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HOW DO CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELORS MAKE
MEANING OF THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF A
DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATION AND ENACT EFFECTIVE PRACTICES?

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

FRANK ANDRISANI

Montclair State University

Upper Montclair, NJ

2018

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Leslie Kooyman

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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

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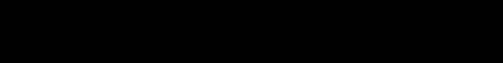
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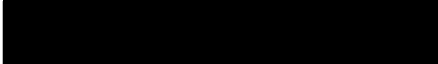

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ABSTRACT

HOW DO CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELORS MAKE MEANING OF THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF A DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATION AND ENACT EFFECTIVE PRACTICES?

by Frank Andrisani

The purpose of this study was to investigate how school counselors who are culturally responsive make meaning of their practices and the challenges faced in meeting the needs of a diverse population. Specifically, my study concentrated on examining real life experiences/practices that resulted in a rich explanation of the phenomenon studied. Hearing the voices of school counselors describing their practices and experiences in providing culturally responsive counseling services contributed to better understanding of the strategies, programs, and actions that define culturally response counseling. This dissertation includes an overview of the study, a review of the pertinent literature, a detailed description of the study's methodology, an analysis of the findings, and a discussion about the implications for the school counseling field.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my amazing parents, Rocco Luigi Andrisani and Annunziata Andrisani, who have always provided me with the encouragement and support needed throughout my life. I would not be where I am today without your unconditional love and for that I am forever grateful to both of you. With much love and appreciation!

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How do culturally responsive school counselors make meaning of the challenges they face in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and enact effective practices?

Chapter One

Introduction

Initially brought about via the social reform movement in the late 19th Century, school counseling has developed from being primarily focused on vocational guidance to today's comprehensive school counseling programs that focus on three areas of student development: academic, social/emotional, and career (ASCA, 2012; Griffin, 2011; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Depending on the social, political, economic, and psychological needs of a particular school community, school counselors are uniquely trained to create programs based on a school's specific needs. For example, there are times where school counselors concentrate their efforts on developing programs that promote academic development while at other times shift to address the social and emotional growth of students (House & Hayes, 2002; Musheno & Talbert, 2002; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Furthermore, in the last 15 years, school counseling has turned its attention from the traditional responsive services to focusing on a more proactive and programmatic system that is integrated with the mission of schools (Bemak & Chi-Ying Chung, 2008; Dahir & Stone, 2009). This proactive approach should be inclusive of various culturally responsive interventions which strategically promote social justice advocacy interventions; these interventions then purposely encourage organizational changes to fuel positive student success, leading to various future career and life opportunities (Bemak & Chi-Ying Chung, 2008; Lee, 2001).

However, a successful school counseling program cannot be effective without the support and collaboration of key stakeholders within the school system and community (Jackson, Snow, Boes, Phillips, Powell Stanard, Painter, & Wulff, 2002). As noted in Paisley and McMahon (2001), school counselors make up a school counseling department that creates programs which are implemented within school systems located within communities. Camadan and Kahveci (2013) further explain that the presence of effective school counseling services has been positively impacted when supported by school administrators and teachers alike. Therefore, it is clear that collaboration between school counselors and other school personnel is essential in delivering counseling services that best meet needs of each student. So in order to fully understand the connection between school counseling and schools, one must understand both today's 21st Century school system and the role a school counselor plays within that system.

As we think of the educational progression from the 20th century to the current 21st century learner, topics surrounding child labor laws, compulsory education, and the scientific method have been replaced by conversations that are focused on elements that are called 21st century student outcomes: life and career skills; learning and innovation skills; and information, media, and technology skills (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000). As a result, the 21st century school system has undergone a transformation in order to help students flourish in a diverse, multifaceted, and ever changing society.

Diversity is defined as "being inclusive, i.e., embracing all similarities and differences in backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, talents, and interests; to make opportunities widely available so that every element of society has equal access, without

legal barriers because of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, and disability” (Johnson, 2013, pp. 517-518). This dramatic movement of cultural diversity in the United States is most apparent in the public schools. As 21st century schools become filled with students from diverse backgrounds, the need for the implementation of effective culturally responsive teaching and counseling approaches increases (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007).

School counselors play an important part in carrying out a school’s mission. Through direct and indirect services, school counselors work together with students, parents, and educators to promote student achievement from an academic, social-emotional, and career standpoint (Lee, 2001). Due to the fact that the cultural diversity is increasing in schools, these services need to include culturally responsive practices. If school counselors intend to be inclusive in their school counseling programs, then they have to consider how to reach all students. Therefore, another key component of a school counselor’s role is to identify and attend to the role that culture plays “as a predominant force in shaping behaviors, values, and attitudes in schools” (Lindsay, Roberts & Campbell Jones, 2005, p.22). However, determining exactly what counselors who are considered successful in being culturally responsive are doing in terms of practice has yet to be examined in depth, which was the focus of my study.

Background Research

With the American schools in the 21st century becoming increasingly diverse, the changing student demographics need to be met with school counselors delivering culturally responsive practices. As noted by Camarota (2007), since 2000, a total of 10.3

million immigrants have entered the United States; this represents one of the highest seven-year periods of immigration in the history of the United States. These demographic changes indicate that the 21st Century schools are becoming a place where all students from truly diverse backgrounds bring their varied behaviors, attitudes, and values together to achieve academic, career, and social success (Lee, 2001). When considering this quickly increasing immigrant population in the United States, it is clear that the immigrant student population in schools will also grow. Therefore, it is important that school counselors attain and deliver culturally responsive practices with this population (Chi-Ying Chung, Bemak, & Grabosky, 2011).

School Counselors within School Organizations

Schools as an organization are made up of partnerships between district leaders, school administrators, faculty members, school counselors, students, parents, and communities (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Current research on the interaction within such organizations is not only increasing, but is also shifting the perception of family and community involvement within school systems. Within these organizations, school counselors play a crucial role in the development of effective programs that promote family and community involvement. Thus, it is important to understand the role a school counselor plays in the partnership between schools, families, and communities with regards to encouraging equitable academic success and social/emotional development for each student (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006).

As noted by ASCA (2009), school counselors are crucial members who are part of the educational community. School counselors are trained to understand the environment

in which they work, align their practices with the school's mission, and implement data driven measures that promote accountability and responsibility for their work (Erford, House, & Martin, 2007). Such school counseling led programs not only foster student success at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, but also support student learning (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). So when considering a school as an organization, it is clear that the role a school counselor plays within that organization is a fundamental piece of the school community.

The Role of a School Counselor

Through various methods, such as individual meetings and group presentations, school counselors are in a position to advocate that students have the tools needed to effectively communicate with all key stakeholders (Goodman-Scott & Carlisle, 2014). By creating and delivering counseling programs that are wide-ranging, data driven, preventative in design, and developmental in scope, school counselors can help prepare students be academically successful (ASCA, 2012). Through the creation of the American School Counseling Association's (ASCA) national standards, school counselors are encouraged to develop plans that focus on what goals students should be able to achieve due to the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program that is standards based (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Dahir & Stone, 2009). In an ideal situation, school counselors use appropriate data to direct their strategies and interventions to aid students in achieving desired outcomes (Grothaus, Crum, & James, 2010; Stone & Dahir, 2006).

By using data that is specifically relevant to the needs of their population, school counselors are in a position to serve as change agents within a fast becoming multicultural society. Through the development of comprehensive school counseling programs, school counselors can impact change not only within a school organization, but one that also extends into the home and community (Lee, 2001). Therefore, when considering the increasing diverse student population in today's school system, the need for delivering culturally responsive counseling practices and being accountable for student success must become an everyday practice for school counselors (Dahir & Stone, 2009).

Culturally Responsive School Counseling

Over the last 30 years, there has been an increased focus in both the literature and counseling programs regarding multicultural competence and culturally responsive school counseling services (Lee, 2001; Sheely & Bratton, 2010; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Counselors who are multiculturally competent have the skill set to successfully work with culturally different clients (Ponterotte, Casas, Suzuki & Alexander, 2010; Sue et al., 1992). In two influential articles that established the multicultural counseling competencies framework, Sue et al., (1992) and Sue, Bernier, Durran, Feinberg, Pedersen, Smith, and Vasquez-Nuttall (1982) identified knowledge, skills, and awareness as the three major areas defining multicultural competence. Since then, there have been many definitions used to explain multicultural competence and culturally responsive services.

Multicultural competence is defined as counseling from the client's cultural perspective (Sue et al., 1992; Sue & Sue, 2007). Roysircar (2003) proposed multicultural competence as having good self-awareness and viewing a client's worldviews and attitudes with cultural sensitivity. Lee (2001) wrote, "Culturally responsive comprehensive guidance initiatives in schools should be based on two important premises: (1) All young people can learn and want to learn; and (2) cultural differences are real and cannot be ignored. A fundamental aspect of any comprehensive guidance approach, therefore, is understanding the cultural realities of children and their importance to academic, career, and personal-social development" (p. 258). Therefore, it seems necessary that school counselors are trained to be multiculturally competent so they can meet the needs of all students.

Considering the recent Census Bureau (2010) report indicating the rapid growth in diversity over the next 15 years in the U.S., it is crucial that school counselors are equipped with the necessary tools to provide culturally responsive counseling services (Clauss-Ehlers, Serpell, & West, 2013; Lee, 2001; Sheely & Bratton; 2010). Additionally, to having an ethical obligation, professional school counselors possess the training needed to be a student advocate in addressing barriers from an academic, cognitive, social, and behavioral standpoint (Galassi & Akos, 2004; Hines & Fields, 2004). As noted by Lee (2001), school counselors are in a position to provide culturally responsive counseling services that focus on access, equity, and educational justice. School counseling strategies that are culturally sensitive can give students from diverse backgrounds the tools needed to successfully overcome the negative perceptions formed

by the dominant culture (Harley, 2009). Through the delivery of culturally responsive counseling services, school counselors can help in addressing issues of poor academic performance and educational injustices such as achievement gap (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). However, what those services exactly are in practice is still an area that needs to be examined in more detail.

Some culturally responsive counseling services have been recommended for use in school counseling programs. For example, Schellenberg and Grothaus (2011) suggest that infusing strategies into the core curriculum to combat culturally biased negative messages with culturally positive self-talk will aid in increasing a student's self-esteem and academic achievement. Specifically, they found that combining culturally responsive practices with students experiencing low academic achievement had a positive educational impact. By taking the lead in culturally centered discussions, school counselors can inform fellow educators and staff on raising cultural awareness within the school community (Harley, 2009). Sue and Sue (2007) propose encouraging White counselors to think about how their White privilege has impacted them in society and have racial/ethnic minority counselors reflect on how they have addressed life experiences that were marginalizing or discriminatory in nature. Chao (2013) recommends training school counselors to understand their own race/ethnicity, racial/ethnic identity, and color-blind racial attitudes. Advanced trainings that encourage self-understanding of counselors' worldviews, potential biases, and cultural backgrounds will prove beneficial. Through such specific practices, school counselors can really begin

to meet the needs of an increasing diverse student population via culturally responsive counseling services (Chang, Crethar, & Ratts, 2010).

CACREP Standards for Training School Counselors

As is the case with many professions and specialty areas, specific training is required for counselors entering the field of school counseling. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) has developed particular standards that outline a shared set of knowledge and skills that are essential to the effective practice of school counseling. Currently, there are approximately 250 CACREP accredited school counseling programs in the United States. According to the standards, students in CACREP-accredited school counseling programs demonstrate knowledge and skills in the following school counseling areas: (a) Foundations, (b) Contextual Dimensions, and (c) Practice (CACREP, 2016).

With the standards comes the ethical responsibility of providing culturally responsive school counseling services (CACREP, 2016). As noted by Lee (2001), the schools that have been successful at meeting the demands of an increasing diverse population by providing culturally responsive services all share some significant elements. Characteristics such as creating a sense of community, embracing diversity, staffing diverse educators who partake in professional development, and broadly defining cultural diversity all have contributed to producing a culturally responsive environment. Accordingly, because of their important advocacy role, school counselors are uniquely positioned to play a crucial part in creating change and endorsing the aforementioned components in schools. When considering the fact that school counselors are given the

responsibility of promoting academic, social/emotional, and career success for all students, then the delivery of culturally responsive services must be an integral part of a school counselor's everyday practice (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011). Therefore, focusing on school counselors who are considered successful in providing culturally responsive counseling services and examining their practices in more depth provided some direction on how to put theory into practice.

Statement of the Problem

When considering the research highlighting the need for culturally responsive counseling services by school counselors, clearly school counselors must make culturally responsive counseling a part of their everyday practice. However, not much research exists on the specific counseling practices and challenges faced by culturally responsive school counselors. With the ever increasing culturally diverse population that school counselors are servicing, the need for culturally counseling services is clear. The following is the research question that guided this study: How do culturally responsive school counselors make meaning of the challenges they face in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and enact effective practices?

Purpose of the Study

According to Chang et al., (2010), in order to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, school counselors are being tasked to provide culturally responsive counseling services. The purpose of this study was to investigate how school counselors who are culturally responsive make meaning of their practices and the challenges faced in meeting the needs of a diverse population. Specifically, my study

concentrated on examining real life experiences/practices that resulted in a rich explanation of the phenomenon studied. Hearing the voices of school counselors describing their practices and experiences in providing culturally responsive counseling services contributed to better understanding of the strategies, programs, and actions that define culturally response counseling. Additionally, those voices also addressed the barriers to effective implementation of such services.

In addition, since schools are changing as organizations, so must change the role of the school counselor. As student needs are identified, school counselors can work in partnership with key stakeholders within the school organization to promote student learning and ensure culturally responsive services for all students (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011). As the role of a school counselor changes within the school organization, Lee (2001), suggests school counselors take a proactive approach in providing students from diverse backgrounds with culturally responsive services that aid their development. In doing so, he highlights 3 important concepts that school counselors should keep in mind when delivering culturally diverse counseling interventions. By keeping access, equity, and educational justice in mind, school counselors will ensure that their practices are culturally responsive to meet each student's needs.

As the role of the school counselor changes to address the increasing diversity in schools, counseling programs play a key role in preparing school counselors to deliver culturally responsive services. Therefore, school counseling programs are on the cutting edge of being the bridge that connects the school to the home and family life of culturally diverse students (Carter & El Hindi, 1999; Lee, 2001). However, in order for school

counselors to be this bridge, they need more knowledge with respect to evidence-based practices. The outcomes of my study provided such knowledge with respect to the practice of culturally responsive counseling in schools.

Significance of the Study

Research indicates that the amount of a counselor's cultural responsiveness does significantly impact a minority client's counseling experience (Naijian & Dixon, 2001). With diversity in schools increasing and society quickly becoming multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual, much attention has been given to multicultural counseling and the need for school counselors to provide culturally responsive counseling services (Goodrich & Shin, 2013; Sue & Sue, 2007). Schellenberg and Grothaus (2011) wrote, "The clarion call to respond to the needs of diverse students and to remove the barriers to student success has reverberated throughout the national and local educational arenas" (p. 222). Lee (2001) indicated, "Appropriate educational processes require that schools move beyond the myth of a monolithic society to the reality of cultural diversity. Professional school counselors can be on the cutting edge of this movement" (p. 261). If school counselors are going to position themselves to provide culturally diverse students optimal academic, career, and personal social development, they need to operate from a culturally responsive standpoint (Baruth & Manning, 2000).

With the need for providing culturally responsive counseling in schools being well documented in the literature, research focusing on culturally responsive practices employed by current school counselors has also grown. For example, Arredondo and Toporek (2004) assert that in order to move towards culturally competent practices,

counselors must first reflect on their own competence with their clients, regardless of cultural background. Lee (2001) adds that school counseling programs must begin to think outside the box to meet the needs of a growing diverse student population and its community. While such theoretical strategies on how to provide culturally responsive counseling services are extremely useful, additional research that actually examines the practices of school counselors in providing culturally responsive counseling services will help bridge the gap between theory and practice. Therefore, my study was significant in providing counseling program faculty and the school counseling profession with specific recommendations on implementing culturally responsive services for students.

Although recent research articles have provided many extremely informative suggestions, activities, proposals, and programs that support effective implementation of culturally responsive counseling in schools, more evidence based practices are needed. Even with empirical studies that have provided encouraging initiatives and feedback from school counselors, many are exploratory in nature and highlight the need for future research to assess the long term effects (Ahmed, Wilson, Henriksen, & Jones, 2011; Najjian & Dixon, 2001; Schwallie-Giddis, Anstrom, Sánchez, Sardi, & Granato, 2004; Sheely & Bratton, 2010; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Indelicato, 2006). Hence, my study contributed to additional evidence based practices on providing culturally responsive school counseling services.

Definition of Terms

Counseling: The American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) refers to counseling as “a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals.”

Counseling Practices: Tools that allow counselors to increase their clients’ awareness, skills, and options regardless of their cultural background (Lee, 2001).

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP): Responsible for the accreditation of Masters degree programs, CACREP (2009) defines accreditation as “a system for recognizing educational institutions and professional programs affiliated with those programs for a level of performance and integrity based on review against a specific set of published criteria or standards. The process includes (1) the submission of a self-study document that demonstrates how standards are being met; (2) an onsite review by a selected group of peers; and (3) a decision by an independent board or commission that either grants or denies accredited status on the basis of how well the standards are met” (p. 58).

Culture: According to Grothaus, McAuliffe, and Craigen (2012) culture is a crucial component in developing behaviors, attitudes, strengths, beliefs, and values “encompassing a constellation of factors (e.g., gender, ability status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, spirituality)” (p. 52)

Culturally responsive counselors: For the purpose of this study, culturally responsive counselors will be identified via nomination from their immediate supervisor as culturally responsive counselors.

Culturally responsiveness: The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (2015) defines cultural responsiveness as “collaborating with stakeholders to create a school and community climate that embraces cultural diversity and helps to promote the academic, career and social/emotional success for all students” (p. 1).

Culturally responsive services: According to Lee (2001), “culturally responsive comprehensive guidance initiatives in schools should be based on two important premises: (1) All young people can learn and want to learn; and (2) cultural differences are real and cannot be ignored. A fundamental aspect of any comprehensive guidance approach, therefore, is understanding the cultural realities of children and their importance to academic, career, and personal-social development” (p. 258).

Diversity: Johnson (2013) defines diversity as "being inclusive, i.e., embracing all similarities and differences in backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, talents, and interests; to make opportunities widely available so that every element of society has equal access, without legal barriers because of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, and disability” (p. 517-518).

Multicultural: CACREP (2009) defines multicultural as “a term denoting the diversity of racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage; socioeconomic status; age; gender; sexual orientation; and religious and spiritual beliefs, as well as physical, emotional, and mental abilities” (p. 60).

Multicultural Competence: Roysircar (2003) describes multicultural competence as having a good self-awareness and viewing a client’s worldviews and attitudes with cultural sensitivity.

School: Lee (2001) describes schools as “a social arena where children who represent truly diverse behavioral styles, attitudinal orientations, and value systems have been brought together with one goal--to prepare them for academic, career, and social success in the 21st Century” (p. 257).

School counselors: According to ASCA (2004), school counselors are individuals who are committed to helping students overcome emotional, social, and economic obstacles and raising student awareness in their educational and career choices.

School counseling program: ASCA (2012) defines a comprehensive school counseling program “as geared toward addressing the needs of all students through services focused on academic, career, and personal/social domains” (as cited in Kimbel & Clemens, 2014, p. 11).

Personal Reflection

My interest in culturally responsive school counseling practices comes from my personal experiences as a high school counselor and supervisor of school counseling. My career path in school counseling is a unique one that began in 2006 working in a school district that was the first in the nation to voluntarily integrate their public schools. Working in a school with such a history on diversity and multiculturalism ignited my passion for the topic of multicultural competency. I worked in this school as a high school counselor from 2006 to 2013 and became the supervisor of school counseling for grades 5-12 from 2013 to 2015. In 2015, my passion to work as a school counselor led me to accept a position to return to my current position, which is working as a high school counselor. In the last 10 years, as both a school counselor and supervisor of school

counseling, I have witnessed firsthand the increasing diverse student population that continues to grow in the United States. In addition to the increased diversity in schools, I have witnessed the role of a school counselor to change towards the inclusion of cultural responsiveness.

In my personal experiences, a major change facing today's role as a school counselor is the increased need to ensure culturally responsive services that provide equity for all students and families. Not only has the need for culturally responsive school counseling services been highlighted in the literature, but as a former supervisor, many conversations with school counselors, school administrators, faculty, parents, and students focused on the need to deliver culturally responsive services for all students regardless of cultural background. This aforementioned information coupled with my passion to provide the current school counseling profession and school counseling programs with practices that have been identified as helpful in providing culturally responsive school counseling services has led me to investigate the current practices of school counselors that have been identified as culturally responsive in providing such services.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction and background literature on school counseling programs and the need for culturally responsive school counseling practices, a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the research question, significance of study, definition of key terms, and my personal reflection. Chapter 2 contains an in-depth literature review of the significant concepts that

will be investigated. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, the participants who will be interviewed, the research question, the method used to collect data, and the procedures and design. Chapter 4 is a presentation of the findings. In conclusion, Chapter 5 discusses the findings and explains how they impact the delivery of culturally responsive school counseling services and future research.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

School counselors have an ethical and moral obligation to provide culturally responsive counseling services and communicate with their students in a way that is developmentally and culturally appropriate (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2012). These services are particularly important because according to the 2010 Census, the next 15 years will bring an increase in diversity into the United States' school systems. Obviously, this increase in diversity will create an increase in the number of minority students entering schools in the United States. Therefore, school counselors are faced with the task of being proactive in working with a diverse student population so that each child is given the opportunity to achieve academic success (Sheely & Bratton, 2010). With this rapid growth in racial and ethnic diversity, it is clear that there must be an emphasis placed on culturally responsive school counseling practices (Lee, 2001; Sheely & Bratton, 2010).

Gaining a greater understanding about these practices then seems important to both practicing school counselors and those in training to become school counselors. Both ASCA (2015) and Lee (2001) describe culturally responsive counseling practices as services that provide equity for all students and create a school culture that embraces diversity. Through culturally responsive practices, school systems can ensure that students are well equipped for school, work, and life in the 21st century. As noted by Johnson (2013), through the mastery of practical skills, exposure to various forms of inquiry, and learning civic actions that citizens living in a democracy must possess, students will have the necessary tools to flourish in a diverse, multifaceted, and ever changing society. Although there has been much literature regarding the need for

culturally responsive school counseling services, little research has focused on the specific experiences of practicing school counselors who are known as culturally responsive. In my study, I examined the practices of 3 school counselors who are known as culturally responsive to shed some much needed insight on the delivery of these services.

In today's 21st Century Schools, both teachers and counselors are responsible to address the needs of an increasing diverse student population. In particular, school counselors are charged with meeting the needs of all students from an academic, career, and social emotional standpoint; therefore, their practices must include culturally responsive counseling services (ASCA, 2004; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Lee, 2001). In addition to ensuring that each child is given the opportunity to achieve academic success, delivering culturally responsive practices places school counselors in a unique position of creating an equitable school climate (Pica-Smith & Poynton, 2014). By working with the entire school community, school counselors can provide services that are culturally sensitive to meet the academic, social/emotional, and career needs of all students.

The purpose of my study was to specifically learn more about the actual practices involved in implementing culturally responsive school counseling services. I achieved this by investigating how a school counselor who was recognized as being culturally responsive goes about her school counseling practice. The findings of my study were particularly significant given the increased diversity entering the school systems in the United States (Census, 2010), thus the need for effective counseling services for diverse students. In learning more about how a school counselor who is known as being

culturally responsive goes about her counseling practice, my study provided useful information that will inform both practicing school counselors and school counseling training programs.

This chapter provides a summary of the literature surrounding culturally responsive school counseling and its practices. This extensive review of the literature will help better understand the existing literature related to culturally responsive school counseling services, what services they include, and how these services are implemented. The topics covered in this chapter will begin with an overview of today's 21st century schools, which is followed by literature surrounding today's increasingly diverse school system; the role of a school counselor within a school organization; a description of specific strategies that have been used with regards to culturally responsive school counseling practices; and concluding with recommendations regarding the training culturally responsive school counselors.

21st Century School System

The educational transformation that has taken place in today's 21st century school system has been one that has taken outdated traditional educational designs and has replaced them with more creative approaches and methods of learning. This current idea of promoting 21st Century Skills for all students has actually been a topic of conversation in education for many years. Numerous educators have attempted to encourage 21st century skills that emphasize critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity, as well as other 21st Century Skills in past generations (Brusic & Shearer, 2014). However, this current 21st century educational movement has been one that has been primarily spurred

by the technological progressions that have promoted life skills building and enhanced communication in the educational arena. Additionally, an ever increasing diverse student population has also played a major role in the transformation of the 21st century schools (Gunn & Hollingsworth, 2013). As a result, the 21st century school system has shifted to help the advancement of all students become better equipped consumers and citizens in a diverse, multidimensional, and ever changing society.

With this transformation, today's 21st century schools are becoming filled with methodologies that promote learning for a diverse set of students who have various interests, skills, and cultural experiences (Gunn & Hollingsworth, 2013; Lee, 2001). The 21st century school system is one that no longer focuses on teaching students previously valued skills like memorization, repetition, recall, and basic comprehension. These now considered lower-order abilities have been replaced by higher-order skills that emphasize critical thinking, creativity, analysis, and assessment (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000; Gunn & Hollingsworth, 2013; Wilson, 2006). Students are now engaging in learning opportunities that encourage them to synthesize information and problem solve situations that will prepare them to become contributing members in an increasingly diverse global economy (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2006; Wilson, 2006).

Therefore, the traditional teaching methods that were previously used have been outdated and no longer meet the demands of today's ever changing diverse student body. Driven by these new 21st century standards that focus on life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, and information, media, and technology skills, school personnel are being challenged to implement many new exciting educational responsibilities that are

grounded in research based teaching and developmental methods (Hilton, 2015; Wilson, 2006). Such methods include: providing instructional diagrams, use of case studies, goal setting, student questioning, and teacher feedback that encourages students to self-reflect on their own learning styles and processes. Furthermore, educators are focusing less on grades and more on modeling problem solving skills where students can collaborate with one another to carry out projects and learn to use various techniques to draw conclusions (Hilton, 2015).

In addition to preparing 21st century students to become independent thinkers, problem solvers, and contributing members to society, Tomlinson (2015) suggests, “Schools will have to become more responsive to the broadening array of cultures, languages, experiences, economics, and interests represented in most contemporary classrooms—and to do so in ways that provide equity of access to robust learning experiences for that broad spectrum of learners. Such classrooms will be heterogeneous in nature, and learner-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, instruction-centered, and community-centered” (p. 204). Through differentiated instruction that is culturally responsive, teachers are challenged to create learning experiences that not only meet the needs of all students academically, but to improve the educational achievement of all students regardless of cultural background (Santamaria, 2009; Tomlinson, 2015).

With the implementation of these new 21st century academic standards, comes the need for preparation. Therefore, it is essential that school personnel be provided with the proper training and professional development opportunities that will help meet the academic, social/emotional, and career goals of the 21st century school system (Gunn &

Hollingsworth, 2013; Wilson, 2006). To meet this need, school districts must come up with initiatives that address the effective delivery of differentiated instruction in the classrooms as well offering professional development opportunities that are student centered and focus on teaching a diverse student population that can become successful from an academic, social/emotional, and career standpoint (Gunn & Hollingsworth, 2013; Prensky, 2001; Wilson, 2006).

Diversity in the 21st Century School Systems

When looking at the make-up of today's 21st century school systems, the increased diverse student population is evident. Johnson (2013) defines diversity as "being inclusive, that is, embracing all similarities and differences in backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, talents and interests; to make opportunities widely available so that every element of society has equal access" (pp. 517-518). As today's 21st century schools continue to diversify, schools are being challenged with tasks of meeting the demands of an increasingly diverse student body with regards to race, ethnicity, academic ability, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, and physical and mental capability (Fletcher, 2014). To meet these demands of an increasingly diverse student population, it is crucial for school personnel to understand the various areas that are being impacted.

From 2000 to 2007, a total of 10.3 million immigrants have entered the United States; representing one of the highest seven-year periods of immigration in the history of the United States (Camarota, 2007). According to Yen (2009), 40% of students in today's 21st century schools are non-White. This fact, coupled with the notion that according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) the student population will no longer be made up of

predominately white students, emphasizes the anticipated increase in racial and ethnic diversity in America's schools over the next half century. Due to this racial and ethnic student growth, schools must create educational and developmental experiences that are in line with the cultural value systems of an increasing diverse student population (Bazron, Osher, & Fleischman, 2005). By providing students with educational and developmental practices that are grounded in cultural experiences and focus on differentiated instruction to address the various intellectual levels of all students, 21st century schools can promote student connectedness and improve the overall learning experience for all students regardless of racial and ethnic background and academic ability (Gay, 2002).

Along with varying academic levels of ability and diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, students in today's schools also differ with respect to their socioeconomic status. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) uses the percentage of students who qualify to receive free and reduced lunch through the National School Lunch Program to measure a school's poverty level or socioeconomic status. In turn, based on the amount of students who are eligible to receive free and reduced lunch, schools having less than 25% are categorized as low-poverty, 26-50% as mid-low poverty, 51-75% as mid-high poverty, and greater than 76% as high-poverty. Using these parameters, it is estimated that in 2007, 1 million secondary students attended a U.S. public school that fell in the high-poverty category (Lumpkin, 2016; NCES, 2012). This statistic is alarming because research indicates that a family's socioeconomic status plays a significant role in educational success, placing students from families with lower

socioeconomic status at greater risk of jeopardizing their chances of achieving academic success (Blau, 1999).

As noted by Bottiani, Bradshaw, and Mendelson (2016), race and socioeconomic status appear to be conflated. Van Dorn, Bowen, and Blau (2006) also found that ethnicity and socioeconomic status are not independent of each other; rather, that there is an association between the two. However, it is not universally accepted that schools in areas that have a larger low socioeconomic population cannot attain high academic achievement. For instance, in a nationwide analysis, the Education Trust (Jerald, 2001) indicated that a positive correlation between academic performance and socioeconomic status does not prevent high academic achievement from students who attend schools in low socioeconomic areas.

Another area that today's schools are more openly acknowledging is an increased diversity in a student's sexual orientation. As noted in Luke and Goodrich (2012), although the exact percentage of LGBTQ students in schools remains unclear, research indicates that the proportion of K-12 students who may identify as LGBTQ is similar to the roughly 6% to 10% of the American population who identify as lesbian or gay. However, it is important to note that this percentage of people who identify as gay or lesbian does not include individuals who identify as bisexual, transgender, or questioning. Therefore, when including the bisexual, transgender, and questioning population, the percentage of 6% to 10% of the American population is most likely higher. These statistics not only highlight the diversity with respect to sexual orientation in today's

schools, but also echoes the need for schools to meet this shift in a more visible minority population in a culturally responsive manner.

Along with the LGBTQ population, today's 21st century schools have also seen significant growth in its special needs population. At the beginning of the 21st century, the number of students with special needs receiving special education services in public schools was approximately 6.7 million students (Aron & Loprest, 2012). This represents a marked increase since the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) was passed in 1975. Currently, approximately 13% of America's student population is impacted by some form of disability (Herzik, 2015).

In addition to IDEA and its reauthorization in 2004, reasons such as improved methods of disabilities identification and increased awareness regarding learning disabilities have also contributed to the increasing number of students with special needs (Hammill, 1993). Due to such factors, the amount of students with special needs being mainstreamed into regular education classrooms has increased. Mainstreaming creates a dramatic shift in today's schools where a significant emphasis is being placed on creating a classroom environment that is focused on improving the academic experiences and overall educational outcomes for all students, including students with special needs (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015).

When considering the "diverse" student populations highlighted above are part of today's 21st century schools, it is clear that school personnel are uniquely positioned to provide all students with a successful learning environment that is filled with academic opportunities that are culturally responsive. However, this task of providing equal

opportunities for an increasing diverse student population has proven to be difficult, given that there are “still unresolved institutional, structural, and even racial attitudes and perceptions that undermine the democratic goals of diversity” (Welton, 2013, p. 3).

For example, although only making up 16% of the U.S. student body, African American students make up 30% of the students classified with specific learning disabilities and similar results are indicated for Hispanic students (Herzik, 2015). Additionally, when compared to minorities, Whites have a higher level of socioeconomic advantage (Blau, 1999). With regards to sexual orientation, researchers indicate that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youths are at increased risk of various forms of victimization, academic struggles, and poor attendance (Hall, McDougald, & Kresica, 2013; Satcher & Leggett, 2007; Van Wormer & McKinney, 2003). These disparities and issues for minority student populations emphasize that the diversity in today’s 21st century schools must be addressed with more than differentiated classroom instruction, thus a need for culturally responsive school counseling services.

The Need for Counseling Services and School Counselors

Originally influenced by the late 19th Century social reform movement that primarily focused on career and moral development, today’s school counseling profession is one that has shifted into a comprehensive approach that focuses on academic, career, and social/emotional development (ASCA, 2012; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Based on the needs of their specific student population, trained school counselors are uniquely positioned as leaders in supporting systemic change within their school communities. Acting as a leader in promoting change is much more than a learned skill;

rather it is a mindset that promotes student advocacy and cultural responsiveness for all students including those from underprivileged backgrounds (Lee, 2001; McMahon, Mason, & Paisley, 2009; Stone & Dahir, 2006).

Children and adolescents have developmental, intrapersonal, social, and interpersonal needs with which school counselors are trained to address. When discussing the need for counseling services and school counselors, it is important to understand how adolescent development impacts the two. Adolescent development is a multifaceted progression where social, emotional, and cognitive components influence the transition from childhood to adulthood (Jagers, Church, Tomek, Hooper, Bolland, & Bolland, 2015). According to Erikson (1963), identity development is linked to social constructs that are ever changing throughout various stages of one's life. By overcoming conflicts that are presented in each of the eight stages, an individual's identity continues to successfully develop. In addition, Havighurst (1972) points to a "critical period" as a time where young adolescents can achieve developmental skills such as personal independence, engaging in positive social interaction, gaining a sense of conscience, morality, and values. Given the fact that children and adolescents are going through developmental stages, they are therefore experiencing rapid periods of change and growth. Adolescents tend to rely on personal beliefs and standards to construct their self-identity, which is further influenced by psychosocial factors (Harter, 2006). In itself this can cause distress and uncertainty. So, if school counselors are only addressing the academic needs of students, their mental health and emotional needs then go unrecognized.

During young adolescence, children encounter a host of social and emotional challenges. Some of these challenges include monitoring their impulses and emotions, dealing with various stressors, working collaboratively, effectively communicating with others, establishing social relationships, and consistently adjusting to new situations (Goleman, 1995). Successful peer acceptance, public interaction, and social problem solving during adolescence characterize important developmental achievements that lead to long-term life adjustment (Ross, Powell, & Elias, 2002). Students who lack popularity or who are excluded from social events by their peer group view themselves as being socially incompetent and unable to maintain close friendships; therefore, leaving them at risk of becoming depressed and increasingly anxious in social situations. Such negative social interactions can seriously impact a child's sense of well-being that can lead to long-term negative consequences (Parker & Asher, 1993). Without the successful development in the aforementioned social and emotional areas, children become at risk for a variety of academic, social, and emotional related problems (Elias & Tobias, 1996).

Therefore, meeting the emotional needs of today's students involves a complicated set of skills, knowledge, and behaviors (Elias, Zins, Weissberg, Frey, Greenberg, Haynes, Kessler, Schwab- Stone, & Shriver, 1997). School counselors are trained professionals who are uniquely situated as educational leaders to help meet the emotional needs of today's students. Being a part of the school setting gives school counselors firsthand knowledge of the school culture and classroom environment. By having direct access to students, teachers, and other school personnel, school counselors are positioned to effectively address social and emotional issues as they arise (Cappella,

Jackson, Bilal, Hamre, & Soulé, 2011). Through proactive actions that include individual and group counseling, collaboration with school personnel, programming, and appropriate community mental health referrals when needed, school counselors can effectively provide students with the necessary tools to ensure successful emotional development (DeKruyf, Auger, & Trice-Black, 2013). Additionally, when you add in the potential for cultural conflict, discrimination, and bullying, students may not feel safe in the school environment unless school counselors are addressing their specific developmental/emotional needs, as well as advocating for safer school environments.

Culturally Responsive School Counseling

With the current student population in the United States becoming increasingly diverse, ideas and thoughts surrounding cultural issues, multicultural competency, and culturally responsive counseling services have been among the most challenging topics facing school counselors and personnel (Lee, 2001; Porto, 2010). To help meet these challenges, Sue et al., (1992) created a framework of multicultural counseling competencies. The overall goal of these competencies is to provide all counselors with the foundation to understand the key role culture plays in society as a whole and the impact it has on the counselor/client relationship (Ahmed et al., 2011).

Therefore, as opposed to delivering practices that are exclusionary and culturally biased, school personnel have established competencies that will assist in producing a learning environment that is culturally responsive and inclusive for all students (Howard-Hamilton, 2000). Through proactive program development that includes access, equity, and culturally responsive school counseling practices, school counselors can help remove

barriers so all students can achieve academic success as much as possible (Bemak & Chi-Ying Chung, 2008; McMahon et al., 2009). In order to ensure the effectiveness of these school counseling services, school counselors must work together with key stakeholders within the school and community to create comprehensive action plans for developing culturally responsive school-based activities to reduce barriers and support student development (Ohrt, Lambie, & Ieva, 2009).

However, it is becoming increasingly clear that current school counseling services are not addressing the needs of the vastly diverse cultural backgrounds represented by students (Baruth & Manning, 2000; Lee, 2001). For example, school counselors are delivering counseling practices that are grounded in Euro-American middle class values to students who come from vastly different cultural backgrounds and origins from countries such as Africa, Central America, Asia, Mexico, Middle East, and the Caribbean (Herring, 1997; Lee, 2001). Ignoring one's culture and practicing from a strictly Eurocentric mindset goes directly against the best practice of attending to culture as a main component in understanding a student's beliefs and values (Lindsey et al., 2005). By understanding a student's daily life both inside and outside of school, school counselors can ensure the delivery of culturally responsive practices (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011). Therefore, the need for culturally responsive school counselors is paramount for attending to an increasingly diverse student population.

In addition to meeting the needs of students from a racial and cultural standpoint, it is crucial that school counselors are culturally responsive in addressing topics surrounding sexual orientation. Already facing many obstacles with regards to acceptance

and marginalization, LGBTQ students are often times victims of violent threats, bullying, and harassment incidents (Satcher & Leggett, 2007). In addition, LGBTQ students often hear anti-gay remarks and derogatory statements referencing their sexual orientation (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network, 2003; Hall et al., 2013; Satcher & Leggett, 2007). Such negative school experiences leave LGBTQ students at risk of academic failure or dropping out (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009; Satcher & Leggett, 2007; Stone, 2003).

With their developmental training, comprehensive programming, and ethical obligation to deliver culturally responsive services, school counselors are in a position to assist students in identifying and accepting their own sexual identities, as well as, encouraging culturally responsive conversations about issues of sexual orientation in schools (DePaul et al., 2009). With research indicating that up to 15% of youth identify as something other than heterosexual, it is clear that this increasingly significant population is in need of culturally responsive counseling services (Hall et al., 2013; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007).

However, research indicates that while some school counselors have attended seminars, lectures, and in service trainings, other school counselors have displayed negative attitudes toward the LGBTQ population (DePaul et al., 2009; Hall et al., 2013; Satcher & Leggett, 2007). Even more alarming is the notion that only one in five school counselors expressed professional fulfillment in counseling GLB students leading to many LGBTQ students possibly being in a situation where their school counselor is either unprepared or unsupportive in addressing their academic and socio/emotional

needs (Hall et al., 2013; Price & Telljohann, 1991). In fact, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (2003) found that when school officials heard or observed anti-gay actions or statements, school personnel often times would not address such inappropriate behaviors. Hall et al., (2013) additionally found that some school counselors revealed homophobic attitudes toward GLB students, which can adversely affect the relationship with students of a sexual minority. Given these unsettling facts it is without question that there is a clear call for the of culturally responsive school counselors.

The Role of the 21st Century School Counselor

Since the turn of the century with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB; 2002) every school professional in education has been tasked with the responsibility to help improve academic achievement for all students. Focused on accountability, the educational arena has turned to using data as a yearly measure of student progress with the intention of raising student achievement and to diminish the achievement gaps that exist between high-performing and low-performing groups of students (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Swanson, 2004). By working to address the achievement gap, educators can begin to level the playing field and academic inequalities that are seen in areas such as: high school graduation rates, standardized testing, and overall levels of academic achievement among minority and low-income students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). For example, although there have been signs of improvement in certain school districts, many minority students in urban schools have continued to drop out at an alarming rate as high as 50 percent (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Noguera, 2009).

However, researchers (e.g., Lee, 2001; Walsh, Barrett, & DePaul, 2007) indicate that in order to address such issues that contribute to the achievement gap and help achieve academic success for all students, school personnel will have to look beyond simply relying on new educational methods. Darling-Hammond (2000) notes that only about 40-60% of the achievement gap can be addressed through new innovative academic approaches. Remaining factors such as class size, family problems, and community concerns that also impact the achievement gap cannot be remedied solely with teaching strategies. Furthermore, many students, families, and communities also deal with issues of sexual abuse, domestic violence, poverty, drug abuse, and homelessness that present major obstacles to learning and mental wellness (Walsh et al., 2007). Therefore, in addition to instructional techniques, services must be provided that address the developmental, cultural, and environmental issues that cause students psychological distress (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Smith-Adcock, et al., 2006). Such distress interferes with effective learning. School counselors can provide such services, particularly through culturally responsive counseling services that respond to their specific challenges and thus enable all students to have a greater chance to achieve academic success (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Lee, 2001; Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011). This clarion call for culturally responsive counseling services is one factor which has led to the transformation of school counseling.

The role of the 21st century professional school counselor is one that is grounded in advocating for educational equity and social justice (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Lee, 2001; Washington, 2015). Marbley, Maloot, Flaherty and Frederic (2011) point out that a

school counselor's focus on social justice advocacy work "is an essential and necessary tool for working with children who are marginalized" (p. 60). Education Trust's (2009) *Transforming School Counseling Initiative* highlighted a move towards advocacy, leadership, and using data in defining the role of the 21st century school counselor. Whereas the role of a school counselor used to be one that was focused primarily on vocational training, 21st century school counselors are now being challenged to assist the students, families, and community members from a cultural standpoint, while at the same time dealing with social, political, economic, environmental, and psychological issues (Portman, 2009).

The American School Counseling Association National Model (ASCA, 2012) identifies advocacy and systemic change as guiding concepts that are essential components of culturally competent school counselors. Furthermore, the ASCA National Model provides guidelines that optimally position school counselors to address inequities that may inhibit student development (Pica-Smith & Poynton, 2014). Through an approach that is focused on collaboration, programming, and being proactive, the ASCA National Model provides school counselors with a clear and consistent philosophy; that is, providing a curriculum and delivering services that are culturally responsive, supportive, and individualized to ensure that each and every student is provided with the tools needed to be academically, occupationally, and social-emotionally successful (ASCA, 2005; Walsh et al., 2007).

CACREP Standards for Training School Counselors

Many graduate counselor preparation programs have evaluation methods in place in order to attain accreditation. Such evaluation methods and accreditation standards make certain that counseling programs are preparing both qualified and competent professionals (McGlothlin & Davis, 2004). Created in 1981, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) is one of the major accrediting bodies for counselor education programs (LaFountain & Baer, 2001). Focused on eight core curriculum standards which are Professional Identity, Social and Cultural Diversity, Human Growth and Development, Career Development, Helping Relationships, Group Work, Assessment, and Research and Program Evaluation, CACREP programs are positioned to provide counselors-in-training with the knowledge and experiences needed to proficiently enter the field of counseling (McGlothlin & Davis, 2004).

Specifically, CACREP approved school counselor education programs focus their body of knowledge on preparing future school counselors with the skill set needed in regards to school counseling. In addition to the aforementioned core curriculum standards, students from CACREP accredited school counseling programs gain knowledge and skills in the following areas: (a) Foundations of School Counseling, (b) Contextual Dimensions, and (c) Knowledge and Skills for the Practice of School Counseling. With *Knowledge and Skills for the Practice of School Counseling* covering Program Development, Implementation, and Evaluation; Counseling and Guidance; and Consultation (Holcomb-McCoy, Bryan, & Rahill, 2002). Due to the fact

that school counselors are working with an increasingly ethnic make-up in today's 21st Century Schools, standards that are grounded in social and cultural diversity are crucial (Fletcher, 2014).

In order to ensure that this increasingly diverse student population is met with counselors that are properly trained to service them with cultural responsiveness, CACREP emphasizes the importance of incorporating multicultural issues into their standards (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999). Therefore, paving the way for counselor education programs to include such diversity related standards for their Masters level students. Although there are differences that exist among Masters Programs with regards to multicultural training program development, Dinsmore and England (1996) note that CACREP-accredited counselor education programs are heading in the right direction on infusing multicultural counseling training into their programs. By including multicultural perspectives in standards such as Social and Cultural Diversity, Helping Relationships, Career Development, and Assessment, counselor education programs are able to address cultural issues in many core subject areas (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999). Therefore, ensuring counselor education programs are providing Masters level students with proper training that incorporates multicultural issues throughout their courses and program.

Conclusion

Schools counselors are professionals who are equipped with the necessary skillset to aid students in academic, social/emotional, and career development. With today's 21st century schools becoming increasingly filled with a diverse student population, school counselors are being tasked to ensure the delivery of culturally responsive school

counseling practices. In order to meet this challenge, school counselors must move away from practices that are rooted in a European-American middle class perspective and shift towards a more culturally responsive worldview that fosters student development for all students (Lee, 2001). Although there is research that provides informative recommendations (Lee, 2001; Najjian & Dixon, 2001; Sheely & Bratton, 2010), additional evidenced based practices are needed. As a result, this study examined how do culturally responsive school counselors make meaning of the challenges they face in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and enact effective practices. By identifying the obstacles encountered by culturally responsive school counselors and understanding how they deliver effective practices, this study provided the school counseling profession with evidence based practices that will be useful in delivering culturally responsive school counseling practices.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

In chapters one and two, I highlighted research indicating that school counselors play an important role in ensuring that all students from diverse backgrounds receive services that promote academic, career, and social development (Lee, 2001). Through various approaches, school counselors foster a caring school culture by building positive relationships with all students, delivering educational guidance lessons, evaluating each student's needs, and developing problem-solving strategies (Lindwall & Coleman, 2008). Although research (e.g., Lee, 2001; Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011; Smith-Adcock et al., 2006) highlights the importance for culturally responsive school counseling practices, additional information to fully understand the complexity surrounding cultural responsiveness is needed (Ahmed et al., 2011; Sheely & Bratton, 2010). That is, research that identifies ways to approach and enact culturally responsive school counseling practices.

In my study, I investigated how counselors known as culturally responsive go about their school counseling practice. Through case studies, I gathered rich information of their everyday practices and experiences in relation to providing culturally responsive services. In particular, I identified how school counselors decide when and how to apply certain approaches, what's cueing them, and their thinking surrounding culturally responsive services for all students and families. Specifically, the counseling practices involved with the LGBTQ population, students of color, and special needs students, who are at higher risk for educational, personal, and cultural challenges (Luke & Goodrich, 2012; Sheely & Bratton, 2010; Smith-Adcock et al., 2006).

Additionally, this chapter includes detailed information regarding my research design, participant criteria, demographics, data collection, analysis, and methods on enhancing trustworthiness. Through this process, my methodology presented a clear picture of the information gathered to inform the school counseling profession.

The Choice for Case Studies

Due to the complexity of my topic, the use of case studies as my methodology was appropriate. Merriam (2009) states, “a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). Furthermore, “qualitative case studies share with other forms of qualitative research the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive” (p. 39). As noted by McLeod (2013), a good case study uniquely allows for the researcher to capture practical knowledge that is complex in its naturally-occurring phenomena. This is achieved through gathering information via multiple sources. Through storytelling, a good case study allows for a concise way of conveying notable experiences and delivering firsthand information to the investigator (Stewart & Chambless, 2010).

According to Simons (2009), “the primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), programme, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action” (p. 21). The “what” that is studied is known as a bounded system, which is a single unit that is surrounded by boundaries. If the phenomenon that is being studied is not inherently bounded, it is not considered a case. The single unit of what is

being studied can vary from a single individual, group, program, or organization (Merriam, 2009). In my study, the single unit was culturally responsive school counselors and how they went about describing their school counseling practices.

Given my interest in this topic, case studies helped shed light on a topic that needed more research. Specifically, case studies were useful in examining culturally responsive school counseling direct practices and the tools needed to intervene effectively with the following populations: LGBTQ students, students of color, and special needs students. Research indicates that students from the aforementioned populations continue to face academic, social, and cultural obstacles, particularly when these obstacles intersect with social class (Blau, 1999; Hall et al., 2013; Herzik, 2015; Smith-Adcock et al., 2006).

For example, according to Cherry (2015), in 2012, 43% percent of black 17-year-old males were reading below basic proficiency when compared to only 19% of same aged white males. It is such academic challenges that translate into only 59% of black men graduating high school in comparison to 80% of white men (Cherry, 2015). Sheely and Bratton (2010) explain that depending on their socioeconomic status, some African American students are at higher risk of academic obstacles when compared to their peers. In addition, there has been increasing literature highlighting that school counselors may lack the proper training or resources to effectively attend to the needs of LGBTQ students (DePaul et al., 2009; Luke & Goodrich, 2012). Generally speaking, all counselors are concerned with kids' well-being, but some are particularly attuned to the discrepancies

that many of the youth who fall under the culturally responsive umbrella face in terms of academic achievement and graduation.

In addition to minority students and the LGBTQ population, many school counselors point to a lack of training in working with students with disabilities (Frye, 2005). Although school counselors play a vital role in helping students with disabilities with many life transitions, more can be done by school counselors to appropriately address the needs of students with special needs (Glenn, 1998; Milsom & Hartley, 2005). With such concerning data, my findings provided much needed information on the practices of school counselors who are known as culturally responsive counselors regarding the LGBTQ, students of color, and special needs population.

Research Question

Research Question 1

How do culturally responsive school counselors make meaning of the challenges they face in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and enact effective practices?

Participants Criteria

The sample size for the case studies was made up of 3 participants who are current high school counselors with at least 3 years of high school counseling experience who were identified by their supervisors as being culturally responsive in working well with diverse populations. I was particularly interested in those who had experience with LGBTQ students/issues, special needs students/issues, and issues surrounding race. The aforementioned issues have been highlighted in the literature as topics that are in need of

more research and attention. For example, Hall et al., (2013) found that although many school counselors have worked with many GLB students, one third felt professionally and educationally unprepared to work with such a population of students. When considering the vast amount of difficulties that special needs students encounter, school counselors must find a way to help special needs students who experience such problems (Stephens, Jain, & Kim, 2010). Lastly, Chao (2013) suggests that race and multicultural competence for school counselors is a crucial aspect of their ethical conduct. So one question to consider is whether a culturally responsive school counselor is comfortable across all these issues and areas, or whether they are “specialists”, that is, known as particularly attuned to working with a specific population such as: LGBTQ students, special needs students, or students of color.

Thus, participants were selected via purposeful sampling. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), purposeful sampling is an often used selection process in research where the researcher chooses participants that share similar qualities. Additionally, the selected participants share practices and experiences that shed light on the research topic of interest. For the nature of this study, a culturally responsive school counselor was defined as someone identified by his or her supervisor of providing culturally responsive counseling services in the 3 specific areas mentioned above. That is, they were culturally responsive in working with LGBTQ students/issues, special needs students/issues, and issues surrounding race identified by their supervisors through observations, student feedback, collected artifacts, recognitions received, and dialogue. The supervisors all had at least three years of school counseling experience, one-year school counseling

supervisory experience, and a supervisory certificate. At the time of the study, all participants were working in a public high school in New Jersey in a suburban setting. The case studies were narrative in nature. They explained how do culturally responsive school counselors make meaning of the challenges they face in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and enact effective practices.

Data Collection

In line with other forms of qualitative research, case studies are investigative in nature with the researcher being the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing the data (Merriam, 2009). The analysis is inductive in nature which includes ongoing data dialogue with other readings to help me make meaning of the information gathered (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2016). Furthermore, since culturally responsive counseling is a complex entity to understand, ensuring data collection from multiple data points was essential. Thus, data collection included semi-structured interviews, identification of critical incidents, participant diary kept throughout the study, and quickwrites.

Ongoing Interviewing

After obtaining written consent (Appendix A), which guaranteed confidentiality and allowed participants to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, I conducted ongoing interviews with three school counselors from three different public high schools in the northeast who were identified as culturally responsive. The participants were interviewed throughout the 2016/2017 school year ranging from November through February. This allowed for consistent dialogue with the participant and the opportunity to gather “rich” and “thick” data (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2016;

Yin, 2008). Seidman (2013) writes, “In order to give the details of their experience a beginning, middle, and end, people must reflect on their experience. It is the process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience” (p. 7). By interviewing the participants over the course of the semester, the participants were able to express their experiences and practices through their own language.

Qualitative interviews range between 60-90 minutes (Merriam, 2009; Schostak, 2006; Seidman, 2013). The fundamental aspect to effective in depth qualitative interviewing research is to gather “rich” data that allows for a deep understanding of the participant’s experiences and practices, which begins with effective questions that capture the participant’s stories as they interpret it (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013; Thomas, 2016). A semi-structured interview allowed me to have both my set of questions (Appendix B) and the freedom to follow up on any comments or descriptions provided by the participants (Thomas, 2016). In addition, since I interviewed participants frequently, I referred to the interviews as guides to help me get a sense of how I wanted to break up each interview in terms of fleshing out their experiences, preparation, and ongoing meaning making. All interviews were digitally recorded. Recording the interview was important because it provided me as the researcher with the opportunity to “trace” the interview, which was crucial from both an accuracy and ethical standpoint. Additionally, it provided insight to the information shared by each participant (Schostak, 2006).

According to Seidman (2013), using a series of three separate interviews truly allows the researcher to gather an in-depth understanding of the participant’s experiences.

Although I did not use Seidman's three interview method, the main idea that I incorporated in my semi-structured interview approach centered on this idea of multiple in-depth interviews. Therefore, it allowed participants the opportunity to share a more detailed account of their thoughts and ideas. The aim was to hear about different in-depth experiences with specific populations in their practice. For example, asking the participant to recount a counseling session from beginning to end with the aim of hearing about their culturally responsive practices with LGBTQ students, students with disabilities, and minority students (Seidman, 2013).

Since I conducted multiple in-depth semi-structured interviews, some of the interviews were shorter than 60 minutes. Additionally, semi-structured interviewing allowed for more flexibly worded questions. In addition, although I had a list of set questions that guided me during the interviews, a semi-structured approach allowed me the opportunity to ask follow up questions that were not necessarily in a specific predetermined order. This type of interviewing provided me with the chance to refer back to previously conducted interviews and ask follow up questions in future interviews (Merriam, 2009).

Critical Incidents

During the interviews, I asked participants to identify and describe critical incidents that occurred while they were thinking through culturally responsive counseling. Critical incidents are described as powerful experiences that impact one's ideas and values (Rademacher, Simpson, & Marcdante, 2010). According to Tripp (2012), a large majority of critical incidents are not at all dramatic or obvious. Instead,

they are mostly straightforward accounts of very commonplace events that occur in routine professional practice which are critical in the rather different sense that they are indicative of underlying trends, motives, and structures. These incidents appear to be ‘typical’ rather than ‘critical’ at first sight, but are rendered critical through analysis.

There are two stages to the creation of a critical incident: first, some phenomenon is observed and noted, which produces a description of what happened, which then can be explained so we have the what/why (Tripp, 2012). By reflecting on critical incidents, participants are given the opportunity to think about the events that occurred and provide descriptive data that specifically connects the participants’ experiences to the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 2009; Rademacher et al., 2010; Yin, 2008). Describing a critical incident allowed my participants to freely communicate their interpretations of the experiences with no limitations. Identification of these critical incidents allowed for a deeper understanding of their viewpoint with regards to culturally responsive practices and how their beliefs have been impacted.

Quick Writes

In addition to interviewing and asking participants to describe some critical incidents, I asked each participant to utilize quick writes as another method of data collection. Quick writes allow participants to briefly describe a critical incident they recall throughout the during times that they are not being interviewed (Thomas, 2016). Also, a quick write provides a snapshot into the participants’ thoughts and allows for a deeper understanding of their perspectives, which is ultimately the researchers’ objective in qualitative case study research (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2016; Yin, 2008). The use of

quick writes invited participants to be vigilant about their practices and moved the idea of culturally responsive services from theory to practice.

Although participant quick writes are an effective data collection tool, I detailed some guidelines to ensure its usefulness. I provided participants with clear and specific directions on the kinds of items to include in their quick writes. For example, I encouraged participants to write down and explain experiences they deemed important in their delivery of cultural responsive school counseling practices. In addition, it provided participants with a sense of confidence in the type of material they recorded. Short and more frequent quick writes increased participation without sacrificing participant detail.

Data Analysis

The overall goal of data analysis is for the researcher to sort out and make sense of all the information collected. This is done through consolidation, reduction, and interpretation (Merriam, 2009). Because qualitative research is holistically emergent, data collection and analysis is a process that takes place concurrently. That is, as data is collected in the early stages, the researcher begins to organize and manage the data as themes begin to emerge (Thomas, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Therefore, I built time into my calendar so that I was able to work with the data and feed my emerging analysis into the next interview. However, this did not mean that when data collection was completed, data analysis ceased as well. Rather, it is quite the opposite in that the data analysis intensified to ensure that every piece of data collected was examined.

When it comes to analyzing qualitative data for case studies, there are some additional features to consider due to its intensive description and bounded nature.

Demonstrating a deep understanding of the case is crucial in analyzing that data (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2013). Because a case study is all-inclusive in nature, simplifying, synthesizing, categorization, and finding consistency are key components of good data analysis that produces a thick description (Thomas, 2016). Therefore, the researcher must pay close consideration to data management and the organization of all the transcripts, interview notes, reflexive notes, and field notes (Merriam, 2009). Yin (2008) identifies the organization of materials as the case study database. Through coding, category construction, and naming the categories, I was able to organize and analyze all the aforementioned documents, allowing me to easily access any relevant piece of information that was needed throughout the intensive data analysis stage.

Due to the fact that I was doing multiple case studies, there were two stages of data analysis; that is, a within-case analysis and a cross-case analysis. I began with a within-case analysis detailing each of my participants' case. Beginning with a within case-analysis allowed me to treat each case study as its own comprehensive case. According to Merriam (2009) and Yin (2008), this helps the reader "meet" each participant in-depth by writing up each case.

Upon reviewing and constantly comparing all the data, the researcher begins to make notes, highlight, and code the bits and pieces of data that is found pertinent to the research question (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2008). Continually analyzing my data throughout, I began by making meaning of each piece of data so it informed my ongoing data collection. Then, once I collected all my data, I looked at the totality of the data. By assigning codes, I began to construct categories and group comments that appeared to be

similar. The goal is to construct categories that capture recurring themes that become apparent across all the data examined and are exclusive of each other (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2016). Through theme and category identification, I began to create the building blocks of my data analysis.

Although the process of categorization is initially an inductive process that begins with the clustering of similar units, it ends up being rather deductive. That is, as you analyze more data, you are checking for confirmation to see if your final set of categories hold true (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2016). Upon creating tentative categories, I began to flesh out and refine the data. By doing so, I decided if any categories need to be renamed, divided into subcategories or revised. It is these final categories that Marshall and Rossman (2006) identify as the “buckets or baskets into which segments of text are placed” (p. 159).

The next step after finalizing my categories was to analyze all the categories and map out how they were all interrelated. Thomas (2016) explains that solely identifying categories, while important, does not explain the relationship between each category. This process of mapping out the themes or categories is crucial because it links the categories in a meaningful way (Merriam, 2009). In addition to detailing the interconnectedness of all the categories, mapping out all the various quotations and data gathered from the interviews, presents a visual representation of sometimes abstract ideas. (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2016). Once this was complete, I gave each participant a chance to comment on my representation of them in the case and made any adjustments that portrayed the most accurate depiction of each participant.

Upon completion of the aforementioned data analysis for each separate case, I then moved from the within case-analysis to the cross-case analysis. Different than the within case-analysis that focuses on each case individually, a cross-case analysis focuses on the comparative nature between cases; however, the data analysis procedure is very similar (Merriam, 2009; Schwandt, 2001; Yin, 2008). This resulted in the identification of common themes and categories that highlighted generalizations regarding culturally responsive counseling practices across all 3 cases. Although I came across some specifics that were different among each case, the end goal was to develop a general description that fits each case. Thomas (2016) warns novice researchers to not focus solely on the description of each particular case, but rather on the differences that come from comparing all the cases. According to Yin (2008), this can be accomplished by beginning with a case study that is easy to understand and working “in dialogue” with the literature to help the researcher make meaning of the data.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Establishing trustworthiness and validity throughout the study and analysis is an important piece of qualitative research that ensures credibility through careful examination of the material being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers and readers alike must have confidence that the data being presented is reliable and free of any uninterrogated preconceptions (Henriksen, Polonyi, Bornsheuer-Boswell, Greger, & Watts, 2015). Methods such as reflexive journaling, engaging a critical friend, member checking, and prolonged engagement aided me in providing truth, accuracy, and validity of the data collected.

Reflexive journal: Reflexive journaling is a valuable tool that allows the researcher to gather, examine, and document human interaction that may come up throughout the interviewing process (Mackenzie, Ricker, Christensen, Heller, Kagan, Osano, & Turner, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Through reflexive journaling, I was able to capture my experiences, feelings, opinions, and the various conversations that took place throughout the study. This reflexive process allowed me to track my professional development as I progressed as a novice researcher and continually improved my researching skills. Additionally, it allowed me to record any thoughts and feelings that came up about myself as the researcher.

Critical friend: According to Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007), having a critical friend is crucial during qualitative research. Due to the fact that I was deeply immersed into the research, having a critical friend aided me in challenging any possible expectations or biases that presented themselves during data collection. In addition to challenging me, having a critical friend provided me with constructive feedback on any assumptions that came up for me as the researcher. Lastly, having a critical friend provided an opportunity for an open discussion with someone I trust and value his or her professional opinion. In order for this to take place, I met weekly with a fellow school counselor from the counseling department at my place of employment. Weekly meetings allowed me to discuss my feelings on a consistent ongoing basis and process any thoughts that arose.

Member checking: In order to increase the internal validity of my study, I performed member checks after transcribing each interview. Maxwell (2005) writes,

“This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say or do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed” (p. 111). The key aspect of member checking is to ensure that your interpretation accurately represents the participant’s experience. If it does not, the participant can suggest some tweaking to ensure that nothing has been missed so there can be a better representation of the participant’s viewpoint (Merriam, 2009). In my study, I built member checks into the interview process. By presenting back to the participant my ongoing analysis and meaning making of what they told me, I ensured that my interpretation correctly identified what the participant described. In addition, I continually spoke with the participants throughout the interview process to get their “take” on what I was coming to understand.

Prolonged Engagement: Another useful strategy in data collection is prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement allowed for extensive involvement with my participants and promoted a close working relationship throughout the data collection period. Morse (2015) states that the assumption underlying prolonged engagement is “spending more time on data collection in a particular setting provides time for trust to be established with participants. With increased trust (and intimacy), you will get better, richer data. More will be revealed, and therefore, data will be more valid” (p. 1214). Through prolonged engagement, the researcher is able to get as close as possible to the participant’s interpretation of his or her experience (Merriam, 2009). Thus, letting the researcher have sufficient interaction with the participants to the point of saturation; that

is, hearing similar accounts of information presented by all the participants with no new material discussed (Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016; Merriam, 2009).

Positionality

Positionality makes clear who the researcher, as the primary data gathering instrument, is to the research. It allows researchers the opportunity to explain their biases and assumptions regarding their particular research and how to methodologically interrogate these biases and assumptions (Merriam, 2009). Positionality is based on the assumption that various dynamics may come into play between the researcher and participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Therefore, allowing the reader to recognize how the researcher may have been swayed in their interpretation of the data presented (Merriam, 2009). As I began my research I brought my own bias, dispositions, assumptions, and professional experiences, that influenced my research approach, design, understanding, and explanation of the data.

As previously explained in Chapter 1, my interest in culturally responsive school counseling practices come from my personal experiences as a current high school counselor and former supervisor of school counseling. As a white male counselor working in the area of culturally responsive counseling, I mirror the profile of most school counselors. My first school counseling job was in a school district that was recognized for being the first in the nation to voluntarily integrate their public schools. Working in a school with such a history on diversity and multiculturalism ignited my passion for the topic of multicultural competency. Additionally, witnessing firsthand the

continually increasing diverse student population in the United States has been influential in my desire to study culturally responsive school counseling practices.

In my current work as a school counselor, I find myself involved in many conversations with fellow school counselors, school administrators, faculty, parents, and students that are centered around the lack of culturally responsive services in today's schools. This aforementioned information coupled with my passion to provide the current school counseling profession and school counseling programs with practices that have been identified as helpful in providing culturally responsive school counseling services has lead me to investigate the current practices of school counselors who have been identified as knowledgeable in providing such services.

Conclusion

Three high school counselors who are considered culturally responsive in their counseling practices participated in the study. Through a case study design, I interviewed each participant and gathered information on how each of them described their culturally responsive practices. To enhance the study's internal validity and trustworthiness, I utilized reflexive journaling, a critical friend, member checking, and prolonged engagement. All interviews were transcribed and audio recorded to ensure accuracy. The data analysis was broken down into two stages; a within-case analysis that highlighted each individual case and a cross-case analysis that led to the identification of general themes that were apparent across all three cases. I detailed the findings from the data analysis in the upcoming chapters.

Chapter Four: Findings

Through the delivery of culturally responsive counseling services, school counselors can help address issues of poor academic performance and educational injustices that impact many disenfranchised students (Lee, 2001). Examining the participants' real life experiences/practices contributed to a better understanding of the strategies, programs, and actions that define culturally responsive counseling and helped in addressing the barriers encountered to effectively implement such services. With the main areas of the research question revolving around how do culturally responsive school counselors make meaning of the challenges they face in meeting the needs of a diverse student population, I conducted both a within case analysis and a cross case analysis. As the researcher, I was the primary instrument for collecting, coding, and analyzing data in the case studies. Emerging themes and categories were analyzed and are described in the following sections.

Participants

My participants were comprised of three Caucasian females who were each interviewed four times. The ages of the participants ranged from 31-47 years old. All participants have been working as a school counselor for a minimum of 3 years. Through purposeful sampling, all three participants were identified by their supervisor as being culturally responsive in delivering school counseling practices. See Table 1 for a description of the participants' age, gender, race/ethnicity, number of years as a school counselor, and religious/spiritual beliefs or practices.

Table 1

Participant	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Number of years as a school counselor	Religious/Spiritual Beliefs or Practices
Lisa	31	Female	Caucasian	7	Islam
Kim	40	Female	Caucasian	4	Roman Catholic
Sarah	47	Female	Caucasian	17	Jewish

To ensure that each participant's identity remains anonymous, I used pseudonyms when describing each participants' quotes and statements. For each case, the meaning making process of becoming a culturally responsive school counselor is described in great detail. To capture an in-depth understanding of each participant's journey, the crucial themes that I recognized throughout the interviewing process and data analysis have been identified for each case. The findings consist of two stages; a within-case analysis and a cross-case analysis. I begin with a within-case analysis detailing each of the high school counselors' experiences which is followed by a cross case analysis that highlights the comparative nature between cases. In describing each case, I have italicized words or phrases that were identified as key concepts by both myself and the participant with regards to their meaning making process in becoming a culturally responsive school counselor. This aids the reader identify central components for each participant.

Within-Cases Analyses

Case of Lisa

My first case is Lisa, a 31-year-old Muslim female, who has been a high school counselor for seven years. The high school Lisa works in has 1,240 students and is comprised of two suburban towns in the Northeast. A drive down tree lined streets reveals large, beautifully landscaped homes. The yearly median income per household for the two towns is \$121,000 and \$116,000 with the demographic makeup being very similar in both towns; 89% white, 5% Latino, 5% Native American and 1% African American. Although there are private school options, over 92% of families send their children to the public schools. Pulling into a circular driveway shows a beige stucco building centered around a well manicured lawn with a parking lot to the left and entrance stairs to the right. Entering the building, photographs of previously graduated classes, organized by year, line a long hallway. Two banners, created and signed by students, hang from the ceiling. Written on them are aphorisms such as “we celebrate differences,” and “respect all students.” A straight walk down the hallway to the center of the building reveals a gender neutral bathroom to the right and the counseling suite to the left. Upon entering the box shaped counseling suite, two secretaries’ desks sit side by side in the center of the suite with seven counseling offices and a conference room surrounding them. Filling the hallways are students talking to each other and wearing school colors supporting the various school’s sports teams and clubs.

Upon entering the counseling office, I am immediately greeted by Lisa with a handshake and smile. Lisa’s office is a small welcoming space with thank you notes from

former students, inspirational signs, and peace symbols on the bulletin board to the left of her desk, which faces the entrance. From her sign stating “all students are welcome” to her college banners to her welcoming LGBTQ stickers on her door, an immediate sense of warmth, trust, and acceptance permeates throughout Lisa’s office. Always professional in appearance throughout the interview process, Lisa is friendly and well-spoken. Initially cursory with her answers, probing Lisa produces more in-depth responses. Consistently maintaining eye-contact and smiling, Lisa creates a sense of comfort throughout our conversations. Expressing that culturally responsive counseling is something very much needed in today’s counseling profession, Lisa explains she is looking forward to our time together.

Point of Entry. Every counselor enters the profession with a level of cultural responsiveness that is formed by both past and present experiences. It is these experiences that shapes one’s *Point of Entry* as a counselor. For Lisa, her point of entry defines her ability to embrace her sense of difference of being alone and feeling different from everyone else and use it as a learning tool to inform her practice in a school that she not only attended, but now works in. It is Lisa’s marginalized experiences that echo and shape her point of entry into her work as a culturally responsive school counselor.

Referring to the level of cultural responsiveness a counselor enters the profession with, it is Lisa’s point of entry that serves as her starting point. It is this point of entry that operates as Lisa’s foundation and building blocks as she enters the counseling profession and begins her journey of becoming a culturally responsive counselor. Lisa explains:

“Every counselor starts their counseling career with a certain level of cultural responsiveness that is created from their lived experiences. Therefore, each counselor’s level of cultural awareness and responsiveness is different based on their point of entry into the counseling profession. For me, identifying as a Muslim American and being able to connect to our Muslim students’ cultural customs and other students that feel different greatly impacted me as I began my work as a school counselor.”

Growing up in a town and attending a school where she was the diversity plays a major role in Lisa’s level of awareness and sensitivity in her work as a counselor.

Although she never considered herself necessarily a very religious Muslim, Lisa articulates that simply being a Muslim female in this town and school creates a different kind of cultural sensitivity and awareness for me as a counselor. Although there isn’t anything about her appearance that would convey she is Muslim, Lisa recalls being unable to participate in events such as Secret Santa and Easter Egg Hunts with her friend because she wasn’t like them. Witnessing firsthand what it feels like to be very different from others around her and constantly feeling like an outsider, Lisa recalls wanting to start a Muslim club in high school and feeling discouraged because there weren’t enough people like her. Such high school experiences filled with feelings of seclusion and frustration all shaped Lisa’s entry point as she entered her work as a school counselor.

Currently living and working in the same town she grew up in, which remains primarily a Catholic and Jewish population, Lisa frequently mentions that feeling alone and very different from everyone around her is still something she experiences.

“Even to this day, when eating lunch with my colleagues and conversing with them, I realize that I have completely different cultural norms than a lot of people in this area, and it’s something that I think still differentiates me from most people who I work with; however, now I wear it proudly.”

Referring to a shift in how she now internalizes feeling different from everyone else, Lisa explains that opposed to shutting down and retreating like she did back in high school, she now uses being Muslim as an opportunity to educate and connect with students that feel isolated.

Taking her feelings of loneliness and turning them into positive learning experience allows Lisa to actively use her lived sense of difference in her current work with students who articulate that they feel just that. Working to enter their worlds by educating herself as well as by gathering up how their personal stories differ, Lisa explains:

"There are many times when my special needs students explain how they feel different than other students in the class or that they can't identify with them. I explain to them how I recall going through those same exact feelings during high school. This type of connection creates a bond of understanding with the student. Although this particular example has to do with one of my special needs student, the feeling of isolation is a very common theme that I hear from many of my underrepresented groups of students."

As previously mentioned, each counselor enters into this work bringing their own experiences, both good and bad, that shape them. For Lisa, that sense of feeling different

allowed her to learn a lot about herself. Whereas some people would have ended up feeling alienated or still carry that sense of marginalization with them, Lisa turned it into a plus for her practice and now regards it as a positive experience.

Information Gathering. A complicated process, cultural responsiveness requires willingness to move beyond one's comfort zone. Although Lisa shares a sense of difference with her marginalized students, there are also points of departure, where their experiences are not hers; therefore, gathering information by collaborating and having actual conversations with students, colleagues, parents, teachers, or administrator to be better equipped allows Lisa to educate herself on students that are very different from herself.

As counselors, we often collaborate with others to gather information quite frequently; however, Lisa describes a much more complicated process. A multi-purposed and multi-pronged approach that involves not only, being able to identify that a situation is unfamiliar and admitting that I do not know how to best proceed, but then having the awareness to push yourself to collect the necessary tools to provide responsive services. Lisa details moving beyond her comfort zone and needing to consciously hold one of her transgendered student's reality:

"Having my first transgendered student was a real challenge because at first I didn't know the student was transgendered, and I think once they shared that with me, it became quite an adjustment to remember how to properly use the pronouns that they wished. Because it was my first transgendered student I started to ask

other colleagues if they had any experience in counseling transgendered students.”

Having the awareness that she was not effectively prepared to provide adequate services to her student, Lisa sought out assistance from someone with more expertise in counseling transgendered students. Lisa continues:

“I collaborated with our SAC (Student Assistance Counselor), who has more experience with the transgendered population. As a counselor, you always need to ask yourself, what is the proper skill set that I need, or what do I need to know to be able to properly serve a specific population of students, just making sure that I have the most helpful information. It’s okay to say, I don’t know much of something about a particular population and let yourself learn from the experts in dealing with that particular population.”

An approach that involves turning an unaccustomed experience into a learning opportunity allows Lisa to continually add to her counseling toolkit. Encountering new experiences requires Lisa to do her homework, network with her colleagues and utilize the expertise of other people around her.

A multifaceted process that extends beyond admitting that you don’t know everything, cultural responsiveness requires being willing to be vulnerable with more knowledgeable others and knowing that my colleague knows more than me surrounding this specific topic. Admitting to her student that this is her first experience with a transgendered student, Lisa establishes a sense of honesty and trust. Explaining that we are going to learn from each other together allows Lisa to create a safe space and use her

base knowledge as a starting point. Lisa's willingness to not fake it, but rather grow into authentic work, aligns conditions of support for herself and the student. Lisa explains:

"Students can see right through you when you try to fake it and don't really know what you are talking about. It is always best practice to allow yourself to grow with the process. This forges a stronger relationship in the long run."

In gathering information that better serves her diverse student population, Lisa collaborates within and outside her school to seek out professional development opportunities that educate and inform her practice.

Lisa explains, *"Professional development opportunities can be very informative when sought out intentionally and properly matched with the needs of your population."*

Proactively seeking out opportunities ensures Lisa is meeting the individual needs of her students and at the same time fostering her own professional growth. Highlighting a process that is individualized to meeting the needs of each student and not waiting for something to come across her desk, Lisa continues:

"I am seeing an increase in my special needs students classified with an emotional disorder diagnosis. So, rather than wait for an opportunity, I reached out to the supervisor of special services and asked her if she knew of any upcoming workshops or professional developments focusing on topics such as depression, anxiety, and anger management. Sure enough she was able to find a workshop that was being held at one of the local technical schools at no cost."

Meeting the needs of marginalized students is a complex process that requires a tremendous amount of work from Lisa. Given the fact that her underrepresented students

are often victims of bullying, school violence, and academic failure, Lisa advises against a one size fits all approach; rather consider each situation its own case.

“Connecting with every student is not an easy task. I have to be willing to accept it is an ever-changing learning process that will be filled with feelings of uncertainty and inadequateness. By treating each case individually, I can best meet the needs of my students.”

With a progressive mindset that is not afraid to try something new and admit she lacks knowledge, Lisa is not afraid to take risks in delivering fair and equitable services for all students. Taking previous experiences that left Lisa feeling voiceless and now using them as the fuel she needs, enables Lisa to create change. Lisa narrates,

“Continuing to work from a status-quo perspective leads to stagnation. For example, our school never had a support group for Muslim students. One of the first things I did once I started working here as a school counselor was to start an acceptance group that was open to all students. Starting such a group symbolized more than a personal victory for me, it gave a voice to other underrepresented populations that may be thinking of starting a group.”

Moving Beyond Conventional Practices. In meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, Lisa emphasizes the implementation of specific school counseling practices that move beyond conventional strategies. A process that takes the traditional cookie-cutter approach and transforms it to a personalized practice that is tailored to meet each student’s specific needs. Such ideas have also been highlighted in the literature. Lee (2001) notes that when discussing a culturally responsive school

counseling program, the school counselor's role involves expanding traditional school counseling practices.

Translating this idea of moving beyond conventional practices into her work, Lisa finds herself using student data as one of the tools to inform her practice. Working with at-risk students requires looking for trends and collecting data that serve as Lisa's benchmarks in measuring student improvement. Often using attendance records as a means of evaluating and connecting multiple pieces in creating an action plan, Lisa describes her work with a special needs student:

“Noticing that one of my special needs students wasn't doing well, I started collecting information to help me better understand what was causing him to fail three classes. One of the first things I did was run an attendance report. I noticed that between cutting class and full day absences, the student only attended 12 full days of school in the last month. I immediately set up a meeting with the student, parents, and case manager to get to the root of the problem. At the meeting, the student disclosed that he was avoiding school because some of his classes were too difficult for him. Working together, we modified his IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) and made schedule changes to reflect classes that better met his abilities.” Moving forward, Lisa uses checking in with the student as well as his attendance record as indicators in monitoring his performance.

Moving beyond conventional practices requires intentionality on the part of the counselor in identifying the specific needs of the target population. Seeking out the necessary tools and resources must be done with purpose and will look different for each

student depending on his/her ever-changing needs. Lisa explains intentionality using a rather common school counseling practice:

Frank: You talked about working with Hispanic students. What practices have you found specifically effective in delivering culturally responsive services?

Lisa: In order to be able to communicate with non-English speaking students and parents, I often utilize a translator because I don't want things to get lost in a conversation. So, it is about taking advantage of that resource available in our school to make sure that things are clearly communicated.

Taking this idea of intentionality with a commonly used practices and now applying it to non-traditional practices, Lisa points to having a sense of creativity in coming up with alternatives in meeting the needs of each child. Lisa explains,

“Another commonly used practice is calling students to the counseling office using the loud speaker. However, you have to remember that each child is different. What works for one student does not always work for another. For example, one of my special needs students prefers I personally go get him from class as opposed to calling his name over the loud speaker because he finds that to be embarrassing. Another special needs student prefers being called over the loud speaker because it does not bring as much attention to her as having to walk out of her class in front of other students.”

Investing the time to understand how each student interprets an experience is key in determining the best approach and not hindering the student's self-confidence. Simply using the same strategies and resources repeatedly are no longer allowing Lisa to meet

the needs of her students. Lisa points to the role of a 21st century culturally responsive school counselor as a complex process that emphasizes data collection, collaboration, and leadership.

“Becoming a culturally responsive counselor takes time and is continually developing. It goes from simply advocating for marginalized students and shifting to thinking in their best interests.”

The transition Lisa notes here is that advocacy involves more of a one size fits all approach. Although a general understanding of what the student needs is required in simple advocacy, thinking in their best interest differs in that it involves a more individualized approach that requires getting to know the students and understanding their realities. Therefore, seeing things through the student’s eyes and implementing strategies accordingly. Lisa describes an example that combines intentionality and acting in the student’s best interest:

“There are times that I manually pick each teacher for a student one by one. Taking into account both the teacher’s and student’s personalities, I act in the student’s best interest and intentionally match him/her with a teacher that I feel will foster a positive learning environment.”

This one step at a time approach really allows for the understanding and development of each student as well as avoiding issues later in the school year. So part of the process is trying to head off at the pass a set up for a teacher or student where they might not do very well together.

Knowing that her at-risk students do not often seek out her services unless reached out to, Lisa does not wait around; rather, she schedules bi-weekly meetings in her calendar to ensure they are not forgotten about. This proactive measure allows Lisa to check-in and consistently keep in touch so she can continually monitor the student's progress. Lisa discusses how this looks in her practice:

“Whether via email or in person, maintaining an open line of communication is crucial in establishing a sense of acceptance to the counseling process. As one of my special needs students explained, none of my previous counselors ever called me to their office. Knowing that my at-risk students have traditionally experienced feelings of rejection and lack self-esteem, I personally seek them out if they don't respond to my initial email. It is not uncommon for me to go to the classrooms and get these students myself. It is such actions that begin to instill a sense of self-worth in these students.”

It is Lisa's belief that moving from conventional school counseling practices to a more hands on approach will help in meeting the needs of an underrepresented student population. Through comments such as “I feel like I matter to you” and “I like that you call me down regularly,” Lisa notices a proactive shift on the part of the student.

A complex journey that I have identified as Lisa's *Process of Becoming*, it is Lisa's meaning making coupled with her first hand knowledge and experiences that have ultimately culminated in her work as a culturally responsive school counselor. An approach that Lisa herself describes as ongoing and ever-changing, cultural responsiveness is extremely challenging work. Beginning with her personal experiences

of marginalization in a school that she not only attended but currently works in created Lisa's *Point of Entry*. It is this starting point that serves as a foundation in shaping her work as a counselor. A practice that takes the idea of collaboration and complicates it into a multipronged approach, Lisa highlights the importance of pushing beyond simple collaboration and accepting that she does not know everything and that is ok. Through *Information Gathering*, Lisa uses her past experiences of isolation as a student to inform her current practice in connecting with her underserved population, while at the same time identifying that these students are very different than herself. By *Moving Beyond Conventional Practices* and enacting a more hands on approach, it is Lisa's feeling that the individual needs of increasingly diverse population will be better met.

See Figure 1 for a visual representation of the three identified sub-themes and the one overarching theme of Lisa's case.

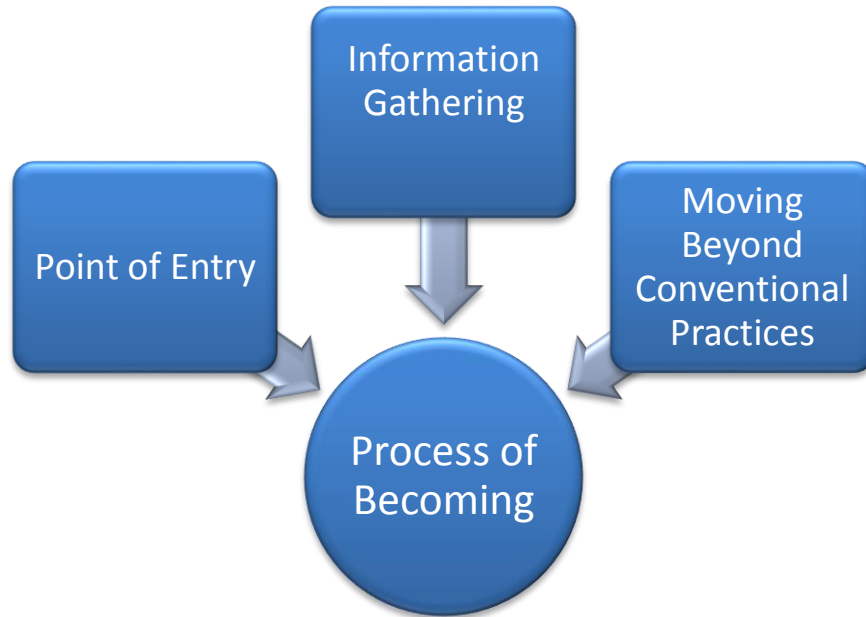


Figure 1. Identified Themes for Participant Lisa

Case of Kim

My second case is Kim, a 40-year-old Caucasian Catholic female, who has been a high school counselor for four years. The high school Kim works in has 1,315 students and draws from one suburban town in the Northeast. Similar to Lisa's town, many large homes spread across areas of beautifully manicured lawns. The yearly median income per household is \$105,000 with the demographic makeup being; 72% white, 22% Asian, 5% Latino and 1% African American. Given the option between public and private schools, 90% of students attend the public high school. Separated from the main road by a row of parking spaces to the right and left, a drive into the main entrance reveals the school building straight ahead with a cement walkway lined with red mulch on both sides leading to the school's entrance. Upon entering the high school building, a security

officer sits behind a desk located to the right. In addition to monitoring the students as they enter and leave the building during school hours, the security guard is tasked with having each visitor sign in and directing them to their destination with the help a floor plan of the building. A walk down a long brightly lit hallway shows photographs of various athletic recognitions from past and present athletes decorating both sides of the walls. Being that the interviews took place after school, not many students are present in the building. At the end of a long hallway is a “U” shaped school counseling suite with two entrances, one to the left and one to the right. A walk into either entrance reveals a secretary with the school’s name and a welcome sign on the wall behind their desks. In addition to greeting visitors and students, the secretary notifies the counselors when an appointment has arrived. Upon being called by the secretary, Kim greets me with a gentle handshake and smile. A walk to Kim’s office shows a total of eight counseling offices wrapped around the “U” shaped suite.

Kim’s office is a large inviting space with her desk to the left facing the entrance and a book case that sits to the right with motivational sayings spread across the back wall. Upon sitting down, Kim stated, *“This is exciting. I’m ready to get started.”* Dressed in a professional attire consisting of a long skirt and blouse, Kim’s presence is welcoming and engaging throughout the interview process. In contrast to my experience with Lisa, who often seemed reluctant to speak expansively and provide rich descriptions, Kim’s explanations are detailed and go beyond surface level responses. Consistently maintaining eye-contact and answering in an engaging manner, Kim sits facing me with her legs crossed and both hands placed on her knees throughout our interviews.

Beginning the interview with questions focusing on Kim's meaning making process and experiences in delivering culturally responsive counseling services, Kim continually referred to the important role her previous career experiences played. It is Kim's prior professional opportunities that exposed her to such culturally rich experiences that serve as a teaching tool in her current work as a school counselor. By immersing herself in such experiences, Kim positioned herself to learn about different cultural norms and adequately prepared herself for future experiences that required culturally responsive services.

Immersion. Kim considers her career path to be a varied one that has worked to her advantage in terms of developing a sense of cultural sensitivity and serving as a bridge in connecting her previous career experiences to her current work as a culturally responsive school counselor. Her previous experiences working with undocumented individuals and serving as a RA (Resident Assistant) at the college level with students of a racially diverse background, exposed Kim to learning experiences that helped her gain the skillset needed to shape her work as she entered the counseling profession.

Kim's early career experiences were humbling in that they made her realize that she needed to have the stance as a learner. Being able to identify and accept that she did not have all the answers provided Kim with the learning opportunities needed to gain transferable knowledge. For example, Kim's work in helping undocumented Irish and Brazilian families attain permanent residency allowed her to witness firsthand the difficulties and discrimination these families endure. Kim realized that it was okay not to

have all the answers to their questions, but rather listen to their stories and provide them with the support and strategies needed throughout the immigration process.

Working in Residence Life during graduate school allowed Kim to learn many important skills required to address the difficult nature of culturally responsive work. For instance, in dealing with student conflicts revolving around discriminatory views and comments, part of Kim's learning was understanding the foundation of these bigoted beliefs. By meeting with the students individually and discussing how these thoughts developed at a young age helped Kim explore the student's prejudicial beliefs. Hearing comments such as: *"Oh, I don't like my roommate because she's black, and, you know, my family doesn't like black people"* to *"I'm Jewish, and I can't have a Muslim roommate"* allowed Kim to learn how to be with the students and understand the underpinnings of their prejudices; that is, primarily stemming from their families' stereotypical thoughts coupled with their own personal experiences.

In addition to her work with undocumented individuals and Residence Life, Kim's experiences as a legislative aid on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. allowed her to become immersed in culturally rich conversations. Such opportunities pushed Kim outside of her comfort zone and gave her the platform to engage in political actions. Kim explains:

"My love for politics and having the opportunity to advocate for the rights of underprivileged individuals helped me gain a sense of their constant struggles. Being able to voice my opinion and feel the isolation they feel allowed me to enter their realities and witness firsthand the hardships they experience."

It is these real life learning experiences that provided Kim with the opportunity to consistently immerse herself in advocacy work to give a voice to underrepresented individuals. Carrying this idea over into in her current work as a high school counselor, Kim has found that letting her students have a voice gives expression to things you don't want to hear. Kim details a recent group session for females who are at greater risk:

“During a group session, one of the girls in the group, who is Eastern European, was making derogatory statements about our Latino population, stating, “They are uneducated and don't have the skillset to be successful in college.” This prompted a female to shout out, “You should leave the group.” Rather than stop the conversation, as the group facilitator, I explained that it is important to hear her reasoning and encouraged the Eastern European female to share her perspective. She explained that growing up she was consistently told by family members that Latinos are uneducated. That prompted a Latina female in the group to ask, “Do you find that to be true in your interactions with Latinos?” The Eastern European female responded, “No. In fact, I think they are some of the hardest working people I know, but I could not say that around my parents.” That lead into a dialogue of the many discriminatory stereotypes that exist in today's society and how to address such negative beliefs. For example, a female in the group said, “I think it is important to say something when you hear such negative comments.” Another added, “If I don't say something it is a form of acceptance of whatever is being said.”

Kim describes such opportunities as “teachable moments” where she is able to take complex discussions and facilitate productive conversations where group members can challenge each others’ thoughts and ideas. By asking thought provoking questions that push group members beyond their comfort zone, Kim is able to educate group members and explain that it is okay for such sensitive conversations to become messy.

Below is an exchange between Kim and group members:

Kim: Do any other students hear discriminatory comments at home or in school?

Group Member: I have been hearing a lot more at home because of the election. My parents are sharing their thoughts on immigration that are not so nice.

Group Member: The election has definitely lead to many sensitive conversations about discrimination and immigration.

Kim: How do these conversations make you girls feel?

Group Member: It is really uncomfortable, especially if you don’t agree with what the other person is saying. But I think they are important because that is how you educate others.

Group Member: I think that having these conversations in this group makes me feel safe because I trust everyone in this group. But outside this group, I am not so sure I would be as vocal.

Kim: I am glad you said that because the purpose of this group is to create a safe and trusting space where everyone can share their thoughts and feelings and we can discuss them in a respectful manner. It is also important to understand that when you are talking about such sensitive topics outside this group, it is ok to feel

uneasy or apprehensive about sharing your opinion; however, that is how progress takes place.

School Counselors Taking the Lead. As the trained professional in ensuring fair and equitable educational services to all students and families, Kim often finds herself in the position of needing to take the lead in initiating the delivery of responsive services. Kim describes leading this charge as an “*all hands on deck approach*” that involves collaboration among students, parents, faculty, and administrative staff, Kim explains:

“As counselors, we are the experts in delivering culturally responsive services. The one thing that’s really good here is that the administration, school counselors, child study team members, and teachers, all have a really good rapport and understand that everyone has a function in creating a responsive school culture. The principal has really been one our biggest advocates and often utilizes his counselors during staff meetings to educate faculty on various counseling topics. As counselors we are really looked upon to serve as the change agents in the school. However, creating a culturally responsive school is not solely the responsibility of the school counselors; rather, it involves all key stakeholders (administrators, faculty, parents, students, and community members) to play a role.

Being identified as a change agent allows Kim to lead the charge and advocate for new initiatives for underrepresented students with teachers and administrators. For example, seeing an increase in the transgendered population, Kim works with teachers to teach lessons on raising awareness regarding sexual orientation, acceptance of one

another, and the importance of celebrating student differences. Teaching with other colleagues provides Kim with an opportunity for her to share her knowledge with others, but to also maintain a pulse on the needs of the teachers and students. Consistently evaluating the needs of both the teacher and student population is essential in fostering a positive school culture. As Kim describes it, *“I think of it as an orchestra all working together in harmony to create a school culture that provides all students with fair and equitable services.”*

The knowledge Kim gains in the classroom is consistently shared with her fellow counselors, supervisor, and building principal to discuss possible future school initiatives. Many of these initiatives and ideas are discussed at faculty meetings where Kim is often asked to facilitate conversations based on the knowledge she is gathering in her discussions with teachers, parents, and fellow counselors. Kim explains:

“Although faculty meeting presentations are often thought as commentary and scripted, having myself or a fellow counselor serve as lead facilitators changes the tone of the presentations from action less to action packed. For example, we often make our dialogues teacher focused; that is, we ask the teachers to share what they are seeing and hearing in the classrooms. These conversations can serve as “spring boards” for future counselor led classroom lessons. In addition, at the beginning of each year, the counselors meet with all new staff members to discuss the role of a school counselor. A major focus of these conversations with new staff centers around creating a positive school culture and emphasizing working together as a team.”

A multi-layered task that extends beyond school personnel to include students and parents alike, leading a charge that is focused on equitable services for all students requires school counselors to take a proactive approach and not sit back. Kim explains meeting with her special needs students and families to discuss the college process:

“A complex journey for all students, the college process usually gives my special needs students and parents an increased level of anxiety. Traditionally, I have always set up a meeting during their junior year consisting of myself, the student, parent/s, and case manager. The meeting allowed for an informative dialogue covering all the important aspects of the college process. However, I began to notice that the case managers, who oversee the students four-year academic plan, lacked the knowledge needed regarding the college process to effectively meet their student’s academic needs.”

Although meeting with students and parents regarding the college process is a rather routine task in a school counselor’s job description, evaluating the process, collecting data, and adjusting future practices accordingly are the key elements that separate Kim from operating as a change agent as opposed to maintaining the status-quo. For example, noticing that members of the child study team lacked information on aligning four year course plans with college requirements, Kim uses that information and turns it into action. By meeting with each of the case managers individually, Kim is able to review pertinent information regarding courses and the college process resulting in improved responsive services for special needs students and parents.

In addition to applying the information gathered from her observations and interactions with colleagues to improve school culture, Kim emphasizes staying abreast of the current literature and maintaining an active network of school counselors for herself. Whether it is reading journal articles, attending national/local conferences, or engaging in conversations with other school counseling professionals, Kim is continually adding to her counseling toolkit. Staying up-to-date in her practice ensures Kim being equipped with new innovative ideas and implementing best practices in her work. Kim explains:

“Delivering responsive services is challenging work. It is always about pushing yourself to overcome obstacles and being an advocate to help initiate change. Once you stop pushing yourself, you become ineffective and that’s when stagnation sets in. One of the best things you can do in implementing change is to assess your school’s trends, look for any injustices, and devise an action plan to address those inequalities.”

One of Kim’s biggest challenges is centered around student scheduling and course selection. As the point person responsible for meeting with each student and selecting courses for the following year, Kim plays a vital role in helping students not only select their courses, but also appropriately placing them based on their academic ability. One of the major components in this process is working with the teachers and their course recommendations. Kim often finds herself meeting with teachers and advocating for underrepresented individuals to be recommended for advanced level courses. For example, Kim explains that sometimes she has to go to teachers and say, *“He/she has*

maintained an “A” all year and would like to meet to discuss being moved up a level.”

Although she is sometimes met with resistance, Kim has found that meeting together with the student and teacher, explaining the student’s case and coming up with action plan to ensure the student’s academic success often ends with the teacher agreeing to the higher level recommendation.

Additionally, Kim emphasizes maintaining a work life balance is essential in preventing counselor burnout. Kim states, *“Being a school counselor is mentally draining. We are tasked with many responsibilities that are grounded in advocating for our students; however, it begins with taking care of yourself.”* Staying active with her own personal hobbies allows Kim to decompress and clear her mind. Consistently collaborating with colleagues at work enables Kim to share her thoughts, feelings, and express frustrations. Having multiple outlets both at work and outside of work is key in ensuring Kim’s mental wellness.

Cultivating Self-Confidence. Compared to other students, marginalized students are at greater risk of encountering school bullying, violence, academic failure, and substance abuse. Although providing a sense a comfort and active listening are important skills in the counseling relationship, Kim points to building a sense of self-worth as a foundational component when working with students from underrepresented groups. Being able to enter their world and truly understand their struggles is a challenging process that is a multilayered, this is the tension. As a white woman she really can’t understand this struggle, but is trying to as the student’s counselor. It requires Kim to see things as they see them and internalize their realities. By being with them, gaining their

sense of trust, validating their experiences of oppression, and educating herself on how these experiences impact the lives of marginalized students, Kim is able to understand their realities and the discrimination they face in today's society.

Although part of this work for Kim is focusing on the students who have been ostracized and made to feel as invisible members of society, Kim recognizes that her work also includes addressing the perpetrators and factors that are responsible for making marginalized students miserable. Creating an environment that includes a better inclusive school culture is key in promoting acceptance throughout the school community. By establishing a culture that promotes positive acknowledgement of all students, Kim is able to work on improving their self-esteem and building their self-confidence:

Frank: What have you found to be helpful in working with your students of color, special needs students, and LGBTQ population?

Kim: One of the most important things is to make them feel valued. These students have been ignored and are often ostracized by other students. Such negative experiences impact their self-esteem leading to a lack of self-confidence.

Frank: So how do you work towards addressing these issues of isolation and the mistreatment of these students?

Kim: I think it is important to work with the culprits in addition to these marginalized students. By working with the teachers and going into the classrooms to educate students on issues of acceptance allows me to lay the groundwork for creating change and promoting a positive school culture. Also, collaborating with the administration to make these marginalized students feel

more welcomed in the school building is essential. By having clubs such as “Gay Straight Alliance” gives these students a voice and representation in the building which important to raising their self-confidence and making them feel visible.

Understanding these students’ realities and showing them that they matter, Kim highlights a hands-on approach where traditionally underserved students witness tangible actions being carried out to foster their success. Demonstrating how this looks in her work, Kim describes an experience with a 9th grade African American female:

“Four years ago, we started a recognition program where any freshman who received all “A”s in a marking period was sent a letter home acknowledging his/her achievement. Upon reviewing the 1st marking period grades, I noticed that one of my African American female students received all “A”s. I called her to my office and said, “Congratulations on receiving all “A”s in the first marking period. I see you are in all college prep classes and getting 99s, Is this too easy for you? Yes, she responds, but Honors will be too hard for me and I wasn’t recommended; plus, it’s probably to late to make changes now she explains.”

By acknowledging the student’s accomplishments and praising her for doing some fact finding of her own regarding level changes, Kim demonstrates a keen interest in the student. Identifying the student’s lack of self-esteem and self-assurance, Kim’s suggestion of exploring different options and seeing if anything can be done displays going the extra mile for the student. Suggesting to meet together with the teachers, Kim shows her confidence in the student’s abilities. Protecting against an academic misplacement, Kim’s setting up of a probation period where the student is able to assess

her comfort level in the Honors class without penalty provides the student with a much needed sense of encouragement. Consistently encouraging her student to challenge herself and take educated risks resulted in the student taking Honors and Advanced Placement classes for the remainder of her high school career. Periodically checking-in and discussing future goals with the student were key in Kim demonstrating a vested interest in her student. Revisiting the student's academic plan at the beginning of each year allows Kim to ensure appropriate academic rigor for the student.

Pointing to patience in the process, Kim explains, *“building a student's self-confidence takes more than just time; rather, it takes understanding the marginalization that these underrepresented students have experienced their entire lives.”* Being able to build their self-confidence requires Kim to see their experiences through their eyes. By placing herself in their reality, Kim identifies a starting point in building their self-confidence. Kim describes experiences with her LGBTQ population:

“I've noticed that many of our LGBTQ students don't seek out their counselors as much other students do. Some students will say, “I am tired of being judged by other people; Don't worry about me; I don't need to talk to my counselor; I'll talk to my friends who are like me and understand me.”

In discussing such comments with her LGBTQ students, Kim is able to identify their thoughts and feelings and see the world through their realities. Building their self-confidence starts by listening to them and understanding how their past experiences impact their current actions. Requiring time, dedication, and above all acknowledging the oppression they continue to experience, Kim works towards building their self-

confidence by acknowledging them in the hallways, going to get them from class, listening to their stories, finding out interests, and creating a safe thriving environment.

By cultivating an atmosphere of self-confidence, Kim provides marginalized students with a drastically different counseling experiences than they have encountered in the past. By taking a vested interest in her LGBTQ students and consistently meeting with them allows Kim to listen to their stories and understand their experiences. By establishing a trusting relationship, Kim is able to understand their feeling of being invisible and unknown to members of the school community.

Seeing the world through their eyes and understanding how their past negative experiences continue to impact their current behavior, Kim focuses on delivering practices that are centered on building the student's self-esteem and at the same time addressing the homophobia in the school. By working with the administration to implement teacher professional developments, counselor led class discussions, and establishing clubs such as Gay Straight Alliance, Kim witnesses a shift where issues of homophobia are addressed and her LGBTQ students begin to gain an increased sense of self-worth, visibility, and belongingness in the school building.

An Ongoing Journey that encompasses difficult work, developing cultural responsiveness is a process that takes time. Greatly influenced by her career related experiences in working with marginalized individuals, it is Kim's *immersion* in such experiences that are instrumental in her meaning making process of becoming a culturally responsive counselor. Kim's exposure to such culturally rich experiences pushed her

beyond her comfort zone and provided her with the skillset needed to address educational inequalities.

A calling that provides an opportunity for fair and equitable services to an increasingly diverse student population, Kim encourages school counselors to take the lead and *serve as change agents* in collaborating with key stakeholders to ensure the delivery of such practices. As the trained professional in cultural responsiveness, Kim positions herself to utilize her expertise to educate others around her and create change for her underrepresented students.

Creating an atmosphere that promotes a sense of self-confidence in students that have been traditionally marginalized and are at higher risk of increased incidences of bullying, violence, and academic failure, Kim provides practices that are grounded in understanding the student's reality coupled with delivering tangible services that are visible to the student. Kim finds practices that foster a sense of self-worth cultivates self-confidence for students that continue to face societal obstacles in achieving equality. Through culturally responsive tenets of immersion, school counselors taking the lead, and cultivating self-confidence, it is Kim's belief that school counselors would be better equipped in meeting the needs and educational injustices that continue to plague marginalized students.

See Figure 2 for a visual representation of the three identified sub-themes and the one overarching theme of Kim's case.

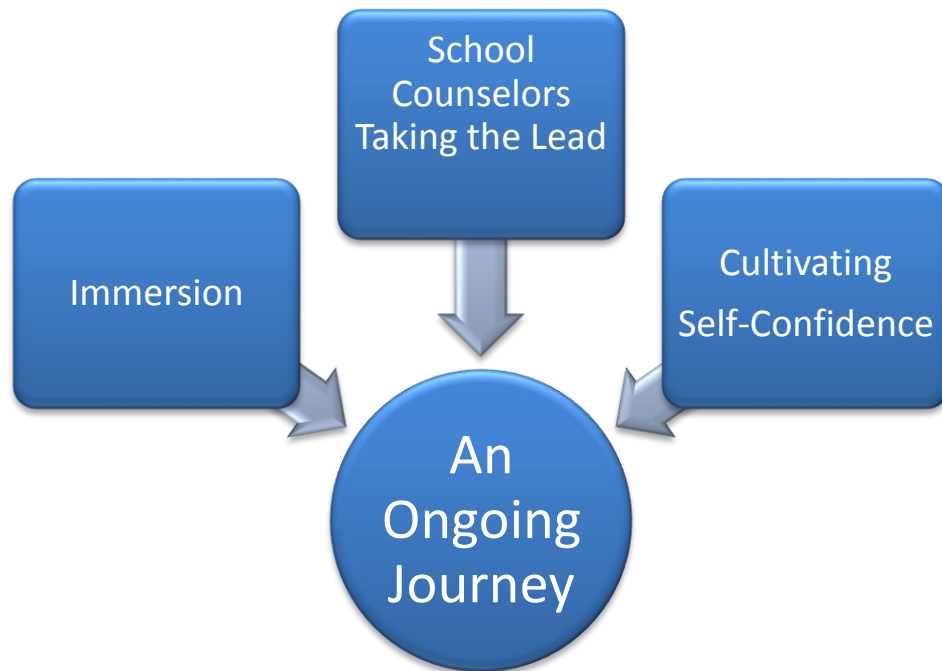


Figure 2. Identified Themes for Participant Kim

Case of Sarah

My third case is Sarah, a 47-year-old Jewish female, who has been a high school counselor for 17 years. The high school Sarah works in has 1,295 students and is comprised of one suburban town in the Northeast. Unlike Lisa's and Kim's towns, where the homes were spaciouly spread apart, small tutor homes spaced closely together spread across areas of manicured lawns. The yearly median income per household is \$92,000 with the demographic makeup being; 56% white, 29% African American, 5% Asia and 10% Latino; however, the high school student population is 11% white, 44% African American, 11% Asia, 24% Latino and 10% opting not to disclosure demographic information. Being a town where many of the white students attend Yeshivas and private schools, there is a difference between the town demographics and those of the high

school. Given the option between public and private schools, only 60% of students attend the public high school, which is vastly lower than the high schools Lisa and Kim work in. Located immediately off of a major highway, a drive into the high school's main entrance reveals a parking lot to the left and a brown brick school building to the right surrounded by trees and grass. A few students sit outside on the stairs that lead to the building. Upon entering the school, two security officers stand behind a desk greeting visitors and having them sign in. Once signed in, one of the security officers escorts the visitors to their destination. Behind the security officers' desk is the entrance to the school counseling suite to the left and the main office's entrance to the right. A walk into the school counseling suite reveals a long parallel shaped suite with two secretaries sitting behind their desk located in the center of the suite. Tasked with welcoming guests and notifying the appropriate counselor when visitors have arrived, one of the secretaries called Sarah upon my arrival. A large bulletin board with the heading "Our Students" in blue lettering containing newspaper clippings of individual academic and athletic recognitions of current students decorates the back wall. A look to the right and left of the parallel shaped school counseling suite shows 3 counseling offices to the right of the secretaries' desks and 4 counseling offices to their left. Standing next to one of the secretaries is Sarah waiting for my arrival.

Working together with Sarah for 7 years as a counseling colleague and 2 years as her supervisor, she greets me with a big hug and smile. Knowing Sarah and having an existing professional relationship as both her colleague and supervisor created an interesting dynamic in regards to the interview and meaning making process for both of

us. For example, a few times during the interview, Sarah alluded to our time together bringing back memories of discussions we use to have regarding the injustices in the high school. Similarly, I also felt that many of my questions were extensions of previous conversations we had regarding the delivery of responsive services.

Ironically enough, the aforementioned conversations often took place in Sarah's office, which was the same setting where the interviews were conducted. A setting that looked the same and was very familiar to me, a walk into Sarah's office shows a medium-sized welcoming space with her desk to the right facing away from the entrance and a book case holding various pieces of literature to the right of her desk. On the wall to the left of Sarah's desk is a bulletin board lined with thank you notes and graduation pictures of former students. Dressed in a professional manner and her hair pulled back, Sarah's presence is friendly and engaging throughout the interview process. Being the most detailed and explanatory of all three participants with her responses, Sarah's explanations are filled with specific narratives highlighting the difficulty of culturally responsive work. Sarah explains, "Delivering culturally responsive practices is not easy and often filled with many obstacles that prevent the delivery of such services." Consistently maintaining eye-contact and answering in an approachable manner creates a welcoming atmosphere.

Diverse Lived Experiences. Growing up in a town where she was consistently surrounded by diverse cultures and ethnicities, Sarah's lived experiences created a cultural awareness at a young age. As a youngster Sarah recalls constantly having conversations that focused on diversity and different customs with her parents and

friends. Being raised and now working as a school counselor in a town that was instrumental in the desegregation of schools in the United States, has greatly influenced her. Sarah explains her experiences of growing up in a culturally diverse town:

“Growing up, I was always around diverse groups of people and different languages. Acceptance of different cultures was always emphasized by my parents and this belief stayed with me throughout my life. Although I grew up in middle-class household, I interacted with many different groups of people that struggled financially and were underrepresented. I believe that all of this exposure and various experiences played a role in creating my awareness. Exposure and interaction with others that were very different than me at such a young age was very influential.”

Growing up in a household of middle socioeconomic status, Sarah recounts experiences with friends that were less fortunate than her and witnessing the separation of society based on one’s social class. As she explained, *“Witnessing the division of people based on their economic status is something that really opened my eyes to the injustices people go through in our society.”* For example, she recalls some of her more affluent friends having tutors throughout middle-school and high school; in comparison, friends from a lower socioeconomic status weren’t so fortunate and struggled with their academics. Additionally, some of her wealthier high school friends had college coaches to help them through the college process where other friends whose families couldn’t afford such services often times ended up missing out on opportunities such as financial aid and scholarships. Applying these experiences to her work as a school counselor

allowed Sarah to enter the counseling profession with an increased sense of awareness surrounding the socioeconomic inequities present in her school. Working in a district where approximately 33% of the student population receives free or reduced lunch, Sarah is consistently seeking helpful resources to aid this population of students. For example, during her 11th grade college conferences, Sarah makes it a point to inform her students and families who are eligible to receive free and reduced lunch that they are entitled to have two fee waivers for both the ACT and SAT college entrance exams. Such examples highlight how Sarah's past experiences surrounding social class have informed her practice in ensuring responsive services to her students and families.

In addition to Sarah's experiences and understanding the division of individuals based on social class in the United States, living in Israel for two years and attending both fifth and sixth grade there also allowed Sarah to continue developing her cultural experiences in a new country at a young age. Adapting to life in a new country and learning to speak Hebrew after arriving in Israel gave Sarah first hand knowledge of a very different way of life. Memories of learning a new language, adapting to different customs, and living in an apartment building where soldiers regularly walked the streets with machine guns are experiences that Sarah refers to as being instrumental in further developing her cultural identity. Sarah explains:

“The idea of moving to a different country and meeting new people from various backgrounds was not easy. At such a young age, I remember being afraid and lost. Leaving my friends and the idea of creating new ones was a daunting task to think about at my age. However, once in Israel, I really began gaining an

appreciation for all people. The fact that most of the people there, children and adults alike, were so inviting and welcoming really stayed with me. It was a really a life changing experience, in that, I was around different groups of people and who spoke a language that was unfamiliar to me. Because I didn't actually speak the language when I went there, I had to learn it while living there which was uncomfortable."

Personally knowing what it feels like to be unfamiliar with the societal norms of a new country and not knowing the language, Sarah uses such past experiences in relating to the uncomfortable realities that her new students and families experience when transferring into the high school where she works. With an average of 75 students either transferring in or out of her high school each year, Sarah is consistently tasked with ensuring that the student's transcript reflects an accurate description of the previous courses taken. Assigning credit for all the courses previously taken and matching them to meet the high school state requirements is a key component in helping students graduate and receive a high school diploma. Although not all students transfer from a different country, a change of scenery that often times involves exposure to people of different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic class, and sexual orientation creates a sense of uneasiness for students and families. Sarah continues:

"Moving to a new country and transferring schools is an experience with many dimensions. For me, living in Israel for two years provided me with many learning opportunities that pushed me out of my comfort zone. Unlike a family that moves out of desperation, my father took a two-year sabbatical from teaching

to provide this experience for my family. Nonetheless the idea of moving to a foreign country was still an intimidating feeling. Such past experiences enable me to connect with my new students and relate to those feelings of uneasiness. Similar to my experience, many of the students that transfer into the high school from another country or different school district have not been forced to move; rather, their families have elected to come to the United States or transfer in from another town. Being able to understand their realities and think back to what helped me feel comfortable allows me to understand their emotions they are experiencing. For example, when my new students describe sitting in class and being afraid to speak, I'm thinking, I remember that. I remember what it's like to feel alone and not understand what is going on."

Understanding their realities and feelings of isolation leads Sarah to implement different strategies with her new students that are grounded in making a connection and creating a sense of comfort for both the student and parents. For example, knowing that creating new relationships was very helpful for her in Israel, Sarah meets with the student and families individually to find out more about how she can best meet their needs. Familiarizing herself with the new student allows Sarah to send each teacher an introductory email that is specific in explaining the student's background and individualized details overviewing the students needs. Knowing that a follow-up is essential in the student's transition, Sarah sets up a follow-up meeting with the student, family, and teachers two weeks after the initial email to evaluate how the student is

progressing and if there is a need for any modifications in the students academic, social and/or career plan.

Through her personal encounters with friends less fortunate, Sarah was able to see other's real life struggles firsthand. Being able to personally witness the role (SES) socioeconomic status plays in society provided Sarah with an increased sense of awareness on the disparities in services received based on one's SES. Sarah shares an exchange with a classmate in Israel at age 11:

"It was my birthday and one of the kids in school brought me a present. She gave me something wrapped in newspaper and told me not to open it until I got home. So, when I got home, I opened it, and it was a half-filled bottle of bubbles. And I remember being 11 years old and thinking, my God, this girl seriously had nothing, but she wanted to give me something of hers. I know it may not sound like a big deal, but as a young kid it truly impacted me and continues to influence my work as a school counselor. For example, many of my students who transfer both into and out of the high school often bring me a little gift that they either made or brought from their country as a gesture of thanks.

Understanding the importance of her situated privilege and how that plays out in not only delivering acts of kindness, but making the connection between kindness and instilling a sense of confidence in her students is the take away for Sarah in her work as a counselor. Often thinking back to her feeling of privilege when she was given the present, Sarah often delivers gestures that display her caring nature towards her students as a foundational piece in developing her students' trust. For example, running a list each

morning to see which of her students is celebrating a birthday, Sarah either goes to their classroom or sends them an email wishing them a happy birthday. When reading a newspaper article about an athletic and academic accolade that one of her students has received, Sarah displays it in her office on her bulletin board.

As Sarah explains it, *“It is not just about me being a nice person; rather, it is about my kindness opening a line of communication that allows me to build a trusting relationship with the student. I have found that one of the key components in working with marginalized students is building a relationship that is grounded in trust and consistency.”* On the surface, such gestures are viewed as nice and rather routine from a counseling standpoint; however, it is the deeper meaning that connects Sarah’s sense of caring and commitment to building a sense of self-confidence in her students that is noteworthy.

Interacting with students of different socioeconomic groups, customs, and values created a notion of acceptance and appreciation which has stayed with Sarah in her current work as a school counselor. It is this understanding that helps Sarah deliver services that help minimize the responsiveness gap that exists in her school. For example, identifying her special needs males that are at greater risk of losing course credit due to excessive absences, Sarah created a support group that discusses effective strategies to help these students stay in school. Additionally, knowing the difficulties associated with transferring into a new school, Sarah holds monthly meetings with her recently transferred new students and families throughout their first year to help them effectively transition to the high school.

Support of Key Stakeholders. In addition to her diverse lived experiences, responsive work requires more than just the effort of one person; rather, Sarah emphasizes the importance of all key stakeholders working together in establishing fair and equitable services for all students. As noted in the literature, a successful school counseling program cannot be successful without the support and collaboration of key stakeholders within the school system and community (Jackson et al., 2002).

Starting with her fellow counselors in her own department, Sarah highlights the important roles her colleagues play in ensuring responsive practices. Exchanging thoughts with her fellow counselors within a diverse make-up allows Sarah to see different perspectives that she may not have considered. Sarah explains:

“As counselors we must remember that in providing responsive services we do not know everything and have to be okay with seeking others that are more knowledgeable than us on a specific topic. I often go and speak with my colleague whose office is next to mine. Jon is one of my former students and now a counselor. Being that he is an African American male, I will go to him if I feel one of my students would benefit from speaking with a positive African-American male figure. For example, I have an African-American male whose father was murdered. The student is often involved in altercations with males so I set up a meeting for my student to meet Jon in my office. I first spoke with the student and see how he felt about speaking with Jon. Once he gave me the go ahead, I then went to Jon to give him a little background. In the end, Jon and my students were able to create a bond that allowed the student a safe place to go to when needed.”

Admitting that you don't know everything, the delivery of responsive services requires being willing to be vulnerable with more knowledgeable others and being okay with the fact that your colleague may know more than you surrounding a specific population. For example, acknowledging that her male student may benefit from meeting with Jon, Sarah continues to grow into authentic work and aligns conditions of support for both herself and the student.

In addition to collaborating with members of her department, culturally responsive work also requires the support of administrators and Board of Education members; however, Sarah describes this as a constant battle of justifying her job description and responsibilities. The lack of respect that is often encountered from Board of Education members and administrators alike leave Sarah and her colleagues feeling frustrated and unsupported. Many of the battles involve seeking out approval for professional development opportunities. Sarah explains that without the support of key stakeholders, attending professional developments can become virtually impossible. Often times there are professional developments that either Sarah and/or other counselors want to attend, but the red tape and bureaucracy of attaining approvals interferes. A process that starts with her supervisor's approval, Sarah highlights a lack of understanding regarding counselor development by those who control the way in which money spent by the school district.

A multi-layered approval process where professional development opportunities are often times denied, Sarah points to the obstruction that can sometimes result for herself and fellow counselors. Highlighting monetary reasons and lack of understanding

in regards to the daily tasks of a school counselor, Sarah points to the importance of school counselors taking a proactive approach in advocating for the profession.

Emphasizing that such failed opportunities leave her feeling discouraged, Sarah uses such experiences as a motivating factor in advocating for her profession and collaborating with her supervisor to understand how to make attending professional developments a reality.

Sarah explains:

“Although our supervisor does bring in guest speakers on designated professional development days, it is much more difficult for us as counselors to get approval to attend professional developments where we leave the building. I think that money is an issue and the fact that they don’t want many counselors being out of the building at once. Also, I think there is a lack of respect and understanding for what we do as counselors.”

Highlighting the the lack of awareness surrounding the counseling profession, Sarah points to the advocacy piece as being a crucial component of her work. Although she recognizes the difficulty of her work, Sarah feels that her job responsibilities are often times misunderstood; however, through the use of data, presentations, and dialogue these misconceptions and lack of awareness surrounding the counseling profession can be addressed. Sarah explains:

“Knowing that getting professional developments approved is difficult, I approached my supervisor and discussed my frustrations. He highlighted that in order to attend such opportunities, they must be affordable and relevant to our population. Knowing that we have a fairly large Spanish speaking population in

our school and that it is a population that is underrepresented at the college level, I was able to find a free one-day program that focused on this very population. Ultimately, it was approved and supported by key stakeholders.”

Sarah believes moving from a reactive position that often comes across as defensive to a more proactive and collaborative approach is a key element in moving the counseling profession forward. Advocating for students that have been traditionally marginalized, engaging in productive dialogue with key stakeholders, and holding ourselves accountable for our professional responsibilities allows for the delivery of culturally responsive school counseling practices. With the use of such strategies in confronting obstacles, it is Sarah’s hope that fair and equitable services for all students will move from being a constant battle to an accepted norm by all stakeholders involved.

Confronting Obstacles. Growing up with friends from varied socioeconomic backgrounds and currently working with approximately 33% of students who receive free or reduced lunch provides Sarah with the opportunity to work with students from various socioeconomic classes. Highlighting the inequalities that are often present with her underrepresented populations, Sarah makes very clear that her work in seeking out fair services for these students and families is a constant struggle. An arduous task that is many times filled with barriers and inaccessible services, Sarah spends a large portion of our time together underscoring that her work can often become confrontational when advocating for the rights of her underserved students. Sarah explains:

“Providing fair services for all students is not easy. Many times I find myself arguing with teachers regarding the services a student is entitled to, especially

with my special needs students and their IEP accommodations. One of the main things that makes responsive work so difficult is the lack of awareness and willingness on the part of the teachers and administrators. It's not just about raising awareness; rather, it's taking that awareness and locating the resources needed to deliver equitable services. As the student's advocate, it is my job to bring these injustices to light and work with the teachers and administrators and challenge the beliefs and practices."

Vastly different from Lisa's and Kim's experiences and "cheerleading" renditions of culturally responsive work, Sarah does not sugar coat the fact that delivery of fair and equitable services is an extremely difficult undertaking that requires the counselor to "get his/her hands dirty." Filled with tasks that challenge unjust policies and working to overcome barriers, the delivery of fair services for all students is a challenging job that is often uncomfortable. Sarah often finds herself having to challenge the status quo of past procedures that have been put in place. For example, one of the course requirements to take Culinary Arts III is to earn a grade no less than a "B" in Culinary Arts II. Last year, two of her special needs students earned a "C+" and were initially told that they were not eligible to continue on in the Culinary Arts III. Feeling that they were given that grade to purposely keep them from advancing, Sarah first spoke with her supervisor and then set up a meeting with the building principal and department supervisor to discuss the issue. Considering that both students were possibly thinking of pursuing culinary arts post high school, Sarah felt it important to advocate for her students. Through her persistence, Sarah was able to get her students in the course and initiated a discussion on removing

the grade prerequisite moving forward for all other students looking to enroll in the course.

Repeatedly reminding me that her responsive lens is specific to the diverse experiences that have impacted her up to this point, Sarah describes responsive work as a continuous journey that is without an exact starting and ending point. She highlights the fact that cultural responsiveness is filled with learning experiences that continually take place to inform ones' practice. Pointing to her graduate work as a time that was filled with challenging her classmates' viewpoints, Sarah describes her experiences in graduate school:

"I remember being in grad school and thinking to myself what is wrong with these people? First of all, there were all white students with many of them were explaining that they never met a black person. So I am thinking to myself if you never never met a black person how can you ever begin understand their needs and struggles. There were many angry exchanges I had with classmates regarding their comments and feelings towards underrepresented populations. For example, people would often comment, "Black people should stop thinking everyone is against them;" to which I would respond, "Have you ever been pulled over or followed around in a store for the fear that you may steal something just because of your skin color?"

A response strategy that in retrospect Sarah admits was not effective and stemmed from being frustrated with her peers for what could be understood as un-informed points of view, Sarah emphasizes that culturally responsive work is a messy process that

constantly requires challenging other's beliefs, actions, and statements. Sarah pushes on what she sees as mistaken analyses and beliefs – where folks speak out of their own privilege and bring it into the work without challenging themselves. As Sarah describes it, *“When I heard everyone making such insensitive comments, it dawned on me that there is so much lack of awareness and knowledge surrounding the everyday injustices that take place in the world.”* Tasked with an important responsibility of bridging the gap between lack of awareness, skillset, knowledge, and responsive counseling, Sarah highlights the key role that graduate programs play in infusing topics of cultural responsiveness into their curriculum.

For Sarah, culturally responsive work is a way of thinking that didn't stop once she left classroom; rather, it was something that continued to develop as she challenged her own assumptions and beliefs. As she describes it, *“Acceptance of people's differences is something innate that becomes a part of you as you challenge your own biases and not something that you have to think about.”* Sarah goes on to further explain that her cultural responsiveness is not something that she turns on and off like a light switch. It is an awareness that continues to grow through her personal experiences and interactions with her students. Highlighting no beginning and end point, Sarah emphasizes the continuous journey that ultimately leads to the development of her cultural responsiveness.

Applying this mindset in her work as a school counselor and ensuring the delivery of responsive services is a tiring process that presents many challenges. Sarah often finds herself “battling” with parents and teachers alike. Sarah describes a challenging experience with a father of a Muslim female who recently transferred from Bosnia:

“I have a Muslim female that just came here from Bosnia. My first meeting with the girl’s father was pretty intense. He was actually very aggressive towards me and spoke to me in a condescending manner explaining that in his culture there is a hierarchy with males being at the top. Because it was our first meeting and I was aware that his cultural lens is very different than mine based on his values, customs and traditions, I just listened to him initially. In my responses, I made it a point to acknowledge his viewpoints by nodding and reassure him that although this is a new cultural for his family, we will work together in meeting their needs. Now being in the country for three months, he continually reminds me that he is in charge of his household and will decide what school activities his daughter will and will not be allowed to participate in.”

This is the kind of intensity of the work where you have to “perform” being fine with someone being challenging and aggressive – and then also with wanting to maintain the patriarchal hierarchy as his daughter makes her way in the US. For Sarah, the ongoing work is a balancing act of working with the daughter to provide her responsive services based on her needs and at the same time forming a counselor/parent relationship with the father. As Sarah explained it, *“My main focus is working with the daughter to help her effectively transition to her new high school; however, understanding the father’s beliefs allows me to create a successful academic plan that he is on board with as well.”*

Knowing that providing responsive services for students and families can sometimes be impeded by the families themselves, a multipronged approach that involves

understanding the parent's and student's cultural needs is often times needed in dealing with issues of acculturation.

In walking this tightrope of retaining her student's cultural heritage, but recognizing that the student lives in the United States, Sarah works together with the student in creating goals. Highlighting the feeling of empowerment that accompanies creating a list of goals, Sarah emphasizes the importance of giving the student "a voice" in her acculturation. Framing her work around a strength based perspective, Sarah often reminds her student that their sessions are confidential and meant to help her effectively transition into the high school. Focusing on helping her student integrate into her new environment, but at the same time maintaining the student's cultural heritage, Sarah points to the importance of dialogue in meeting her student where she is in her acculturation process.

In dealing with the teachers, Sarah is consistently met with resistance in regards to ensuring that her special needs students are treated fairly. A complex process that often involves systematic obstacles, challenging teacher's views, and raising their awareness in dealing with her special needs population is a constant charge for Sarah. Varied from her one-on-one work, Sarah explains that this kind of larger systematic work requires a different approach. An approach that requires Sarah to understand the teacher's perspective, Sarah highlights how her former years of being in the classroom as an English teacher has aided her in working with the teachers. She recalls the difficult task of having to *"juggle so many different academic levels in the class."*

Using her past teaching experiences to inform her current work with teachers, Sarah spends time collaborating with teachers and together creating individualized action plans to aid identified students. Applying strategies that Sarah recalls missing in her teacher/counselor relationship when she was in the classroom helps Sarah formulate an effective approach in her work with teachers. Highlighting her “run-ins” with teachers regarding placement of students with special needs in their classrooms, Sarah explains:

“Many times I have teachers come to me after they notice that some of the students on their class rosters have IEPs (Individualized Education Plans). They will say things like, I really have kids with IEP’s in my class or my class will be too difficult for him/her. Although it sometimes makes me angry and frustrated, many times their comments stem from not understanding the IEP, especially for new teachers. Explaining the accommodations to the teacher and meeting together (myself, teacher, and student) to develop a plan together usually helps out a great deal, but it is a constant fight of me advocating for the student, especially with the teachers that have been there a long time. I am always reminding them that we are a public high school and students are entitled to a free and fair education that must be met by fulfilling their needs and accommodations.”

A continuous and complex journey that I have identified as Sarah’s *Meaning Making Process*, Sarah does not sugar coat the fact that the delivery of fair and equitable for all students is extremely challenging work. Having grown up in a culturally rich community and attending school in a different country for two years, Sarah points to her

Diverse Lived Experiences as an influential in shaping her work as a culturally responsive school counselor. Pushing Sarah beyond her comfort zone and moving to Israel at a young age, it is her past feelings of loneliness that Sarah often recalls when working with students and parents who transfer into her high school.

Stressing the need of *Support from Key Stakeholders*, Sarah emphasizes the importance of being ok with not knowing everything and utilizing the support of her fellow counselor's expertise in relating better with certain students. Describing an often frustrating process of getting everyone on the same page, Sarah points to conversations with her supervisor as her immediate point person in what she describes as "*a chain of command*." In addressing the multilayered approval process of attending professional developments, lack of respect and misconceptions regarding the school counseling profession, Sarah employs a proactive approach that focuses on the use of data, dialogue, and raising awareness in meeting the needs of increasingly diverse student population.

Providing responsive services to an increasingly diverse student population is no simple task and should not be passed off as easy work. A demanding charge that is filled with challenges, Sarah describes it as a calling that involves *Confronting Obstacles*. Highlighting verbal confrontations in graduate school over insensitive comments and disagreements in her current work with teachers over the placement of special needs students into their classrooms, Sarah points to taking the time to educate her fellow colleagues on the needs of her underrepresented students.

See Figure 3 for a visual representation of the three identified sub-themes and the one overarching theme of Sarah's case.

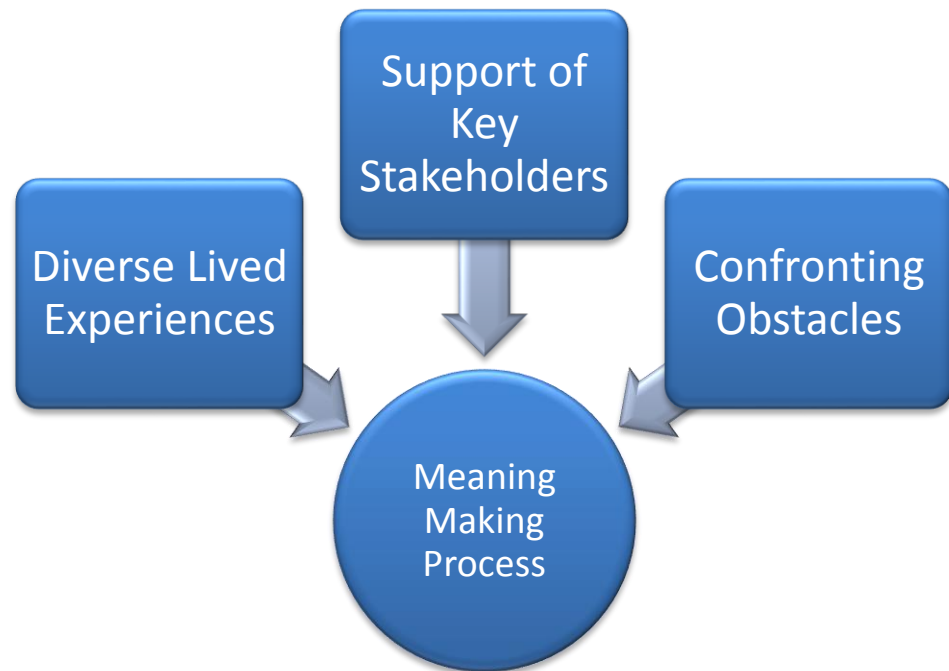


Figure 3. Identified Themes for Participant Sarah

Cross-Case Analysis

Different than the within-case analysis that focused on Lisa, Kim, and Sarah individually, a cross-case analysis allows me to move beyond each case and focus my attention on the rich description between each of the three cases. Where the within-case analysis paid attention to the uniqueness of each case, identification of common themes and categories regarding culturally responsive counseling practices across all three cases is accomplished through a cross-case analysis (Thomas, 2016). Although I did come across some themes and assertions that are unique to each participant's meaning making process, the cross-case analysis suggests that the overarching theme and sub-themes for all three cases share many similarities that span across each case.

An Ongoing Journey

One of the most consistent themes that all three participants note is how their meaning making process of becoming a culturally responsive school counselor is an ever-developing process. A continuous journey with no clear starting or ending point, responsive practices involve being aware of gaps in their knowledge and experiences and being open to learning from more informed others. Whether it is fellow counselors, the students themselves, or other educational professionals, all three participants point to learning from others as a crucial component in ensuring fair and equitable services for all students.

Collectively agreed upon by all three participants, becoming a culturally responsive counselor takes time and is a continually developing journey that varies for everyone based on their experiences. A multi-pronged approach that involves being able to identify when a situation is unfamiliar and being okay with not knowing how to best proceed, moving beyond traditional practices and collect the necessary tools needed to deliver responsive services is a constant theme across all three cases. Consistently checking in with their students and having the awareness to assess what is working and what needs improvement in their academic, career and social development is evident throughout all three cases.

In addition to consistently checking in with their students, another component that is essential for all three participants' in their ongoing journey is seeking out professional developments. Pointing to a process that is purposeful in specifically meeting the needs of their population, each participant identifies attending professional developments as an

important piece in cultivating their culturally responsive development. Stressing the obstacles in being able to access professional developments and the importance of collaboration among all key stakeholders, all three participants detail a creative approach in seeking out professional developments. Highlighting a process that combines intentionality and pursuing cost effective learning opportunities, all three participants emphasize attending professional developments that properly meet the needs of their population. Proactively seeking out opportunities that addresses the individual needs of their students and at the same time fosters their own professional growth is a common theme across all three cases.

Emphasizing a process with no exact beginning or ending, all three participants point to not having “arrived” to a level of cultural responsiveness; rather, being “an expert” means being open to ongoing learning as their context pushes on their current knowledge base. Seeking out professional developments and utilizing the knowledge of their fellow colleague’s expertise in relating better with certain students is a common theme encouraged by all three participants. Stressing a process that requires school counselors to grow into their authentic work, the delivery of responsive services requires novice counselors to be aware of the continuous and ever-changing nature of their work. A progression that serves as a foundational component in shaping their work as they entered the counseling profession, pushing beyond simple collaboration and accepting that they not know everything is a constant theme that is instrumental in each participant’s meaning making journey.

Practices Grounded in Personal Lived Experiences

Additionally, all three cases highlight personal lived experiences as being impactful in their responsive development along they way. Although each participant share experiences that are different in nature, all are early life experiences that helped form their level of responsiveness. Experiences that serve as central pieces in shaping their current work as school counselors, all three participants highlight significant events from their formative years. Whether being impacted before or after starting their work as school counselors, all three participants point to their personal lived experiences as important elements in shaping their culturally responsive work. These lived experiences helped create a foundational lens for all three participants, as well as establishing an entry point in their work as school counselors.

Whether it is Lisa's experience of having grown up and attending school in a primarily white neighborhood and constantly feeling like an outsider as a Muslim female; Kim's previous experiences of serving as a RA (Resident Assistant) at the college level for students of a racially diverse background; or Sarah's experiences of living in Israel for two years and attending both fifth and sixth grade, each participant's personal lived experiences is essential in shaping their skillset upon their entering into the counseling profession. Although experiences were different and unique for each participant, the common theme across all three cases is how each participants' personal journey impacts their level of responsiveness.

Whereas each participant could continue carrying their sense of uneasiness with them, they instead take their past feelings of discomfort and turn them into positive

learning experiences. Applying such a constructive approach to understanding their experiences allows each participant to actively use their lived sense of difference in their current work with students who articulate feeling just that. Often referring to their past experiences as serving as a bridge to their current work as culturally responsive school counselors, it is these real life learning experiences that provide each participant with the opportunity to consistently push themselves outside of their comfort zone. Immersing themselves in unfamiliar situations provides each participant with the skillset needed in delivering services that are fair and equitable for all students.

A constant theme throughout the participants' meaning making process, early life experiences serve as significant factors in being influential in shaping their culturally responsiveness. Exposure to diverse cultures, socioeconomic groups, and customs is crucial in sensitizing each participant to their own experience of being immersed in an unfamiliar situation. From Lisa's and Sarah's experiences of personally knowing what it feels like to have different cultural norms from others around them to Sarah's working with undocumented individuals, pushing beyond their comfort zone plays a key role for each participant. Such personal experiences during their formative years created a level of cultural awareness for each participant that serve as their entry point into their work as school counselors.

School Counselors Taking a Lead Position

Whether it's Lisa's *Moving Beyond Conventional Practices*, Kim's *School Counselors Taking the Lead*, or Sarah's *gaining Support of Key Stakeholders*, all three participants share similarities in highlighting the need for school counselors to take a lead

position in delivering culturally responsive practices. In actual practice, serving as change agents and spearheading responsive work means taking action. It requires the school counselors to actively work with key stakeholders to provide educational justice and equity to every student. Going beyond the once a year “Diversity Day” and consistently providing accessibility for all students creates a culture of acceptance throughout the school building. Lee (2001) points to ongoing staff development, pushing beyond one’s comfort zone and making changes to existing policies as crucial components in school counselors initiating change.

A process where school counselors move away from the traditional approach and transform it to a personalized practice that is tailored to meet each student’s specific needs is a consistent theme for all three participants. Whether it’s Lisa’s purposeful approach, Kim’s hands on disposition, or Sarah’s collaborative nature, taking a lead position involves maintaining a progressive mindset coupled with challenging existing policies. A practice that looks different for each student depending on his/her ever-changing needs, being purposeful and constantly pushing themselves outside of their comfort zone in ensuring the delivery of responsive practices is consistent across all three cases.

A multi-layered task that includes school personnel, students and parents alike, leading a charge that focuses on equitable services for all students requires school counselors to not sit back; rather, take a proactive approach with all key stakeholders. In working with key stakeholders, all three participants highlight the importance of consistently evaluating existing policies that are often outdated and replacing them with

new school initiatives that ensures meeting the needs of all students. For example, keeping their transgendered student population in mind, Lisa's high school has 3 gender neutral bathrooms throughout the school building. A practice that is also noted in the literature (Jackson et al., 2002), not operating in a vacuum enables all parties to gain various perspectives ultimately leading to the betterment of each student. Whether it's Sarah advocating for her special needs population, Kim challenging the status quo of minority students being placed in advanced level classes or Lisa emphasizing the importance of administrative support in helping underrepresented students, consistently evaluating the needs of their marginalized student population is essential in achieving academic success for all students.

Pointing to intentionality as a key aspect of becoming change agents, taking the lead requires school counselors to be at the forefront of advocating and identifying the specific needs of the target population. Moving away from traditional practices that often times are not applicable to marginalized students, school counselors are uniquely positioned to deliver services that are equitable for all students. Looking at existing practices and revamping them to provide accessibility is a key component of initiating change. Taking the lead in challenging procedures that are outdated and not inclusive of all students is foundational in providing responsive school counseling services.

Context for Practice Matters

In comparing the differences within each participant's school district, it is evident that many facets related to school context play a role in their ability to ensure the delivery of responsive practices for every student. In discussing what it means to be a culturally

responsive counselor, participants highlight how their respective contexts influence their practice. From technological accessibility to the number of students on the free and reduced lunch program, it is clear that all three participants work in districts that vary in context.

For example, with a disparity in the socioeconomic make-up of the students and families, it is apparent that implementing ideas and delivering equitable services for all students vary across all three cases. Given the fact that Sarah's high school has a percentage (33%) of students who receive either free or reduced lunch, her context of what it means to be a culturally responsive counselor is vastly different than Lisa's and Kim's school where only 3% and 6 % respectively are economically disadvantaged. Whereas Sarah highlights seeking out resources for her economically disadvantaged students, such as fee waivers for college applications, Lisa and Kim make little to no mention of dealing with students who are economically disadvantaged. However, this is not to say that Lisa and Kim do not deal with other issues. For example, Lisa highlights working closely with her transgendered population and collaborating together with other stakeholders to effectively meet their needs. On the other hand, Kim discusses spending much time meeting with her special needs population and collaborating with other members of the Child Study Team in learning how to best meet their needs.

In addition to the disparity of the socioeconomic make-up of each town, there is distinct difference in demographic make-up as well. Where as the towns in which Lisa and Kim work have a predominately Caucasian make-up, 89% and 72% respectively, the demographic break down in the town in which Sarah works in is only 56% Caucasian.

Therefore, each participant describes different experiences in their work with minority students. Whereas Lisa describes a context that highlights a lack of racial diversity, both Kim and Sarah describe contexts of helping minority students overcome challenges regarding to academic placements.

Highlighting the differences in technological accessibility, all three school districts vary in technological resources available to each student. For instance, Lisa's and Kim's district provide each student with a laptop or chromebook throughout their four years at the high school. Having laptops readily available for each student allows both Lisa and Kim to deliver classroom presentations and complete student activities in a timely manner, leaving them more time to attend to other job responsibilities. Conversely, working in a district that does not provide every student with a laptop, Sarah's utilizes the Media Center and the College and Career Center when delivering student presentations that require the use of a computer. Having to work with a limited amount of computers in her school, Sarah often finds herself having to deliver presentations to group of only 15 students at a time.

Influencing each participant differently, a common theme across all three cases is that school context for practice matters. When considering the aforementioned differences, it is clear that all three districts vary in regards to the resources available for faculty and students alike. With such a disparity in school context, delivering fair and equitable services for all students impacts each participant's meaning making process differently.

Point of Divergence

When looking across all three cases, only Sarah highlights the true difficulty involved in delivering culturally responsive services. Perhaps being influenced in part by the way I framed the task to them, that is labeling them as “experts,” only Sarah indicates that providing fair and equitable services for all students is challenging. Conversely, Lisa and Kim describe their responsive work in a more cheerleading way and wanting to provide the “right answers” to the questions. Although affirming that their responses are factual and based on their meaning making process of delivering culturally responsive practices, it is my belief that identifying them as “experts” may have caused Lisa and Kim to downplay the level of difficulty involved in their work so not to appear as “non-experts.” Not having enough data to further confirm whether being identified as “experts” caused a feeling of all knowing for the participants, this is an area for future exploration.

Informing the participants that they have been identified as “experts” caused a clash of apparent contradictions. On the one hand, participants point to responsiveness being an ongoing journey that involves learning from others and taking the lead in initiating change. Conversely, although the participants emphasize an openness to learn from others, there is a tendency to put a positive spin that minimizes the level of difficulty in delivering equitable services. From my conversations with the participants, it is my belief that having this label of “experts” creates a feeling of all-knowing and having to have the “right answer” on their part. Therefore, possibly causing them to downplay the difficulties of responsive work based on my cueing them as “experts.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how culturally responsive school counselors make meaning of the challenges faced in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and enact effective culturally responsive practices. Findings from three rounds of interviews and examination of quick-writes revealed that the delivery of culturally responsive school counseling services is an ongoing process for all three participants. A continuous journey, responsive practices involve being okay with not knowing everything and learning from more informed others. Emphasized as a foundational component of their responsive work, accepting that responsiveness is a constant learning process is an apparent theme throughout all three interviews. Additionally, pointing to early life events as being significant in shaping their culturally responsive lens, each participant point to how experiences in their formative years and young adulthood moved them beyond their comfort zone. Playing a key component as they entered their counseling career, such personal lived experiences created a level of cultural awareness for each participant that served as their entry point into their work as school counselors.

Moving away from traditional practices and emphasizing intentionality in becoming change agents in meeting the specific needs of their marginalized populations, taking the lead is a common theme for all participants. Looking at existing practices and revamping them to provide accessibility is a key component of initiating change. Challenging procedures where professional development opportunities are often times denied, participants point to a frustrating multi-layered approval process. Stressing the

obstacles in being able to access professional developments, all three participants highlight an approach that involves working with administrators and seeking out cost effective professional developments in providing responsive school counseling services.

In looking at the disparities of each participant's school district, it is increasingly clear that the many aspects related to school context for practice most likely influences what it means to provide fair and equitable services for each participant. Being identified as experts in delivering responsive services appears to have caused a clash of apparent contradictions, mainly for Lisa and Kim. Although all three participants underscore learning from more knowledgeable others, there was a feeling of having to give "the right answer" and minimizing the level of difficulty involved in responsive work. A further discussion on the aforementioned topics, implications for practice, as well as future research will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter Five

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to investigate how culturally responsive school counselors make meaning of the challenges they face and enact effective practices in meeting the needs of a diverse student population. Specifically, I examined the counseling practices involved with the LGBTQ population, students of color, and special needs students who are at a higher risk for educational, personal, and cultural challenges. A total of three participants were involved in my qualitative case study research. Upon examination of my data collection which consisted of transcriptions from three rounds of interviews and quickwrites, it was clear that although all three participants had some unique experiences, the overarching themes for all three cases shared many similarities.

As previously highlighted, research indicates that a counselor's cultural responsiveness does significantly impact a minority client's counseling experience (Naijian & Dixon, 2001). With diversity in schools increasing and society quickly becoming multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual, much attention has been given to multicultural counseling and the need for school counselors to provide culturally responsive counseling services (Goodrich & Shin, 2013; Sue & Sue, 2007). However, because many empirical studies are exploratory in nature, more research is needed to provide additional evidence based practices on providing culturally responsive school counseling services; therefore, my research focused on evidence based practices.

In this chapter, I further discuss my findings and how they connect back to the research literature. Additionally, I detail implications for school counselors, counselor

educators, and school administrators with specific evidence based practices on delivering culturally responsive services for both students and families. I conclude with limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

In addressing how they make meaning of the challenges they face in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and enact effective culturally responsive practices, participants detailed a journey in which school counselors are at the forefront of delivering such services. By intervening themselves to ensure responsive services, school counselors set the tone in the school regarding how to best serve marginalized students. This finding is similar to previous research, which indicates that school counselors must take the lead in providing culturally responsive services for traditionally underrepresented students (Lee, 2001; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Schellenberg, 2011).

Additionally, school counseling strategies that are culturally sensitive can give students from diverse backgrounds the tools needed to successfully overcome the negative perceptions formed by the dominant culture (Harley, 2009). Emphasizing their meaning making process, all three participants highlighted a charge that involves school counselors taking the lead in confronting constant barriers such as the lack of administrative support for underrepresented students. This idea is supported by Ahmed et al., (2011) and Ratts et al., (2007), who highlight how culturally responsive counseling can be effective in confronting barriers. In the following section, I discuss my interpretations of each case's overarching themes: Process of Becoming, An Ongoing Journey, and Meaning Making Process.

Process of Becoming

One of the most consistent themes for all three participants was their process of becoming a culturally responsive school counselor. A continuous journey with no clear starting or ending point, a major component in the process of becoming is a counselor's point of entry. Entering the counseling profession with a certain level of cultural responsiveness that served as their point of entry, participants emphasized a complex process that is formed by both past and present experiences. It is these experiences that were highlighted as essential components in shaping their point of entry in their process of becoming a responsive school counselor. Similar findings were also reported by previous researchers (e.g., Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999) who pointed to culturally different personal experiences as part of becoming a responsive counselor. Whether it was Lisa's personal experiences of marginalization, Kim's working with undocumented families, or Sarah's feeling of isolation when first moving to Israel, it has been the process of becoming that has been so instrumental in serving as a foundational piece in their work as culturally responsive school counselors. An approach that has developed over time, cultural responsiveness is something that is continually growing and being informed in their everyday practice. This notion of cultural responsiveness actively developing over time was also noted by Ponterotto et al. (2010) and Musheno and Talbert (2002).

Whereas each participant could have carried their sense of uneasiness with them, they instead took their past feelings of discomfort and turned them into positive learning experiences. Using their sense of difference in their work with students who articulate

feeling just that, each participant pointed to their lived experiences as being influential in their process of becoming. As noted by Sue et al. (1992), counselors who fail to recognize the basis for differences are likely to attribute negative characteristics to people different than them. Turning these opportunities into teachable moments, participants used their past experiences as an opportunity to understand their students' realities. Often referring to their past experiences as an important piece in their process of becoming, it is these real life learning experiences that provided each participant with the opportunity to consistently push themselves outside of their comfort zone. Immersing themselves in unfamiliar situations provides each participant with the skillset needed in delivering services that are fair and equitable for all students.

Highlighting information gathering and moving beyond conventional practices as key elements in the process of becoming, responsive practices involved being aware of gaps in one's knowledge and experiences and being open to learning from them. All three participants pointed to a process of becoming that involved moving beyond conventional practices and learning from more knowledgeable others. Turning ideas of simple collaboration and outdated traditional practices into a multipronged approach, all three participants highlighted gathering information from other experts in the counseling field in becoming responsive counselors. This finding aligns with previous research that reports that enacting responsive services requires counselors to think outside the box in meeting the needs of their population (Ahmed et al., 2011; Lee, 2001; Ratts et al., 2007).

An Ongoing Journey

Greatly influenced by early life experiences that have impacted their point of entry, participants point to their level of responsiveness as a continuous learning experience. Taking advantage of consistently immersing themselves in experiences grounded in cultural sensitivity allowed participants to connect their previous learning experiences to their current work as responsive school counselors. These findings are supported by those of previous researchers (e.g., Ahmed et al., 2011; Lee, 2001; Stone, & Dahir, 2006) who reported that responsive counseling requires patience and self-discovery.

A charge that is ever-developing and ongoing, school counselors are uniquely positioned to take the lead in collaborating with key stakeholders to ensure the delivery of responsive practices (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Lee, 2001). Positioning themselves to educate others through classroom presentations, facilitating professional development for faculty, and leading parent information sessions, participants described an ongoing journey that they come to grow into. As trained professionals in cultural responsiveness, participants pointed to consistently sharing their knowledge with fellow counselors, supervisors, and building principals to discuss possible future school initiatives. Highlighting the frustrations associated with operating as a change agent, as opposed to maintaining the status-quo, participants emphasized that delivering responsive services takes time and requires becoming a change agent.

By pushing beyond their comfort zone, school counselors can begin to take the lead in addressing the educational inequalities that exist in today's school systems (Lee,

2001; Roysircar, 2003; Sue et al., 1992). Actively listening and placing themselves in the realities of their students helped participants come up with the strategies needed to effectively confront institutional obstacles. For example, whether promoting students from a racially diverse background to take advanced level classes, advocating for students with special needs to have access to certain courses, or helping marginalized students gain an increased level of comfort in the school building, ensuring fair and equitable services requires school counselors to understand their students' realities. This is similar to Sue et al. (1992) who report that counselors should actively work with their clients in a bias free manner to fully understand their worldviews and create a sense of comfort.

Emphasizing a proactive approach that encourages school counselors to be on the forefront of initiating change, the delivery of responsive services is a multilayered task (Lee, 2001; Roysircar, 2003; Stone & Dahir, 2006). Consistently keeping up-to-date with current school procedures and questioning policy for the betterment of each student, staying active in the school counseling profession is as an essential component in providing responsiveness services. For example, by reviewing journal articles, attending national/local conferences, and maintaining a school counseling professional network, participants remained proactive in equipping themselves with new innovative ideas that led to the implementation of best practices in their work. Similarly, Sheely and Bratton (2010) reported that in order to ensure academic success of an increasingly diverse population, school counselors must respond to this charge in a proactive manner.

Doing away with outdated counseling approaches and implementing new practices, participants pointed to a more hands on individualized approach. This one step at a time method really allows for the understanding and development of each student as well as avoiding issues later in the school year. So part of the process is trying to head off at the pass any potential obstacles and being proactive in setting up each student for future success. In line with Lee (2001), taking the conventional cookie cutter counseling approach and replacing it with a more personalized method, school counselors ensure meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

By cultivating an atmosphere of self-confidence and creating a trusting relationship with students that have consistently been marginalized throughout their educational experience delivers a drastically different counseling experiences than they have encountered in the past. Seeing the world through their eyes and understanding how their feeling of being invisible and unknown to members of the school community continue to impact their current behavior, participants focused on delivering practices that are centered on building students' self-esteem and at the same time addressing their maltreatment in the school. Doing so helps underrepresented students gain an increased sense of self-worth, visibility, and belongingness in the school building (Lee, 2001; Seelman et al.; Smith-Adcock et al., 2006).

Meaning Making Process

As trained professionals, all school counselors have an ethical obligation to provide fair and equitable services to all students (Galassi & Akos, 2004; Hines & Fields, 2004; Lee, 2001; Sue et al., 1992). Enacting such responsive services for all students is a

continuous charge that is filled with confronting obstacles and challenges (Portman, 2009; Stone & Dahir, 2006). A process that includes Sarah highlighting the difficulties encountered in delivering responsive services to Lisa's and Kim's accounts on how they provided responsive services, all participants detailed a meaning making process that was grounded in lived experiences, collaboration, maintaining an ongoing open stance to learning, and being reciprocal in their learning with fellow colleagues.

Recalling their past lived experiences of knowing what it feels like to be presented with feelings of loneliness, transitioning to a new environment, and working with marginalized individuals, all three participants applied their diverse lived experiences in relating to the uncomfortable realities of their underrepresented students and families. Relating to their realities of marginalization, applying proactive strategies in ensuring responsive services is an ongoing process that requires constant evaluation. Built on self-awareness and creating a sense of comfort for both the student and parents, a cultural responsive school counselor is always willing to discuss topics of culture and diversity (Ahmed et al., 2011; Sue et al., 1992). Applying these lived experiences in their work as school counselors, participants described a process that focused on an increased sense of cultural awareness.

In meeting the ongoing needs of an increasingly diverse student population, Epstein and Voorhis (2010) and Lee (2001) suggest constantly evaluating the services being provided and redirecting them to meet the individual needs of all students. Highlighting the barriers that can often impede culturally responsive work, all participants consistently pointed to evaluating their current practices and implementing

new strategies in creating individualized action plans in enacting responsive services. Maintaining an open stance towards learning and being vulnerable with more knowledgeable others, participants discussed being okay with the fact that others may have more expertise in dealing with a specific population. Requiring school counselors to actively work towards providing equity for every student, responsiveness goes beyond the designated once a year “Diversity Day” and focuses on creating a daily culture of acceptance throughout the school building.

Requiring collaboration with students, parents, and administrators alike, responsive work is not an individual effort (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Sheely & Bratton, 2010; Watkinson & Hersi, 2014). Participants emphasized the importance of support from key stakeholders in working together in establishing a school culture that promotes equity for all students. Moving from a reactive position that often comes across as defensive to a more hands-on approach, participants pointed to taking the time to educate their fellow colleagues on the needs of their underrepresented students. Exchanging thoughts with fellow counseling colleagues, administrators, faculty members, students, and parents allowed participants to see different perspectives that she may have not yet considered. Such proactive measures provide supports in helping marginalized students confront and overcome institutional obstacles (Smith-Adcock et al., 2006; Stone, 2003; Sue, & Sue, 2007).

Implications for Practice

Based on my findings of how culturally responsive school counselors make meaning of the challenges they face in meeting the needs of a diverse student population

and enact effective practices, I discuss implications that may be helpful moving forward. I begin by offering suggestions on how my findings may have implications for school counselors in practice. Additionally, I suggest implications for counselor educators in their preparation of counselors-in-training. Lastly, I discuss how my findings may have useful implications for school administrators in creating a responsive school culture.

School Counselors

Findings from this study suggest that cultural responsiveness is an arduous task that is many times filled with barriers. Grounded in work that can often become confrontational when advocating for the rights of underserved students, providing fair and equitable services for all students is a constant struggle. Delivering responsive services is a difficult and frustrating process that requires constant evaluation of current practices and bringing to light the inequalities that are often present with marginalized students. Part of this frustration for school counselors is sometimes due to lack of knowledge or expertise in dealing with a specific population.

Responsiveness is Ongoing. Emphasized as a foundational component of ensuring equity for all students, responsiveness is an ongoing process that takes time and involves learning from more knowledgeable others. Growing into responsive work is a multifaceted process requiring the ability to identify that a situation is unfamiliar, and then having the awareness to collaborate with more knowledgeable others in providing responsive services. An approach that extends beyond admitting that you do not know everything, cultural responsiveness requires being willing to be vulnerable as a learner.

Collaborating with colleagues who have more expertise and experience in dealing with a particular marginalized population is emphasized by all three participants.

Moving Beyond Conventional Practices: The delivery of responsive services requires counselors to move beyond conventional practices in meeting the needs of their population. Highlighting information gathering and “thinking outside the box” as key elements in delivering responsive services, all three participants pointed to a process that challenges current philosophies and alters them to meet the needs on increasingly diverse student population. Turning ideas of simple collaboration and outdated traditional practices into a multipronged approach, all three participants described moving beyond conventional practices in becoming responsive counselors.

Taking a Lead Position. In addition to consulting with more knowledgeable others, school counselors taking a lead position in providing responsive services is a central focus of responsive work. Taking a lead position involves maintaining a progressive mindset coupled with evaluating existing policies. A practice that challenges the status quo and focuses on meeting the individual needs of each student, constantly pushing themselves outside of their comfort zone was consistently underscored by all three participants. A process that involves transforming one’s approach from reactive to proactive, taking a lead position requires implementing strategies that are tailored to meet the specific needs of every student. A crucial component in school counselors taking a lead approach is the attendance of professional development opportunities that address the needs of their specific population.

Professional Development. Seeking out professional development opportunities that further educate and continue to inform one's practice is essential to continue developing a sense of responsiveness. Rather than sitting through professional development opportunities that are designed for teachers, proactively seeking out school counseling learning opportunities and not waiting for an opportunity to present itself is key. In addition to meeting the individual needs of each student, locating learning opportunities is a foundational component in fostering one's own professional growth. In turn, as trained professionals in delivering responsive services, school counselors can utilize their expertise to educate others around them in creating change for underrepresented students. By working with the administration to implement professional developments for faculty members and counselor led class discussions, school counselors can begin to establish a culture of acceptance in their respective schools.

Helping Students Build a Sense of Self-Worth. Although cultivating a sense of trust and active listening are important skills in the counseling relationship, helping students build a sense of self-worth is a foundational component when working with individuals from underrepresented groups. Being able to enter their world and truly understand their struggles is a challenging process that is a multilayered. Internalizing their realities, providing a sense of comfort, and authenticating their experiences of mistreatment is an essential component in understanding the discrimination marginalized individuals face in today's society.

Counselor Educators

Real-World Learning Experiences. In regards to counselor educators, my findings suggest that assignments focused on immersion experiences that include interacting with members of marginalized population may be helpful in shaping the cultural lens of counselors-in-training. As exemplified in Kim's work with undocumented individuals, immersing herself in such learning experiences helped her gain the skillset needed to shape her work as she entered the counseling profession. Such real life learning opportunities may provide counselors-in-training with the opportunity to immerse themselves in advocacy work with underrepresented individuals. Service learning assignments centered around immersion will not only provide counselors-in-training the opportunity to apply theory into practice, it will expose them to real hands-on opportunities that may carry over into their future work as counselors.

Impact of Past Lived Experiences. Additionally, counselor educators can lead discussions on how diverse or non-diverse lived experiences may impact counselors-in-training entry point into counseling. Formed by past and present experiences, every counselor enters the profession with a level of cultural responsiveness, although counselors-in-training may not initially recognize their experience with cultural responsiveness. Therefore, counselor educators should facilitate discussions on how past experiences impact each student's entry point. Thus, helping to raise their self-awareness as they begin their work as counselors. Possibly serving as a foundational building block for students beginning their practicum and internship work, it may be beneficial for future counselors to understand how their lived experiences may impact their entry point into

the counseling profession. Discussions by counselor educators on how each student's diverse lived experiences may impact their future work may raise their students' cultural awareness.

Infusing Topics of Responsiveness Across the Curriculum. As opposed to relying on the traditional one or two multicultural/diversity courses to address areas of responsiveness, counselor educators may find that infusing topics across the curriculum may be helpful in providing a consistent message regarding equity throughout one's graduate experience. In creating a graduate experience that is grounded in promoting advocacy and the delivery of equitable services, counselor educators can play a vital role in the educational development of their students. Tasked with an important responsibility of bridging the gap between lack of awareness, skillset, knowledge, and responsive counseling, counselor educators bring their expertise and training into their work with their students.

Preparing Counselors-in-Training to Become Change Agents. Playing a crucial role in the development of counselors-in-training, counselor educators should help counselors-in-training gain the skills to become change agents. As highlighted by all three participants, school counselors taking a lead position is extremely important in the delivery of responsive services. Pointing to intentionality as a key aspect of becoming change agents, counselor educators can help counselors-in training learn how to identify the specific needs of their target population upon entering the counseling profession.

School Administrators

Supporting Professional Development Opportunities. Acknowledging that school counselors are professionally trained to deliver fair and equitable educational services to all students and families, school administrators can work in collaboration with them to ensure the delivery of responsive services. Part of the work for the school counselors is to educate their administrators regarding their roles and need for specific professional development opportunities that are geared towards them. As opposed to attending professional development opportunities that are designed for teachers, counselors can intentionally seek out topics that meet the needs of their marginalized students.

Creating a Culturally Responsive School Climate. Working together with school counselors, school administrators can possibly begin to confront systemic barriers and help create a school climate that is inclusive of all students. By supporting multicultural responsiveness for students, administrators can create a school climate that values diversity. In addition to promoting an accepting school culture, school administrators must support school counselors in identifying policies and procedures that may create barriers. In addressing the barriers that may be preventing the delivery of responsive services, school administrators can start creating a school that is fair and equitable for all students.

Limitations

I believe the findings from this study will provide counseling programs and the school counseling profession with specific evidence-based practices on delivering culturally responsive services. Limitations to this study include areas of generalizability,

sample size, diversity of gender, and work setting. The first limitation is the lack of generalizability. Although my case study approach provided me with rich information regarding the everyday school counseling practices and experiences in relation to providing culturally responsive services, my findings are not generalizable to a larger population, as it is an in-depth study of only three individuals (Yin, 2008). While my findings may be useful for school counselors, counselor educators, and school administrators, my findings cannot be generalized in regards to the delivery of fair and equitable services for students and families.

The second limitation is that my sample of three participants lacks diversity in regards to gender and the settings in which they work. Although the counseling profession is made up of more females than males, of the three participants, none were males. It is possible that having a male perspective may have yielded a different meaning making process in delivering responsive services. In addition, although the three school districts did somewhat vary in regards to the socioeconomic and demographic make-up of the student population, the findings did not include perspectives from participants in either urban or rural school districts. Having interviewed school counselors from either an urban or rural high school could have provided a different lens regarding their meaning making process on delivering culturally responsive services.

Suggestions for Future Research

It is my hope that the findings from this study will highlight the importance of delivering culturally responsive school counseling practices for today's increasing diverse student population. Although there have been many empirical studies done in

regards to responsive school counseling practices, they have been in large part exploratory in nature. My study is one of the few studies that has taken a case study approach to examine the meaning making process of the challenges faced in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and enacting effective practices. It is my hope that future studies further explore some of the evidence based practices that have been identified in this study with regards to providing culturally responsive school counseling services.

Of my three participants, two of them have seven years or less working experience as a school counselor, while the other participant had 17 years. In future studies, it would be interesting to see if years of school counseling experience plays a role in how the participants describe the level of difficulty related to the delivery of responsive services. Perhaps this was in part how I framed the task to them, but it may shed some light on why my two participants who have been school counselors for 4 and 7 years respectively focused more on how they provided services, rather than the difficulties encountered while providing such services.

Given my small sample size of only 3 participants, a larger quantitative study with more participants can provide more generalizable information. Lacking diversity in regards to my participants and settings, a larger study that includes a more diverse participant pool in addition to varied settings may provide useful information. Such information can be helpful in drawing broad inferences.

When considering the differences within each participant's school district, it is possible that there were facets related to school context that likely play a role in the

participant's ability to ensure the delivery of responsive practices. One suggestion for future research is to study these varied contexts and see how cultural responsive practices may vary in particular contexts. Although I did include a section that discussed how context for practice matters, future research may be able to provide richer data on the role these varied contexts play in the delivery of responsive services.

More research also needs to be conducted on whether or not the perceptions of school counselors related to providing culturally responsive services is in line with how school administrators think of such services, if at all. Understanding these perceptions may provide helpful answers in narrowing the gap that exists in providing responsive services. Future research can address these questions and possibly provide strategies on ensuring equitable services for all students.

Exploring whether counselor educators are actually providing training for evidence based practices may provide counseling programs with useful information moving forward. Based on my research, although theory receives much attention, there seems to be a shortage of literature that addresses evidence based practices. In exploring how counselors-in-training are being prepared may shed light on possible effective strategies that counseling programs may want to include in future curriculum revisions.

Conclusion

With the American schools in the 21st century becoming increasingly diverse, school counselors are uniquely trained to meet the changing student demographics with effective culturally responsive practices. Through various proactive methods, such as challenging existing policies and attending professional development opportunities,

school counselors have the tools needed to effectively communicate with key stakeholders on behalf of their marginalized population. However, although research focusing on culturally responsive practices has grown, additional research that examines the actual practices of school counselors in providing culturally responsive counseling services will help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The findings of my study suggest that the meaning making process in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and delivering culturally responsive practices is a complex journey. Becoming a culturally responsive school counselor is an ongoing charge that is difficult and often times filled with confronting obstacles. Serving as an entry point, it was the participant's own personal immersions and experiences of marginalization that were foundational as they entered the school counseling profession. Although the generalizability of my findings is limited due to the qualitative nature of the study, the information provided may prove helpful in providing counseling program faculty and the school counseling profession with specific recommendations on providing all students with culturally responsive services. Because of my participants' willingness to share their meaning making process in meeting the needs of a diverse student population, implications for practice for fellow school counselors, counselor educators, and school administrators were suggested.

Underscoring the fact that responsive work is an ongoing task that is often times frustrating and requires school counselors to consistently justify their job responsibilities, the findings provide current school counselors and school administrators alike with information that may be helpful in ensuring that all students receive responsive services.

Additionally, my findings suggest that counselor educators may find immersion assignments and discussions on how diverse lived experiences impact counselors-in-training entry point may be helpful in shaping the cultural lens of their students. As school counselors, we must heed this clarion call and ensure the delivery of culturally responsive school counseling practices for all students moving forward.

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Appendix A



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CONSENT FORM FOR ADULTS

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

Study's Title: How do culturally responsive school counselors make meaning of the challenges they face in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and enact effective practices?

Why is this study being done? The purpose of this study is to investigate how school counselors who are culturally responsive describe their practices and the challenges faced in meeting the needs of a diverse population.

What will happen while you are in the study?

- 1) The PI or research team member and the participant will communicate and arrange appointment at a convenient time for the participant. Interviews will take place at the participant's high school of employment.
- 2) At the interview, the participant will be provided with a consent form and she/he will be asked to read it carefully.
- 3) Adult respondents will sign the consent form if they agree to participate in the study. They will be informed of all risks and that they can leave at any time they wish.
- 4) Participants will be informed about the overall interview process.
- 5) Data collection will include the following:
 - Interviews will be Semi-structured (approximately 60 minutes or shorter) with open ended questions.
 - Identification of participant's critical incidents.
 - Participant will journal of quick writes throughout interview process.
 - Collection of physical material/artifacts used by participants.
- 6) Interviews will continue until saturation of information is reached.
- 7) All interviews will be recorded digitally and notes will be taken on paper during the interview.
- 8) Digital audio files will be transcribed and then deleted.

Time: This study will consist of interviews, which will continue until no new information is presented. Each interview will last between 30 and 60 minutes.

Risks: I do not anticipate you experiencing any foreseeable risks or discomfort.

Although we will keep your identity confidential as it relates to this research project, if we learn of any suspected child abuse we are required by NJ state law to report that to the proper authorities immediately.

Benefits: This study will benefit the current school counseling profession and school counseling programs by providing them with practices that have been identified as helpful in providing culturally responsive school counseling services.

Who will know that you are in this study? You will not be linked to any presentations. We will keep who you are confidential.



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You should know that New Jersey requires that any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to the Division of Youth and Family Services
Do you have to be in the study?
Do you have any questions about this study?
Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant?
Future Studies
Statement of Consent

Appendix B

Initial Interview Questions

As you know, I'm particularly interested in culturally responsive counseling. Your colleagues identified you as someone with expertise in culturally responsive counseling. What do you think your colleagues were "seeing" in your counseling practices that lead them to identify you as an expert?

As a school counselor, how would you define culturally responsive counseling?

Sub-question: How have you put this into practice as a school counselor?

What does that look like in your practice as a school counselor?

Can you describe for me a specific time where, as a school counselor, you felt you were practicing culturally responsive counseling?

What are some of the common challenges you face, as a school counselor, in ensuring culturally responsive counseling services?

Sub-question: Describe for me a time when this kind of challenge came into play.

***** Follow up with "Any others that come to mind? Follow up with asking participant to name it and describe it.

What have some school supports that have been helpful to you, as a school counselor, in providing culturally responsive counseling services to your counsees?

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