exist describing school counselors as having high self-reported multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; 2004; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004), none were found that detail how they attach meaning to cultural competence and incorporate culturally responsive strategies into their work. The current phenomenological study explored how school counselors conceptualized and understood implementing multicultural competence into their work. This study allowed practicing school counselors to define multicultural competence and to discuss how they demonstrate this in their work with students.
Summary

The schools in the United States are becoming more culturally diverse. By the year 2050, the population of children is expected to be 62% children of color (US Census Bureau, 2008). However, ethnic and racial minorities are not the only cultural groups that can be found in schools. Other groups include but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, gender, ability, socio-economic status (poor/low-income, middle class, wealthy), sexual orientation, religious affiliations, immigration/citizenship status, geographical residence (Urban, Suburban, Rural), English Language Learners, special education status, and military affiliation. With the diversification of America’s schools, professional school counselors are being tasked to meet the needs of a diverse population.

One area in which professional school counselors can be of assistance is in addressing the achievement gap. Disparities in the educational achievement of culturally diverse students have been demonstrated in the research (Education Trust, 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Schools based on traditional White, middle class values support the advancement of certain groups of students while opening the door of racism, oppression, and failure to others (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). As student advocates, PSC’s can promote school counseling services tailored to meet the needs of all students.

In order to accomplish this goal, professional school counselors need to develop comprehensive, developmental school counseling programs with an emphasis on social justice, advocacy, and equity for all students (Erford et al., 2007; Field & Baker, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Advocacy involves challenging the status quo and identifying policies and practices that prevent groups of students from succeeding (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Herr & Erford, 2007; House & Martin, 1999). As student advocates, counselors
operate as systemic change agents. Social justice can be seen as placing a value of
fairness and equity with regards to the rights of groups of people who are typically
marginalized in society (Constantine et al., 2007). Lee (2001) stated that in order for
school counselors to have social justice based program they need to operate from two key
points: (1) All students can and want to learn and (2) cultural differences should not be
ignored. Equity involves treating students differently based on cultural differences, and
not simply ignoring how culture impacts student’s behavior, thoughts, and actions
(Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

To guide counselors as they pursue multicultural competence, standards were
designed by Sue, et al. (1992). They identified three dimensions – beliefs/attitudes,
skills, knowledge – and three characteristics – (1) counselors awareness of own
assumptions, values, and bias, (2) understanding the worldview of the culturally different
client, and (3) developing appropriate interventions, strategies, and techniques.
Holcomb-McCoy (2004) outlined nine competency areas for school counselors which
included: Multicultural Counseling, Multicultural Consultation, Understanding Racism
and Student Resistance, Multicultural Assessment, Understanding Racial Identity
Development, Multicultural Family Counseling, Social Advocacy, Developing School-
Family-Community Partnerships, and Understanding Cross-Cultural Interpersonal
Interactions. Furthermore, ASCA (2004), CACREP (2009), and national and state
certification boards have recognized multicultural competence as an ethical imperative
for professional school counselors.

In several studies school counselors reported high levels of multicultural
competence and several factors were shown to be associated with competence.
Holcomb-McCoy and Day-Vines (2004) noted that multicultural competence is a multidimensional concept and competence in one area does not guarantee competence across the board. The majority of the measures used self-report data and were quantitative in nature. Despite the promising reports, there is no evidence that school counselors actually practice culturally responsive practices. Qualitative research is needed to understand how school counselors define multicultural competence and how they incorporate it into their work (Robinson-Wood, 2009).
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The cultural landscape of the United States continues to grow more ethnically and culturally diverse. People of color currently comprise approximately one third of the U.S. population and are projected to represent 54% by 2050. Within the same span of time, the Latino/Latina population is expected to double (from 15 to 30%), the Black population is expected to increase from 14% to 15%, and the Asian population will also see a rise (5.1% to 9.6%). By 2030, more than half of the children in the U.S will be a person of color. Accordingly, by the year 2050 the population of children of color is expected to be 62% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

However, despite the changing demographics of schools, and the increase in cultural diversity, there is still a serious problem facing the American education system. Academic achievement of students of color and students from low income homes has lagged significantly behind the achievement of their White, middle class or wealthy counterparts (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Education Trust, 2000; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Although there are numerous factors that could contribute to these academic disparities, culture can have a serious impact on how well a child performs at school (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Grothaus et al., 2010). Research has shown that the achievement incongruities are “a result of environmental, historical, sociopolitical, sociocultural, and institutional factors rather than student’s capabilities (Bemak & Chung, 2008, p. 372). Therefore, it is not the students that need to be “fixed” but the system (Erford et al., 2007). With this in mind, professional school counselors, as student advocates can be
proactive in working to reduce this gap in achievement (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

The American School Counselors Association (ASCA) has recognized the importance of cultural competence. In their Position Statement on Cultural Diversity (2009) ASCA identifies that "Professional school counselors promote academic, career, and personal/social success for all students. Professional school counselors collaborate with stakeholders to create a school and community climate that embraces cultural diversity and helps to remove barriers that impede student success" (p. 16). This is further reflected in the ASCA Code of Ethics (2004) which tasks that the professional school counselor should practice multicultural competence in their work.

Professional school counselors are in a unique position to be change agents within their schools. As advocates for all students they can facilitate positive interactions, affect attitudes, and create opportunities that promote respect of cultural differences (Uehara, 2005). Therefore, professional school counselors need to be equipped to address the personal/social, academic, and career needs of a diverse student population. They also need the skills to engage in culturally responsive consultation with school faculty, as well as culturally appropriate methods for working with family groups different from their own. To achieve this goal, professional school counselors need adequate multicultural training. Recently, CACREP (2009) included more multicultural training requirements for school counselor trainees (Cates et al., 2007). National and state certification boards have also adjusted their requirements to include multicultural competencies for school counselors (Cates et al.; Herring, 1998). Literature has generally shown support that prior multicultural training has had a positive effect on the perceived multicultural
competence of school counselors (Constantine, 2001a; Constantine et al., 2001; Constantine & Gushue, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008).

In general, school counselors tend to report high levels of both multicultural competency and multicultural counseling self-efficacy. However, they tend to report higher amounts of competence in the areas of multicultural awareness and terminology, than in knowledge of other cultural groups, skills to work with culturally different clients, and knowledge of racial identity development (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). Researchers have also found that certain factors contribute to higher ratings of self perceived multicultural competence. These factors include: prior coursework (Constantine, 2001a; Constantine et al., 2001; Constantine & Gushue, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008), being a member of an ethnic group of color (Yeh & Arora, 2003), years of counseling experience (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008), espousing an eclectic/integrative theoretical orientation, ability to be empathic (Constantine, 2001b), high tolerance attitudes, and low racism attitudes (Constantine & Gushue, 2003).

Despite the high self-perceived competence of school counselors, there appears to be no evidence that professional school counselors actually use culturally responsive practices in their work (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). Most research pertaining to this topic is quantitative in nature, based on self-report, and addresses whether or not professional school counselors view themselves as multiculturally competent on a defined scale. However, there is no uniform agreement on how to prepare school counseling students (Herring, 1998). There is also some confusion as to the definition of multicultural
competence as well as how to accurately assess this factor (Herring, 1998; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004). There does not appear to be any research that offers insight into how practicing professional school counselors define multiculturalism and how or if they infuse their work with culturally responsive practice.

The purpose of the current study was to explore how professional school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence and how, or if, they incorporate it into their work based on this understanding. The methodology for the current study will be detailed below.

Methodology Overview

A good qualitative design is grounded in a philosophy, tradition, paradigm and purpose (Drisko, 1997). It takes into account the researcher and research team biases, and determines how data will be collected and analyzed. It also considers trustworthiness and important ethical and legal considerations. In the following sections philosophy, tradition, paradigm, and purpose will be detailed. Other key components, such as researcher team bias, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical and legal considerations will also be discussed.

Philosophy

Quantitative research is usually "based on this positivist-reductive conceptual system that values objectivity, linearity, cause and effect, repeatability, and reproducibility, predictability, and the quantification of data" (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996, p. 538). In contrast, qualitative research seeks to describe and give a voice to the lived experiences of the participants (Farber, 2006; Poggenpoel, Myburgh, & Van Der Linde, 2001). At the heart of qualitative research is the assumption that there is no single way of
knowing and that multiple realities exist. Qualitative research seeks to "examine what people are doing and how they interpret what is occurring rather than pursuing patterns of cause and effect by replicating experiments in a controlled setting" (p. 537).

Other disciplines including nursing, anthropology, sociology, education, family studies, and family therapy, have utilized qualitative research but this methodology has seen a slow growth in the counseling field (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996). However, qualitative design can be a natural fit for multicultural research as it does not operate from a linear worldview. "More specifically, the various aspects of qualitative research that address multicultural paradigms include recognizing non-linear causality and interrelatedness, making social and cultural context explicit, and valuing interpersonal relationships and subjectivity" (Merchant and Dupuy, p. 538). In addition, editors of professional journals have requested the need for more qualitative studies in guidance and counseling (Berrios & Lucca, 2006).

Creswell (2006) recommended that an individual choose a qualitative research design based on the nature of the research question, the necessity of exploration for the current topic, and because a detailed view of the problem is needed. For the current study, a qualitative approach was selected because: the research questions sought to understand how professional school counselors conceptualize and implement multicultural competence, there has been little exploration of this topic, and no research appears to exist examining this topic with practicing professional school counselors. Finally, although quantitative studies exists describing school counselors as having high self-reported multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; 2004; Holcomb-McCoy
& Day-Vines, 2004), none have been found that detail how they attach meaning to cultural competence and incorporate culturally responsive strategies into their work. 

Paradigm

According to a social constructivist paradigm, there is no universal truth. There are different meanings prescribed to a particular phenomenon and how these differing meanings interact with each other should be explored (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the current study encouraged the exploration of differing views about multicultural competence, allowing the participants to define the phenomenon. This was accomplished by bracketing researcher assumptions and asking open-ended questions during the individual and focus group interviews. This study sought to illuminate how professional school counselors define, identify, and incorporate multicultural competence into their school counseling work.

The research paradigm underpinning these views is social constructivism. This paradigm asserts that multiple realities of a phenomenon exist. Because constructivism is built on the tenet of ontological relativity, it assumes that all beliefs about reality are based on a worldview, and its tenet of epistemology asserts that this knowledge is actively constructed by the individual through social interactions. There are different ways to construct reality and these constructions by individuals have consequences for their behaviors and for the people with whom they interact (Patton, 2004). Therefore, two individuals can experience the same phenomenon in two very different ways, based on how they perceive the world. In other words, the multicultural competence experience of one professional school counselor does not necessarily reflect or mirror the experiences of another.
A social constructivist paradigm is concerned with how the participants conceptualize the research question. The axiology of social constructivism emphasizes the values that individuals attribute to their experiences. Therefore, in a qualitative study using a social constructivist paradigm the values of the researchers and the participants will be considered. The rhetoric of this paradigm is to present data that reflect the voices of the participants while detailing the role of the researchers in exploring the research question (Patton, 2002). The lived experience of each participant was detailed and analyzed with the context of his/her words and perceptions of his/her views.

**Tradition**

This paradigm was paired with a tradition of phenomenology. The goal of phenomenology is to expose the lived experience of a phenomenon by examining individual and collective meanings. These core meanings come together to explain the essence of a shared experience (Patton, 2002). In the current study, the researcher gathered information about the lived experiences of PSC’s and their implementation of multicultural competence into their school counseling program. Because epoche, the suspension of prejudgments about reality, is an important component of the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2006), the researcher entered the process by first bracketing her own views of how PSC’s should conceptualize multicultural competence and what this should look like in their daily activities.

The phenomenon under study was multicultural competence in school counseling programs. The researcher sought to give a voice to the lived experiences of professional school counselors. To that end, the words and meanings of the participants were used to describe the phenomena.
The researcher provided context by focusing on one school district. The needs of middle, high, and elementary professional school counselors and students can vary drastically. Furthermore, schools have extreme variations within districts as well as across districts and regions. Utilizing a single case will allow for a deeper exploration and understanding of the culture of those involved (Creswell, 2006).

Purpose

Qualitative research usually has as its focus areas that have not been previously researched in an exploratory manner (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996). Although quantitative studies exist that report perceived multicultural competence of school counselors (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson & Bradley, 2005), there seems to be no research that explains how professional school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence and the relationship, if any, between their reported level of competence and their actual practice. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the experiences of practicing professional school counselors working in culturally diverse schools. This study aimed to highlight how PSC’s understand, define, and incorporate cultural competence into their work. This was accomplished through interviews and focus groups with professional school counselors. The goals of this study were to add insight into how professional school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence, how they demonstrate this in their work, and to inform the preparation, training and continued professional development of school counselors to work in culturally diverse schools.

Research Question
Merchant and Dupuy (1996) stated that meaningful research questions are “drawn from a contextual understanding of a particular group or an individual’s experience within a given society” (p. 539). With this in mind, the current researcher draws from her contextual understanding of school counseling, derived from having worked as a professional school counselor for seven years, to formulate the research question. She understands that each school is different based on geography, culture, ethnic, and socio-economic make-up. A comprehensive school counseling program, facilitated by a professional school counselor, is designed to meet the developmental needs of the students at a particular school. Therefore, the multicultural skills a counselor possesses at one school may not be adequate for another professional school counselor in the same school district. Therefore, it is important to understand the essence of each experience to gain insight into how school counselors choose to conceptualize and implement multicultural competence.

There are two research questions for the current study: How do practicing professional school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence? How does their conceptualization of cultural competence influence the school counseling services they facilitate?

*Research Team*

*Primary Researcher.* Merchant and Dupuy (1996) asserted that qualitative research is different from quantitative in that it’s “based on the belief that subjectivity is unavoidable in any research endeavor” (p. 539). The qualitative researcher seeks objectivity not through controlling variables, but through naming and bracketing
researcher assumptions and biases. This process protects the validity of the participant’s experiences being studied.

The primary author and researcher is a doctoral student in a counselor education program. She holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology, and a Masters Degree in Counseling. She is a Licensed Professional School Counselor in a Southeastern U.S. state and is currently seeking a license as a professional counselor (LPC). She has worked for seven years as a professional school counselor at the elementary level in an urban area in a Southeastern U.S. state. Before that, she worked briefly as a residential counselor in the same geographic area.

It should further be noted that the researcher entered the process with a series of experiences and beliefs about the role of multicultural competence in school counseling programs. This researcher is currently a practicing professional school counselor at the elementary level and has completed two graduate courses on multiculturalism in the CACREP core area of social and cultural diversity. She has also read multiple journal articles and books about the importance of school counselors being culturally competent. This researcher believes that multicultural competence should play a key role in all school counseling programs. She also believes that most school counselors believe they are culturally alert, even if they do not feel efficacious in the area of multicultural competence. She also believes that advocacy, equity, and social justice are essential aspects of multicultural competence. This view has been generally supported in the literature (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007)

There are several key points that should be noted about the primary researcher’s background. She is a 31 year-old, African-American female. Having grown up in the
military, she also considers herself part of this sub-culture. Furthermore, she is heterosexual, Christian, and able-bodied. Growing up, her family was lower middle class, however, the income level of the family has improved during her adult years. Currently, she is married, with no biological children, and is considered middle class.

Research Team. The primary researcher was responsible for completing a comprehensive literature review on the topic and designing the methodology. The research questions for the individual interviews and focus groups were also decided by the primary researcher, in consultation with her dissertation committee. Other duties for the primary researcher included: designing protocol, submitting required documents for Human Subject Research Review Committee approval, participant recruitment, and training focus group moderators.

A research team was created to assist with co-moderating the focus groups and coding of data. This team consisted of three additional members. The team was chosen to represent diverse cultural groups as well as offer different perspectives. The team consisted of one practicing school counselor, one school counseling graduate who has not worked in schools, and a counselor with no school counseling background. The primary researcher identified two other doctoral students in her program who met the above criteria (experience as a school counselor and training with no working school counseling experience), and one recent graduate from a counselor education doctoral program to perform as an auditor. The primary researcher conducted pre-interviews with each potential team member to ascertain the fit for the team. Biases, prejudices, attitudes, and expectations were discussed, and bracketed for this study.
The first member of the research team is a doctoral student who has received her masters in counseling with a major in school counseling, but has not worked in the field. She is a 26 year old White female, who has participated in multicultural courses at both the masters and doctoral level. She states a strong belief that all counselors should be multiculturally adept, and reports having high-possibly too high- expectations for practicing school counselors. However, she does believe that her lack of school counseling experience is a limitation in understanding the practical work of school counselors.

The second research team member is a doctoral student, and a trained and licensed professional school counselor. She worked for 5 years as a middle school counselor and 4 years as an elementary school counselor. During this time she spent 4 years in working with majority "privileged" students and 5 years working in an urban setting. She is a 34 year old, African American female, and has been in multicultural courses at both the masters and doctoral level. She states her biases as a belief that counselors should actively engage in advocacy efforts, and have an awareness of inequality within the educational system.

The auditor is a recent graduate of a counselor education doctoral program. He has no experience with school counseling work. He works in a private practice setting and as an adjunct professor for masters’ level courses in a counseling program. He was selected for his research in multilingual competence, knowledge of qualitative research design, experience auditing qualitative studies, and lack of a school counseling background. He is a White male, who has received multicultural training, and holds a
bias towards qualitative research, in that he believes qualitative research to be a valuable source of rich information.

Team member selection was finalized the summer semester of 2009 by the primary researcher. All team members, with the exception of the auditor, were responsible for checking the accuracy and conducting data analysis of the transcribed transcripts. This allowed for triangulation and corroboration in the process of determining codes, themes, and patterns (Creswell, 2006). The auditor was not part of data collection, analysis of data, or moderating focus groups.

Selection of a Case

There were several considerations in case selection for this study. One of the most important factors the researcher had to consider was the accessibility of the case. The current study design called for prolonged engagement, interviews, and focus groups. The primary investigator currently works as a school counselor in the district chosen for the case. Therefore, this district was both open and accessible for the current study. Furthermore, the researcher stands in a unique position to provide rich context for the study due to her prolonged engagement (seven years) with the case.

Case

The case for this study is defined as an urban school district in a Southeastern state. This school district educates approximately 31,350 children. The district consists of 5 early childhood centers, 26 elementary schools, 9 middle schools, and 5 high schools. There are professional school counselors employed at all schools within this district, and multiple counselors in middle, high, and some elementary schools (based on number of enrolled students). According to the ASCA (2005b) a professional school
counselor is defined as a professional with a master’s degree in school counseling or an equivalent, have obtained state licensure or certification, and are trained in meeting the personal/social, academic, and career development needs of all students. There is also one School Counseling Supervisor, who supervises all the PSC’s in the district and represents the school counseling department at district meetings. School counselors to student ratios are approximately 1:500 for elementary school counselors, 1:400 for middle school counselors, and 1:350 for high school counselors. These numbers are in accordance with the state law. School counselors are encouraged to seek professional development opportunities, both within and outside of the district. These opportunities could include state and national conferences, workshops, meetings, and classes. The district supervisor has level (elementary, middle, and high) meetings with the school counselors each month. During these meetings, professional development topics have included developing multicultural competence. Furthermore, the supervisor is encouraging all school counseling programs to align themselves with the ASCA national model and to apply for Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) status.

The mission of this school district is to “provide a quality education that encourages every student to realize his/her fullest potential.” The vision of the district is identified as a “community of lifelong learners that demonstrates the knowledge, skills, and values required for productive global citizenship.” Of the 31,350 students, 50.8% are male and 49.2% are female. The percentage of enrollment represented by ethnic groups of color is 69.8%. Black students (57.3%) comprise the majority of enrollment, with White students (30.2) representing the second largest demographic group, and Hispanics (6.8%) the third. Socio-economic status is another cultural group of important note, as
the literature has documented that socio-economic status can affect student learning, development, and involvement in school (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Youth from families with low income account for 50.4% of the student enrollment. Other cultural groups present in the school include students receiving special education services (13.1%), military students, undocumented citizens, students labeled as talented and gifted (5.6%), and several other unidentified ethnicities (2.4%.

Table 1
District X’s Student Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment</td>
<td>31359</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Male</td>
<td>15938</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Female</td>
<td>15421</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Native American</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Black</td>
<td>17962</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hispanic</td>
<td>2127</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- White</td>
<td>9474</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Unspecified</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education:</td>
<td>4103</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talented and Gifted:</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged:</td>
<td>15793</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note: The demographic information presented above is an approximate number of student demographic data taken yearly in October. This includes all students (full- and part-time, preschoolers, GED, special programs, etc.).

In this Southeastern state there are 134 school districts and a total of 2,203 schools, serving approximately 1,220,440 students. Of these schools, 26.4% of them are classified as Title I schools. The racial/ethnic makeup of students in this state is 59.3% White, 26.7% Black, 8.3% Latino/Latina, 5.4% Asian/Pacific Islanders, and .3% American Indian/Alaskan Native (NAEP, 2008). The diverse cultural and ethnic makeup of the selected school division made it a viable case for study. It served as a critical case in that it met all the conditions necessary for inclusion. Those conditions included:
employs professional school counselors, racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse school district, and has schools representing elementary, middle, and high school.

Participants

In a phenomenological study, the participants need to be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation and are willing to share their experiences (Creswell, 2006; Patton, 2002). Participants were 12 currently practicing professional school counselors. Creswell (2006) stated that 10 participants in a phenomenological study is a reasonable size. To provide cultural context, the study focused on professional school counselors in one school division. A stratified purposeful sampling was used to select participants. The schools were divided into three different categories: elementary (grades K-5), middle (grades 6-8), and high school (grades 9-12). To achieve maximum variation, four professional school counselors were selected from each category. In the middle and high school category, counselors were randomly chosen to be invited to participate. In the elementary school category, the schools were divided into two different socio-economic categories, Title I or non-Title I school. Title I status was used as a socio-economic marker. Based on The Elementary and Secondary Education Teacher Act of 1965, all schools are automatically classified into one of these categories. Title I is the largest federally funded program under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. As research often shows, students in schools with higher numbers of students from low income families perform academically lower than students in schools with a smaller concentration of these students, the federal government has allocated additional funds to assist these schools. A school qualifies for Title I status if the percentage of students in attendance receiving free or reduced lunch is equal to or
exceeds the district average for the percentage of students classified as obtaining free or reduced lunch (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The schools were divided into Title I or Non-Title I to ensure participants working with students from both socio-economic groups were represented. In this district only the elementary schools hold Title I status. Of the 26 elementary schools, 16 are classified as Title I schools.

Yeh and Arora (2003) reported on several studies that demonstrated Whites were not as multiculturally aware or knowledgeable as their ethnic counterparts, yet they still represent most of the counselors in the U.S. Other studies have shown a relationship between being a member of an ethnic group of color and reporting high levels of multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008). To further explore how ethnicity may impact multicultural competence, at least one counselor at each level was selected from an ethnic group of color. Other identifiable cultural factors, such as age, have not been demonstrated in the literature to relate to high levels of self-reported multicultural competence. However, random selection allowed for a variation of age, experience levels, gender, knowledge, and personal experiences. One potential limitation of using this sampling method was the risk of not having enough male counselors. However, the researcher believed this was more indicative of the culture of the group and allow for better transferability, as school counseling tends to be a female dominated field.

Participants were recruited in the fall of 2009. The researcher created a list dividing schools by level (elementary, middle, or high) and then divided the elementary schools by Title I status. One counselor from each level was selected based on ethnicity. The primary researcher’s relationship to the school district allowed her to be able to select at least one participant at each level that was non-White. The other three...
counselors at each level were randomly selected. For the elementary schools, school names were written on sheets of paper, divided by Title I or Non-Title I status, and selected. At each elementary school there is only one full-time school counselor. For the high school and middle schools, school counselors were randomly chosen.

Participants were initially contacted via telephone to solicit their participation. Messages were left on the voice mail if school counselors did not pick up the telephone. School counselors that did not return phone messages received an email. After two weeks of no-response, a new name was selected. At the elementary and middle school level, all eight participants agreed to participate after the first phone call. At the high school level, two of the original participants agreed after the first phone call and two did not respond. Two more were selected, and agreed after the first phone call. After the participants agreed, individual interviews were scheduled. The participant selected the location of the interview. Eleven of the 12 counselors requested the interview take place in their office at their school. One school counselor requested the interview take place in a conference room at the central administration building. This request was made in the interest of time, as she had been there for a meeting prior to the interview.

**Participant Profiles**

Participants for this study were 12 practicing school counselors from the same southeastern school district. All participants were assigned a numerical code to ensure confidentiality, and any identifying information on the transcriptions was erased. Demographic information about the participants was collected utilizing a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) administered at the individual interview. Participant profiles...
were created for a detailed description of the group used for this study (See Table 2 in Chapter Four).

There were four school counselors at each level (elementary, middle, and high). Six of the school counselors identified themselves as African-American or Black and six identified themselves as White or Caucasian. Ten participants were females and 2 identified as males. The mean age of participants was 41, with an age range from 26-57 years old. The mean number of years of experience as a school counselor was 10.5, with a range from 1.5-23 years. All but one of the counselors held a Masters degree as the highest level attained. That one school counselor listed the Education Specialist degree as the highest degree. All participants stated receiving prior training in multicultural counseling. Eight of the PSC’s cited master’s level courses as one mode of training, 10 cited district or school level professional development, one cited professional association conferences, and one cited being an anthropology major.

When asked about other aspects of their culture they may wish to share, 8 responded no or did not answer the question, the other four responses included: being of Greek descent, Bahrainian daughter-in-law, Baptist affiliation, and no contact with black people prior to the age of 13. Three school counselors reported no involvement with culturally diverse individuals outside of the school counseling setting, and nine reported they were involved with culturally diverse individuals. Only one school counselor did not respond to question pertaining to cultural groups for which they provide services. Of the remaining school counselors, 10 listed racial/ethnic groups, 2 of which also mentioned non-racial/ethnic cultural groups. One listed different social groups they interact with in the school such as national honor society.
Measures to Ensure Participant Confidentiality & Safety

Before beginning the study, the Human Subjects Review Board at Old Dominion University reviewed the proposal and granted the study exempt status. Data collection did not begin until this approval had been granted. Participants were given and signed informed consent forms at the beginning of the individual interview and the focus group (Appendix D). In order to further ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned a numerical code, which was used on all transcripts, documents, observations, and demographic forms. A professional transcriptionist was used, and she was instructed to remove any identifying information from the transcriptions. All recordings were destroyed after the researchers reviewed them for accuracy, and all paper materials were kept in a locked file cabinet. Participants were assured of confidentiality during the individual interviews, and informed of the limits of confidentiality in a focus group setting. Furthermore, participants were sent transcripts of their interviews for member checks and were offered to receive the results of the study upon written request.

Data Collection Procedures

For the purpose of this study, the following data collection methods were used: focus groups, individual interviews, and document reviews. This allowed for triangulation of the data, and would permit the researcher to explore how participants thought of multicultural competence and how they implemented it in their work with students. Data collection occurred during the fall semester of 2009 and the early spring semester of 2010. The researchers adhered strictly to the ethical guidelines (ACA, 2005; ASCA, 2004) and all collected data first had the written consent of the participants (Appendix D).
Individual Interviews

Interviewing is a commonly used method of collecting data in qualitative studies. During an interview a researcher is seeking to obtain a rich, detailed account of the participant’s experiences. The researcher uses empathic and active listening, acceptance, and trust to form an environment in which the participant feels comfortable opening up their experiential world to others. During the interview the focus remains on the participant’s story, and the researcher willingly follows the story allowing it to be told in the words of the participant (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996; Polkinghorne, 2005).

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. To foster a sense of safety and security, the participants chose the setting, date, and time in which they preferred the interview to take place. For the individual interviews, the primary researcher used an open-ended standardized questionnaire that she developed. The questions inquired about attitudes toward multicultural competence, how it is conceptualized, and what meaning making is assigned to the phenomenon (Appendix A). Additional questions sought to understand how or if the professional school counselors incorporate multiculturally responsive services into their work. This was done by incorporating multicultural terminology generally accepted in the literature as best practices for multicultural competence. A primary purpose of this study was to explore participants’ views of the multicultural concepts found in the literature. To create an atmosphere that is open, the researcher had the freedom to ask additional questions, such as probes for further information when necessary.

Interview Protocol

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Holcomb-McCoy (2004) suggested that the key for professional school counselors to becoming multicultural competent was to continually assess the level of their own competence and to receive additional training and professional development where necessary. She identified nine areas of cultural competence for professional school counselors generated from a theme analysis of the multicultural school counseling literature. These competency areas include: multicultural counseling, multicultural consultation, understanding racism and student resistance, understanding racial identity development, multicultural assessment, multicultural family counseling, social advocacy, developing school-family-community partnerships, and understanding interpersonal interactions.

The following categories relate to the areas usually often assessed quantitatively by multicultural competence scales utilized when studying professional school counselor competence. Quantitative measures exploring multicultural competence have included the following factors: knowledge of concepts, use of data and understanding of systemic change, awareness, skills, terminology, assessment, and application of racial and cultural knowledge to practice.

The questions selected for the individual interviews were directed at gaining an understanding of how the participants define and view multicultural competence, what cultural competence skills and knowledge they possess, and how, or if, they implement culturally responsive practices into their work.

At the end of each individual interview, the participant completed a demographics questionnaire (Appendix C). The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather important
information that will add variation and context to the data collected about the participants and the schools in which they work.

*Focus Groups*

Focus groups serve a purpose in that they allow participants to make comments they might not have originally considered themselves without first hearing from others and allow the researcher to gather data in a social context (Patton, 2002). Krueger (1994) recommended that focus groups be well planned to gain insight “on a defined area of interest in a permissive non-threatening environment…the discussion is comfortable and often enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion” (p. 6).

According to Creswell (2006), focus groups serve the most benefit when, “the interactions among the interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other” (p. 124). For the purpose of the current study, the use of focus groups allowed the investigator to explore how professional school counselors think about and incorporate multicultural competence when given the opportunity to consult with similar professionals. As all participants are practicing professional school counselors, they have a shared commonality and because they work in the same district the participants are used to being asked to cooperate with each other.

The focus groups were moderated by the primary investigator and one of the research team members. During the focus groups, the counselors were presented with two vignettes, (Appendix B), adapted to be age and school level appropriate for the
participating school counselors, depicting a concern by a student or group of students. In each scenario some cultural characteristics were given about the students. Beyond this information, the scenarios were left open to interpretation to allow the researcher to explore what cultural variables would the participants consider as they worked through the cases studies. The group discussed the necessary counseling services, the central concerns, and what further information needed to be solicited. The groups were then asked to respond to three questions about multicultural competence and one reflective question about their experience being in the study.

The groups were divided by level (elementary, middle, and high) and took place at school identified as a central location. The focus group interviews did not begin until all individual interviews had been completed and coded. The primary researcher solicited information from the school counselors on their preference for day, time, and location. The researcher attempted to accommodate all personal preferences. All four elementary school counselors participated in the elementary focus group, three middle school counselors participated in the middle school focus group, and two high school counselors participated in the high school focus group. Focus group participation declined as a result of school days being cancelled by inclement weather. The high school and middle school focus groups were scheduled at school locations that were closed during this time. The groups were rescheduled, however, this adversely affected participant participation, as three of the school counselors (one middle and two high school counselors) declined participation in the focus groups.

Document Review
In a qualitative design, documents can provide a rich source of data. The use of documents allows the researcher to make connections and further explore the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). In the current study, participants were asked to share documents from their school counseling program. These documents could include: mission statements, philosophy statements, lesson plans, program goals, letters or flyers sent home, notes from parents or students, or any items that school counselor wishes to share to demonstrate multicultural competence. Participants were requested to email or mail documents to the researcher. Two reminder emails were sent to participants. Six school counselors provided documents from their school counseling programs. All six provided mission statements and philosophy statements. Calendars and weekly activities were provided by three participants, and lesson plans by two participants. The researcher also receive two program goals, three letters sent home to parents/guardians, one academic plan, one management agreement, one evaluation, and two sets of data used to identify services.

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis in qualitative research is the transformation of data into findings. “Phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 482). The recordings of the interviews and focus group sessions were sent to a professional transcriptionist. Once the transcriptionist emailed the completed transcripts, the primary researcher immersed herself in the data by listening to each recording while reviewing the transcript for accuracy.
A phenomenological approach to the analysis of data was used for this study. The design was emergent, using a stepwise procedure, and an inductive analysis of data. The design was emergent as it was open to new paths and understandings based on the emerging data. It was stepwise in that each interview and focus group was sought to be understood separately before integrating into a whole. Finally, it used an inductive analysis of data in that the investigator immersed herself in details and specifics of each data set in order to fully comprehend patterns, themes and relationships. Epoche – the suspension of judgment on what is real until all evidence has been accounted for – was an ongoing process throughout the course of this study.

The data sets in this study are: (1) Individual interviews from the 12 practicing professional school counselors, (2) the focus group interviews involving 9 of the 12 practicing professional school counselors who have already received an individual interview and, (3) documents provided by 6 of the 12 practicing school counselors. In order to code each data set, the procedure set forth by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) was used. This includes: developing coding categories, coding all data, sorting data into categories, checking for data that has been left out, and refining the analysis.

Data analysis began after the first few interviews had been completed. An audit trail was documented throughout the process. The process of data analysis involved:

- Each interview and focus group was transcribed by a professional transcriptionist and emailed to the primary researcher.
- The primary researcher immersed herself in the data by listening to each recording while reviewing the transcript for accuracy. She then emailed the recording to the members of the research team (excluding the auditor).
• After the first 4 interviews were completed and transcribed, they were sent to all members of the team for coding. Team members completed initial coding separately.

• From the transcripts, the primary researcher employed horizontalization (Moustakas; 1994), and identified key words, phrases, and statements which explained how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Each unit was treated as having equal worth, and redundancy was minimized. The two team members of the research team involved in analysis and coding each separately followed the same procedure.

• Initial coding categories or themes were developed and the research team met to discuss and agree on initial codes. The team also decided at this point whether any additional questions needed to be asked at the remaining interviews. It was decided by the team that more examples of multicultural competence needed to be solicited. The team came to agreement on what the emerging themes were up to this point.

• The next round of individual interviews commenced and once 6 new interviews had been completed, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy, they were cycled through the team to repeat the coding process. With each transcript, coding began anew so that each data set was understood separately before integrating it into the whole.

• The research team met to complete consensus coding on the 6 new transcripts. No additional questions were identified during this meeting. Emerging themes

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were revised to incorporate the new data and codes. These themes were agreed upon by the team.

- The final 2 individual interviews were completed, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy. The coding process then restarted. The team met via conference call to discuss and agree on themes. The teams decided that no new themes had emerged from the individual interview data.

- After the completion of the individual interviews, the focus groups were scheduled and conducted. After the first focus group was transcribed and reviewed for accuracy by the primary researcher, it was emailed to the other two research team members. The process for coding the focus groups mirrored the same process for the individual interviews. The document reviews were also coded as they were received.

- After each focus group the research team coded separately and then conducted consensus coding via telephone conference call. Some new themes emerged from the focus group data, and was integrated into the codebook. The codes and themes were agreed upon by all members of the group.

- The primary researcher then recoded all the data based on the consensus codes and themes. In order to understand the relationship between emerging themes, codes, and patterns the researcher used various data displays. These included: charts, graphs, and visual tools. The themes were divided into two categories representing the research questions: (1) Conceptualization of multicultural competence, and (2) Implementation of multicultural competence.
• This final selection was sent to the auditor for review. The auditor suggested the reduction of themes.

• The researcher developed additional data displays to help her further consolidate the themes into core relationships. As a result, a new category was added to the existing two categories, (Incongruencies and Improvements), and each category was found to have 3 subcategories. Within most subcategories 2-3 themes were identified. The data were then recoded based on the consolidated themes. The themes were sent to the research team for agreement. Once agreement was achieved they were sent to the auditor for final review, and he approved.

• The results of the study are reported in Chapter 4.

Trustworthiness

Internal validity, external validity, objectivity, and reliability are terms used to establish the credibility of a quantitative research study. Those concepts are addressed in qualitative study with some variations. The establishment of a study’s integrity in qualitative research is known as trustworthiness. Trustworthiness implies that the researcher is “balance, fair, and conscientious in taking into account multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities” (Patton, 2002, p. 575). The qualitative researcher desires to be close to the phenomenon, to be factual and fair regarding the experience, but still seeks after a certain measure of objectivity. This helps to minimize any researcher bias that may be present.

Transferability, dependability, confirmability, and credibility are concerns of quantitative researchers that also have parallel meanings in qualitative study. Credibility – or internal validity – is demonstrated in qualitative research through the assurance and
communication of rigor. This is accomplished via thick, rich descriptions and data saturation, and how sufficiently the data was assessed. Transferability – or external validity – speaks to the generalization of findings (Morrow, 2005). This is achieved when “the researcher provides sufficient information about the self (the researcher as instrument) and the research context, processes, participants, and researcher-participant relationships to enable the reader to decide how the findings may transfer” (p. 252).

Dependability – or reliability – deals with the consistency of the study. This is paralleled in qualitative research by tracking the emerging design and creating audit trails- detailing of research activities and processes, and coding, that can be examined by other researchers or advisors. Next, confirmability – or objectivity – is concerned with the representation of findings having accounted for and minimized the influence of researcher bias to the extent possible. In qualitative research this is illuminated in the researcher being able to bring together data, analytic processes, and findings, while maintaining the integrity of the data (Morrow, 2005).

To establish trustworthiness and validity researcher biases and assumptions were bracketed. These areas were thoroughly discussed in the reporting of any results from this study. As researcher presence might have influenced the responses of some of the participants, this was taken into consideration when coding and analyzing the data. During consensus coding the research team discussed any responses that may have been socially acceptable responses. It was decided that the primary researcher would ask participants to give examples for answers that could have been socially acceptable responses. Triangulation of data also took place. Gathering data from multiple sources allowed the research team to make constant comparisons and to illuminate any
discrepancies. The research team made it a point to identify any divergent perspectives. Member checks were conducted during the focus group interviews and by giving each participant a transcript of their interview to review for accuracy. The participants were informed that at any point in the study they could have requested the current data and codes for review. After the final codes had been decided and themes developed, each participant was sent the information via email to offer comments and additional insight if necessary. None responded to report that any changes were needed. This increased confirmability, as the researchers aim to describe the experience using the meanings and words of the participants. Finally, with the stratified purposeful sampling procedure, results of the proposed study have enhanced the potential for transferability. The random selection of participants can allow for a more representative sample of the target population, which was the school counselors in the one urban district in a southeastern U.S. state.

Ethical Considerations

Patton (2002) listed 10 ethical considerations important to qualitative inquiry. These will be listed here and followed by an explanation of how these considerations were addressed. The first is to explain the purpose of the inquiry and methods – participants received informed consent prior to participation in any activities and were encouraged to ask questions about the research. The second is reciprocity or what the participants gained from the process – it is hoped that the participants gained knowledge and insight from the process of participating and that they will be able to add to the knowledge and understanding to the field.
The third is risk assessment, the risks associated with participation – there were no clearly identifiable legal or psychological risks. However, any potential risks were included in the informed consent form. Interview data remained confidential to reduce any political risk and participants were encouraged to share only what they felt comfortable with in both individual and focus group interviews. This is also associated with the fourth risk of confidentiality – participants were assured of confidentiality during interviews, and reminded of the limits of confidentiality during focus groups.

The fifth consideration is informed consent – all Human Subjects Research procedures were followed and implemented and detailed consent forms were signed prior to participation. Data access and ownership is the sixth consideration – the primary investigator holds the responsibility of keeping safe all data. All data has been kept in a locked file cabinet when not being utilized by the primary researcher. Participants could review the data from their interview, focus group, or documents, and the results of the analysis and coding at any time during the study by request. The recordings were destroyed after transcription and the transcripts will be destroyed after two years. The seventh consideration is interviewer mental health which addresses with whom interviewers are able to discuss with the content of interviews, insights gained, questions, or concerns without breaching confidentiality. The four members of the research team were able to consult with each other and any member of the primary investigator’s dissertation committee. The dissertation committee also provided ethical advice, the eighth consideration. Consideration nine involves data collection boundaries – participants were not coerced to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable with and could have ended or refused an interview at any time. Finally in accordance with the
tenth consideration, this study was guided by the American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics (2005) and the American Counseling Association Ethical Standards (2004).

Summary

The cultural landscape of the United States continues to grow more ethnically and culturally diverse. By 2030, more than half of the children in the U.S will be a person of color (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). However, despite the changing demographics of schools and the increase in cultural diversity there is still a serious problem facing the American education system. Academic achievement of students of color and students from low income homes has lagged significantly behind the achievement of their White, middle class or wealthy counterparts (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Education Trust, 2000; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Culture can have a serious impact on how well a child performs at school (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Grothaus et al., in press).

As advocates for all students, professional school counselors can facilitate positive interactions, affect attitudes, operate as change agents, and create opportunities that promote respect of cultural differences (Uehara, 2005). Therefore, professional school counselors need to be equipped to address the personal/social, academic, and career needs of a diverse student population. National and state certification boards, ASCA and CACREP have recognized the importance of cultural competence for professional school counselors (Cates et al., 2007).

Despite the high self-perceived competence of professional school counselors, there appears to be no evidence that school counselors actually use culturally responsive practices in their work (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). There does not appear to be any
research that offers insight into how practicing professional school counselors define multiculturalism and how or if they infuse their work with culturally responsive practice.

The purpose of the current qualitative study was to explore how professional school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence and how, or if, they incorporate it into their work based on this understanding. Qualitative research seeks to describe and give a voice to the lived experiences of the participants and can be a natural fit for multicultural research as it does not operate from a linear worldview (Farber, 2006; Poggenpoel et al., 2001). Several researchers have promoted the use of qualitative methodology to study multicultural issues (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996) and editors of professional journals have requested the need more qualitative studies in guidance and counseling (Berrios & Lucca, 2006). Qualitative research is needed to understand how professional school counselors define multicultural competence and how they incorporate it into their work (Robinson-Wood, 2009).

The research paradigm underpinning these views is social constructivism. This paradigm asserts that multiple realities of a phenomenon exist (Patton, 2002). This paradigm was paired with a tradition of phenomenology. The researcher gathered information about the lived experiences of professional school counselors and their implementation of multicultural competence into their school counseling program. The phenomenon under study in the proposed research is multicultural competence in school counseling programs.

There are two research questions for the current study: How do practicing professional school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence? How does their
conceptualization of cultural competence influence the school counseling services they facilitate?

The researcher selected a team of three to assist with data collection, data analysis, and code and theme development. The research team includes two members who co-moderated focus groups and analyzed the data, and one member who served as an auditor. Team members were recruited during the summer 2009 semester.

The participants in the current study were 12 currently practicing professional school counselors in a southeastern urban school district. This number satisfied Creswell's (2006) recommended sample size for a phenomenological study. A stratified purposeful sampling procedure was employed to select participants. To achieve maximum variation, the schools in the district were divided into three different categories, elementary (grades K-5), middle (grades 6-8), and high school (grades 9-12), and four counselors from each category were chosen. Participants were recruited during the fall 2009 semester.

The Human Subjects Review Board at Old Dominion University reviewed the proposed study prior to data collection. Once approval was received data collection proceeded. Each participant participated in an individual interview and nine of the twelve participants participated in a focus group moderated by a research team member. All interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed by a paid transcriptionist and verified for accuracy by the primary researcher. In addition, six participants responded to the request to submit documents for review and analysis by the research team. A phenomenological approach to the analysis of data was used for this study. There was an
emergent design, using a stepwise procedure, and an inductive analysis of data. Member checking occurred throughout the process.

To establish trustworthiness and validity, researcher biases and assumptions were bracketed. Researcher presences and socially correct response were taken into consideration when coding the data. Triangulation of data also took place as data was gathered from multiple sources. To increase confirmability, at any point in the study participants could request the current data and codes for review. The 10 ethical considerations Patton (2002) considers important to qualitative inquiry were addressed and accounted for to the extent possible. Limitations of the study include: (1) researcher and research team bias, (2) researcher’s lack of experience, (3) participant attrition, (4) possibility of socially desirable responses, (5) use of self-report, (6) use of the single case method, and (7) two of the researchers being employed as school counselors in the school division utilized for the case. The dissertation study took place over the fall 2009 and parts of the spring 2010 semesters.
Chapter IV

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

The goal of this study was to explore how practicing school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence and how they implement it in their work. These questions were examined with qualitative methodology using a phenomenological tradition. Participants were selected from one southeastern urban school district using a stratified purposeful sampling procedure. Participants volunteered to participate in one individual interview, to share documents from their school counseling programs, and attend a focus group. The primary researchers, in collaboration with the research team, examined the documents submitted for review and coded and analyzed each transcript of the interviews and focus groups. The team searched for key words, phrases, themes, and patterns in the data sets. In this chapter, those findings will be presented. Participant profiles will be outlined, followed by a discussion of the data collection and analysis process. The results will then be reported for each category and theme that emerged from the analysis. Finally, a description of the essence of the phenomenon will be offered along with considerations for rival explanations and member checks.

Participant Profiles

Participants for this study were 12 practicing school counselors from the same southeastern school district. All twelve participants were assigned a numerical code to ensure confidentiality, and any identifying information on the transcriptions was erased. Demographic information about the participants was collected utilizing a demographic questionnaire administered at the individual interview. Participant profiles were created for a detailed description of the group used for this study (See Table 2).
## Table 2

### Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Profile Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1104           | Elementary  | - 57 years old, Female, White  
                 |             | - 20 years of experience  
                 |             | - Highest degree attained – Masters  
                 |             | - Cultural aspects include: Greek Descent  
                 |             | - Prior Multicultural training included: Diversity conference, Ruby Payne staff development.  
                 |             | - Cultural groups serviced include: AA, HS, AS, WH  
                 |             | - Active Involvement with culturally diverse groups outside of school setting  |
| 1106           | Elementary  | - Female, Black (Did not report age)  
                 |             | - 19 years of experience  
                 |             | - Highest degree attained – Masters  
                 |             | - Cultural aspects include: No response  
                 |             | - Prior Multicultural training included: School Related.  
                 |             | - Cultural groups serviced include: No Response  
                 |             | - No active Involvement with culturally diverse groups outside of school setting  |
| 1109           | Elementary  | - 31 years old, male, Black  
                 |             | - 5 years of experience  
                 |             | - Highest degree attained – Masters  
                 |             | - Cultural aspects include: No response  
                 |             | - Prior Multicultural training included: Diversity conference, social and cultural issues graduate level course.  
                 |             | - Cultural groups serviced include: AA, HS, WH  
                 |             | - No active Involvement with culturally diverse groups outside of school setting  |
| 1110           | Elementary  | - 30 years old, Female, White  
                 |             | - 1.5 years of experience  
                 |             | - Highest degree attained – Masters  
                 |             | - Cultural aspects include: No response  
                 |             | - Prior Multicultural training included: Masters level multicultural course, diversity conference, and anthropology major  
                 |             | - Cultural groups serviced include: Low SES, racially diverse, TAG, LD, TMD, gender  
                 |             | - Active Involvement with culturally diverse groups outside of school setting  |
| 1203           | Middle      | - 26 years old, Female, Black  
                 |             | - 2.5 years of experience  
                 |             | - Highest degree attained – Masters  
                 |             | - Cultural aspects include: Church traditions (Baptist), family reunions, soul food  
                 |             | - Prior Multicultural training included: Multicultural graduate course,
| (FG03) | connections advocate for diversity  
| | • Cultural groups serviced include: AA, HS, WH, gender, religious affiliations  
| | • Active Involvement with culturally diverse groups outside of school setting |
| 1204 (Middle) | Participated in Focus Group 3 (FG03)  
| | • 28 years old, Female, Black  
| | • 4 years of experience  
| | • Highest degree attained – Masters  
| | • Cultural aspects include: No answer  
| | • Prior Multicultural training included: Multicultural graduate course  
| | • Cultural groups serviced include: AA, HS, WH, AS, NA, unidentified  
| | • Active Involvement with culturally diverse groups outside of school setting |
| 1215 (Middle) | Participated in Focus Group 3 (FG03)  
| | • 56 years old, Female, Black  
| | • 20 years of experience  
| | • Highest degree attained – EDS  
| | • Cultural aspects include: No Answer  
| | • Prior Multicultural training included: Connections advocate for diversity  
| | • Cultural groups serviced include: Bosnian and Mexican  
| | • No active Involvement with culturally diverse groups outside of school setting |
| 1218 (Middle) | Did not participate in a Focus Group  
| | • 57 years old, Female, White  
| | • 6 years of experience  
| | • Highest degree attained – Masters  
| | • Cultural aspects include: Daughter-in-law from Bahrain  
| | • Prior Multicultural training included: Multicultural training with the district, classes at two universities  
| | • Cultural groups serviced include: AA, HS, WH, NA, PI, ESOL  
| | • Active Involvement with culturally diverse groups outside of school setting |
| 1208 (High School) | Did not participate in a Focus Group  
| | • 56 years old, Female, White  
| | • 14 years of experience  
| | • Highest degree attained – Masters  
| | • Cultural aspects include: Never met a Black person until the age of 13  
| | • Prior Multicultural training included: Multicultural graduate course and professional workshops with the school system  
| | • Cultural groups serviced include: AA, AS, NA, mixed race.  
| | • Active Involvement with culturally diverse groups outside of school setting |
| 1216 (High School) |  
| | • 50 years old, Female, White  
| | • 23 years of experience  
| | • Highest degree attained – Masters  
| | • Cultural aspects include: No answer  
| | • Prior Multicultural training included: Multicultural graduate course, |
There were four school counselors at each level (elementary, middle, and high).

Six of the school counselors identified themselves as African-American or Black and six identified themselves as White or Caucasian. Ten participants were females and two identified as males. The mean age of participants was 41, with an age range from 26-57 years old. The mean number of years of experience as a school counselor was 10.5, with a range from 1.5-23 years. All but one of the counselors held a Masters degree as the highest level attained. That one school counselor listed the Education Specialist degree as the highest degree. All participants stated receiving prior training in multicultural
counseling. Eight of the PSC's cited master's level courses as one mode of training, ten cited district or school level professional development, one cited professional association conferences, and one cited being an anthropology major.

When asked about other aspects of their culture they may wish to share, 8 responded no or did not answer the question, the other four responses included: being of Greek descent, Bahrainian daughter-in-law, Baptist affiliation, and no contact with black people prior to the age of 13. Three school counselors reported no involvement with culturally diverse individuals outside of the school counseling setting, and nine reported they were involved with culturally diverse individuals. Only one school counselor did not respond to question pertaining to cultural groups they provide services for. Of the remaining school counselors, 10 listed racial/ethnic groups, 2 of which also mentioned non-racial/ethnic cultural groups. One listed different social groups they interact with in the school such as national honor society.

Data Collection

The data sources for this study consisted of individual interviews, focus groups, and document reviews. The first round of collection consisted of the individual interviews. As the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked to email the researcher documents demonstrating multicultural competence. After the completion of the individual interviews, the focus groups commenced. There were three focus groups (elementary, middle, and high school). Participants were assigned a focus group based on their work level. During the focus group the participants also responded to a reflective question about their experience in the study. All interviews and focused groups were recorded for later transcription.
Individual interviews and document reviews

All participants volunteered for an individual interview. The interviews were conducted at a location of their choice. The questions for the individual interview sought to address the research questions: How do school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence and how do they implement multicultural competence into their work. The questions included: (1) How would you define the role of the school counselor?, (2) How would you define culture?, (3) What does multicultural competence mean to you?, (4) What cultures, if any, are present among the student body in your school?, (5) What cultures, if any, are present among the faculty and staff in your school?, (6) In what ways, if any, does the cultural background of students that you work with influence your work with students?, (7) In what ways, if any, does the cultural background of the families that you work with influence your work with families?, (8) In what ways, if any, does the cultural background of the students and families you work with influence your work with faculty and staff?, (9) Tell me about a time, if there is one, that culture influenced your school counseling services, (10) What forms, if any, of racism, heterosexism, sexism, discrimination, or oppression have you noted in your school?, (11) If you have noticed any forms of racism, heterosexism, sexism, discrimination, or oppression in what ways, if at all, have these been addressed? (12) If any of these are present in your school, what role have you played in addressing these behaviors or attitudes?, (13) What role, if any, does the school counselor play in creating a positive multicultural environment?, (14) How, if at all, do you see yourself implementing your multicultural competence in your practice of school counseling?, (15) How would you define advocacy?, (16) What role, if any, do you believe advocacy plays in the work of the school counselor?, (17) How, if at
all, do you practice or implement advocacy in your work?, (18) What role, if any, do you believe the school counselor serves in addressing equity, social justice, and systemic change?, (19) How, if at all, do you address equity, social justice, and changing the system in your work?, and (20) What, if any, areas of growth in understanding or practicing multicultural competence do you have for yourself?

Interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and were recorded for transcription purposes.

At the completion of each interview school counselors were asked to email documents from their school counseling programs that demonstrates or is an example of multicultural competence. Participants were requested to email or send by mail documents to the researcher. Two reminder emails were sent to participants. Six school counselors provided documents from their school counseling programs for a response rate of 50%. All six provided mission statements and philosophy statements. Calendars and weekly activities were provided by three participants, and lesson plans by two participants. The researcher also received two program goals, three letters sent home to parents, one academic plan, one school counseling management agreement, one evaluation of a workshop, and two sets of data used to identify services.

Focus Groups

Focus groups did not begin until all individual interviews had been conducted, transcribed, and coded. After reviewing the data, the research team decided that no changes needed to be made to the initial focus group protocol. Participants were assigned to focus groups based on their work level. The focus groups were conducted by the primary researcher and one the research team members.
During each group the participants were read two case studies and asked to discuss them. Following the reading of the case study, participants were asked: (1) What additional information did they need to know about the scenario, (2) What were the central concerns for the student?, and (3) How would they address this problem? The purpose of the case studies was to gain an understanding of how school counselors would implement multicultural competence. Following the case studies, participants were then asked additional questions pertaining to the research questions. These questions included: (1) If you were to explain multicultural competence in school counseling to someone else how might you describe it?, (2) What is your opinion of the school counselors' role in advocacy, social justice, addressing equity, and changing the system in which you work and how is that connected to multicultural competence?, and (3) What role, if any, does the school counselor play in creating a positive multicultural environment? Participants were also asked to respond to a reflective question about their experience in the study. This question was: how, if at all, has participation in the current study affected your views on multicultural competent practice? The reflective question was the final question in the focus group.

Data Analysis

Data analysis started once the first four individual interviews had been completed. The data was transcribed and the primary researcher immersed herself in the data and reviewed each transcript to ensure accuracy. Each interview was sent to the interviewee as a member check for accuracy. The data was then sent to the other two members of the research team for coding. These two members were doctoral students in counselor education and both had completed a course on qualitative methodology. The two
members and the primary researcher coded the data separately, identifying key words, phrases, and initial themes. The team members then met to agree on the emerging codes and themes. At this time, the team decided that more examples needed to be solicited in the remaining interviews. The next round of individual interviews commenced and as interviews were completed, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy, they were cycled through the team to repeat the coding process. With each transcript, coding began anew so that each data set was understood separately before integrating it into the whole. Upon completion of all individual interviews, initial codes and themes were established and the team agreed that the data was saturated and that no new information had emerged that didn’t fit the established codes and themes.

Document analysis was ongoing throughout the process. The documents from the participants came in at different intervals and were collected and coded by the primary researcher. Focus groups were scheduled for all three levels. After the first focus group was transcribed and reviewed for accuracy by the primary researcher, it was emailed to the other two research team members. The process for coding the focus groups mirrored the same process for the individual interviews. After each focus group, the research team coded separately and then conducted consensus coding via telephone conference call. The codes and themes were agreed upon by all members of the group. During the consensus coding meetings conducted by the research team it was noted by all members that most of the same themes and codes found during the individual interviews emerged in the focus group and document review data sets as well. It was further noted that the participants in the focus groups were in agreement with each other about how they addressed the case studies and responded to the questions. The focus group data gave the
research team insight in how the participants might choose to work with a student, and what services they might provide. However, there were some conflicting data that suggested a discrepancy between what school counselors stated in their individual interviews, demonstrated with their documents, and actually stated they would do during the case study portion of the focus group. New codes were developed to represent this incongruent data.

The primary researcher then recoded all the individual, focus groups and document data sets based on the consensus codes and themes. The auditor reviewed the codebook, audit trail and categories. He recommended the reduction of themes. In order to understand the relationship between emerging themes, codes, and patterns the researcher used various data displays. These included: charts, graphs, and visual tools. The qualitative researcher seeks to compile the patterns and relationships into meaningful categories and themes (Patton, 2002). These themes were further inductively coalesced into three categories: (1) Conceptualization of multicultural competence, (2) Implementation of multicultural competence, and (3) Incongruities and Improvements. These categories serve to explain the relationship between key themes that emerged from the data. Within each category there are three subcategories and additional themes (See Appendix G).

Results

The goal of a phenomenological study is to expose and describe the lived experience of a phenomenon by examining individual and collective meanings (Patton, 2002). In this study, the researcher sought to give a voice to the lived experience of professional school counselors with regards to their conceptualization and
implementation of multicultural competence. To that end, the words and meanings of the participants were used to describe the phenomena. The results of the study were organized into three different categories: (1) Conceptualization of multicultural competence, (2) Implementation of multicultural competence, and (3) Incongruities and Improvements.

Category I: Conceptualization of Multicultural Competence

This section includes subcategories and themes reflecting how school counselors in the current study defined and thought about multicultural competence. This includes how they viewed the role of the school counselor in relationship to multicultural competence, how they described culture and its impact on the services they facilitate, as well as their attitude toward multicultural competence. Information from the individual interviews and focus groups helped to shape this category. The document review also served to inform this category. The provided mission and philosophy statements allowed the researcher to understand how the participants viewed the role of the school counselor in the school counseling program and to identify the belief system of the participants.

Based upon participant responses, three sub-categories were identified. These categories included: (A) role of the school counselor, (B) understanding of culture as multifaceted, and (C) components of multicultural competence. In two of the three subcategories, two or three additional themes emerged which explained the subcategory. Each sub-category will be described in the following sections.

Subcategory A. Role of the School Counselor

Based on the responses of all 12 participants, the data indicated that the participants believed that the role of the school counselor included elements of
multicultural competence. The themes contained in this subcategory describe the aspects of multicultural competence that inform school counselors' role in the school setting.

These themes included school counselors serving: as an advocate, a systemic change agent and as a multicultural expert in the building.

Theme 1: Advocate. Nine of the school counselors commented that one aspect of their role as a school counselor was one of advocate. It was spoken of as being embedded in the role, providing a support and giving a voice to students.

| 1109 | The role of a school counselor here at this level is to be a advocate for our children, and help them to be successful, uh in this setting, um socially, uh emotionally and academically and just being that bridge for them for any barrier they may have that uh would prevent them from achieving here at school. |
| 1203 | In terms of middle school, elementary, and high school, um I see the role of the school counselor as an advocate for students. Um as a support network for students... I see the role of the school counselor as also being um a change agent, okay. In terms of programs, um things that are going on not just with students personally, but also building wide, looking at the data, um evaluating the data, I try to do that a lot, um to see if things are working, and to introduce new and fresh ideals. |
| 1208 | To act as an advocate for the student |
| 1104 | To work with all children, regardless of gender, race, social economic whatever. To be an advocate for the children...Okay, to serve and advocate for parents and for children |
| 1106 | I would define the role of the school counselor as an advocate okay for students |
| 1215 | Um, the role of the school counselor is to be an advocate for students to achieve successful academic performance in all subjects, and to be prepared for the world and the future. |
| 1216 | We um are the advocates for students with within the school environment, between teachers, the students themselves, administration, um their parents, peers, that's, I really feel we're kind of a go between, the glue |
| 1218 | I think advocacy is, is what we do in everything that we do. Whether it's um academic, or career, or social um it, it, it has to be, we have to be the adult who is always at all times saying what is in the best interest of the child, what is for the child because teachers are looking at curriculum, principles are looking at IEP, um you know everybody has their pieces of the pie, we have to be the one that says what's the whole picture, what's the whole child. |
| 1014 | Uh I feel like that's probably one of our biggest roles, um you know teacher student relationships, you know teachers are suppose to be in charge, teachers are suppose to be you know, but just because their suppose to be doesn't mean they are always in the right, And you know kids cant tell them they're wrong |
you know, a lot of times we end up being the mediator, I don’t wanna say mediator because it’s a lot more of us going to, to a teacher and saying well you know can we, can we just get them one more day on this assignment, or can we you know can we get them you know can I let them stay after school and make the stuff up, can I you know and its a lot of us serving as the kids voice because the teachers generally don’t want to hear it from them

**Theme 2: Multicultural Experts.** All twelve school counselors viewed themselves as the multicultural experts in the building. They believed themselves to be the expert in the building on understanding and working with culturally different individuals and groups. School counselors spoke of this expert role as a consultant. The school counselor was conceptualized as a resource in the building to assist teachers and staff when dealing with and educating students/families who might be culturally different from them. The relationship between counselor and teacher/staff member is considered both collaborative and didactic. The school counselor also promoted culturally competent education methods, including being culturally sensitive by understanding the cultural context for a diverse student body. School counselors instructed teachers and staff on correct ways of interacting with various cultural groups. The following eight quotes illustrate this theme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1110</th>
<th>I feel like I’m working with teachers to take into account a student’s background, or a family’s background more.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1218</td>
<td>I try to when, when faculty or staff come with a concern about a student I try to hear their concerns, but I also like to say to myself when, when I’m answering that what does that faculty and staff bring to that, to that relationship and how is that impacting what that student and can I help them see that student in a different light, can I help reframe it for them.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 1203  | I will be the first to say I do not know it all by, by any means, but I think in the role of a counselor you get a chance to be introspective and really see the student for who they really are. And a lot of times I have to educate faculty and staff on what’s really going on with the student, okay. Particularly um African American male students. And I think, for example, you could take two young men, um in African American culture who are walking um, you know by each other in the hallway and they may sort of bump shoulders or greet each other a
certain way, and to an untrained eye it make look as though one person is sort of trying to start an altercation with the other, and if you're not privy to that cultural innuendo you may say you know well, “What’s going on? What are you doing?” and one student is in trouble, their trying to explain and then you're um coming across defensive, and they feel disrespected, so then it grows into this big thing and it's not really about what happened anymore. So just not having a cultural misunderstanding, not being multiculturally competent, um can cause a lot of a lot of issues. So I find myself when I learn things, I may not always know, when I learn things I’ll say to the teachers, or to my assistant principal, or to anyone that I come, even other students um listen really think about it from this point of view, um I can understand why he or she feels this way because they are looking at it from a different point of view. So I find myself engaging in many teachable moments.

I have to advocate for those students and the family members, and preach the same thing to the staff, um that it is important to kind of know, and accept and appreciate the culture of the students that you serve, um so its important if you’re a Caucasian teacher, it is important for you to know that calling a black male son or boy probably isn’t going to get a response that you would want, and so you kind of just have to know, you have to know how important church is to some African American families, you kind of just have to know it’s all about your approach, and for me, well as counselors I feel like we should advocate and really teach teachers things that maybe they forgotten about, because we do have veteran teachers who you know they’re old school, this is the way they do it, and we kind of have to let them know that our students are very different now, families are very different, and it is important that um we just, that approach is so key, and just making sure that we advocate for our students.

You know some teachers forget that they need a double dose of help, a double dose of understanding, and I sort of advocate and be the interceding person, and say but lets try, but not if he’s making an effort guess what, we can try. So you have to help the teachers help them, cause often times they get so involved in instructional SOL requirements that they forget the need of those individual kids who cant speak for themselves.

I think the teachers sometimes they, they know the material, they know what they’re doing, they been in the business a long time but sometimes we have to reiterate to them the change in the culture, the change in the students, and you know sometimes it’s not teaching that same student where you can just give them a worksheet, or you can just teach the information one time, we have to find new ways in the 21st century of reaching these kids, maybe using some of the technology that they already use, um so I really believe that we have, we’re, we have to I guess I won’t say we have to teach them but we have to reiterate and we have to always you know keep their mind thinking wow there’s a changing cycle of kids that are coming through, its not like the old students you know before.

Um, we’ve had some families here that I know where they come from...And what goes in their neighborhoods or in their areas is, is rough...so teachers will complain a lot of times and this has happened before too about they don’t
have their homework, or they don’t have this, or they don’t have that, or dah
dah dah dah duh, so, so I try to make these people understand where these children
are coming from...And that uh for a lot of them it’s just survival, it’s what they
you know all they care about, it, it will foremost in their mind, and that if we
had to go to some of their situations and if we had to live in those situations
then we’d understand why they are like they are.

Sometimes helping the faculty, the faculty sometimes gets so focused on the
content they’re attempting to teach the kids that they forget all the things that
are, the variable that come with that child, and sometimes just being able to
explain a little bit about the students background helps to take the pressure of
the faculty, it helps them to understand and be better able to, to instruct the
student and to, to present material to them, in a way that they can learn it.

Theme 3: Systemic change agent. Eleven of the participants believed the role of
the school counselor also involved being a systemic change agent. This was illustrated
by their stated commitment to address and question the status quo and to be an agent of
change so that the institution promoted success for all students in the school. This is
accomplished by using data to identify and address disparities for culturally diverse
students in access, opportunity, or equity. The following seven quotes illustrate this
theme:

...going through the data that we have to have and letting her see and, and
know that we aren’t just sitting around and uh watching things continue on the
way that they have been going, that we trying to make a change in the system so
that these kids can be successful.

we also use data to advocate for students, um again looking at the program
goals to see if they worked, if they’re working, if not you know to scratch them
and start something new.

I think that’s important especially um talking about like the equity in education
um as school counselors now in 21st century school counselors with the data
pieces I think assessing the data in your building is a good way to start um
being and advocate for social justice

Because sometimes I’ve noticed patterns with teachers, certain cul, cultures or
races might be getting in trouble more than others. I don’t know that the teacher
notices that

Um as far as change is concerned, again a squeaky wheel will get oil, so we
need to, if there’s a, something is not right, we need to make the effort to get it
changed, and whether that’s speaking to superiors, or parents, or whoever to get
the cage rattled and change made then that’s what we need to do.
We have to speak up, um we have to really look at within the building especially cause I know that there is so many concerns. Systemic change is probably the biggest thing that we can, we can support because systemic change is long range, it is opportunity now but it is opportunity for those coming, so systemic change is what we need to be, you know temperate change works for that time that, that instance, but systemic change makes it institutional and makes it part of what we do forever.

I think we play a big part, um I think we play a big part in social change because of the different types of students that come in.

Subcategory B: Understanding of Culture as Multifaceted

All of the participants identified what they considered to be a cultural group and identified the cultural groups that they believed were present in their school. Culture was understood as involving various common characteristics of different groups of people. Identification of cultures in the school was not limited to just race, religious affiliation, or geographical location. Culture was also understood to also include ethnicity, gender, SES, ability, and sexual orientation. All participants identified cultural groups in their school. Furthermore, the school counselors understood that an individual could belong to more than one cultural group.

Uh I define culture uh, with you know backgrounds the heritage of your ethnicity, um learned behaviors from uh, not only just you’re your parents, but your community that you live in and, and uh things that are, are kind of traditionally brought down to you as you grow up.

Here we have of course African American, which is our main population, uh we have Caucasian, um we have not many but we have Latino presence here at our school, and this year was the first year that we are uh ESL school...We have students uh from the country of Burma, and um Guiana it’s not very many but we do have about maybe less than 5-10% of our student population.

Culture is everything we bring to the table, um our background by birth and our background by um experience.

Wow, we have a fairly large Hispanic culture and even within the Hispanic culture we have students from Puerto Rico, from Cuba, from Mexico, from South America, and from the Pacific Islands where they speak some version of, of Spanish. Okay we also have students from the Sudan some of those are
refugees, we have students from Liberia, we have um students from the Ukraine, we have a population here from Iran, we have four Saudi students uh and their a delight, uh we also have gosh I’m trying to think, cause we have so many come through what’s actually here right now, uh Korean, Chinese, uh golly gee wilickers, oh we have a French student he’s a foster child too which is a little interesting, um being fostered by a Mormon family

I would define culture as um, a background in which every student could come from a different place in their life where they may not go through the same things that you go through, there’s a different makeup of the family, um also the beliefs and rituals that are going in that family could be totally different from mine or anybody else’s so there’s a wide range of um, things you have to look at when dealing with uh people from different cultures.

Um, I think there’s a wide range. I think um I really can’t say that there’s you know I know the, here at XYZ high school there’s a different make up then what most schools um just depending upon the area they come from. In this area you have people that come from the military sectors that have uh blended families from overseas, you have you know your Caucasian families here, you have your African American, you have a lot of Japanese, Hispanic culture here. So there’s a wide range here at XYZ high school um but because the military’s so close there are a lot of blended families in that respect also.

I think that culture is what defines a group of people, whether it be um based on you know race, um a neighborhood that you grew up in, um your gender, um just a group of you know, characteristics about a group of people

Um, we have a very, very diverse population; um we have middle to upper-middle class students...We have very, very low-income students; um we have you know boys and girls...Um, we have a wide range of um academic, um level of academics, levels of intelligence from talented and gifted all the way down to mentally disabled...Um, we have a broad spectrum of race, um black makes up about xx%, white makes up about xx%, um but there are Hispanic, and Asian, Native American ...And uh unspecified students here...Um, we have a large special ed population here. I think we have a little bit of everything

Well lot’s of different ways (laughs), um it can be defined by your race, your ethnicity, your living situation, your socio-economic status, um your religious beliefs...Your sexual preference, um think I’ve hit everything... lots of different factors, absolutely.

Um if we look at race as a definition of culture we have um African Americans, we have Caucasians, we have some Asians, we have some couple of kids who are Native Americans, we have some bi-racial students so that’s one of the cultures, types of cultures we have in the school. We also have students from different socio-economic groups, kids from extreme poverty as well as kids who are pretty well off financially. Um that presents a whole different type of culture as well.

I define culture, let’s see, when I think of culture I think of lifestyle. I think of a
way of doing things. Um I think of the total person, in terms of um race, ethnicity, gender, um religious uh preference, um sexual orientation, um values, perceptions. I think all of that ties into culture. Um, I think it’s sort of not all um exclusive; I think people can belong to many different cultures.

African American students, uh Caucasian students, uh Hispanic students, we also have our ESOL students who are English as a second language coming from um, different countries and I love that in our building. Um we also have students who may be from families who are um divorced, parents who are still together, maybe uh same sex parents, so a difference in sort of the family dynamic brings a different cultural perspective. Um in terms of religion I spoke of, we have Jewish students here in our building, Christian students, Muslim, um and also students who may not have a belief at all.

I think culture is (clears throat) groups of people who have the same beliefs, possibly um same background. Maybe uh, in some ways come from certain areas. Like the same types of foods.

There is, African American, Asian, Hispanic, White, uh, we have uh Romanian, but on you know, those uh…Phillipino, kore- well Asian would come under all that, um we have a lot of mixed cultures too…Children come from mixed cultures, so they get the benefits really of both

Culture I would define as, heritage, genetic make-up, customs, culture of a group of people

At my school, uh especially this year we have ESL, ESOL students…Hispanics, Asians majority and uh two students who are from Africa, okay?

Culture to me is pretty much just being aware of everybody being different. We don’t have people who look the same, um you can be an African American but you could be dark skin, or light skin, or you could be biracial, um so culture to me is just groups of people who look totally different who still have sometimes the same types of ideas and beliefs, um that everybody else has.

are pretty much, predominantly African American, um we do because we’re a magnet school we do have um Caucasian students, um Native American, Asian students, and Hispanic students as well. So we got the whole gamut um here at the school.

Culture is what makes that person, how they grew up, exposures that they have had, um that they understand and feel comfortable with.

Here we have a large Hispanic population, um they speak Spanish, um we have two Indians, and I think maybe one I want to say Japanese but I’m not sure, but the largest population is Hispanic and a lot of them are from Mexico.

Well, many different layers of culture, I mean people have um different aspects I think to themselves. They may you know have an ethnicity, it might be male female at some point, you may be even physical things like I’m bigger, or
smaller, or taller, or shorter, so I think all of those things people can be many different categories.

We’re roughly 50/50 um African American and, and white, but we also have Hispanic students, we have um Asian students, we have people of mixed race, we have a little of everything I think.

I mean I guess it’s kind of like a set of beliefs, and behaviors, and attitudes I guess. Um I guess ESL here it’s just, it’s just the ABC and XYZ that have ESL... Um because we don’t have a huge population of them but they’re pretty diverse when they come to us

**Subcategory C: Components of Multicultural Competence**

All twelve participants were asked to define multicultural competence in the individual interview and the focus groups. All shared responses which reflected their attitude toward multicultural competence, and what components they believed were involved in multicultural practice. Two different themes prevailed: (1) awareness and understanding, and (2) action.

**Theme 1 – Awareness and Understanding.** Ten of the participants expressed a belief that awareness and understanding were components of multicultural competence. This involved having an awareness of which cultural groups are present in the school and the unique needs of these groups. Additionally it involved, understanding those needs and seeking to understand the viewpoint of the individual when they work with them. Both male counselors stated that being an African-American male influenced their role as a school counselor. They reflected on their own cultural background in order to understand the needs of other males in the building. This “awareness and understanding” component of multicultural competence is illustrated in the six quotes below.

Multicultural competence. Knowing, I guess, knowing about cultures. Knowing about different beliefs in cultures maybe, especially if you’re working
with kids, um being competent in that, that you know that in certain cultures this is believed, in certain cultures this is not a belief this is accepted or this is not accepted to be more aware of those things

Being aware of what I just stated, that we’re all different, um we all have different backgrounds and beliefs, um and just being aware that your particular mindset doesn’t make it the be all the end all.

I think foremost respect. That nothing is better than anything else, its just awareness that people might have a different perspective than you do, and respecting all cultures.

I don’t think (culture) changes how I work with them, other than trying to understand them, and where their coming from. Like to, to have a better understand because I know in certain, in certain cultures um things are stressed that maybe aren’t stressed

Uh, multicultural competence means that we have an understanding of the differences in, in the diversity that we have amongst each other, um not being set in your own ways as to uh just thinking what you think or what you know is the only way that something is suppose to go that way um and just having uh, uh being respectful for what everybody uh comes from, and what their beliefs are.

...being a African American male myself and, and, and if you go to, to through any of the records with our disciplinary referrals the majority of our referrals are from our African American males...And I try, with some of the things that I been through um going through the school system as a male, and uh trying to let some of the faculty members know some of the stressors and things that could hinder uh the males at our school, but also working with our males to let them know what they can and shouldn’t be doing here at school because people see things in a different light from what they may see or think, or people blaming them you know for things which they can do differently uh so I kind of use that to my advantage in, in trying to help them.

Uh multi-cultural competence means understanding uh or, understanding that there, there’s something that you may not know about a certain person not, just because they have the same face features or they may have come from the same area doesn’t really mean that you know the total kid and what their situation is, and understand the make up of their family. I believe that um in a lot of situations kids come from uh different backgrounds and different cultures and it’s a mixed relationship of other cultures so you can’t always distinguish which culture they actually come from without trying to uh learn more about the student and learn more about multi-culture.

I think as a male counselor a African American male counselor uh the things that I’ve been faced with growing up you know sometimes you try to relate uh relate your situations to new situations that’s going on now but with dealing with some of these kids you find out its more extreme and its more things going on that you have that their faced with um that sometimes the little things or the
things that were a big struggles in my life, would be little struggles for some of these kids

I think it influences with every encounter that I have with them...When you take into consideration, you know where they come from perhaps their life experiences, their cultural norms...Um, I think that it helps you get to know them better and get to know their behaviors better...Um, and a lot of those, a lot of those components aren’t always considered in education

Theme 2 – Action. Six of the participants believe an important component of multicultural competence was taking the awareness and understanding of cultural needs and extending it to include taking appropriate actions. This action theme was defined as having the belief that multicultural competence means an awareness and understanding of different cultures, and using this understanding to work appropriately with culturally diverse groups.

Multicultural competence means to me, when I think of multiculturalism I think of um not just an awareness of different cultures, but accepting different cultures, having a working knowledge um of the cultures and how it impacts me as a school counselor. When I think of competence I think of being able to successfully do something, okay. So I think when a person walks through my door, um I think multiculturally, a multiculturally competent counselor would look at them for how they fit within the world, this world context in terms of their gender, their religious preference, um sexual orientation, to see their viewpoint, um not just what I think things should be. So I think multicultural competence is a combination of knowing and practicing.

being appropriate um with students and their families, um with faculty and staff learning and helping them learn that its okay to be different, that not everybody is a cookie cutter and we can’t put them into a mold, that we do want certain expectations for all children, but within those expectations there has to be a little wiggle room so that we understand that everyone can be successful maybe in a different way.

Um, the ability to be sensitive to the particular belief structures, behaviors, and needs of different cultural groups in such a way that you can be an advocate for children in a, in a counseling situation or whoever your counseling. Um I think the sensitivity part and the understanding part is the main thing to be able to meet people where they are.

I have to know, I kind of have to know where they’re coming from to be able to, to help them make the decisions that are going to enable them to become productive, happy members of society. Um to make good academic choices, to

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make good social-personal choices, I really need to know, know about their life and whether their happy in the situations they’re in, what kind if change to that is going to upset the apple cart at home, you know how, just how to reach them.

Um, I guess it kind of just means I would take all those cultures as they are and you know just kind of work with kids with you know as, as they come to you, and but you know at the same time makes sense of the fact that they’re not exactly like you and they’re not exactly like the other kids that you work with.

I guess now when kids come in I pretty much been kind of exposed with everybody you know so it’s, it’s nice when they come in now that I can buddy them up or like you know when I first group of Burmese came in I mean there’s nobody, I mean who speaks Burmese you know so I felt like those kids kind of got thrown to the wolves so now it’s a little better um that you know that there’s some kids that have been here maybe a year or so that even though they don’t speak the greatest English they can kind of help the other kids get around so, a lot of my work a lot of times is just pair them up with somebody that you know is from a similar place or I mean just, I mean you come here to us in, in the 9th grade and you never been to school or you only been to school on a refugee camp and your in basically 3rd grade but your 17 so they throw you in here and, and a lot of my work with them is just really finding somebody they can kind of latch onto.

I think um with being multicultural competent first you have to um just become aware, you know get information um don’t be afraid to ask questions, do research um because I hear new things about cultures everyday that I had no idea. Um I think the second thing is more so once you know it then you can begin to um foster culture of acceptance um I don’t really like the word tolerance for some reason but embracing, accepting um and then just knowing your limitations um they may, there may be some situations that you may not be comfortable dealing with cause counselors are people too so you have to know that this is kind of out outside of my realm I can still be professional but I’m not going to be the best helping professional in this situation. Um so I think that’s important to know those things.

I think its, its taking everyone’s backgrounds, um their living situations, their economic situations, um same as yours different than yours into consideration you know when your just working with people. Um that there might be another cause for the way that someone is behaving that’s not you know what they’re presenting you know just at the table you just kind of have to dig a little deeper sometimes than when your just seeing.

Category II: Implementation of Multicultural Competence

This section includes subcategories and themes reflecting how participants in the current study believed they implemented and demonstrated multicultural competence in
their work as professional school counselors. The individual interviews and document reviews informed this section. The case studies utilized during the focus group interviews also served to further address how school counselors implement multicultural competence in their work.

Based upon participant responses, three subcategories were identified. These subcategories included: (A) creating a positive multicultural environment, (B) offering programs and services, and (C) promoting equity and equality. Within two of the three subcategories, themes emerged which explained the category. Each subcategory and the themes will be described in the following sections.

Subcategory A: Creating a Positive Multicultural Environment

All twelve participants stated that the school counselor has a key role in helping to create a positive multicultural environment. Participants described various methods and techniques for creating a positive multicultural environment, which ranged from hanging culturally diverse posters to ensuring that all cultural groups are represented in activities and events. The majority of participants (10) viewed the role they play in establishing a positive multicultural environment as direct. The other two participants stated a more indirect role to creating a positive multicultural environment. Their description of their role involved taking direction from administrators. The other 10 school counselors stated taking an active leadership role, which involved responsive services as well as school wide activities. The participants stated leading by example, conducting lessons to promote tolerance, and ensuring the students from all cultural backgrounds were represented in school wide activities, programs, awards, and events.
environment, and I think multiculturalism is not just the presence of multiple cultures but creating an environment where those cultures are accepted, okay.

1215 | I’m trying, and, and I do know in multicultural education that all educators need to make sure that there’s a wide and varied representation of ethnicities on your wall you know what I mean, so you might see different colors um, I purposely did that, and that picture is different from that one and that was orchestrated, that was purposely done.

1215 | Um as counselors we always, many times not always, many times we are asked to assist with the selection of youngster for different projects or greeting guest for career day it behooves us to make sure we have a wide and varied representation of the cultures who are helpers and who are seen to be leaders in the building. Recently we had, we have the uh partnership with a Credit Union and we are going to start a credit union at our school and I told the math teachers and make sure that there’s a wide and varied diversity in gender you know, gender friendly person selected need it be said...And sure enough I got many across the board, Hispanic and girl boys so speaking it, talking it, always being cognizant that in this situation when we have a representation of our school are we truly making sure that all diverse populations are represented. Even the pictures on our wall and um things we put out to the public.

1109 | Uh, to, well we have a citizenship program...Um, which we talk about different traits that people should show in order to have a, a, a positive atmosphere here at school and wanting kids to come to school, and be happy here at school, um with that we focus on words or traits such as being respectful to each other no matter what your background is...Uh, or maybe we do things to uh kind of celebrate the kids who are showing those traits throughout the school year, um one that goes along with that trait is tolerance that we do a lot with uh in which we focus on the different ethnic groups at that time and, and not just ethnic groups but how people are different altogether and, and it kind of um let them know that even though we all are different we do share one thing in common and that’s the feelings that we have and kind of just trying to make sure that we want everybody to feel happy, um amongst each other.

1208 | being welcoming, I mean being open to everybody, being caring of everybody, um squelching things that can be hurtful like, “Oh he’s so gay” or you know using, using terms that are you know, “He’s my nigga” getting kids to, to not use term, terminology that is insulting or degrading, um and then by example. You know walking the walk, talking the talk.

1216 | I think in guidance um we make a real effort if we’re nominating you know people for things to be representative, and you know if we’re going to have um student assistants that work in the office there’s and application that you fill out but we do try to get a variety you know, its not all straight A’s students although there is a minimum grade point average cause they you know, need to have the credits that they need, and they need to be responsible and trustworthy people, but we try to have you know a good representation of ethnicities and male and female and, and all of that so, because its like a face of our school that, and um even when we nominate people um you know if we’re doing I don’t know some sort of awards or something I think we all have in the back of
our mind well lets get, you know who else can we pick that your not always thinking the same kind of um way.

| 1011 | And I think also being available and being uh where they can see you and actually notice that you’re around, and you’re in the hallways, and you know they’re name, uh you know a lot of kids believe if you know their name you know and you can talk to them and have a conversation you know something about them, it kind of helps build that rapport saying its more of a family than its just my counselor. |
| 1218 | Oh gosh well I, I think we’re one of the key players. We aren’t the key player but we are one of the key players. |
| 1204 | I think its our just duty and obligation um ethical obligation to make sure that every student is comfortable within the school building |
| 1104 | We play a big role in, in as far as being able to uh have an environment in which everybody, Is safe and secure, um and respect uh respect each other uh because we are better equipped I would I guess for a lack of better words to be able to understand where our children are coming from, and kind of of um helping everybody else understand where these children are coming from with, with different lessons that we do, um especially with our character education piece um having everybody know that we’re all a big family in our school and how we should treat each other being that we’re a big part of a family uh so that everybody can feel comfortable each and every day, and get along with each other each and every day, and more so letting everybody understand that each persons feelings do matter and in order to do that we have to be able to understand what makes, how or what makes everybody feel good about themselves and what may make this person feel good may not make that person feel good because of the different uh backgrounds, and uh different uh, places where different , places that uh people come from which are different from each other and um so its, it’s a as a counselor I see myself uh helping our students, helping our faculty, helping each other uh know about the different factors and uh things that make each person a special unique individual. |
| 1014 | Um recently like our homecoming weeks or whatever we do, there’s usually one day that’s, that’s kind of focused on them you know dress like your country or dress you know um or you know its like a ethnic food day or it’s a you know um just kind of high lighting that they’re here and you know they’re, they’re part of our school too, so we kind of you know do that stuff as well um, they do like uh like a ESL I don’t wanna say pep rally but it before um like their, their testing at the end of the year their ELL’s they do like a um, like a showcase of their work in the halls in the um oh the big thing um our ESL classroom use to be down by the library and its off on a little leg and its all by , you know its kind of by itself, Um and it had been you know teachers and other students and stuff had started calling it you know little Mexico or little Havana or whatever cause that’s just kind of where they all congregated you know so last year we moved the ESOL classroom down to the main hallway and so those kids kind of have to intermingle and its right in front of the main stairwell and so its um, its, its kind of made them come away from, |
Subcategory B: Offering Programs and Services

All twelve participants discussed programs and services they provide to students and families as a part of implementing culturally competent school counseling services. These programs and services were divided into three themes which inform this subcategory: (1) building relationships, (2) advocating for students, and (3) using creative techniques and accessing school and community resources.

Theme 1: Building Relationships. Eight participants discussed the importance of building relationships with students. In most cases, a relationship was an important element in being able to assist students and families from cultures that were different than the school counselors' own constellation of cultures. In other instances, participants stated that having a relationship with someone in the building, whether or not it was the school counselor, was an effective method for assisting students. The school counselor worked at establishing a relationship with students and families in order to provide them with culturally competent services. This is illustrated in the quotes below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1208</td>
<td>I agonize for a couple of years how I could have any, any kind of impact, and then experiences with certain kids began to lead me to realize that it was that relationship that was the key, and it didn’t matter if I was purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1215</td>
<td>Oh you know they stick out like a sore thumb, so you try to accommodate them and to uh build a relationship with them so that they won’t feel isolated and they have a connecting factor with the counselor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1011</td>
<td>And usually even if the kid maybe doesn’t want to talk to you, you might be able to find somebody that they do have a connection with...It might be a security guard, it might be the assistant principle, a different teacher maybe they can talk to the student and see what’s going on and then let us know how we can help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1203</td>
<td>Um again like with the student I cited earlier, the student who is of a Jewish faith, having the ability to ask questions, and I find myself doing that a lot, and some students will ask me questions in return, if they’re appropriate I’ll answer them for them, because its like an educational teachable moment, going back and forth, and it really helps the counseling relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1204</td>
<td>Right, and it’s all about building rapport, and building those positive and lasting relationships with students.</td>
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I kind of echo the building the relationship um I like to invite kids in for little lunch bunches and I’ll let them choose who they want to come with them, um so even when their in there with the buddies you know they don’t you know think that I’m asking certain questions for a reason and just kind of like building that relationship and then when you start to find out what they like and maybe something that they work for then you can kind of let the teacher know and come up with you know that behavior plan or an academic plan where you know if you do you know your homework, or you do your class work then at the end of the day you’ll get computer time or get to go work with your buddy, um you know be your little mentor for another student.

**Theme 2 – Advocating for Students.** Another method of implementing multicultural competence was through advocating for students. As stated previously in the conceptualization category, participants believed that part of the role of the school counselor was to serve as advocate. When questioned about how they implement advocacy, seven participants stated that they accomplish this by implementing programs and services to address the needs of all students.

Putting together programs for uh students or for, or for a group of students that may be kind of struggling with some of the issues, and we kind of get them things that they can do to help them out and um, also just being there for them, um some of our students may, whether its here or even at home they don’t have people that will go that extra mile with them.

In talking with a student who was having difficulty in class, um failing an English class, it turned out that he could not see the board, and that came out in here, in my office, um and he was sitting close to the board and the teacher said well, “I have him in the front, you know he’s right in the front,” and, but the child still couldn’t see, and talking with parents they didn’t have insurance, couldn’t afford eye glasses so, um collaborating with the parents, um and also the school nurse, we were able to get a voucher for the student to get eye glasses.

I mean everyday what we do is working where, we’ve got a project going where um we’ve selected some sophomores with attendance and grade issues and we’re trying to work with them in, in about probably about 20-25 and um expose, you know get them academic help if they need it, take them on field trips um show, uh cultural activities, um helping them to see that what you do today effects your tomorrow, so trying to get them to kind of see the big picture but we do projects like that you know working one on one with kids, helping them um negotiate with teachers, fussing them out when they need it.
I implement advocacy by, I collaborate a lot, um with teachers, the my assistant principal, my main principal, um other counselors, um we sort of um, host the first generation program for students who are the first in their family to attend a four year college, um we also use data to advocate for students, um again looking at the program goals to see if they worked, if their working, if not you know to scratch them and start something new. Um I advocate by attending parent teacher conferences, um the 504 and child study meetings, um to let other people know from a different perspective, you know what the student needs, um teachers sort of have a different you know viewpoint, and so does the principal, and I think the counselor has one as well.

We have an intervention list where I have to actually meet with every student who’s struggling with two or more D’s and F’s and you know that’s about 25-30 of our students right now, and so I have to meet with them and kind of say okay, “What is going on? What can we do to make sure that you’re successful?” and so again just being there listening to the students and actually talking with them, sometimes kids just just get sent out of class, no one ever says, “How are you?”

How do I do that? Um I have groups for military kids, I have groups for new kids, but because the population is not that large, I would have a, have a group of uh Hispanic kids who are having some language barriers, but just like I said they are level 1 they passed ESL and they, they appear to be functioning, making honor and all that but, just like those kids who are new to the school miss their old friends, their old city, they may have left grandparents, they get a chance on a regular basis to talk about how this school is different, and I haven’t gotten any friends and when they bring those things out in the meetings in the group sessions so okay, I will end on that.

We have tutoring programs, probably our bigger things um... Yea, scheduling um, you know being a liaison between teachers and parents, or parents and, or teachers and students and that’s about it.

Your advocating for you know something better, um your advocating for a new change, or something that makes something a little bit better and I think uh being an advocator you have to put yourself in the situation of wanting to do more.

I do a lot of different things and that gives me a feel of every, you know different types of students not just the athlete, I get a chance to meet talk and work with some of the top notch kids around here, and also the less fortunate kids so I think with advocacy you can always have a project that everyone can join in on and that’s promoting growth in each other.

**Theme 3 ~ Thinking “out of the box” - Using Creative Techniques and Accessing School and Community Resources.** All twelve participants shared illustrations of the need for school counselors to be creative in implementing culturally competent work with
students, either by using creative techniques and/or accessing and collaborating with school and community resources. These could include using support systems, non-verbal strategies, or providing resources. The nine quotes below illustrate this theme:

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<th>Quote Number</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1215</td>
<td>Um, we had a family here last year not this year who was, they were homeless because the mother got into some problems with the law so she lost her job, and she became a felon, and they did not have a place to live, and they had a friend that let them live in a Norfolk apartment, but she didn't want to change the school system so she would borrow cars to bring the kids so we sort of worked with her, and we sort of uh gave her some resources to you know try to find her a job, but uh she had a language barrier and our security that has been assigned to, at that time 8th grade was bilingual and that, that sort of helps the feelings, if you bring someone in to help me understand what your trying to say, cause often times if you don’t get that person in and you fumble, and you constantly repeat, excuse me can you repeat you know, and sometimes the youngster will help, but if me as a person continuously say, “I don’t understand what your saying,” it breaks their train of thought, and then they give up and they don’t wanna talk to you. You know so you can see right then that they say okay I need to go find somebody I can talk to, and get my problem out, I am up here struggling with her understanding me, so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1106</td>
<td>And how has mother dealt with um the problem that her child is experiencing you know in school. Is she hearing this a lot? Um has she asked uh for support you know from family and friends to assist you know with her son? Uh is there a mentor? Does he attend a church you know? So what support is she receiving?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1204</td>
<td>In elementary school what I would do and I've share this with you, you take those pictures on those feelings charts and make cards make you a stack of cards and when the youngsters come in, especially elementary uh kids, the middle school kids have done them they’ve liked them to, I just don’t have room for a table but you give them a stack of cards and you have them to place the feeling cards that interpret how they are feeling that day and it gives you a sense of what they want to talk about so you can gear your session around those cards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1218</td>
<td>Trying to you know get some things in place for students, and to know what support they have outside the building and what support they have in the building, um and when I started early on I did not always make that connection so that is something I have really learned to uh fall back on that, that connection is powerful and is a wonderful asset and I think we neglected it, I neglected it for a, for a very long time, a very long time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1203</td>
<td>And also there's several websites, there's free translation so if there's some written literature you can always just translate that for the language and then have that ready, cause sometimes parents coming in they kind of feel like they have to conform and kind of forget their language,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Subcategory C: Promoting Equity and Equality

Eight participants discussed promoting equity and equality in their work with students. These participants stated the need to provide services for students of all cultural backgrounds. Although all eight gave examples of serving all students; five focused on providing services in an equal fashion while three stressed the importance of infusing equity in their service provision. The themes underscoring this subcategory are: (1) Equality without equity and (2) Equality with Equity.

Theme 1 – Equality without equity. Five participants promoted services and opportunities for all students, but did not identify any adjustments to services to account for cultural differences and student needs. The focus was placed on a sense of fairness and an attitude of equality for all students.
you always see the best in people," and it doesn’t always feel that way on inside… But I’m glad it looks that way on the outside to them because that’s what I strive to do, and it, and thinking about it honestly I try to be just fair across the board. Um I have a lot of other people who may have perceptions that come out in conversations, um about maybe students who come from um single parent homes, about students who come from a low socio-economic background, and it troubles me you know that people are sort of gate keeping the student because of that, but I really make an effort honestly to be fair and impartial across the board.

before just being here, and being fair and making sure that what I’m doing is fair across the board for all students, um I don’t have favorites, now there are some students who you know they do get probably more hugs than others but that’s just because they come in here more than anybody else would

I don’t, I don’t, I can’t think of one, I mean I try to teach all children equally, regardless, and you know and so I feel like if I treat them all with respect… And I expect for the most part the same thing from them respect, responsibility, things like that then it doesn’t become a real big deal; the cultural part.

equity what’s good for the goose is good for the gander, that’s fairness, I mean it absolutely has, we have to stand up for equity and if we see inequities we have to point them out.

for a long time those ESOL kids just were in elective stuff you know but we’re suppose to be trying to graduate kids in four years and so when I first got them and was pushing them into I’m putting them in English, and I’m putting them in World Geography, and I’m putting them in Earth Science regardless if they can do it or not, if they sit there one time you know maybe the next time they do it they can do it

Theme 2 – Equality with Equity. Another dimension of promoting equity and equality involved the school counselor identifying adjustments to services to account for cultural differences and student needs. Three of the participants recounted services they implement that promote access and equality as well as equity.

I’ve had a student who was I think a Seventh Day Adventist and they cant take like the SAT’s on Saturday, and um that’s a pain, you gotta (laughs… You gotta arrange this one school in Norfolk who does, that you know does it on Sunday’s and all this paperwork you have to fill out, so even though I say it laughingly that was a pain I mean its what you have to do to accommodate the various things, and I actually given a SAT test on um off, well in the building and at another site for a girl and I wanna say she’s either Seventh Day Adventist or whatever Jehovah’s Witness or something, they cant go into other churches buildings, whatever her religions is and all the AP test are given um, off site in like churches
I promote excellence and achievement for my students but also support. We have a lot of students that could do well in higher classes, more rigorous classes but they need support cause they don’t get it at home. There already beyond where their parents can help them, so they you know we have to make sure that we have things in, in place here and to understand that maybe they haven't had opportunities before but they have opportunities now and we need to make sure that those doors are open for them.

well the equity peace trying to get those kids caught up, even close to the same level before they can really you know um take part in the curriculum like everybody else.

Category III: Incongruities and Improvements

This section includes categories reflecting challenges school counselors face in practicing multicultural competence, discrepancies between how they conceptualize it and how it is implemented, and areas of growth and development for school counselors. Data from the case studies utilized during the focus group interviews, individual interviews and document reviews served to illustrate this category.

Based upon participant responses, three sub-categories were identified. These categories included: (A) discrepancies between conceptualization and implementation (B) challenges, and (C) growth and development. Within each subcategory, additional themes emerged which explained the category. Each sub-category will be described in the following sections.

Subcategory A: Discrepancies between Conceptualization and Implementation

The first sub-category under this section involves discrepancies noted by the researchers between participant’s conceptualization of multicultural competence and their description of how they implemented multicultural competence. This subcategory emerged from comparing the data from the individual interviews and data garnered from the case study portion of the focus groups. It also emerged from comparing responses to
questions in the individual interviews. In the individual interviews, participants stated an understanding of multicultural competence that involved advocacy, acting as a systemic change agent, and considering the cultural background of students as part of culturally competent service delivery. During the discussion of case studies in the focus groups, these self-identified aspects of cultural competence were not clearly displayed. Participant’s responses included references to offering programs and services, promoting equity, access, and equality, and creating a multicultural environment. However, when focus group data was compared with data from individual interviews and document reviews, a discrepancy became apparent between some of the participants’ conceptualization of multicultural competence, their stated implementation of culturally competent school counseling services, and their statements about how they would actually respond to the situations depicted in the case studies (Appendix B). Participants also stated that they believed the school counselor helped create a multicultural environment. These efforts were direct and proactive. However, when questioned about forms of oppression, participants took primarily a reactive approach. These noted discrepancies were divided into two themes: (1) an overreliance on reactive approach to addressing racism and other forms of discrimination and (2) promotion of counselor or school values when working with students and families.

Theme 1: Overreliance on Reactive method to addressing racism and other forms of discrimination. In the individual interviews, nine counselors stated that they had noted racism and other forms of discrimination. These forms took the shape of teasing from student to students, homophobia, heterosexism, and staff on student discrimination. Participants stated they addressed racism and discrimination once it is brought to their
attention. Although school counselors are often in the position of responding to racism and other forms of discrimination, they should also be proactive in identifying and addressing oppression (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). During the individual interviews, participants stated that the school counselors played an active leadership role in creating a positive multicultural environment, they advocated for students, and they were systemic change agents who addressed inequities. However, when participants discussed how they address forms of oppressions, they focused primarily on addressing racism and other forms of discrimination in a reactive manner. This raises the question of how balanced are their school counseling programs between proactive and reactive. This theme was defined by the research team as an overreliance on reactive approach to addressing racism and other forms of discrimination and is illustrated in the seven quotes below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1215</td>
<td>The students will, the students will make us, will bring it to our realization, they will bring it to the forefront, cause they’re going to be feeling um inept, they’re going to be feeling mistreated and uncomfortable, and surely they will go to an adult. Sometimes, many times they will come to me, and they portray a situation, or they’ll give me a description of what happened and you can see the adult didn’t know where to go with that and, so you sort of help them see and then I might mention it to the adult and say, tell me about what happened, and a lot times 60% of the time they are willing to see that they may have handled that a little differently,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1218</td>
<td>Mostly um you have to react to the situations when the situations happen so you have to have a ready repertoire of things that you could pull out and, and activities you can do.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1208</td>
<td>Um it hasn’t been, I don’t think its been blatant enough, it hasn’t been widespread enough, its just, you know there’s just that little bit of and undercurrent, so and I just attempt to be as open and honest with the kids as I can when I have students in my office with um sexuality issues, I’m just as, you know, as welcoming as I can and as open as I can be with them to let them feel comfortable that they can talk about it here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1104</td>
<td>We pretty much just sit down and talk about it...And um, making them more aware of what they’re doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1109</td>
<td>I’m a firm believer in calling parents you know, when I hear it, when I see it I feel like parents you know need to know, I said I met with your child today, uh they were referred to me by the teacher, uh maybe another student, this comment you know was made... I said I just would like to make you aware of</td>
</tr>
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</table>
I'm a firm believer in calling parents, you know, when I hear it, when I see it. I feel like parents need to know what's going on, so I said I met with your child today, uh, they were referred to me by the teacher, uh, maybe another student, this comment was made. I said I just would like to make you aware of it, and more likely they said thank you, I will talk about it with my child. So I don't give any suggestions, you know, anything like that, but I just want to make them aware that they need to talk with their child.

Well, I think in the role that I would have is being understanding the situation of what's going on and being that mediator, and that comforting person that they can come to, to help deal with the situations, and maybe I may have already have a rapport built up with the kids, or relationship where I can you know try to help the kids understand, or the persons understand something that's going on. I believe that the counselor's role at XYZ high school is more of a soothing, we get a chance to do a little bit of counseling and we get a chance to actually uh, you know, get a chance to get a feel for the situations around here, and our and our principle kind of uses us as that person in the middle when they can't get to that kid or when there's so much stuff going on. I know that they'll use us in that matter because we try to step away from the situation and we're in the best interest of the situation and not just from each. We want to look at what's going on and how can we help to fix the problem.

**Theme 2 - Promotion of counselor or school values when working with students and families.** Ten of the participants expressed a promotion of school or counselor worldview when working with families. This data conflicts with participants understanding of multicultural competence and their attitude toward multicultural competence. During the individual interview all school counselors stated at least being aware of cultural groups, and the majority of them stated understanding the different needs of students. However, during the case study portion of the focus groups, ten of the participants responded in a way that demonstrates using an individualistic orientation when working with culturally diverse students. This student-focused orientation could be in direct opposition to the worldview of the student's family or background. The participants did have an understanding of the conflict and cultural discontinuity that...
students may experiences. However, when balancing the student needs with conflicting cultural demands or differences, the school counselors appeared to promote the dominant culture’s individualistic orientation by emphasizing the students’ desires more than the family or community values. They seemed to promote helping the families accept a more American value system when making decisions about their student. The assumption that parents are incorrect in their beliefs/actions or just need further information appeared to be evident in their statements.

| 1216 | Again being sensitive to where they are coming from, that you don’t want to force people to do things that they are uncomfortable with but you also want to give kids the opportunity to spread their wings and grow in the ways that they want to grow. |
| 1110 via FG01, | I guess one being able to talk to her family about the whole situation and what she wants as opposed to just doing something to make her family happy cause in the overall she wants to be, she wants to do something that she’s interested in, and her family is wanting her to pursue something that they think would make her, you know put her in a better position to be successful uh in the future so, um that would be one big thing is to just getting that, being able to get her to understand how she could talk to her family or and, and what to do to go about uh sparking that conversation with her family cause she from the way it sounds she may be a little hesitant to go and talk with her family about what her wants are uh as opposed to what their wants are. |
| 1018 via FG02 | if she’s 18 she can uh have a choice of taking uh classes of her choice, but we also want to look at the big picture and see if we can compromise the situation by giving her classes that she can be successful in, in both fields maybe a dance class and something that’s going to the medical field. |
| 1011 via FG02 | I mean she could do whatever she wants to do but she has to be committed to whatever it is, and look at all the options and all the choices but she has to make the decision. |
| 1203 via FG03 | I would talk with that student um before bringing the parents in and kind of find out exactly what it is you want to do, how do you want to handle the situation, um if talking with your parents is there something you want me to stress more so than not um, because sometimes I find that students are nervous about talking with their parents about things, but they’ll talk to us as the counselor and try to either role play pretend you’re my mom, let me you know run this by you or just sit there with me and be there while talking with my parents so. |
| 1104 via FG01 | Well also I guess getting her family to understand there is different forms of dancing cause they may only see the form the type of dancing that they see on videos or what have you. Getting them to understand that there’s different jobs or careers in dancing that uh are pretty successful such as choreography and um... |
productions and plays of that nature. Just uh helping them out, helping them to see that its just not one form of dancing cause uh some people might not understand or know or see the different areas that uh that are involved in dancing cause uh that could be a good, a big thing, a good factor that could help her to let her family understand its just not something she’s just doing because its fun, it may be a lot more involved than just uh just having dance, going out dancing somewhere that you could uh actually be pretty successful being a dancer.

1215 via FG03 Uh, I would like to know uh if her parents are non-English speaking. What’s their limitations with that, to sort of try to understand their difficulty with not understanding her desires as a middle school eighth grader.

1204 via FG03 Well since we are required to have the career and academic sessions now every year starting in seventh grade the parents would definitely, the counselor should make sure or insure that they attend so that they can understand the progression of the plans for her. And in that discussion they can share their concerns and she can share hers, because she and the parent should be present.

1215 via FG03 It seems like a uh parent workshop curriculum annually to make sure that these parents specifically uh get an invitation to attend. Maybe a invitation and a phone call you know so it would help her out cause it seems like she needs some support just trying to share her concerns with her parents.

1216 via FG01 Being that she’s just in fifth grade I mean with her parents trying to I guess tie her down into one avenue on focusing on being a doctor that wouldn’t be a good thing either because she is going to experience so much more going on to middle school, and in high school that they, dancing could be a extracurricular activity along with doing her academics and uh I guess just more expanding instead of just trying to bog her down to just one avenue.

Subcategory B: Challenges

Participants stated experiencing challenges in attempting to perform as multiculturally competent school counselors. These challenges were reported as both personal feelings of frustration and also experiencing resistance when working with culturally different students, family members, and school personnel. This subcategory is represented by two themes (1) frustrations and resistance and (2) impact of the counselor’s own culture.
Theme 1 – Frustrations and Resistance. Eight of the participants stated experiencing frustrations, difficulties, or resistance when attempting to work with culturally diverse populations. This is illustrated in the six quotes below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I think it has caused me to grow so much as a counselor, um understanding or at least trying to understand um and sometimes being frustrated by culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1011</td>
<td>I think there’s a different make up of family now a days and it makes it much more difficult to, to work with the family and the student, so you have to reach out a little bit more to actually get the whole total picture of what’s going on in that kids life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG03, L409-411</td>
<td>as participant 1 pointed out sometimes it’s hard to get other people on board whether it’s a time issue, whether it’s just being defiant I just don’t want to do it you never know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1109</td>
<td>…we do have some families and this is a small number that uh, they more so in allowing us to help them they kind of push against us and uh, thinking that we may not have the best interest of their child sometimes but like that’s only a small few...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1218</td>
<td>Not arguing with mom anymore, I’m not going through mom anymore because she is very super defensive, super defensive about the school so what I do, I go backdoor whatever I can do through agencies that have this child in mind and, and are not interested in punitive, not interested in punitive so whatever is, whatever I can do that’s not punitive, but I know culturally mom supports what the older children have done so she’s not supporting our measures to get him to school to help him cause she’s more interested in you know help, holding on to him I think as long as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1014</td>
<td>I mean we obviously have some kids that are here illegally so getting their parents in at all is, is very you know they seem very skeptical like you know I don’t wanna answer anything because you know I’m not sure what’s going to happen</td>
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</table>

Theme 2 - Impact of the counselor’s own culture. The school counselors recognized that their own personal cultural values impacted their relationships with students and needed to be taken into consideration when working with culturally different students. However, in this theme, this impact is represented as a challenge that needs to be overcome. This challenge may have created a struggle for the participant in their journey to become multicultural competent. Eight of the participants mentioned these challenges in their individual interviews and focus groups sessions. These participants
understood that the impact of their cultural background would be something they would continually need to assess.

| 1203 | Um, I, as a counselor I try to be fair you know un-bias and impartial, but at the same time I recognize that I’m a human being too, and I have my own you know feelings, my own perceptions, and things like that so I constantly um when working with students try to separate that. Okay, that’s one thing that I consciously try to do, and they’ll say, “well you know what do you think about that, you know what do you believe?” and I’ll often have to push it back on them and say well, “really you know, its not important what I believe, what do you think?” you know, so I have to push it back. |
| 1204 | well the issue that I have, um I’m struggling with um the, some African Americans populations the um, the lower-economic um status, group, and with that um talking with some of the parents at my new school here, um when they hear me talk or when they see me, or when they come in and see credentials they kind of feel like yea she is black but, she doesn’t understand the struggle, she doesn’t know what I’m going through because she doesn’t live downtown, she doesn’t know anything about it, and sometimes for me, its hard for me to um win them over, and so I kind of have to let them know, regardless of my degrees, regardless of how I talk or how I look I’m here to help you regardless |
| 1208 | I thinks so, I mean I struggle, when I first started, started counseling I struggled a lot with the idea of what does a white middle class woman like myself, how am I ever going to reach a young angry African American teenager, boy particularly |
| 1218 | I was uncomfortable when we first started doing multicultural training because I thought especially in this district that there was some emphasis on white not counselors not being as culturally appropriate as African American counselors can be and I wanted to combat that by you know really learning as much as I could but it, it’s almost like you know if you don’t think about it its there anyway it’s like the pink elephant in the room kind of thing, so I’ve tried to take some things and use them but not focus on them. |

Subcategory C: Goals for Growth and Development

Participants expressed goals or a desire to continue and grow and develop multicultural competence. Participants also stated that they wanted to continue to learn from their students about their culture, seek exposure to different cultural groups outside of the school building, and gain knowledge on appropriate techniques and strategies for working with various populations. This subcategory was divided into two themes: (1)
growth through interaction with culturally diverse people and (2) commitment to continued learning.

**Theme 1 – Growth through Interaction with culturally diverse people.**

Participants also stated seeking professional growth in the area of multicultural competence through interacting with culturally different groups. Eight participants identified exposure to and interaction with other cultural groups as an activity to promote their growth and development of cultural competence. These participants viewed students as experts on their own culture. The school counselors expressed a willingness to learn about the traditions, beliefs, practices, or customs of different cultural groups. Students and families were viewed as a source of knowledge about their cultural group’s traditions, beliefs, practices, or customs.

| 1203 | I can think of not too long ago I worked with a student who was Jewish, okay, and that’s very different from my um background being a Christian attending a Baptist church, so I know um different aspects of the Jewish religion and the Jewish culture, but I had to actually go and um research before working with the student and when I had the student in my office, um after building a rapport with her I wasn’t afraid to ask questions um in the midst of our counseling relationship and she told me she appreciated that, um that I didn’t just assume and go by that. I sort of asked her you know, “enlighten me a little bit, tell me,” and that allowed me to sort of see where she was coming from um in terms of students making comments to her, um in terms of even maybe adults you know saying, “Merry Christmas,” and not really thinking of the Jewish culture, so I was able to see that from her point of view and I otherwise wouldn’t have without asking questions. |
| 1204 | Um so for me I think its very important to know your students, know their background, know what they’re coming to the table with, and if I don’t know about a population or a culture I ask the students, “Tell me what you do on the weekends?” or “If you celebrate any holidays, what does it look like?” um so I take the time to get to know the student. |
| 1216 | I will ask kids and, and it’s for knowledge like okay if they have um you know some sort of religious thing you know so, “What’s the significance of that,” just to learn you know have them share their culture and, and for me to learn something about that and its not like, “Oh look you got a thing on your forehead, what does that mean?” you know it’s just like okay so what is the significance of that, and they, kids love to talk about their personal um |

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background and I think it’s, it’s um sharing

1208 working with kids from different cultures than mine, learning more, you know anything I can learn, any little, hey renting all the Madea movies (laughs), you know just learning what I can learn about how things are different than the house I grew up in, and how things are different in the way things are handled, the feelings and the thoughts and so forth, the culture. So it, I, I, the goal is to learn as much as I can learn, whenever I can learn it basically.

1014 guess I mean I would like to try and reach out to the families more

1216 I feel like I’ve made such wonderful friends from the vast spectrum on the world that um being open, traveling this summer my um husband and my son and I we went to Europe and that was very um enlightening...there was every kind of food you could eat, we had north African food, we had Tai food, we had Indian food, we had, we had everything but like you know fish and chips and British food (laughs)....And so it was just wonderful the, the everywhere I mean it was just so diverse and exciting, and all of the, the things you saw in the store windows were neat and interesting, and the people were all neat and interesting, we had a wonderful time. So I think just being open to the vast world that we live in.

1011 I would say um I, there’s a lot to learn about multicultural, I got the cultures are so different and you don’t know everything about them and you know I haven’t met everybody from every culture so you know learning more about the cultures

1110 just being exposed to different things, you know actually visiting the homes or you know going to football games of students, or you know one of my students invited me to her tai-dancing group. Um, it just kind of you know, going to different restaurants and trying different cuisines and you know being friends with you know wide range of people and where they come from

Theme 2 – Commitment to continued learning. Eleven of the 12 participants expressed a commitment to continued learning. They desired to gain knowledge or techniques for working with culturally diverse students and to continue to develop an understanding of the needs of various cultural groups. Their responses ranged from seeking professional development opportunities to identifying specific cultural groups that they needed to develop more culturally appropriate strategies in order to assist.

1204 I think for me it’s the um economic status group, um I just need to be able to figure out ways to reach them, um sometimes we have parent programs at night, and sometimes its rare that we get any parent participation and so I need to be able to find creative ways of getting parents to come in, um you know regardless of yea I’m working two or three jobs, you know both parents are
incarcerated, I have to be able to figure out a way to bridge that gap, so that’s a struggle but I’m planning on doing that, that’s my homework.

| 1218 | I wanna know about for instance I have gone to gang training and I’ve gone to um a lot of homeless training because homeless is a very large population and that transcends culture, that transcends ethnicity that um has different faces to it, there are people that are homeless because of situation, there are homeless because of decisions that they have made, there are people homeless because of weather, we’ve had a lot of Katrina homeless, um so you have to be willing to I guess prepare, you have to be prepared for what’s coming so I try to keep a very long range focus for what’s out there rather than just reactionary to what is happening today right now |
| 1011 | learning how to deal with you know the students um that come from different backgrounds ... I think you, you never know all the answers and there’s never one way to deal with the situation so you learn from that and you try to put you know those things in your mind about how you dealt with the last situation and what would you do differently the next time. |
| 1104 | I think just to be, just to continue to learn |
| 1106 | To grow to um learn more about uh people, their thoughts, ideas, why they do things you know that they do, to be open minded |
| 1110 | I feel like its you learn something new everyday |
| 1203 | I actively want to attend professional developments at conferences, to understand what’s going on with different cultures. |
| 1208 | I really enjoy working, you know going to staff development type things, going to um like breakout sessions at conferences about working with kids from different cultures than mine, learning more, you know anything I can learn, any little, hey renting all the Madea movies (laughs), you know just learning what I can learn about how things are different than the house I grew up in, and how things are different in the way things are handled, the feelings and the thoughts and so forth, the culture. So it, I, I, the goal is to learn as much as I can learn, whenever I can learn it basically. |
| 1215 | I make sure that I’m at conferences, VSCA, VCA, so a lot of times you get these uh conferences that come thru that are so expensive, but VCA and VSCA I look forward to the conference titles of the workshops they offer, and if it is not conflicting with something that I might wanna go to, I might make myself go, if it’s a catchy topic. |
| 1216 | I attend every workshop I can, I serve on the VSCA board, um looking for what is happening in other parts of the state and outside of you know my little division, what else is there because what, where a microcosm of what there is, but what is happening other places is coming here so I have to be prepared, and I have to not react to things I wanna know about for instance I have gone to gang training and I’ve gone to um a lot of homeless training because homeless is a very large population and that transcends culture, that transcends ethnicity that um has different faces to it, there are people that are homeless because of weather, we’ve had a lot of Katrina homeless, um |
so you have to be willing to I guess prepare, you have to be prepared for what’s coming so I try to keep a very long range focus for what’s out there rather than just reactionary to what is happening today right now.

Summary of Findings

The goal of the current phenomenological study was to describe how practicing school counselors conceptualize and implement multicultural competence. The findings provided an exploration of the lived experience of 12 practicing school counselors from one district conceptualizations about multicultural competence and the way they perceived that they implemented this into their work. These findings were informed through the use of individual interviews, document reviews, and focus groups. Data analysis occurred throughout the process, allowing the researchers to incorporate new information and questions as needed. Each interview and focus groups was transcribed and analyzed separately before integrating it into the whole. Therefore, each data set was viewed fresh, with no preconceived notions of what was expected. The research team agreed on initial codes and themes, and the primary researcher continued to collapse themes, until three categories emerged which explained the relationship between the data sets. Within each category, three sub-categories emerged.

Essence of the Phenomenon

The categories that explained school counselors experiences with multicultural competence included: (1) conceptualization of multicultural competence, (2) implementation of multicultural competence, and (3) incongruities and improvements.

In the first category, the majority of school counselors discussed a conceptualization of multicultural competence which involved the roles of the school counselor, their understanding of culture, and their sense of the components of
multicultural competence. These findings demonstrated that practicing school counselors reported viewing themselves as advocates, systemic change agents, and the multicultural experts in the building. This suggests that school counselors understand multicultural competence to be an essential element of the role of the school counselor. Furthermore, school counselors discussed components of multicultural competence that involved having an awareness and understanding of other cultures and taking actions to address their unique needs. Finally, they also viewed culture as multifaceted and identified cultures in their school based on this understanding.

In category two, participants described how they implement multicultural competence. Three themes developed within this category. School counselors reported taking steps to create a multicultural environment, addressed promoting equality and/or equity, and offering programs and services. Participants indicated that the school counselor was a key player in developing a positive multicultural environment. The majority of participants believed in promoting equity and equality in their work with students. However, the findings suggest that although equality was promoted, at times equity was not implemented. Finally, school counselors implemented multicultural competence by offering programs and services. These programs and services included advocating for students, using creative techniques and collaboration with school and community resources, and building relationships.

In the final category, incongruities and improvements were noted by the researchers. Within this category, three sub-categories emerged. These included discrepancies between conceptualization and implementation, challenges, and goals for growth and development. The researchers identified discrepancies between the school
counselors’ conceptualization of multicultural competence and how they implemented it in their work. In addition to appearing to promote an individualistic worldview that could be incongruent with some cultures values, counselors also displayed an overreliance on a reactive approach to addressing racism and other forms of discrimination. Throughout the individual interviews, participants discussed challenges in implementing or being multicultural competent. These challenges included dealing with frustrations and resistance and negotiating the impact of their own culture on students, families, and the services they provide. Finally, participants expressed goals for growth and development which involved interaction with culturally different groups and a commitment to continued learning. This commitment involved gaining knowledge about techniques and strategies for working with various cultural groups through professional development.

*Rival Explanations*

Throughout the data analysis and coding procedures the primary researcher explored rival explanations. Each member of the research team coded each data set separately and then shared their initial codes, themes, and understandings with the research team. A majority of the times the research team members were in agreement with each other. When a full consensus was not met, members discussed rival explanations and the primary researcher selected the explanation that two of the three members agreed upon. The auditor was also in agreement with the categories, subcategories, and themes which emerged. Furthermore, the primary research also reviewed the professional literature and consulted with her dissertation chair to further rule out rival explanations.
Member Checks

Member checks were used to verify the data collected. Following the transcribing and reviewing for accuracy of each data set, participants were emailed a copy of their transcript to verify for accuracy. None of the participants reported an issue with their transcription. As a phenomenological study seeks to explain the lived experience with the words of the participants, this was important in order to offer further credibility to the study. Participants were informed that they could receive a copy of the data, codes, and written report at any time via request.

Summary

The goal of this study is explore how practicing school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence and how they implement it into their work. These questions were examined using a phenomenological qualitative methodology. Participants were twelve school counselors from the same southeastern urban school district. They were selected via stratifies purposeful sampling. Their amount of school counseling experience varied, with a range of 1.5 - 23 years of experience. The range of ages was from 26-57 years old. There were 10 females and 2 males, and 50% of the participants were Black, and 50% were White.

Data for this study consisted of individual interviews, document reviews, and focus groups. Each interview and focus group was recorded, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy. The primary researcher and the research team members separately coded each data set identifying key words, phrases, themes, and patterns. The team then met for consensus coding and themes were agreed upon by the group. Coding and analyzing of
data was an emergent process that occurred throughout the data collection period, allowing the researcher to make adjustments for additional information as needed.

Final themes were grouped into three categories and presented in this chapter. These categories included: (1) conceptualization of multicultural competence, (2) implementation of multicultural competence, and (3) incongruities and Improvements. The first category represented the participants' description of the how they understood multicultural competence and culture. This description involved the role of the school counselor, their understanding of culture as multifaceted, and their view of the components that constitute multicultural competence. The second category represented themes that demonstrated school counselors experience with implementing multicultural competence. These themes included creating a positive multicultural environment, promoting equity and equality, and offering program services. The final category offered a description of the incongruities noted by the researcher between participants' conceptualizations of multicultural competence and their implementation of this competence. Also, the participants' desire to improve their multicultural competence was illustrated. A summary of findings was presented and steps for considering rival explanations and member checks was explained.
Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The current phenomenological study examines the multicultural competence of practicing school counselors by exploring how they conceptualize this competence and implement it into their work. Twelve practicing school counselors participated in individual interviews, nine of the participants were involved in a focus group, and six of the participants shared relevant documents. A research team coded and analyzed all the data and the findings were presented in the previous chapter. In this chapter implications and interpretations of the findings will be explored. First, the purpose of the study and the methodology will be reviewed. This will be followed by a summary of the findings, disaggregated by categories and subcategories. Finally limitations, implications, and suggestions for future research will be outlined.

Review of the Purpose of the Study and Methodology

Disparities in the educational achievement of culturally diverse students have been demonstrated in the research and the professional literature (Education Trust, 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Professional school counselors can be proactive in working to reduce the gap in achievement between groups of students (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). As advocates for all students, professional school counselors can facilitate positive interactions, affect attitudes, operate as change agents, and create opportunities that promote respect of cultural differences (Uehara, 2005). The population of schools is becoming more diverse and professional school counselors need to be equipped to address the personal/social, academic, and career needs of all students
(ASCA, 2005a). National and state certification boards, ASCA and CACREP have recognized the importance of multicultural competence for professional school counselors (Cates, Schaefle, Smaby, Maddux, & Lebeauf, 2007).

Despite the high self-perceived competence of professional school counselors, there appears to be no evidence that school counselors actually use culturally responsive practices in their work (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). There does not appear to be any research that offers insight into how practicing professional school counselors define multicultural competence and how, or if, they infuse their work with culturally responsive practice. Due to the paucity in the literature on this topic, qualitative research is needed to understand how professional school counselors define multicultural competence and how they incorporate it into their work (Robinson-Wood, 2009).

The purpose of the current qualitative study was to explore how professional school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence and how, or if, they incorporate it into their work. The research paradigm underpinning these views is social constructivism. This paradigm was paired with a tradition of phenomenology. The researcher gathered information about the lived experiences of professional school counselors and their understanding and implementation of multicultural competence in their school counseling program. The phenomenon examined in this study was professional school counselors' experience of multicultural competence.

There are two research questions for the current study: How do practicing professional school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence? How does their conceptualization of cultural competence influence the school counseling services they facilitate?
The researcher selected a team of three to assist with data collection, data analysis, and code and theme development. The research team includes two members who co-moderated focus groups and assisted with data analysis, and one member who served as an auditor.

The participants in the current study were 12 currently practicing professional school counselors in a southeastern U.S. urban school district. This number satisfied Creswell's (2006) recommended sample size for a phenomenological study. A stratified purposeful sampling procedure was employed to select participants. To achieve maximum variation, the schools in the district were divided into three different categories, elementary (grades K-5), middle (grades 6-8), and high school (grades 9-12), and four counselors from each category were chosen.

Once approval was received from the Human Subjects Review Board at Old Dominion University, data collection proceeded. Each participant participated in an individual interview and nine of the participants were involved in a focus group moderated by a research team member. In addition, relevant documents were requested from participants, six provided these. All interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed by a paid transcriptionist and verified for accuracy by the primary researcher. A phenomenological approach to the analysis of data was used for this study. There was an emergent design, using a stepwise procedure, and an inductive analysis of data. Member checking occurred throughout the process. To establish trustworthiness and validity researcher biases and assumptions were bracketed. Researcher presence and the possibility of socially correct responses were taken into consideration when coding the data. Triangulation of data also took place as data was gathered from multiple sources.
To increase confirmability, at any point in the study participants could request the current data and codes for review. The 10 ethical considerations Patton (2002) considers important to qualitative inquiry were addressed and accounted for to the extent possible.

Summary of Findings

The goal of the current phenomenological study was to describe how practicing school counselors conceptualize and implement multicultural competence. The findings provided an exploration of the lived experience of how twelve practicing school counselors from one district think about and implement multicultural competence into their work. Three categories emerged which explained the relationship between the data sets. These categories included: (1) conceptualization of multicultural competence, (2) implementation of multicultural competence, and (3) incongruities and improvements. Within each category, three subcategories emerged.

Conceptualization of Multicultural Competence

There is evidence that professional school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence as multidimensional rather than as a single entity and that perceived competency in one area does not guarantee competency in another (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001). As a result, there has also been a call in the literature to provide the field with qualitative studies that explore the multicultural competence of counselors and answer the question of how professional school counselors define multicultural competence (Robinson-Wood, 2009). Participants in the current study shed some light on how practicing school counselors might conceptualize multicultural competence and how they view their role in offering culturally responsive services. The first category, conceptualization of multicultural competence, illustrates how the participants viewed the
role of the culturally competent school counselor, understood culture as being multifaceted, and their understanding of the components of multicultural competence.

*Role of the school counselor.* According to the combined responses of all twelve participants, the role of the school counselor is to perform as an advocate for students, a systemic change agent, and serve as the multicultural expert in the building. These roles served as the themes to help explain this sub-category. Almost all the participants described advocacy as being embedded in the role of the school counselor, and providing a support and voice for students as needed. Advocacy was also described as removing barriers that impeded academic success. This description of school counselor as advocate is consistent with the literature that suggest the school counselor’s role involves advocating for the personal/social, academic, and career development of all students (Bemak & Chung, 2005; House & Martin, 1999; Stone & Dahir, 2007).

Furthermore school counselors are in a prime position to not only perform as advocates, but to also serve as change agents in the school and work to reduce the achievement gap (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Walker, 2006). In the current study, practicing school counselors confirmed this by defining their roles as systemic change agents. The professional school counselors expressed that their role was to confront the status quo by using data to note disparities in discipline, academic, and attendance data. In this capacity, the school counselor not only identifies disparities but also should take steps to address them through promotion of equity, access, and equality. These findings were in line with professional literature that recommends using data and examining existing practices and policies to ensure no group is being marginalized (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).
Walker (2006) stated that school counselors are usually considered the "people expert" in their building and as a result have an opportunity to promote the success of all students. Participants in the current study also viewed their role as one of expert. They described themselves as being the multicultural expert in the building. This perceived position requires that school counselors have adequate multicultural training and competence in order to facilitate competent practices. School counselors are often involved in direct instruction or perform as culturally competent consultants and as a result need to possess knowledge pertaining to the role of culture in the learning environment (Grothaus et al., 2010; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). In this study all participants had participated in at least one course on multicultural competence.

*Understanding of Culture as Multifaceted.* American schools continue to grow more and more diverse (US Census Bureau, 2008). Schools consist of not only racial and ethnic groups, but various other cultural groups as well (McAuliffe, 2008). School counselors need to be ready to address the needs of a diverse student body (ASCA, 2005b; Walker, 2006). In the current study, participants' identification of cultural groups in their school was contingent upon their identification of what constituted culture. Culture was considered multifaceted and could include race, ethnicity, gender, SES, ability, or sexual orientation. Some participants only identified groups that would be considered a minority at their school. These findings shed light on how school counselors identify various culture groups in the school. The participants in the current study identified that various cultural groups that they believed were represented in their school.
Components of multicultural competence. The multicultural counseling competencies presented by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) and endorsed by ACA and ASCA recognize three dimensions of cultural competence. These dimensions include beliefs/attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Participants identified components of multicultural competence that were not completely aligned with these dimensions. Components addressed by the Professional School Counselors represented an awareness of other cultures and an understanding and respect of the cultural needs of diverse students, and an action approach towards using appropriate strategies to address the needs of culturally diverse students. It is important to note that awareness was considered by the participants to mean ability to identify cultural groups in the school. Some participants stated that being aware of various cultural groups in the building and understanding the perspectives of these students demonstrated multicultural competence. This is consistent with the knowledge dimension. This verbiage is also consistent with a previous study of 24 developmental guidance programs in the U.S. which found that the multicultural standard was listed as “recognizing differences,” or “appreciating other’s differences” (MacDonald & Sink, 1999).

The action theme is consistent with the skills dimension which involves the development and appropriate use of culturally responsive interventions (Sue et al., 1992). When the goals and techniques that counselors use are aligned with the lived experiences and cultural values of their clients, counseling is at its most effective. Several studies have shown evidence for the importance of making counseling consistent with the client’s worldview (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Sue, et al, 1992). However, although participants considered the client’s worldview in deciding their interventions,
these findings do not depict whether the intervention was culturally responsive or that the students benefitted from them.

Culturally responsive counseling also involves knowing how one’s own cultural conditioning can impact the counseling relationship (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Sue, et al.). This is the Sue et al. belief/attitudes dimension. This domain asserts that counselors recognize their own bias, prejudices, limitations, and attitudes in order to affectively work with clients. When questioned about their definition or perception of multicultural competence, only one participant mentioned the cultural influences of their own worldview in the counseling session. Both male participants did state that their own culture influenced their work, but this extended primarily to young males. Participant’s lack of including this in their definition of multicultural competence is consistent with other studies that have demonstrated that school counselors rate themselves lower on multicultural awareness than other dimensions (Robinson & Bradley, 2005). However, as discussed in category III, subcategory II, some participants did state being cognizant of the impact of their own culture on the school counseling services they provide. As they did not include this dimension in their definition of multicultural competence, School counselors may indeed be stronger in this area than they report on self-report multicultural assessments. This evidence further suggests that multicultural competence be considered as a multidimensional concept.

Implementation of Multicultural Competence

According to quantitative research in the literature, professional school counselors often rate themselves as having high levels of multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson & Bradley, 2005)
and high levels of multicultural counseling self-efficacy (Holcomb-McCoy, Harris, Hines, Johnston, 2008). However, there is no evidence that suggest that school counselors actually provide culturally competent services. This category detailed how participants conceptualized implementing multicultural competence. The goal is to begin to close the gaps in the literature by providing information on how PSC's report practicing cultural competence in their work. In the current study, school counselors reported implementing multicultural competence by creating a positive multicultural environment, offering programs and services, and promoting equity and equality. Each of these methods represents sub-categories in this category.

**Creating a positive multicultural environment.** Participants in the current study believed that school counselors should work towards creating a positive multicultural environment. Strategies that school counselors reported using to create this environment include hanging culturally diverse posters, promoting activities that honor various cultures, ensuring representation of all cultural groups in programs and activities, and facilitating a warm and caring environment. These efforts are consistent with ASCA's (2005b) statement that professional school counselors create a positive, multiculturally inclusive environment.

The majority of participant's efforts in fostering a positive multicultural environment were direct. They believed that the school counselor takes an active, leadership role which involved responsive services as well as school wide activities. These findings are consistent with the shift in the field from traditional role of counseling, consultation, and coordination to one of active leadership and collaboration (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Field & Baker, 2004; Stone & Dahir, 2007). However, two
participants did seem to espouse the more traditional role, which involved an indirect approach to creating a positive multicultural environment. Under this approach, participants offered responsive services on an as needed basis, and waited for direction from administrators in order to take action.

Offering programs and Services. Sue et al. (1992) reported that a characteristic of competent multicultural counseling included the ability to develop appropriate interventions, strategies, and techniques to work with culturally diverse populations. Holcomb-McCoy (2004) identified competence in selecting culturally responsive counseling interventions and techniques when working with students and families as part of the multicultural counseling competency for school counselors. In this study, participants described three methods in which they offer culturally responsive services to students and families. These include building relationships, using creative techniques and collaborations with school and community resources, and advocating for students. The majority of the participants stated that the school counselor should work towards establishing a relationship with students and families, and offered examples of how they accomplished this task.

To keep the programs from becoming an ancillary service for some students while ignoring the needs of others, participants also described advocating for all students by implementing programs and services to address their needs (ASCA, 2005a). These services were for individuals or for groups, depending on the needs at the various schools. These findings are aligned with Ratts, Dekruyf, and Chen-Hayes (2007) recommendations that advocacy actions can assist school counselors in providing culturally competent services by recognizing which situations call for direct interventions.
with students, advocacy on their behalf, or greater community and political efforts. Participants described advocacy efforts that involved implementing programs and services for students that ranged from providing groups, support, giving a voice to students, or performing as a liaison. Participants did not mention political efforts on behalf of their students. Lewis, Arnold, House, and Toporek (2002) presented advocacy competencies which provide a framework from which counselors can assist in impacting the world of the client at the both the micro and macro level. These competencies were (1) Client/Student Empowerment, (2) Client/Student Advocacy, (3) Community Collaboration, (4) Systems Advocacy, (5) Public Information, and (6) Social/Political Advocacy. The data illustrated the participants discussed advocacy which involved the first four categories, but not the last two.

The use of creative techniques for working with culturally diverse groups was identified by all participants as another method for offering culturally responsive programs and services. These ranged from using support systems, non-verbal strategies, or providing resources. This was consistent with calls in the professional literature for school counselors to effectively work with all populations by collaborating with families and community resources (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Promoting Equity and Equality. Equality is defined as treating all students equally without consideration of student differences or unique circumstances, whereas equity involves taking these differences into consideration to provide appropriate services for students. The literature supports equity as a foundational element in promoting cultural diversity (Lee, 2001) and designing a program that operates from a social justice perspective (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Although eight participants discussed promoting
equity in their school counseling program, when detailing equitable services they offer in their current program, only three described equity. The other five consisted of treating all students the same and honoring a sense of fairness.

Incongruities and Improvements

Participants in the current study described their conceptualization of multicultural competence, as well as their understanding of how they implement it into their work. The literature states a need for studies that explore the actual multicultural competent practice of school counselors (Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson-Wood, 2009). The current study used document reviews and case studies in the focus groups to understand the relationship between school counselor's conceptualizations of multicultural competence and how they implement it into their work with students. This category is informed by themes that address the inconsistencies between concept and practice, challenges faced by school counselors in attempting to practice culturally responsive services, and goals for growth and development.

Discrepancies between concept and implementation. The researcher and research team noted two key discrepancies between what individuals stated in their individual interviews and how they stated they would work with a student during the case study portion of the focus groups. Discrepancies were also noted between responses given during the individual interview. School counselors stated being systemic change agents, advocates, and leaders in creating positive multicultural environments. However, they did not report proactive steps to addressing racism and other forms of discrimination. These discrepancies include: a reactive approach to addressing racism and other forms of discrimination and also the promotion of an individualistic worldview in decision
making. Furthermore, of the six school counselors that provided documents for review, only one philosophy statement mentioned multicultural competence. However, all six did mention addressing the needs of all students. This does not imply that school counselors are not practicing multicultural practices, only that they did not communicate that in their mission or philosophy statements.

Holcomb-McCoy (2004) identified understanding racism and students resistance as an area of competence for culturally responsive counselors and asserted that a social justice approach to school counseling revolves around efforts to reduce the effects of racism and discrimination on students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). However in the current study, participants demonstrated a tendency for an overreliance on a reactive approach to addressing racism and other forms of discrimination. Nine of the participants stated that they did address racism and discrimination once it was brought to their attention. Students, staff, or administrators may request help or services due to racism or discrimination and the school counselor would handle each situation on an individual basis. School counselors are tasked to respond to issues of racism and other forms of discrimination and often provide responsive services in this capacity (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). However, comprehensive school counseling programs should not rely solely on responsive methods, but should also be preventative in nature (Erford et al., 2007). These findings suggest that an imbalance might exist between preventative and intervention methods. Examples of racism and discrimination were identified as teasing of students, heterosexism and homophobia. No forms of oppression were identified by the participants. As school counselors are tasked to recognize and combat racism, discrimination, and oppression, this finding raises questions about school counselor’s
ability to identify and appropriately address oppression as well as racism and other forms of discrimination.

Cultural discontinuity, the mismatch between the white, middle class norms prevalent in schools and the values and norms of students of color, account for misinterpretations of the behaviors, attitudes, abilities, and interactions of culturally diverse students. Due to the negative effects of cultural discontinuity on student achievement, counselors need to be advocates who fight for changes that benefit all students (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). The culturally responsive counselor recognizes that it is important to understand how their clients' perceive the world and to refrain from passing judgments on the worldview of the client (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis, 1992). Ten of the participants demonstrated a promotion of an individualistically oriented worldview when working with students and families. These values could be incongruent with those of the students or the families. Instead, the school counselor aimed to help the families accept a more mainstream American value system when making decisions about their student. An assumption seemed to be that parents are incorrect in their beliefs/actions or just need further information. This data conflicts with participants stated understanding of multicultural competence and their attitude toward multicultural competence and what is promoted in the professional literature.

Challenges. Participants in the current study identified challenges in performing as a multiculturally competent school counselor. These challenges included frustrations and resistance and the impact of the participant's cultural background. School counselors experienced resistance from family members of culturally different students. The
resistance often stemmed from mistrust on the part of the parent/guardian and/or family or a clash in values between the school counselor and student's family. One way in which school counselors demonstrate multicultural competence is by understanding resistance by certain students and families to engage in cross-cultural interactions (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). The findings of this study suggest that school counselor seek to create home-school partnerships but struggle with experiencing resistance from the family.

Another challenge facing participants was dealing with frustrations. This frustration could be a symptom of lack of time, language barriers, and lack of sensitivity of others towards culturally different students. These frustrations can create obstacles that lead to school counselor's resistance of adopting the role of advocate and systemic change agent (Bemak & Chung, 2008). A final challenge to multicultural competent practice described by the participants included the impact of the school counselor's cultural background on their work. School counselors recognized that their own personal cultural values impacted their relationships with students and need to be taken into consideration when working with culturally different students. This is consistent with literature that states culturally responsive counselors consider the impact of their own worldview and culture on the counseling relationship (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen Hayes, 2007; Sue et al., 1992). Despite these challenges, participants remained positive that they could effectively work with culturally diverse students.

Goals for Growth and Development. Professional school counselors can increase their multicultural competence by immersing themselves with culturally diverse groups professionally and personally, being active in the communities in which their school is
located, seeking multicultural training and professional development opportunities, seeking opportunities for multicultural engagement, soliciting feedback on the practice and understanding of multicultural issues, continually assessing the needs of their students, and assessing one’s own multicultural competence on a regular basis (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Lee, 2001; Vera, Buhin, & Shinn, 2006). In the current study, participant’s goals for growth and development fell mainly within two areas: growth through interaction with culturally diverse people and a commitment to continued learning. School counselors expressed a desire to further expose themselves to diverse cultural groups through the use of travel, participating in events, or personal interactions. In the demographics survey only three school counselors stated that they did not actively interact with culturally diverse individuals outside of the school setting. Overall, the participants expressed a willingness to learn about the traditions, beliefs, practices, or customs of different cultural groups. Students and family were viewed and utilized as a source of knowledge about their cultural group’s traditions, beliefs, practices, or customs. This willingness to learn from their students also aided in establishing a relationship between the school counselor and the student. These findings suggest that school counselors recognize they need to continue to learn about different cultural groups, perhaps through use of cultural informants, people who know mainstream culture and the particular cultures of diverse groups (Day-Vines, Patton, & Baytops, 2004).

Further evidence of this is seen in the remaining area commitment to continued learning. Participants understood growth as an ongoing process. School counselors also stated a need to gain additional knowledge and techniques for working with culturally
diverse students. In some cases this was simply a stated need, while other participants discussed seeking professional development trainings at conferences or the district level. These findings highlight school counselor’s desire for additional training in areas of multicultural competence, with an emphasis toward knowledge about various cultural groups. These findings conflict with self-reports of school counselors high multicultural competence on quantitative scales of multicultural knowledge (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). It suggests that school counselor may not feel they have enough knowledge about diverse groups. It does however imply that they have goals and plans to seek out this knowledge.

Limitations

The researcher made attempts to mitigate the limitations in the current study. The use of document review, focus groups, and individual interviews provided triangulation of data and permitted the researcher to verify some of the self-report data. However, there are still limitations that need to be addressed. These include: (1) researcher and research team bias, (2) researcher’s lack of experience, (3) participant attrition, (4) possibility of socially desirable responses, (5) use of self-report, (6) use of the single case method, (7) two of the researchers being employed as school counselors in the school division utilized for the case, (8) use of current multicultural terminology and number of interview questions, and (9) use of professional transcriptionist.

Researcher and research team bias

The qualitative researcher seeks objectivity not through controlling variables, but through naming and bracketing researcher assumptions and biases. This process protects the validity of the participant’s experiences under study. The researcher began the study by first bracketing her assumptions and instructing members of the research team to do
the same. Biases, attitudes, and preconceived notions were discussed by the team throughout the data collection process. Team members made a point to challenge each other on emerging themes whenever necessary, to ensure the phenomenon was understood from the perspective of the participants.

Researcher’s Lack of Experience

Although the primary researcher has completed one doctoral level qualitative design course, this lack of relative experience may have led to missed opportunities to asking probing questions during the individual interviews and the focus groups. To mitigate this effect, the research team met to discuss codes throughout the data collection process. This allowed the team to recommend additional questions that needed to be asked during the interviews. During the focus groups, one of the research team members served as co-moderator to glean additional information as needed. Furthermore, the auditor for the study had taken a doctoral level qualitative design course and successfully completed a phenomenological study.

Participant Attrition

Another limitation in this study was participant attrition. As professional school counselors are often busy due to their myriad of responsibilities, the researcher was initially concerned that participants would grow resentful of the time required to participate in the study. Therefore, expectations were explained via a phone call to all participants, and participants selected the dates, times, and locations for individual interviews. When the researchers scheduled the focus group interviews, she polled the participants at each level to find out which dates and times were the most convenient, and selected the majority response. Focus groups were also held in a central location in order
to increase accessibility. Unfortunately, a snow storm led to the district closing for several days. As a result, two focus groups had to be rescheduled. The participants were once again consulted; however, three middle and high school level school counselors expressed a difficulty with continuing participation. The researcher invited these three participants to attend either the middle or high school focus group, however they declined. Document reviews were another limitation. Two reminder emails were sent to participants who had not submitted documents but only six participants shared documents from their programs. To address this limitation, the researcher solicited more actual examples of actions during the focus groups.

Possibility of Socially Desirable Responses

In self-report data there is always the chance of socially desirable responses. The primary researcher attempted to reduce the likelihood of socially desirable responses by allowing the participants to select their location for the individual interviews. This way the participants could select a venue in which they felt comfortable. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses during the recruitment process and through informed consent during the beginning of each individual interview and focus group session.

Use of self-report

There are limitations to self-report measures. The researcher addressed these limitations by triangulating the data through individual interviews, focus groups, and document reviews. The researcher also used open-ended questions about implementation of multicultural competences and case studies. However, there is still the chance that
what school counselors stated about implementing multicultural competence does not correspond to actual practice.

Use of the single case

The single case method is also a limitation of the study. Several of the schools in the district involved were in the process of applying for Recognized ASCA Model Program status. Therefore, many of the participants were working towards aligning their program with the ASCA national model. The researcher recognizes that this may not be representative of school counselors in other districts. The thick description of the school district school counseling professional development and its students were intended to assist others in determining transferability of findings to other districts.

Two of the researchers being employed as school counselors in the school division utilized for the case

Another potential limitation is two of the researchers' relationship to the division in the study. The primary researcher and one of the research team members both work in the same district. This allowed for access, prolonged engagement and thick description. This limitation was addressed through having one research team member and an auditor who did not have a working relationship with the district. Rival explanations were also considered. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledged and bracketed her biases before beginning the data collection and analysis.

Use of Current Multicultural Terminology and Length of Interviews

The use of multicultural terminology in the interview questions was also another possible limitation of the study. The terms used in the questions allowed the researcher to explore how participants conceptualized and implemented what the literature generally
agrees to be best practices in multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). However, this may have prompted the participants to respond in a certain way. The researcher attempted to mitigate this by including questions that did not mention multicultural terminology (e.g., What is the role of the school counselor?), and explored what emerged from these responses which related to multicultural competence. Additionally, the interviews consisted of 23 questions. Although the amount of questions allowed for a more detailed exploration, it may also have the potential for coercion.

Use of Professional Transcriptionist

Another limitation involved the use of a professional transcriptionist. All of the individual interviews and focus groups were transcribed by a transcriptionist. The transcriptionist agreed to remove any identifying information from the document and destroyed all recordings and transcriptions once she emailed them to the primary researcher. The primary researcher immersed herself in the data by listening to each recording again while reading through the transcription.

Implications

School counselors are tasked to meet the diverse needs of students and to work towards closing the achievement gap (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). As advocates for all students and systemic change agents, professional school counselors can facilitate positive interactions and create opportunities that promote respect of cultural differences and achievement of all students (Uehara, 2005). Therefore, professional school counselors need to be equipped to address the personal/social, academic, and career needs of a diverse student population. National and state certification boards, ASCA and CACREP have recognized the importance of cultural competence for professional school
counselors (Cates, et al., 2007). School counselors often report high self-perceived multicultural competence on quantitative measures (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson & Bradley, 2005). However, this does not demonstrate that school counselors are practicing culturally responsive services (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). There does not appear to be any research that offers insight into how practicing professional school counselors define multiculturalism and how or if they infuse their work with culturally responsive practice. Therefore, this study sought to explore how practicing school counselor conceptualize and implement multicultural competence.

Findings from this study suggest that school counselors have a conceptualization of multicultural competence that includes an understanding of the role of school counselor as advocate, expert, and systemic change agent. They also understand that culture affects the services they provide, and they reported on components of multicultural competence. Findings also demonstrated that school counselors report implementing multicultural competence by creating a positive multicultural environment, offering programs and services, and promoting equity, access, and equality. Furthermore, the findings highlight that a discrepancy does exist between how school counselor conceptualize multicultural competence and how they may implement it. It also suggests challenges and improvements involved in performing as a culturally competent counselor. These findings have implications for counselor educators and supervisors, practicing school counselors, and professional associations.

Counselor Educators
Cultural groups found in schools include but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, gender, ability, socio-economic status (poor/low-income, middle class, wealthy), sexual orientation, religious or spiritual affiliations, immigration/citizenship status, geographical residence (Urban, Suburban, Rural), English Language Learners, special education status, and military affiliation. As a result, school counselors have to be prepared to work with a diverse group of students. CACREP has instituted multicultural training requirements for school counselor trainees (CACREP, 2009) and national and state certification boards have also adjusted their requirements to include multicultural competence for school counselors (Herring, 1998). Therefore, counselor educators and supervisors need to be ready to help school counselor trainees develop this multicultural competence. Evidence for the current study suggest that school counselors may have a concept of multicultural competence that is aligned with the literature, and yet there appears to still be a discrepancy between having this understanding and actual practice. Counselor educators should consider integrating multicultural competence into all coursework with school counselor trainees, highlighting and modeling successful implementation of cultural competence, and requiring students to develop methods for implementing culturally responsive services. Furthermore, supervisors can use the practicum and internship experiences to require school counseling trainees to engage in activities intended to develop multicultural competence.

When questioned, school counselors in the current study did not identify any areas of oppression. Identification of racism and discrimination was limited to homophobia, teasing, and sexism. Additionally, school counselors indicated a reactive approach to addressing racism and discrimination. This suggests that school counselor
trainees would benefit from both coursework and field experiences focused on the identification of racism, discrimination, and oppression, and methods for addressing these detrimental behaviors. School counselors also need further skill development for advocating for their students. In the current study advocacy efforts were confined to the individual and school wide level. School counselors need to understand how they can also impact the broader community (e.g., through legislation) to better advocate for their students.

Counselor educators can promote the value of ongoing professional development in cultural competence to their students through involvement with culturally diverse groups, culturally competent supervision, and workshops and trainings. In addition, counselor educators can collaborate with school districts to promote and provide the tools needed for continued growth.

School Counseling Supervisors

Professional development of cultural competence should be ongoing throughout a school counselor’s career. District supervisors for school counselors can assist school counselors by providing and requiring professional workshops or classes that address multicultural competence. District supervisor should also encourage school counselors to annually assess their multicultural competence and advocate to include assessment of cultural competence as part of school counselor performance evaluation. This could be accomplished with Holcomb-McCoy’s School Counselor Multicultural Checklist (2007), use of the qualitative questions employed for this study, or other instruments. Furthermore, district supervisors can advocate for time for school counselors to seek these professional development opportunities and also engaging in culturally competent
and ongoing supervision. A reduction in non-counselor duties would allow for school counselors to further develop in areas such as multicultural competence. This would also allow for school counselor to spend more time advocating for students at institutional and legislative levels as well.

Practicing school counselors

With the diversification of America’s schools and the increasing achievement gap, school counselors are tasked to work as advocates, leaders, and systemic change agents to promote the educational advancement of all students (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Walker, 2006). If school counselors are going to accomplish this goal they need tools for identifying and addressing racism, discrimination, and oppression. Holcomb-McCoy (2007) challenged school counselors to operate from a social justice perspective in order to reduce the achievement gap. She stated that “essentially, a social justice approach to school counseling is centered on reducing the effects of oppression on students and improving equity and access to educational services” (p.18). Practicing school counselors can gain knowledge about addressing racism, discrimination and oppression by seeking professional development opportunities and supervision as well as being personally and professionally active with diverse groups (McAuliffe, Grothaus, et al. 2008). Furthermore, school counselors should use data to assist in identifying inequities in the system. This data can be used to develop interventions, inform advocacy efforts, and challenge the status quo. School counselors should take steps to share this information with key stakeholders.

In this study, participants shared that they believed that school counselors played a key role in creating a multicultural environment. PSC’s can enhance this role by being
accessible in school, creating a welcoming and inclusive climate, being active in the community, promoting culturally responsive educational practices, advocating for enhanced school-family-community collaboration, having a multicultural advisory council, utilizing cultural informants, and providing training for faculty and staff (Day-Vines et al., 2004; Virginia School Counseling Association, 2008).

School counselors also need to advocate for professional development opportunities for themselves. They can accomplish this by seeking funds for workshops, attending state and national conferences, and participating in community activities. Additionally, school counselors need to continually assess their own multicultural competence and identify areas for growth and improvements. Professional development should be sought in these identified deficit areas. School counselors can continue to monitor their cultural competence through supervision. Finally, school counselors should also seek training on how to advocate for students and families at the institutional and legislative levels.

Professional Associations

In the current study, participants expressed a desire to gain knowledge and techniques for working with students and families from diverse cultural groups. Some participants responded that they attend professional development trainings and conferences from both state and regional associations. Professional associations can assist in the multicultural competence growth and development of school counselors by offering programs, workshops, and services that address offering culturally responsive services. Furthermore, professional associations can make these opportunities available to all school counselors by offering them throughout the year, at affordable rates. Many
of the participants reported seeking activities during the summer months. This would be a prime opportunity for professional associations to facilitate training and development. Professional associations can also take the lead in advocating for policies and legislation promoting equity in access, resources for all students, and systemic changes that promote the success of all students.

Future Research

Further research on practicing school counselor’s conceptualization and implementation of multicultural competence is needed. Future research can begin by expanding on this study to include a wider sample of practicing school counselors from various districts and states. This would help greater inform how school counselors define and implement multicultural competence in their work. Other change in an expanded qualitative study could include more document reviews and observations to offer insight on the actual practice of school counselors. Additional research may also consider interviewing students and other stakeholders to examine their perceptions of the cultural competence of the school counselors in their school. Stakeholders can also be asked about whether their needs are being adequately addressed. Furthermore, the use of a critical theory approach could expand on the current study. Another avenue for future research involves identifying a school or school system that has been effective in addressing the achievement gap, then exploring the role of the school counselors in these efforts. This would allow researchers to better explore the role of the school counselor in helping to reduce the achievement gap. Finally, additional research is needed to understand barriers to school counselors working to address racism, discrimination, and
oppression. This research would be valuable in helping school counselors as they
develop social justice focused programs.

Conclusion

The schools in the U.S. are characterized by a conglomeration of diverse cultures. However, a gap in achievement still exists for certain groups. School counselors are in a unique position to promote the academic, personal/social, and career development of all students. In order to accomplish this they need to offer appropriate services that address the needs of a diverse student body. School counselors employ multicultural competence through advocacy, social justice efforts, and challenging inequities in the system. In the current study school counselors described how they understood and implemented multicultural competence into their work with students. Further information is needed to explore how culturally competent the actual practices of school counselors are and if they benefit the students they are intended to serve. Multicultural competence is an ongoing process that positively impacts the growth and development of all students.

As a practicing school counselor each interview was a learning experience. Immersing myself in this topic, discussing multicultural competence with other school counselors, and thinking about the implications and emerging themes influenced me to consider my own work with students. I do believe that most school counselors attempt to be culturally responsive. This study demonstrates that the participants attempted to practice from a multicultural standpoint. However, there are times when conceptualization and intentions do not equal practice. As I collected data, I reflected on my own school counseling program and the services that I provide to students. Assessing
my competence in this way required me to consider my deficit areas, and to acknowledge
cultural competence as a developing process. I believe my immersion in this experience
has helped to make me a more informed and competent school counselor. The value that
school counselors would receive from continually assessing their multicultural
competence and discussing it with others, perhaps in a supervision format, would provide
rich multicultural development, which would benefit all students.
CHAPTER VI

MANUSCRIPT

A Phenomenological Exploration of School Counselors’ Conceptualization and Implementation of Multicultural Competence

By

Jasmine L. Knight and Tim Grothaus

Old Dominion University

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Author Note

Jasmine L. Knight, Department of Counseling and Human Services, Old Dominion University; Tim Grothaus, Department of Counseling and Human Services, Old Dominion University.

Jasmine L. Knight is now at Department of Counseling and Human Services, Roosevelt University.

This manuscript is based on data used as part of a doctoral dissertation.

Correspondence regarding this email should be addressed to Jasmine L. Knight, Email: jharr005@odu.edu.
ABSTRACT

School counselors need multicultural competence to implement comprehensive school counseling programs that promote the achievement of all students. This phenomenological, qualitative study explored the lived experiences of how practicing school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence and how they implement it into their work. Twelve practicing school counselors from a southeastern, urban school district participated in individual interviews, focus groups, and documents reviews. A research team analyzed the data for themes and patterns, and findings were subjected to verification procedures. Three categories emerged: conceptualization of multicultural competence, implementation of multicultural competence, and improvements and incongruencies. Implications for school counselors, supervisors, and counselor educators are discussed.
A Phenomenological Exploration of School counselors’ Conceptualization and Implementation of Multicultural Competence

American schools are becoming increasingly diverse. According to the United States Census Bureau (2008), by 2030, youth of color will be a numerical majority in the U.S., increasing to 62% by the year 2050 (US Census Bureau, 2008). Cultural groups in schools also includes areas such as religion, gender, socio-economic status, geography, ability, age, sexual orientation, and first language. For example, more than 13 million children currently live in poverty (Children’s Defense Fund, 2009) and 1.6 million children are undocumented citizens (Urban Institute, 2009). Students who are English Language Learners are the fastest growing group, currently constituting more than 10% of public schools’ census (Gollnick & Chin, 2006; Spinelli, 2008). Students with disabilities represent 13% of the school population (The Education Trust, 2009), and Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth account for 9% of students in schools (GLSEN, 1999).

Despite this increase in cultural diversity there is still a serious problem facing the American education system. Academic achievement of students of color and students from low income homes has lagged significantly behind the achievement of their White, middle class or wealthy counterparts (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Disparities in the educational achievement of culturally diverse students have been demonstrated in the research (Education Trust, 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and The Education Trust illustrate that students from low-income homes, and students from some racial/ethnic groups are outperformed by their White, middle class
and wealthy peers. This discrepancy between the achievements of students with equal capabilities is known as the achievement gap (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). The school dropout rate for further illuminates educational gaps. In 2006, the dropout rate for Hispanic students and black students exceeded that of their white counterparts. Similar discrepancies were noted among genders, with males across every ethnic group more likely than females to not complete high school. One exception of this finding is with Black males, as Black females drop out at higher rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). Similar trends have been demonstrated for socio-economic status as well as geographical location and sexual orientation. Low-income students were six times more likely to drop-out as their higher income counterparts. In addition, students in suburban/rural communities were less likely to drop out than their urban counterparts. According to a national study published by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2005), 28% of gay and lesbian students dropped out of school.

Although several factors could contribute to these academic disparities, culture can have a serious impact on how well a child performs at school (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Grothaus, Crum, & James, 2010). The American educational system has traditionally operated from a White, middle class frame of reference (Grothaus et al., 2010). As a result, students from non-dominant backgrounds and groups are placed at a distinct disadvantage. Research has shown that the achievement incongruities are often a result of environmental, sociopolitical, or institutional systemic factors, rather than student’s capabilities (Bemak & Chung, 2008). Therefore, it is not the students that need to be “fixed” but the system (Erford, House, & Martin, 2007). Students come to school with their own cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that shape how they
interact with students and teachers (Uehara, 2005). The cultural mismatch between the White, middle-class norms that permeate schools in the U.S. and the values and norms of students of color is known as cultural discontinuity. These differences often cause misinterpretations of students' behaviors, abilities, interactions, and intelligence. This discontinuity has been linked to psychological distress, depression, low mastery, and low levels of life satisfaction in children (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008).

The changing demographics of schools, gaps in achievement, and cultural discontinuity require educators and school counselors who are equipped to meet the needs of a diverse student body (Walker, 2006). School counselors are in a unique position within schools to promote a more socially just and equitable education system (Bemak & Chung, 2008) and to facilitate the growth and development of students from various backgrounds (Walker, 2006). To ethically and effectively carry out this mission, school counselors need to be multiculturally competent and develop comprehensive school counseling programs based on the foundations of advocacy, social justice, and equity (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Lee, 2001).

**School Counselors and Multicultural Competence**

Multiculturally competent school counselors are able to develop comprehensive school counseling programs built on advocacy, social justice, and equity (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). They do not ignore the impact of culture, oppression, and racism on society. Nor do they base their school counseling programs on traditional, European, middle class values (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2007). Holcomb-McCoy (2004) identified nine areas of multicultural competence for school counselors. These areas include competence in multicultural counseling, multicultural
consultation, understanding racism and student resistance, understanding racial identity development, multicultural assessment, multicultural family counseling, social advocacy, developing school-family-community partnerships, and understanding interpersonal interactions.

CACREP (2009) requires training in multicultural competence for school counselors and ASCA (2004) has incorporated multicultural standards into their code of ethics. National and state certification boards have also adjusted their requirements to include multicultural competencies for school counselors (Cates et al.; Herring, 1998). In the literature, school counselors generally report high levels of self-perceived cultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson & Bradley, 2005) and multicultural counseling self-efficacy (Holcomb-McCoy, et al., 2008). In addition, prior coursework (Constantine, 2001a; Constantine et al., 2001; Constantine & Gushue, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines; Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005); being a person of color (Yeh & Arora, 2003); years of counseling experience (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008); espousing a eclectic/integrative theoretical orientation (Constantine, 2001); ability to be empathic (Constantine, 2001); and having high tolerance attitudes; and low racism attitudes (Constantine & Gushue, 2003) have correlated significantly with predicting self-perceived multicultural competence.

Despite the plethora of quantitative studies, there appears to be no evidence that school counselors actually practice culturally responsive services (Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004). There is a paucity in the literature on how school counselors conceptualize and implement multicultural competence and further information is needed.
Qualitative research provides an avenue in which to explore a particular topic where little information is currently available (Creswell, 2006). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how school counselors define multicultural competence and how they apply this concept in their effort to meet the needs of a diverse study body. Two research questions guided this study: (1) how do school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence? and (2) how does their conceptualization of cultural competence influence the school counseling services they facilitate?

**Method**

The goal of a phenomenological study is to expose the lived experience of a phenomenon by examining individual and collective meanings (Patton, 2002). The phenomenon studied was multicultural competence in school counseling programs. The researcher sought to give a voice to the lived experiences of school counselors by gathering information about the lived experiences of school counselors and their implementation of multicultural competence into their school counseling program. This was accomplished through individual interviews, document reviews and focus groups with school counselors.

The qualitative researcher seeks objectivity through naming and bracketing researcher assumptions and biases (Merchant and Dupuy, 1996). This process protects the validity of the participant's experiences being studied. To further promote objectivity, prior to data collection and participant selection, a research team of three was recruited. One of the team members was a doctoral student in a counselor education program that was currently working as a school counselor and one was a doctoral student in a
counselor education program that had been trained in school counseling, but had yet to work in a school counseling setting. Both of these team members co-moderated the focus groups and assisted in data analysis. The third team member had no background in school counseling and served as an auditor. He did not participate in data collection or data analysis. Because epoche, the suspension of prejudgments about reality, is an important component of the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2006), the researcher and research team entered the process by first bracketing their own views of how school counselors should conceptualize multicultural competence and what this should look like in their daily activities.

**Case Selection and Participants**

To provide cultural context, the study focused on school counselors in one school division. The case for this study is defined as an urban school district in a Southeastern state. This school district educates approximately 31,350 children. Of the 31,350 students, 50.8% are male and 49.2% are female. Black students (57.3%) comprise the majority of enrollment, with White students (30.2) representing the second largest demographic group, and Hispanics (6.8%) the third of the student enrollment. Other cultural groups present in the school include youth from families with low income (50.4%) students receiving special education services (13.1%), military students, undocumented citizens, students labeled as talented and gifted (5.6%), and several other unidentified ethnicities (2.4%). The diverse cultural and ethnic make-up of the selected school division made it a viable case for study. Furthermore the case was convenient as the primary researcher, and of the research team members, worked as a school counselor in the district chosen for the case.
Participants were 12 currently practicing school counselors. A stratified purposeful sampling was used to select participants. The schools were divided into three different categories: elementary (grades K-5), middle (grades 6-8), and high school (grades 9-12). To achieve maximum variation, four school counselors were selected from each category. In the middle and high school category, counselors were randomly chosen to be invited to participate. In the elementary school category, the schools were divided into two different socio-economic categories, represented by a federally funded program under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Title I or non-Title I school. Title I status implies a significant number of students receive free or reduced lunch in a particular school. The schools were divided into Title I (n=16) or Non-Title I (n=10) to ensure participants working with students from both socio-economic groups were represented. In this district only the elementary schools hold Title I status.

Studies have shown a relationship between being a member of an ethnic group of color and reporting high levels of multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008) and that Whites were not as multiculturally aware or knowledgeable as their ethnic counterparts (Yeh and Arora, 2003). To further explore how ethnicity may impact multicultural competence, at least one counselor at each level was selected from an ethnic group of color. However, random selection allowed for a variation of experience levels, gender, knowledge, and personal experiences. One counselor from each level was selected based on ethnicity. The other three counselors at each level were randomly selected.

Participants were initially contacted via telephone to solicit their participation. At the elementary and middle school level, all eight participants agreed to participate after...
the first phone call. At the high school level, two of the original participants agreed after the first phone call and two did not respond. Two more were selected, and agreed after the first phone call.

Demographic information about the participants was collected utilizing a demographic questionnaire. Six of the school counselors identified themselves as African-American or Black and six identified themselves as White or Caucasian. Ten participants were females and two identified as males. Their ages ranged from 26-57 years old and their school counseling experience range from 1.5-23 years. Eleven held Masters degree, and one held an Education Specialist degree. All participants stated receiving prior training in multicultural counseling.

When asked about other aspects of their culture they may wish to share, 8 responded no or did not answer the question, the other four responses included: being of Greek descent, Bahrainian daughter-in-law, Baptist affiliation, and no contact with black people prior to the age of 13. Three school counselors reported no involvement with culturally diverse individuals outside of the school counseling setting, and nine reported they were involved with culturally diverse individuals. Only one school counselor did not respond to question pertaining to cultural groups for which they provide services. Of the remaining school counselors, 10 listed racial/ethnic groups, 2 of which also mentioned non-racial/ethnic cultural groups. One listed different social groups they interact with in the school such as national honor society.

Procedure

Data for the study consisted of individual interviews, document reviews, and focus group interviews. Interviewing is a commonly used method of collecting data in
qualitative studies. During an interview a researcher is seeking to obtain a rich, detailed account of the participant’s experiences (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996; Polkinghorne, 2005). Upon recruitment, participants scheduled an individual interview. To foster a sense of safety and security, the participants chose the setting, date, and time in which they preferred the interview to take place. An open-ended standardized questionnaire developed by the researcher was utilized. The questions inquired about attitudes toward multicultural competence, how it is conceptualized, and what meaning making is assigned to the phenomenon. Additional questions sought to understand how or if the school counselors incorporate multiculturally responsive services into their work. The researcher had the freedom to ask additional questions, such as probes for further information when necessary. Following the individual interviews, participants were asked to share documents from their school counseling program. The use of documents allows the researcher to make connections and further explore the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). These documents could include: mission statements, philosophy statements, lesson plans, program goals, letters or flyers sent home, notes from parents or students, or any items that school counselor wishes to share to demonstrate multicultural competence. Participants were requested to email or mail documents to the researcher. Six school counselors provided documents from their school counseling programs. All six provided mission statements and philosophy statements. Calendars and weekly activities were provided by three participants, and lesson plans by two participants. The researcher also received two program goals, three letters sent home to parents/guardians, one academic plan, one management agreement, one evaluation, and two sets of data used to identify services.
The use of focus groups allowed the investigator to explore how school counselors think about and incorporate multicultural competence when given the opportunity to consult with similar professionals. The focus groups were moderated by the primary investigator and one of the research team members. They were divided by level and took place at school identified as a central location. During the focus groups, the counselors were presented with two vignettes, adapted to be age and school level appropriate for the participating school counselors, depicting a concern by a student or group of students. The group discussed the necessary counseling services, the central concerns, and what further information needed to be solicited. The groups were then asked to respond to three questions about multicultural competence and one reflective question about their experience being in the study. The focus group interviews began after all individual interviews had been completed and coded. The primary researcher solicited information from the school counselors on their preference for day, time, and location. All four elementary school counselors participated in the elementary focus group, three middle school counselors participated in the middle school focus group, and two high school counselors participated in the high school focus group. Focus group participation declined as a result of school days being cancelled by inclement weather.

**Data Analysis**

A phenomenological approach to the analysis of data was used for this study. The design was emergent as it was open to new paths and understandings based on the emerging data. It was stepwise in that each interview and focus group was sought to be understood separately before integrating into a whole. Finally, it used an inductive
analysis of data in that the investigator immersed herself in details and specifics of each data set in order to fully comprehend patterns, themes and relationships.

Data analysis started once the first four individual interviews had been completed. The data was transcribed and the primary researcher immersed herself in the data and reviewed each transcript to ensure accuracy. The data was then sent to the other two members of the research team for coding. After coding the data separately to identify key words, phrases, and initial themes, the team members then met to agree on the emerging codes and themes. At this time, the team decided that more examples needed to be solicited in the remaining interviews. The next round of individual interviews commenced and as interviews were completed, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy, they were cycled through the team to repeat the coding process. Upon completion of all individual interviews, initial codes and themes were established and the team agreed that the data was saturated and that no new information had emerged.

Document analysis was ongoing throughout the process. The documents from the participants came in at different intervals and were collected and coded by the primary researcher. After the first focus group was transcribed and reviewed for accuracy by the primary researcher, it was emailed to the other two research team members. The process for coding the focus groups mirrored the same process for the individual interviews. The codes and themes were agreed upon by all members of the group. During the consensus coding meetings conducted by the research team it was noted by all members that most of the same themes and codes found during the individual interviews emerged in the focus group and document review data sets as well. It was further noted that the participants in the focus groups were in agreement with each other about how they addressed the case.
studies and responded to the questions. The focus group data gave the research team insight in how the participants might choose to work with a student, and what services they might provide. However, there were some conflicting data that suggested a discrepancy between what school counselors stated in their individual interviews, demonstrated with their documents, and actually stated they would do during the case study portion of the focus group. New codes were developed to represent this incongruent data.

The primary researcher then recoded all the individual, focus groups and document data sets based on the consensus codes and themes. The qualitative researcher seeks to compile the patterns and relationships into meaningful categories and themes (Patton, 2002). These themes were further inductively coalesced into three categories: (1) Conceptualization of multicultural competence, (2) Implementation of multicultural competence, and (3) Incongruities and Improvements. The auditor reviewed and approved the codebook, audit trail and categories.

Establishing Trustworthiness

The establishment of a study’s integrity in qualitative research is known as trustworthiness. Trustworthiness implies that the researcher is “balance, fair, and conscientious in taking into account multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities.” (Patton, 2002, p. 575) To establish trustworthiness and validity researcher and researcher team biases and assumptions were bracketed. During consensus coding the research team discussed any responses that may have been socially acceptable responses. It was decided that the primary researcher would ask participants to give examples for answers that could have been socially acceptable responses.
Triangulation of data also took place. Gathering data from multiple sources allowed the research team to make constant comparisons and to illuminate any discrepancies. The research team made it a point to identify any divergent perspectives. To increase confirmability, member checks were conducted during the focus group interviews and by giving each participant a transcript of their interview to review for accuracy. The participants were informed that at any point in the study they could have requested the current data and codes for review. After the final codes had been decided and themes developed, each participant was sent the information via email to offer comments and additional insight if necessary. None responded to report that any changes were needed. Finally, with the stratified purposeful sampling procedure, results of the proposed study have enhanced the potential for transferability.

Results

The data from this study was organized into three categories which characterized the participant’s responses to the individual interviews and focus group questions. These three categories were: (1) Conceptualization of multicultural competence, (2) Implementation of multicultural competence, and (3) Incongruities and Improvements. Within each category, themes and sub-themes were found to describe each category (Table 1).

Category I – Conceptualizations of Multicultural Competence

This category involves themes and sub-themes reflecting how school counselors in the current study defined and thought about multicultural competence. This includes how they (A) viewed the role of the school counselor in relationship to multicultural
competence, (B) how they described culture, as well as (C) components toward multicultural competence.

**Theme A - Role of the school counselor.** Based on the responses of all the participants, the role of the school counselor included elements of multicultural competence. The role of the school counselor in multicultural competence was defined as being an advocate, multicultural experts, and systemic change agent.

**Advocate.** Nine of the school counselors commented that being an advocate for students was an embedded in the role of school counselor. One participant stated, “It’s what we do, in everything we do.” This included providing a support and giving a voice to students. One school counselor identified the role as, “To be an advocate for students to achieve successful academic performance in all subjects, and to be prepared for the world and the future.”

**Multicultural expert.** Participants also described themselves as the expert in the building on understanding and working with culturally different individuals and groups. As one school counselor stated, not only was she an advocate, but she had to “preach the same thing to the staff, that it is important to kind of know, and accept and appreciate the culture of the students that you serve.” The school counselor was conceptualized as a resource in the building to assist teachers and staff when dealing with and educating students/families who might be culturally different from them. One participant described this as

“The faculty sometimes gets so focused on the content they’re attempting to teach the kids that they forget all the things that are the variables that come
with that child. Sometimes just being able to explain a little bit about the students' background helps.”

**Systemic change agent.** Eleven of the participants believed the role of the school counselor also involved being a systemic change agent. This was illustrated by their stated commitment to address and question the status quo and to be an agent of change so that the institution promoted success for all students in the school. This is accomplished by using data to identify and address disparities for culturally diverse students in access, opportunity, or equity. Representative comments from this sub-theme included, “I think that’s important, especially, talking about like the equity in education as school counselors now in the 21st century... assessing the data in your building is a good way to start um being and advocate for social justice.”

**Theme B - Understanding of culture as being multifaceted.** All of the participants identified what they considered to be a cultural group and identified the cultural groups that they believed were present in their school. Culture was understood as involving various common characteristics of different groups of people and could encompass different variables, such as ethnicity, gender, SES, ability, and sexual orientation. Furthermore, the school counselors understood that an individual could belong to more than one cultural group. One participant shared that she defines culture as, “... the total person, in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, religious preference, sexual orientation, values, perceptions. I think all of that ties into culture. I think it’s sort of not all exclusive; I think people can belong to many different cultures.” When asked about what cultures were present in her school she mentioned racial/ethnic groups, socio-economic status, family situations, and religious/spiritual affiliations.
Theme C – Components of multicultural competence. All participants were asked to define multicultural competence in the individual interview and the focus groups. From their definitions two key components of multicultural competence prevailed, awareness and understanding, as well as taking action.

Awareness and understanding. Ten of the participants expressed a belief that awareness and understanding were components of multicultural competence. This involved having an awareness of which cultural groups are present in the school and understanding the unique needs of these groups. As one school counselors stated it involved, “Knowing about different beliefs in cultures especially if you’re working with kids…that you know in certain cultures this is believed, in certain cultures this is not a belief. This is accepted or this is not accepted.”

Action. Six of the participants believed an important component of multicultural competence was taking the awareness and understanding of cultural needs and extending it to include taking appropriate actions with culturally diverse groups. As one school counselor stated, “multicultural competence is a combination of knowing and practicing.” Quotes which informed this theme include,

“Being appropriate with students and their families, with faculty and staff. Learning and helping them learn that it’s okay to be different, that not everybody is a cookie cutter and we can’t put them into a mold. That we do want certain expectations for all children, but within those expectations there has to be a little wiggle room so that we understand that everyone can be successful maybe in a different way.”
This section includes themes reflecting how participants in the current study believed they implemented and demonstrated multicultural competence in their work as school counselors. Based upon participant responses, three themes were identified. These themes included: (A) creating a positive multicultural environment, (B) offering programs and services, and (C) promoting equity and equality.

**Theme A – Creating a positive multicultural environment.** Participants stated that the school counselor has a key role in helping to create a positive multicultural environment. This is highlighted by one participants statement that, “We play a big role in as far as being able to have an environment in which everybody is safe and secure, and respects each other.” They described various methods and techniques for creating a positive multicultural environment, which ranged from hanging culturally diverse posters to ensuring that all cultural groups are represented in activities and events. The majority of participants (10) stated taking an active leadership role, which involved responsive services to school wide activities. An example includes,

> “well we have a citizenship program… which we talk about different traits that people should show in order to have a positive atmosphere here at school and wanting kids to come to school, and be happy here, with that we focus on words or traits such as being respectful to each other no matter what your background is…”

The participants stated leading by example, conducting lessons to promote tolerance, and ensuring the students from all cultural backgrounds were represented in school wide activities, programs, awards, and events. The other two participants stated a
more indirect role to creating a positive multicultural environment which involved taking direction from administrators.

**Theme B – Offering program and services.** Participants discussed programs and services they provide to students and families as a part of implementing culturally competent school counseling services. These programs and services included building relationships, advocating for students, and using creative techniques and accessing school and community resources.

**Building relationships.** Eight participants discussed the importance of building relationships with students. In most cases, a relationship was an important element in being able to assist students and families from cultures that were different than the school counselors’ own constellation of cultures. As one school counselor stated, “I agonize for a couple of years how I could have any, any kind of impact, and then experiences with certain kids began to lead me to realize that it was that relationship that was the key, and it didn’t matter if I was purple.” In other instances, participants stated that having a relationship with someone in the building, whether or not it was the school counselor, was an effective method for assisting students.

**Advocating for students.** Another method of implementing multicultural competence was through advocating for students. As stated previously in the conceptualization category, participants believed that part of the role of the school counselor was to serve as advocate. When questioned about how they implement advocacy, seven participants stated that they accomplish this by implementing programs and services to address the needs of all students. Participants shared examples of advocacy, such as, “We have an intervention list where I meet with every student who’s
struggling with two or more D’s and F’s. I meet with them and kind of say okay, ‘What can we do to make sure that you’re successful?’

Thinking “out of the box” - Using Creative Techniques and Accessing School and Community Resources. All twelve participants shared illustrations of the need for school counselors to be creative in implementing culturally competent work with students, either by using creative techniques and/or accessing and collaborating with school and community resources. These could include using support systems, non-verbal strategies, or providing resources. For example, during the case study portion of the focus groups, one participant assessed the resources available to the parent, “Has she asked for support from family and friends to assist with her son? Is there a mentor? Does he attend a church? What support is she receiving?”

Theme C – Promoting equity and equality. Eight participants discussed promoting equity, access, and equality in their work with students. These participants stated the need to provide services for students of all cultural backgrounds. Although all eight gave examples of serving all students; five participants promoted services and opportunities for all students, but did not identify any adjustments to services to account for cultural differences and student needs. The focus was placed on a sense of fairness and an attitude of equality for all students. One school counselor discussed assigning students to classes without consideration for obstacles they might face,

“for a long time those ESOL kids just were in elective stuff. But we’re supposed to be trying to graduate kids in four years and so when I first got them...I’m putting them in English, and I’m putting them in World Geography,
and I’m putting them in Earth Science, regardless if they can do it or not. If they sit there one time, maybe the next time they do it, they can do it.”

However, three of the participants recounted services they implement that promote equality as well as equity, such as, “I promote excellence and achievement for my students but also support. We have a lot of students that could do well in higher classes, more rigorous classes but they need support cause they don’t get it at home.”

**Category III: Incongruities and Improvements**

This section includes themes reflecting challenges school counselors face in practicing multicultural competence, discrepancies between how they conceptualize it and how it is implemented, and areas of growth and development for school counselors. Based upon participant responses, three themes were identified, (A) discrepancies between conceptualization and implementation (B) challenges, and (C) growth and development.

**Theme A: Discrepancies between conceptualization and implementation.**

This theme emerged from comparing the data from the individual interviews and data garnered from the case study portion of the focus groups. It also emerged from comparing responses to questions in the individual interviews. Although participants stated an understanding of multicultural competence that involved advocacy, acting as a systemic change agent, and considering the cultural background of students as part of culturally competent service delivery, during the discussion of case studies in the focus groups, these self-identified aspects of cultural competence were not clearly displayed. These noted discrepancies included an overreliance on a reactive approach to addressing
racism and other forms of discrimination, and promotion of counselor or school values when working with students and families.

**Overreliance on Reactive method to addressing racism and other forms of discrimination.** In the individual interviews, nine counselors stated that they had noted racism and other forms of discrimination, yet did not address it until it was brought to their attention. For example one School Counselor stated, “Mostly you have to react to the situations when the situations happen. So you have to have a ready repertoire of things that you could pull out and, and activities you can do.” Although school counselors are often in the position of responding to racism and other forms of discrimination, they should also be proactive in identifying and addressing oppression (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

**Promotion of counselor or school values when working with students and families.** Ten of the participants expressed a promotion of school or counselor worldview when working with families. Despite the majority of them stating a need to understand the different needs of students, during the case study portion of the focus groups, ten of the participants responded in a way that demonstrated using an individualistic orientation when working with culturally diverse students. When balancing the student needs with conflicting cultural demands or differences, the school counselors appeared to promote the dominant culture’s individualistic orientation by emphasizing the students’ desires more than the family or community values. The assumption that parents are incorrect in their beliefs/actions or just need further information appeared to be evident in their statements, such as, “I would like to know uh if her parents are non-English speaking.
What’s their limitations? To sort of try to understand their difficulty with not understanding her desires as a middle school eighth grader.

**Theme B – Challenges.** Participants stated experiencing challenges in attempting to perform as multiculturally competent school counselors. These challenges were reported as both personal feelings of frustration and also experiencing resistance when working with culturally different students, family members, and school personnel. Eight of the participants stated experiencing frustrations, difficulties, or resistance when attempting to work with culturally diverse populations. This is illustrated in the following quote: “we do have some families, and this is a small number, that they more so in allowing us to help them they kind of push against us and uh, thinking that we may not have the best interest of their child sometimes.”

Additionally, eight of the school counselors recognized that their own personal cultural values impacted their relationships and viewed it as a challenge that needed to be overcome to become multicultural competent. This is illustrated by such comments as, “I mean I struggle, when I first started counseling I struggled a lot with the idea of what does a white middle class woman like myself, how am I ever going to reach a young angry African American teenager boy.” These participants understood that the impact of their cultural background would be something they would continually need to assess.

**Theme C: Goals for growth and development.** Goals to continue and grow and develop of multicultural competence were discussed. Participants stated seeking professional growth in the area of multicultural competence through interacting with culturally different groups. Eight participants identified accomplishing this through exposure to and interaction with other cultural groups. Furthermore, these participants
viewed students as experts of their own culture and expressed a willingness to learn about the traditions, beliefs, practices, or customs of different groups.

Eleven of the twelve participants expressed a commitment to continued learning. They desired to gain knowledge or techniques for working with culturally diverse students and to continue to develop an understanding of the needs of various cultural groups. Their responses ranged from seeking professional development opportunities to identifying specific cultural groups that they needed to develop more culturally appropriate strategies in order to assist. As one participant responded, “I actively want to attend professional developments at conferences, to understand what’s going on with different cultures.”

Discussion

Although research has explored school counselors self-perceived multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson & Bradley, 2005), there is a lack of research exploring the relationship between perceived competence and actual practice. The current study sheds some light on how practicing school counselors might conceptualize multicultural competence and how they implement this understanding into their work.

The professional literature describes multicultural competent school counselors as advocates for student success and development (Bemak & Chung, 2005; House & Martin, 1999; Stone & Dahir, 2007) and systemic change agents who challenge the status quo (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Walker, 2006). Walker (2006) stated that as the “people expert” in their building, school counselors are in prime position to promote the success of all students. In the current study, school counselor’s
description of their roles as advocate, multicultural experts, and systemic change agents who use data to address inequities was consistent with the literature. This suggests that school counselors have an understanding of their role in helping to reduce the achievement gap.

School counselors in the current study embraced the components of multicultural competence that involved an awareness of other cultural groups, understanding their needs, and taking action to offer culturally responsive services. This is somewhat consistent with the multicultural counseling competencies presented by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) and endorsed by ACA and ASCA recognize three dimensions of cultural competencies. These dimensions include beliefs/attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Culturally responsive counseling also involves knowing how one’s own cultural conditioning can impact the counseling relationship by recognizing your own bias, prejudices, limitations, and attitudes (Holcomb-Mcco & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Sue, et al.). When questioned about their definition or perception of multicultural competence, only one participant mentioned the cultural influences of their own worldview in the counseling session. Both male participants did state that their own culture influenced their work, but this extended primarily to young males. Participant’s lack of including this in their definition of multicultural competence is consistent with other studies that have demonstrated that school counselors rate themselves lower on multicultural awareness than other dimensions (Robinson & Bradley, 2005). However, as discussed in category III, theme B, some participants did state being cognizant of the impact of their own culture on the school counseling services they provide. As they did not include this
dimension in their definition of multicultural competence, School counselors may indeed be stronger in this area that they report on self-report multicultural assessments.

Implementation of multicultural competence involved creating a positive multicultural environment, offering programs and services, and promoting equity and equality. These efforts are consistent with ASCA's (2005b) statement that professional school counselors create a positive, multiculturally inclusive environment. The field of school counseling has shifted from the traditional role of counseling, consultation, and coordination to one of active leadership and collaboration (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Field & Baker, 2004; Stone & Dahir, 2007). These findings suggest that practicing school counselors are embracing a more direct, leadership role in the school. Furthermore, school counselors appear to implement multicultural competence through offering programs and services to students and families based on their needs. In the current study this involved building relationships, using creative techniques and accessing school and community resources, and advocating for students. Ratts, Dekruyf, and Chen-Hayes (2007) recommended that advocacy actions can assist school counselors in providing culturally competent services by recognizing which situations call for direct interventions with students, advocacy on their behalf, or greater community and political efforts. Based on the results of the current study, participants may need further training of advocacy for political efforts on behalf of their students.

Participants in the current study described their conceptualization of multicultural competence, as well as their understanding of how they implement it into their work. The literature states a need for studies that explore the actual multicultural competent practice of school counselors (Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Robinson-Wood,
2009). The current study used document reviews and case studies in the focus groups to understand the relationship between school counselor's conceptualizations of multicultural competence and how they implement it into their work with students. Two key discrepancies between conceptualization and implementation of culturally responsive practices were observed, an overreliance on a reactive approach to addressing racism and other forms of discrimination and also the promotion of an individualistic worldview in decision making.

School counselors stated being systemic change agents, advocates, and leaders in creating positive multicultural environments. However, they did not report proactive steps to addressing racism and other forms of discrimination. School counselors are tasked to respond to issues of racism and other forms of discrimination and often provide responsive services in this capacity (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). However, comprehensive school counseling programs should not rely solely on responsive methods, but should also be preventative in nature (Erford et al., 2007). These findings suggest that imbalance might exist between preventative and intervention methods. Additionally, culturally responsive counselors recognize that it is important to understand how their clients' perceive the world and to refrain from passing judgments on the worldview of the client (Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis, 1992). However a majority of participants demonstrated a promotion of an individualistically oriented worldview when working with students and families. These values could be incongruent with those of the students or the families. This data conflicts with participants stated understanding of multicultural competence and what is promoted in the professional literature.
Along with the challenges of frustration and resistance from families, participants included the impact of their own cultural background as an impediment in offering culturally responsive services and felt it needed to be taken into consideration when working with culturally different students. Despite these challenges, participants remained positive that they could effectively work with culturally diverse students. They also understood that growth and development were on-going processes, and expressed a willingness and commitment to learning. Their goals for growth included interacting more with culturally diverse groups and gaining additional knowledge and techniques for working with culturally diverse students.

**Implications**

School counselors are tasked to meet the diverse needs of students and to work towards closing the achievement gap (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Therefore, professional school counselors need to be equipped to address the personal/social, academic, and career needs of a diverse student population. If school counselors are going to accomplish this goal they need tools for identifying and addressing racism, discrimination, and oppression. Holcomb-McCoy (2007) challenged school counselors to operate from a social justice perspective in order to reduce the effects of oppression on students, improve equity and access to educational services, and close the achievement gap. Practicing school counselors can gain knowledge about addressing racism, discrimination and oppression by seeking professional development opportunities and supervision as well as being personally and professionally active with diverse groups (McAuliffe et al. 2008). Furthermore, school counselors should use data to assist in
identifying inequities in the system. This data can be used to develop interventions, inform advocacy efforts, and challenge the status quo.

In this study, participants shared that they believed that school counselors played a key role in creating a multicultural environment. This role can be enhanced by being accessible in school, creating a welcoming and inclusive climate, being active in the community, promoting culturally responsive educational practices, advocating for enhanced school-family-community collaboration, having a multicultural advisory council, utilizing cultural informants, and providing training for faculty and staff (Day-Vines et al., 2004; Virginia School Counseling Association, 2008).

School counselors also need to advocate for professional development opportunities for themselves, such as workshops, attending state and national conferences, and participating in community activities. Additionally, school counselors need to continually assess their own multicultural competence, identify areas for growth and improvements, and seek out supervision to address deficits and increase skills. Finally, school counselors should also seek training on how to advocate for students and families at the institutional and legislative levels.

Counselor educators should consider integrating multicultural competence into all coursework with school counselor trainees, highlighting and modeling successful implementation of cultural competence, and requiring students to develop methods for implementing culturally responsive services. Furthermore, supervisors can use the practicum and internship experiences to require school counseling trainees to engage in activities intended to develop multicultural competence. Further skill development and
training is also needed to assist school counselors in advocacy efforts that affect the broader community.

District supervisors for school counselors can assist by providing and requiring professional workshops or classes that address multicultural competence. District supervisors should also encourage school counselors to annually assess their multicultural competence and include assessment of cultural competence as part of school counselor performance evaluation. Furthermore, a reduction in non-counselor duties would allow for school counselors to continue development in areas such as multicultural competence and advocate for students at the institutional and legislative levels.

Limitations and Future Research

The researcher made attempts to mitigate the limitations in the current study. The use of document review, focus groups, and individual interviews provided triangulation of data and permitted the researcher to verify some of the self-report data. The locations for the interviews were also chosen by the participants to foster a sense of safety to reduce the likelihood of socially desirable responses. To limit possible biases in the data, the views of the researcher team were bracketed prior to beginning the study. Participant attrition was a negative aspect of the study. Expectations for participation were explained via a phone call to all participants, and personal preferences for interview dates and times were accommodated as frequently as possible. Unfortunately, a snow storm led to the district closing for several days. As a result, two focus groups had to be rescheduled, three middle and high school levels school counselors expressed a difficulty with continuing participation. The researcher invited these three participants to attend either the middle or high school focus group, however they declined. Document reviews were
another limitation. Two reminder emails were sent to participants who had not submitted documents but only six participants shared documents from their programs. To address this limitation, the researcher solicited more actual examples of actions during the focus groups.

The use of a single case method also may limit the diversity of experiences. Furthermore, several of the schools in the district involved were in the process of applying for Recognized ASCA Model Program status. Therefore, many of the participants were working towards aligning their program with the ASCA national model. The researcher recognizes that this may not be representative of school counselors in other districts. Finally, two of the researchers were employed in the division under study. This allowed for access and thick description. However, it also might limit these researchers' ability to be objective. To mitigate this limitation, rival explanations were considered, and the research team continually discussed the primary researcher's objectivity.

Further research can begin by expanding on this study to include a wider sample of practicing school counselors from various districts and states. Additional research may also consider interviewing students and other stakeholders to examine their perceptions of the cultural competence of the school counselors in their school. Another avenue for future research involves identifying a school or school system that has been effective in addressing the achievement gap, then exploring the role of the school counselors in these efforts. This would allow researchers to better explore the role of the school counselor in helping to reduce the achievement gap. Finally, additional research is needed to understand barriers to school counselors working to address racism,
discrimination, and oppression. This research would be valuable in helping school
counselors as they develop social justice focused programs.

**Conclusion**

The schools in the U.S. are characterized by a conglomeration of diverse cultures. However, a gap in achievement still exists for certain groups. School counselors are in a unique position to promote the academic, personal/social, and career development of all students. In order to accomplish this they need to offer appropriate services that address the needs of a diverse student body. School counselors employ multicultural competence through advocacy, social justice efforts, and challenging inequities in the system. In the current study school counselors described how they understood and implemented multicultural competence into their work with students. Further information is needed to explore how culturally competent the actual practices of school counselors are and if they benefit the students they are intended to serve. Multicultural competence is an ongoing process that positively impacts the growth and development of all students.
References


References


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Appendix A

Individual Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Thank you for your participation in this study. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How would you define the role of the school counselor?

2. How would you define culture?

3. What does multicultural competence mean to you?

4. What cultures, if any, are present among the student body in your school?

5. What cultures, if any, are present among the faculty and staff in your school?

6. In what ways, if any, does the cultural background of students that you work with influence your work with students?

7. In what ways, if any, does the cultural background of the families that you work with influence your work with families?

8. In what ways, if any, does the cultural background of the students and families you work with influence your work with faculty and staff?

9. Tell me about a time, if there is one, that culture influenced your school counseling services?

10. What forms, if any, of racism, heterosexism, sexism, discrimination, or oppression have you noted in your school?

11. a) If you have noticed any forms of racism, heterosexism, sexism, discrimination, or oppression in what ways, if at all, have these been addressed?
   b) If any of these are present in your school, what role have you played in addressing these behaviors or attitudes?

12. What role, if any, does the school counselor play in creating a positive multicultural environment?

13. How, if at all, do you see yourself implementing your multicultural competence in your practice of school counseling?

14. How would you define advocacy?
15. a) What role, if any, do you believe advocacy plays in the work of the school counselor?  
   b) How, if at all, do you practice or implement advocacy in your work?

16. a) What role, if any, do you believe the school counselor serves in addressing equity, social justice, and systemic change?  
   b) How, if at all, do you address equity, social justice, and changing the system in your work?

17. What, if any, areas of growth in understanding or practicing multicultural competence do you have for yourself?
Appendix B

Focus Group Interview Protocol
(High School)

Protocol: Read the situation scenarios listed below. Read one at a time and allow the group to discuss before moving to the next scenario. The questions provided should guide the discussion.

Fo is an Asian student at your school. She is currently in her senior year and is excited to learn about careers and other future options. Fo comes to see you because she wants to apply to college in another state and is worried her parents won’t agree. She also wants to study dance, as she has had the lead role in the school musical the last three years. However, she tells you that her parents want her to become a doctor. Fo is an excellent student, with a high G.P.A and will probably qualify for a scholarship.

➢ What further information do you want to know about this scenario?
➢ What is/are the central concern(s) for this student?
➢ How would you address this situation?

Andre is an African-American sophomore at your school. Unlike previous years in school, his grades are failing, he appears disengaged, and his attitude has become very negative. Andre is often being sent to the principal’s office because of behavior and when he visits with the counselor he refuses to speak. The teacher has attempted to have his mom come in for a conference, but she is a single-mom and states her job will not let her off.

➢ What further information do you want to know about this scenario?
➢ What is/are the central concern(s) for this student?
➢ How would you address this situation?

Additional questions:

➢ If you were to explain multicultural competence in school counseling to someone else how might you describe it?

➢ What is your opinion of the school counselors’ role in advocacy, social justice, addressing equity, and changing the system in which you work and how is that connected to multicultural competence?

➢ What role, if any, does the school counselor play in creating a positive multicultural environment?

➢ How, if at all, has participation in the current study affected your views on multicultural competent practice?
Focus Group Interview Protocol  
(Middle School)

Protocol: Read the situation scenarios listed below. Read one at a time and allow the group to discuss before moving to the next scenario. The questions provided should guide the discussion.

Middle School Scenario

Fo is an Asian student at your school. She is currently in her eight grade year and is excited to learn about careers and other future options. Fo comes to see you because she wants to apply to college in another state one day and is worried her parents won’t agree. She also wants to study dance, as she has had the lead role in the school musical the last three years. However, she tells you that her parents want her to become a doctor. Fo is an excellent student, with a high G.P.A and will probably qualify for a scholarship.

➢ What further information do you want to know about this scenario?
➢ What is/are the central concern(s) for this student?
➢ How would you address this situation?

Andre is an African-American 7th grader at your school. Unlike previous years in school, his grades are failing, he appears disengaged, and his attitude has become very negative. Andre is often being sent to the principal’s office because of behavior and when he visits with the counselor he refuses to speak. The teacher has attempted to have his mom come in for a conference, but she is a single-mom and states her job will not let her off.

➢ What further information do you want to know about this scenario?
➢ What is/are the central concern(s) for this student?
➢ How would you address this situation?

Additional questions:

- If you were to explain multicultural competence in school counseling to someone else how might you describe it?

- What is your opinion of the school counselors’ role in advocacy, social justice, addressing equity, and changing the system in which you work and how is that connected to multicultural competence?

- What role, if any, does the school counselor play in creating a positive multicultural environment?

- How, if at all, has participation in the current study affected your views on multicultural competent practice?
Focus Group Interview Protocol
(Intermediate School)

Protocol: Read the situation scenarios listed below. Read one at a time and allow the group to discuss before moving to the next scenario. The questions provided should guide the discussion.

Elementary School Scenario

Fo is an Asian student at your school. She is currently in her 5th grade year and is excited to learn about careers and other future options. Fo comes to see you because she wants to one day apply to college in another state and is worried her parents won’t agree. She also wants to study dance, as she has had the lead role in the school musical last year. However, she tells you that her parents want her to become a doctor. Fo is an excellent student, with a high G.P.A and will probably qualify for a scholarship.

➢ What further information do you want to know about this scenario?
➢ What is/are the central concern(s) for this student?
➢ How would you address this situation?

Andre is an African-American fifth grader at your school. Unlike previous years in school, his grades are failing, he appears disengaged, and his attitude has become very negative. Andre is often being sent to the principal’s office because of behavior and when he visits with the counselor he refuses to speak. The teacher has attempted to have his mom come in for a conference, but she is a single-mom and states her job will not let her off.

➢ What further information do you want to know about this scenario?
➢ What is/are the central concern(s) for this student?
➢ How would you address this situation?

Additional questions:

➢ If you were to explain multicultural competence in school counseling to someone else how might you describe it?

➢ What is your opinion of the school counselors’ role in advocacy, social justice, addressing equity, and changing the system in which you work and how is that connected to multicultural competence?

➢ What role, if any, does the school counselor play in creating a positive multicultural environment?

➢ How, if at all, has participation in the current study affected your views on multicultural competent practice?
Appendix C
Demographics Questionnaire

1. How many years have you been a school counselor? ____

2. Current work setting:
   ____ High School   ____ Middle School   ____ Elementary School

3. What is your race/ethnicity? __________________

4. What is your gender? __________  5. What is your age? ______

6. Highest degree attained?
   ____ Bachelors   ____ Masters   ____ EDS/Advanced Certificate   ____ Doctorate
   ____ Other (please list): ______________________________

7. Have you received prior multicultural training? _____

8. Please list the multicultural trainings, multicultural professional development, and multicultural classes in which you’ve participated:
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

9. Please list the cultural groups for which you provide services:
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

10. Are you actively involved with culturally diverse individuals outside of the school counseling setting? ____ Yes _____ No
Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

PROJECT TITLE: A Phenomenological Exploration of School Counselors’ Conceptualizations and Implementation of Multicultural Competence

INTRODUCTION
The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES to participating in a phenomenological exploration of school counselors’ conceptualization and implementation of multicultural competence.

Principal Investigator
The primary investigator is Jasmine Knight, M.S.Ed. in Counseling, and a PhD candidate in Counselor Education at Old Dominion University. The project will be supervised by Dr. Tim Grothaus, a Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY
The purpose of this study is to explore how practicing school counselors conceptualize multicultural competence and how they integrate this conceptualization into their work.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study that examines how school counselors define multicultural competence. This research is qualitative in nature, rather than experimental. If you say YES, then your participation will involve an interview that will last for approximately one hour in a location of your choice. In addition, you will be asked to participate in a focus group with other school counselors. The focus group should last about 1 hour.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA
Because you are a practicing school counselor, you meet the requirements for participation in this project. In addition, you will be asked to complete a demographic form that will act as supplementary information but that does not act as an exclusionary requirement.

RISKS AND BENEFITS
RISKS: If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of lost planning time and potential interruptions in your schedule. The researcher tried to reduce these risks by planning interviews to accommodate your schedule. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.
BENEFITS: The main benefit to you for participating in this study is gaining personal knowledge about how you think about multicultural competence. Others may benefit by gaining a clearer understanding of their conceptualizations of multicultural competence.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS
The researchers want your decision about participating in this study to be absolutely voluntary. Yet they recognize that your participation may pose some inconvenience. Unfortunately, at this time the researchers are unable to offer you compensation for your participation.

NEW INFORMATION
If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY
All information obtained about you in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The results of this study will not be used outside of this dissertation.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE
It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY
If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in this research project, you may contact Jasmine Knight at 757-639-3954 or Dr. Grothaus tgrothau@odu.edu.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT
By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Jasmine Knight (757) 639-3954.

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. David Swain, the current IRB chair, at 757-683-6028, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.
And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants Printed Name &amp; Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**INVESTIGATOR’S STATEMENT**
I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject’s questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigator’s Printed Name &amp; Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

This study has been approved by Old Dominion University Human subjects Review Board
Appendix E

Human Subjects Review Board Approval Notification

From: Gomez, Ed
To: Grothaus, Tim
       Harris (Knight), Jasmine L.

Sent: Mon, Aug 3, 2009 at 3:11 PM
Subject: Exempt Study

Dr. Grothaus:

Your proposal submission titled, "A Phenomenological Exploration of School Counselors’ Conceptualization and Implication of Multicultural Competence" has been deemed EXEMPT by the Human Subjects Review Committee of the Darden College of Education. If any changes occur, especially methodological, notify the Chair of the DCOE HSRC, and supply any required addenda requested of you by the Chair. You may begin your research. Please send a signed hardcopy of your application submission to the address below. Thank you.

Edwin Gómez, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee, DCOE
Recreation & Tourism Studies, ESPER
Old Dominion University

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Appendix F
Introduction Letter

Dear Colleague,

I would like to invite you to participate with my dissertation research study. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling and Human Services at Old Dominion University and an elementary school counselor. My dissertation seeks to gain insight into how practicing school counselors conceptualize and implement multicultural competence into their school counseling work. This is an area of need in the profession, and there has been limited research focused on this area. To explore this area, I intend to interview practicing elementary, middle and high school counselors to gain an understanding of how they think about multicultural competence and incorporate into the work they do with students. Information learned from this study may eventually be used to assist counselor educators in preparing school counselors to become multiculturally competent.

If you agree to participate in this study, the time commitment required will be approximately 2 1/2 hours. You will be asked to participate in one individual interview and provide documents from your school counseling program. The interview will be conducted at a location of your choosing and kept confidential. It should last no longer than 1 hour. You will also be asked to participate in a focus group session with 2-3 other school counselors. The focus groups sessions should last no longer than 1 1/2 hours. Although I anticipate no harm will come to you, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified, such as recalling unpleasant experiences. The potential benefits of this study may be to assist school counselors and counselor educators in multicultural professional development, as well as adding to the professional literature on this topic.

If you are willing to take part in this study, please contact me at jasmine.knight@nn.k12.va.us or 757-639-3954 to schedule your first interview. During the initial interview you will receive an additional informed consent that must be signed prior to continuing the interview. You can refuse an interview at any point, or decline responding to any questions. You are welcomed to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding this project.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jasmine Knight, M.S.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Coordinator
Old Dominion University
(757) 639-3954
jasmine.knight@nn.k12.va.us

Tim Grothaus, Ph.D., NCC, NCSC, ACS
Assistant Professor/School Counseling Coordinator
Old Dominion University
(757) 683-3007
tgrothau@odu.edu
### Appendix G

**School Counselors Conceptualizations and Implementation of Multicultural Competence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Conceptualization of Multicultural Competence</td>
<td>Role of the school counselor</td>
<td>Advocate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multicultural Expert</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Systemic Change Agent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Understanding of culture as multifaceted</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Components of multicultural competence</td>
<td>Awareness and Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of Multicultural Competence</td>
<td>Creating a positive multicultural environment</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Offering programs and services</td>
<td>Building relationships</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Advocating for students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thinking outside the box</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Using creative techniques and accessing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>school and community resources</td>
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<td>Promoting equity and equality</td>
<td>Equality without equity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Equality with equity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incongruities and Improvements</td>
<td>Discrepancies between conceptualization and</td>
<td>Overreliance on a reactive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>implementation</td>
<td>approach to addressing racism and other</td>
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<td>forms of discrimination</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Promotion of school or counselor world</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Frustrations and resistance</td>
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<td>Impact of counselors' culture</td>
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<td>Goals for growth and development</td>
<td>Growth through interaction with culturally</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>diverse people</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Commitment to continued learning</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Jasmine Knight earned a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology in 2001 from Old Dominion University and she earned her Master of Science in Education degree in counseling with an emphasis in school counseling in 2003 from Old Dominion University. She is a licensed school counselor in the state of Virginia.

Jasmine currently works as an elementary school counselor in Virginia, and has done so for the past seven years. Prior to this, Jasmine was a residential counselor for adolescent girls in a mental health treatment facility.

Jasmine is also the Multicultural and Diversity Chair for the Delta Omega chapter of Chi Sigma Iota, at Old Dominion University, an academic honor society for the counseling profession. She has presented at local, regional, and national conferences on topics such as adolescent dating violence, relational aggression in girls, working with African-American families, gate-keeping in counselor education, and multicultural competence of school counselors. Additional professional affiliations include the American Counseling Association, Virginia Counseling Association, Virginia School Counseling Association, Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, and the Southern Association for Counselor Education and Supervision.