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Establishing an Antiracist Foundation in School Counselor Preparation: A Self-Study

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Abstract

This article will discuss the findings from a collaborative self-study involving two school counseling faculty, one graduate student, and an alumna of the school counseling program who is now a first-year school counselor. Given the dearth of research exploring educator-counselor (EC) identity development, the researchers sought to understand how faculty prepare preservice school counselors to engage in antiracist practices through institutional and andragogical practices, and how students experience these practices in developing their EC identity. The findings will provide a framework for antiracist foundations in school counselor preparation and illustrate the practices needed for school counselor educators to actualize antiracist work.

Significance to the Public

This collective self-study provides a framework for school counselor educators to reflect on their practices, examine their programs, and make antiracist practices foundational and ongoing. In this self-study, faculty members created seven conditions that influence preservice school counselors' educator-counselor identity. Findings can inform programs for school counselor educators on conditions for learning and educator-counselor identity development.

Keywords: antiracist school counseling, self-study, educator-counselor identity

Counselor educators have been called to prepare counselors with the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of diverse students and clients for some time (Haskins & Singh, 2015; Ponterotto & Casas, 1987). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2023) requires counselor educators to provide training in multicultural counseling competency and strategies for identifying and eliminating processes of oppression and discrimination. In the wake of recent anti-Black racism, violence, and murder, there is a call for school counselor educators to address racism in educational systems and prepare preservice school counselors to practice antiracist school counseling (Ieva, Beasley, et al., 2021;

Mason et al., 2021; Mayes & Byrd, 2022). Taking an antiracist approach to school counselor education is critical, given that data such as rates of high school dropout, suspension, and incarceration continue to suggest that race is a significant factor in determining inequity in schools (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021).

In response to the urgency to address racism in educational systems and prepare preservice school counselors to practice antiracist school counseling, two significant efforts have been made by school counselor educators in the field. First, a theoretical foundation for embedding antiracist systems and practices within school counseling programs has

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been established (Ieva, Beasley, et al., 2021; Mason et al., 2021; Mayes & Byrd, 2022). To apply theory to practice, recent research has also been conducted to highlight examples of practicing school counselors infusing antiracist practices within the services they provide students, such as group counseling (Beasley et al., 2023), while also identifying gaps in school counselors connecting antiracist training with what they do in practice (Ieva et al., 2022).

Second, there has been focused attention on school counselors' identity as educator-counselor (EC; Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2021). As ECs, school counselors are situated in K–12 school environments and carry out preventative educational services, and are also trained as counselors who provide individual and group counseling and counseling-related consultation and referrals. Through this lens, these identities (i.e., educator and counselor) are nondual and nonhierarchical, and thus cohesive, as school counselors provide school counseling services (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2021). Although a theoretical foundation for embedding antiracist systems and practices within school counseling preparation programs has been established, more needs to be known about preservice school counselors' experience in such programs. Thus, more research is needed to understand how school counselor education shapes preservice school counselors who enact antiracism. To advance the narrative of school counselors as ECs, more research is also needed to explore how preservice school counselors experience these practices in developing their EC identity.

Theoretical Framework: Antiracist School Counseling

The term antiracist has been defined as “one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea” (Kendi, 2019, p. 13). Operating from an antiracist approach includes establishing a belief that racism is omnipresent in education and society and focuses on gaining knowledge about the underpinnings of racism to better understand the impact of intersectionality

(Leigh-Osroosh et al., 2023; Mayes & Byrd, 2022). It also requires responsibility by self-examining racist practices and internalized oppression, challenging norms, and addressing oppressive beliefs and policies (Leigh-Osroosh et al., 2023; Mayes & Byrd, 2022, p. 3). To contextualize what it means to be antiracist in the field of school counseling, school counselor educators have established a theoretical foundation and framework to infuse antiracist practices and policies throughout school counselor education programs (Ieva, Beasley, et al., 2021; Mason et al., 2021; Mayes & Byrd, 2022).

Mason et al. (2021) updated the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI; The Education Trust, 2009), emphasizing leadership, advocacy, collaboration, coordination, and data utilization to shift focus from student deficits to systemic improvements. Within each revised tenet, Mason et al. (2021) provided intentional and practical strategies school counselor educators can use to infuse antiracist practices and ways of being into their program structures and coursework. For example, preservice school counselors can be given the opportunity to examine racist or inequitable school policies (i.e., leadership), connect with community organizations that support antiracist initiatives (i.e., teaming and collaboration), and examine school data to identify interventions for school staff rather than students (Mason et al., 2021).

To further examine the role school counselor educators play in infusing antiracism into their practices and programs, Ieva, Hannon, et al. (2021) conducted a self-study through the lens of critical race theory and ecological systems theory. Through the self-study process, the authors examined privilege, complacency, and intentionality, and sought to understand the impact of infusing antiracism and related topics (e.g., systemic oppression, cyclical trauma) into their courses, supervision, and interactions with faculty colleagues. The authors highlighted the impact of their efforts including recruiting and supporting students of color; using coursework and field-based experiences to provide students with opportunities

to learn from diverse perspectives and address privilege and implicit bias; and conducting intentional personal and professional examination (Ieva, Hannon, et al., 2021). Although valuable efforts have been made to highlight how antiracist practices are infused into school counselor education programs, additional exploration is needed to understand how preservice school counselors experience these practices and their impact of antiracist practices on EC identity development.

Preservice School Counselor Identity Development

An essential part of approaching school counselor education from an antiracist school counseling theoretical framework is for preservice school counselors to gain knowledge and skills to practice antiracist school counseling. This approach also has the potential to foster preservice school counselors' identity development. Levy and Lemberger-Truelove (2021) proposed this combined EC identity to capture how school counselors are positioned as educators and oriented by counseling within schools. Practically speaking, this cohesive identity can be actualized through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program. Further, developing an EC identity can also be a vehicle for actively addressing racist systems and practices in K–12 schools as school counselors embody this identity through services such as classroom instruction, appraisal and advisement, counseling, collaboration, referrals, leadership, advocacy, and systemic change (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2021).

To date, there is limited research on the effects of embedding antiracist practices into preservice school counselor preparation and its impact on identity development. We also note a scarcity of studies on non-CACREP programs, particularly regarding their unique contexts and potential influence on EC identities. These programs often operate within diverse community settings, offering valuable insights into how contextual factors shape identity development. Additionally, non-CACREP programs may demonstrate flexibility in addressing

evolving societal needs and counseling practices. In this article, we investigate these topics. We utilized a self-study approach to explore the following questions:

1. What are the antiracist instructional practices employed by faculty members in preparing graduate students to become antiracist ECs?
2. What antiracist practices do faculty members utilize to establish antiracist systems within the graduate program?
3. How do faculty members' instructional practices and program systems impact graduate students' antiracist EC identity development?

We provide a framework for school counselor educators to reflect on their practices, examine their programs, and make antiracist practices foundational and ongoing. We extend extant literature by outlining how antiracist practices can be ingrained into multiple levels of school counselor education programs and across multiple phases (i.e., before, during, and after enrollment). In addition, we highlight how school counselor educators can engage preservice school counselors and program alums in dialogue centered on their experiences. School counselor educators can use these findings to inform practices related to improving preservice preparation for future ECs operating from an antiracist approach.



Method

Collaborative Self-Study

The decision to use a self-study methodology is deeply informed by Samaras' definition, which frames self-study as an individual and collective endeavor, rooted in the researcher's teaching environment, demanding critical and collaborative reflection to produce insights and contribute to the broader field of education (Samaras, 2011). This approach allows researchers to openly ask questions about their teaching, practice, and student learning by studying their classroom (Samaras, 2011). In our case, a self-study facilitated the examination of the

unique context of our program, including student demographics and non-CACREP status, and how this context shaped the implementation and effectiveness of EC identity development and antiracist practices, an aspect that has been missing in the school counselor preparation literature. The main goal of a self-study is to create professional awareness of how educators could transform education and, thus, improve the quality of training of preservice educators (Kosnik et al., 2006; Samaras, 2011). A critical friend — a collaborative colleague who plays a critical role in shaping and reshaping interpretations, issues, and scenarios, uncovering biases in the process — is a fundamental feature of self-study research (Costa & Kallick, 1993). In our self-study, two school counselor educators, a current student, and an alumna, added diverse perspectives and insights. The counselor educators brought theoretical knowledge, andragogical expertise, and program insights. Conversely, the student and alum, serving as critical friends, introduced accountability and real-world application. The student and alumna, as critical friends, took the “time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcome that the person or group is working toward” (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50). Their engagement refined methodology, evaluated program efficacy, and ensured researcher reflexivity and transparency.

Context and Participants

Our school counseling program, though not CACREP accredited, closely follows established training standards. With a cohort model of around 25 students per cohort, our 60-unit program operates within a minority-serving institution (MSI) in a diverse urban setting in the western United States. Recognized for its Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) status, approximately half of our students are first-generation, aged 21–25. Over five years, our program’s demographics show 62% Hispanic/Latino, 11% Asian, 10% White, 7% Black, and 5% identifying with two or more groups. Our institution defines first-generation as “a student

with parents who neither attended nor graduated from college (and in the case of a student with one parent, that parent neither attended [nor graduated]) from college” (California State University, Long Beach, 2023).

The participants of this self-study include two school counseling faculty, a current student (at the time of the study), and an alumna committed to antiracist practices. The student and alumna served as critical friends, and all participants are the authors. Antiracism entails critically examining and disrupting societal systems, starting with acknowledging the influence of White privilege and supremacy on all forms of oppression. It is a proactive effort to dismantle racism within education and broader society (Corneau & Stergiopoulos, 2012). We extend this commitment by training preservice school counselors within our program. Our school counseling faculty implement a two-pronged approach within this framework: (a) intentional reflection and implementation of antiracist practices among faculty, and (b) development of antiracist program and andragogy.

Reflexivity involves systematically acknowledging the context in which knowledge is produced, with a particular focus on the researchers’ influence throughout the research process (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In this study, the authors, including a student and alum who served as critical friends, acted as both data sources and coders for the analysis, necessitating an awareness of their positionalities. Understanding their positionalities, which are described next, is crucial for discerning the perspectives that the researchers bring to the study.

CLP: As a Latina associate professor, I bring a unique background, having grown up in a multigenerational bilingual immigrant household in an urban setting. With 11 years of full-time teaching experience at two universities, I’ve focused on racially and ethnically diverse student populations as both a school counselor and counselor educator. My teaching approach, influenced by my experiences as a first-generation student and mentorship by faculty, emphasizes community building, educational equity, and tackling systemic

barriers. My courses cover didactic, seminar, and field-based components.

JAO: As a European American associate professor from a working-class background, my upbringing, family, and professional journey have deeply influenced me. With 8 years of experience as a school counselor educator, I am dedicated to advocating for marginalized students and families. My teaching and research prioritize equity, opportunity, and justice. Drawing from my own experiences and mentorship, I shape the preparation of preservice school counselors, bringing the role to life through shared experiences and fostering a space where students can leverage their motivations to drive impactful work in schools.

FS: As an elementary school counselor with a Palestinian-American background, I prioritize integrating equity, social justice, antiracism, and cultural responsiveness into my work. Growing up as a first-generation immigrant in an urban setting has instilled a deep appreciation for the resilience and diversity within immigrant communities. I am deeply conscious of the influence of global events and geopolitical circumstances on students' emotional well-being. Thus, I strive to establish a safe space where each student feels heard and valued. Driven by my belief in the transformative power of education, I advocate for every student's right to equitable access to resources and support.

JJ: As a Latina school counselor raised in a predominantly Black and brown inner city, I leverage my lived experiences and acquired capital to empower communities through my role in education. Being a first-generation college student who has been impacted by the carceral system informs how I interpret the world and my dedication to dismantling systemic barriers and inequities. My role as an eldest sibling and mentorship have strengthened my dedication to community orientation and investment.

The positionality of each author, shaped by our personal backgrounds and professional experiences, likely influenced our expectations of the self-study's outcomes, and predisposed us toward certain instructional and program practices. To

mitigate potential biases, we engaged in reflexivity throughout the research process to examine assumptions, perspectives, and potential biases and adopted a collaborative approach to data analysis and interpretation.

Procedures and Data Collection

This study examined faculty practices and student experiences during three critical points: before students entered the program, while enrolled, and after program completion. The first author obtained institutional review board approval for the study, which granted an exemption. Multiple sources were used, including admissions data, recruitment and admission documents, course syllabi, student assignments, program exit surveys, and critical friends (current and former graduate student authors). These sources were utilized to examine faculty practices and highlight graduate students' experiences, to understand the impact on EC identity. These artifacts formed the foundation for journal reflections.

All participants contributed to the data by engaging in reflective journaling alongside artifact collection. Prompts covered key program phases: before, during, and after enrollment. For instance, preprogram prompts included questions such as, "How does the program highlight its commitment to diversity and equity, and how might this message resonate with potential applicants?" During the program, prompts explored questions such as, "What methods do [you/faculty] use to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to promote equity and inclusion within educational settings?" Postprogram prompts asked questions such as, "How do faculty members' antiracist practices and program systems impact antiracist EC identity development after the program?" This dual approach enriched the self-study, providing a nuanced view of program practices.

Data Analysis

During three meetings, participants provided valuable insights into the extent to which infusion of antiracism in school counseling preparation

programs influences their antiracist practices and EC identity. These discussions centered around all four participants' journal reflections, fostering a collaborative exploration of the antiracist practices throughout the program. The deliberations were recorded and subsequently transcribed for further analysis. This iterative process allowed for ongoing insights and reflections, and a deeper understanding not only of our individual experiences, but also of the program's collective impact. Critical friend perspectives served as a data source, enabling diverse perspectives about the research sources (Samaras, 2011). The journals maintained by critical friends and discussions with them served as member checks, aiding in examining and validating our interpretations of various data pieces (Samaras, 2011). We utilized thematic analysis to identify patterns, trends, and critical insights. Thematic analysis is used in research to understand people's experiences in detail, to understand the phenomenon in question (McLeod & Balamoutsou, 2001). Coding involves systematically categorizing recurring themes and identifying patterns, allowing us to derive meaningful conclusions from the rich qualitative data in our discussions and reflections.

The researchers followed the phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which include the following: (a) familiarizing yourself with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing a report. All four authors reviewed the journals and the discussion transcripts focused on the "before" phase, to familiarize ourselves with the data; each person created a set of codes based on our interpretation of the data. The authors then came together to discuss our generated codes and identify common themes or patterns. We refined and clarified themes based on our collective insight during this discussion; we worked collectively to define each theme clearly, ensuring consensus on the terminology used.

Trustworthiness

The authors ensured trustworthiness through various measures, including the involvement of

critical friends. During each meeting, the authors deliberated on their individual positionalities in relation to the research, discussing power differentials and sharing experiences. Given the diverse professional positions of the authors, these conversations occurred frequently. Each coder, including critical friends, had an equal opportunity to participate and contribute to discussions concerning the entire research process. This inclusive approach facilitated the integration of new insights and nuances emerging from their dialogues. Additionally, since one of the authors was a current student, coding occurred postgraduation, ensuring an unbiased interpretation of the findings.

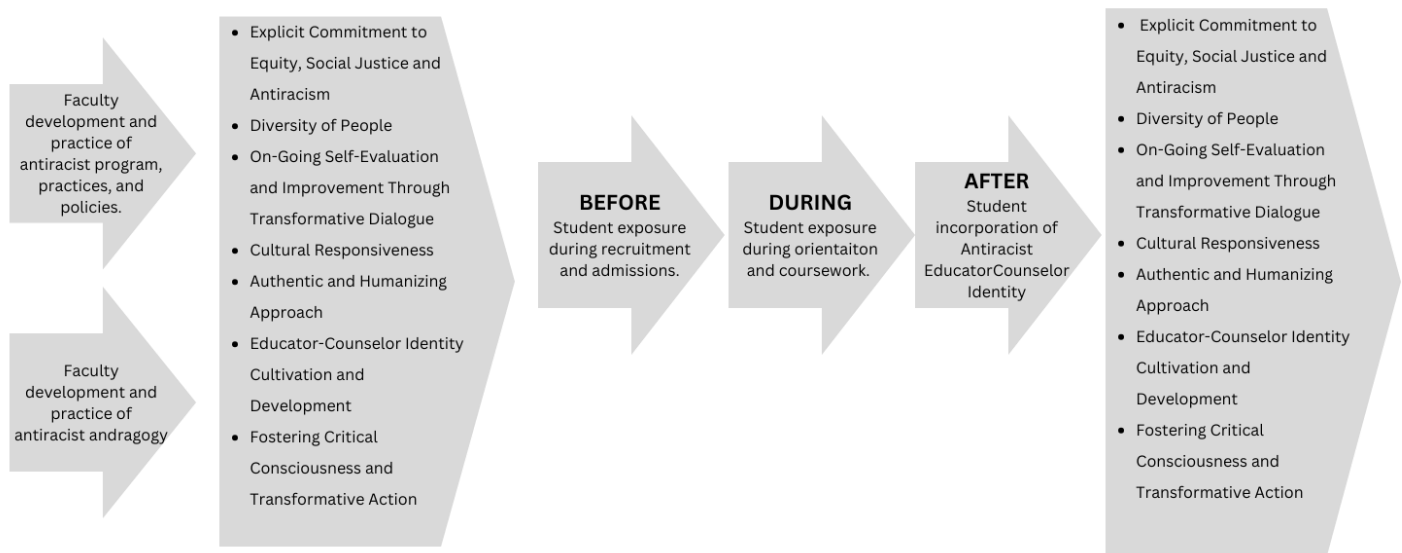


Findings

In this research study, we investigated the antiracist instructional practices employed by faculty members in preparing graduate students to become antiracist ECs. Our findings indicated that faculty members actively addressed seven thematic areas in their antiracist instructional and program practices (see Figure 1). Through early exposure and modeling, faculty members served as influential role models for students. Students observed and internalized themes demonstrated by faculty into their identity and practice. This parallel process highlights the simultaneous occurrence of faculty modeling and student incorporation. This continuous process influenced how students perceived their role as school counselors, educators, and counselors engaging in antiracist work.

Explicit Commitment to Equity, Social Justice, and Antiracism

A prominent theme that emerged is the faculty's clear and *explicit commitment to equity, social justice, and antiracism*, evident across various facets, including the program website, faculty scholarly work and website profiles, application prompts, interview questions, program orientation, faculty practices, course material, and more. This commitment transcends beyond performative values and into systemic practices that informed the many

Figure 1*Antiracist Instructional and Program Practices*

facets of the program experience.

The program commitments were evident during the admission process, where prospective students received indicators reinforcing the program's values and commitments. During the program, faculty engaged students in a critical examination of systemic racism, teaching them to identify inequalities and social justice issues through assignments, readings, and in-class activities. After the program, program graduates manifested this commitment by actively applying their knowledge and skills to address systemic racism in their schools.

An essential component of upholding commitments to equity, social justice, and antiracism is evident in whom the program admits and whether they are similarly committed to upholding the program values. In addition to examining applicants' alignment with the values of equity and social justice, faculty closely examined applicants' perceptions of the EC identity in their personal statements. This assessment is crucial, as it provides insight into how candidates conceptualize their role within the educational landscape. By understanding their views, we could gauge their

readiness to embody the principles of equity and social justice in their professional practice.

During the program, faculty practices in the classroom were explicit indicators of commitments to equity, social justice, and antiracism. Faculty infused literature, assigned projects and assignments, and engaged in conversations that addressed equity, social justice, and antiracism. FS shared how JAO built upon his multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) expertise to engage in culturally responsive assignments. CLP encouraged advocacy across district, state, and national levels; both involved the topics of culturally diverse identities and systemic inequities in their courses. Both critical friends cited courses such as Intro to School Counseling, Law and Ethics, Group Counseling, Career Counseling, and more, where the topics of equity, social justice, and antiracism were a part of the course curriculum, despite covering differing central topics. During JJ's last semester of the program, she recalled faculty incorporating real-life events into conversations surrounding the topics of equity, social justice, and antiracism:

The faculty member who led this course was intentional in her practice of incorporating

antiracist practice by inviting conversations and designating space surrounding the topics of gun violence and mass shootings, as events were occurring simultaneously in the time of our course.

Students graduated with a strong commitment to equity, social justice, and antiracism after completing their education and training. The faculty and program systems prepared students for practice and encouraged their long-term endeavors to expand their professional and personal abilities in upholding equity, social justice, and antiracism. FS reflected on her second year as a school counselor, highlighting the emphasis placed by professors on the importance of attending professional development opportunities and continuing to grow in social justice and advocacy. She integrated strategies and approaches acquired from this emphasis into her daily practice to create a more equitable and supportive environment for all students.

Diversity of People

The theme *diversity of people* originates from the program's dedication to antiracism and the visual presentation of the program's community, fostering an inclusive environment that valued and respected individual differences. For prospective applicants, this public-facing perspective encompassed a transparent view of diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and other relevant identities. While enrolled in the program, students benefited from the diverse composition of the cohorts, guest speakers, alumni, and partnerships with neighboring districts, providing exposure to various perspectives. After the program, students were prepared and sought employment in racially diverse settings where they could promote an inclusive K–12 learning environment.

The program showcased its dedication to diversity well before admissions. In informational sessions, CLP highlighted, "Our program intentionally incorporates images of faculty in the session PowerPoint. I believe these visuals were crucial for illustrating the visible diversity of

identities within our program." Authors 3 and 4 agreed that website images of current students who looked like them influenced their ability to see themselves as potential students. JJ described the impact of the portrayal of a diverse program:

As a prospective student, seeing other folx of color on the website, in the info sessions, etc. showed me that other folx of color are interested in this program, which signaled to me that the program may make an effort to include students of color within the program culture and also the program curriculum, as the overall program interacts with and responds to the identities of racially diverse students.

The interview panel was structured to reflect diversity and minimize biases. JAO emphasized, "We aim to ensure that our [interview] panels represented our program comprehensively, including faculty, alumni, adjunct staff, and diverse perspectives in terms of race, gender, and leadership roles." Due to the equity-focused review process, students entered diverse cohorts of various identities. This diversity fostered intercultural dialogue across various courses and contributed to a rich exchange of insights from varied perspectives. FS highlighted how the cohort's diversity enhanced her cultural self-awareness, enabling her to perceive the world through others' eyes without biases. Engaging with a diverse cohort facilitated understanding of cultural issues from various perspectives, fostering a collaborative learning experience. JJ emphasized the significance of guest speakers from marginalized communities, noting the invaluable insights gained as a cohort. For example, guest speakers addressed a range of topics, including strategies for supporting and fostering inclusivity for gender-diverse students, and understanding the experiences of undocumented students.

Ongoing Self-Evaluation and Improvement Through Transformative Dialogue

The theme of *ongoing self-evaluation and improvement through transformative dialogue*

underscores a continual reflective process aimed at enhancing practices. This involves a critical evaluation of current practices, soliciting feedback, and implementing changes. Faculty engaged in transformative dialogue and self-reflection to improve individual and program practices, aiming for continuous improvement. This commitment is particularly evident in the admissions process, as highlighted by JAO, who described a past initiative involving extensive applicant data review and consultation on equitable admissions practices among full-time and part-time faculty. The transformative dialogue was crucial in developing rubrics and admission interview debriefs to ensure consistency and reduce unconscious bias. CLP emphasized collaborative rubric development and stressed reflection, dialogue, and accountability in addressing systemic barriers, such as analyzing admission data for demographic trends. As part of aligning with updated state training standards, the program recently underwent an overhaul to integrate antiracist and equity perspectives in clinical courses and ensure balance in the EC identity. This balance of EC identity also led to the development of courses related to mental health, curriculum instruction, college admissions counseling, and MTSS. Additionally, recommended readings were curated to encompass equity work and diverse authors.

Students started to cultivate their EC identity through transformative dialogue in class. This began with immersive courses like Introduction to Clinical Interviewing and Counseling Theories, where students explored school counselors' multifaceted roles, honed clinical interview skills, and explored theoretical frameworks. According to FS and JJ, the diverse composition of the cohort, encompassing various identities, contributed to the richness of discussions that expanded their understanding and viewpoints. Frameworks such as the ADDRESSING model (age and generational influences, developmental disability or other disability, religion and spirituality, ethnic and racial identity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, indigenous heritage, national origin, and gender; Hays, 2016) provide a structured approach for exploring various aspects of students' identity.

According to FS, this exercise encouraged students to evaluate their identity, deepening their understanding of privileges and lack thereof, particularly as minority group members, thereby enhancing both clinical interviewing skills and the ability to tailor educational interventions to K–12 students' cultural backgrounds. Acknowledging and respecting diversity empowered school counselors to achieve more profound therapeutic outcomes and effectively carry out preventative educational services in K–12 school environments. Faculty instructional methods such as whole group discussions, reflection questions, and case scenarios further stimulated participation in conversations covering challenging topics such as policing in schools, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, colorism, and ableism. Through these dialogues, graduate students not only grasped how systems, practices, and policies affected K–12 students, but also reflected on their practices as ECs. This ongoing self-evaluation and dialogue aided in their development as ECs and equipped them with the skills to navigate intricate challenges within educational environments.

Graduates recognized that engaging in reflective practice and continuous improvement through dialogue is essential even after they have completed their studies. FS explains how, as a school counselor, she actively participated in dialogue to enhance systems, "Their guidance and mentorship provided me, along with fellow graduate students, with the necessary tools and knowledge to navigate challenging conversations within our educational settings, spanning schools, districts, communities, and even at the state level."

Cultural Responsiveness

The theme of *cultural responsiveness* encompasses the deliberate acknowledgment and appreciation of underrepresented groups' distinct strengths, experiences, and cultural assets. Prior to program entry, the emphasis was on formulating and implementing admission policies that integrate community cultural wealth. Students were taught to be culturally responsive in their roles as counselors and educators. This involved teaching both

culturally sustaining counseling methods and culturally responsive curriculum design. This approach seeks to ensure that students develop the competencies necessary to support and empower diverse populations, both in educational and counseling settings. The faculty's instructional approach was also culturally responsive and involved learner-led activities, where students co-learned discussions, explored their experiences and their peers' experiences, and interacted with school counselors in the field engaged in equity work. This approach continued as students carried the principles of cultural responsiveness into their professional practice. JAO shared insights as to how the program recognizes applicants' cultural capital, "Each year, we reflect and consider how the application process impacted the diversity of our applicants and how it recognized the strengths of underrepresented populations. From how we score GPA to the types of 'extras' that aren't often recognized."

Faculty demonstrated antiracist practices through culturally responsive instruction, preparing professionals for engagement in diverse settings. Strategies included assigning reflective tasks and journals for students to record their fieldwork encounters and helping them comprehend cultural elements and critically analyze how culture impacted the counseling process. Furthermore, students were engaged in group discussions and self-assessment exercises to prompt reflection on their cultural backgrounds and biases. For example, in a group counseling class activity, students were tasked with creating charts or collages that reflected their cultural backgrounds. They responded to three prompts: considering how their cultural views impacted their participation in group therapy, identifying taboo topics within their culture, and recognizing the cultural assets they brought to the group. Following completion, students engaged in a whole group discussion where they shared their reflections. This activity aimed to foster awareness of the influence of cultural factors in therapeutic settings and encouraged students to explore their cultural identities in relation to group dynamics. In their curriculum design and instruction course, they read about culturally responsive pedagogy and

classroom community building, and designed culturally responsive classroom lesson plans.

Faculty played a crucial role in strengthening the educator-counselor identity by guiding students in exploring the intersection between laws, ethics, and antiracism, emphasizing their capacity to drive change through an antiracist lens. This underscored their responsibility in analyzing systemic issues that perpetuate inequality and encouraged advocating for tangible action. By advocating for action, faculty empowered future school counselors to dismantle oppression and foster inclusive environments, solidifying their educator identity. JAO emphasized that assignments such as the student-led "current issues discussion" and the advocacy project were specifically crafted to explore the interplay between ethics and advocating for systemic change. This included assessing cultural responsiveness, systemic barriers, and ethical principles, as well as addressing conflicts arising from personal beliefs, identities, and biases. JJ described how these assignments empowered students to tackle real-world issues, such as systemic barriers in education, to implement meaningful change.

Authentic and Humanizing Approach

The *authentic and humanizing approach* theme stems from the experiences shared by critical friends throughout the admission process, during courses and interactions with faculty, and after the program. Participants in the study described the program and faculty as relatable, approachable, accessible, and welcoming for students. This promoted the development of connections, mentorship, and resources within the program. Faculty authenticity inspired students to confidently embrace and express their identities, experiences, and perspectives. This fostered a learning environment marked by authenticity and openness. FS discussed how the opportunity to present their diverse work experience and community service enhanced their confidence during the admission process. They emphasized the significance of the broad writing prompt, which allowed them to represent themselves authentically.

To humanize the interview process, faculty actively involved alumni, offering applicants the chance to engage with those who had completed the program. Through group Q&A sessions and one-on-one interactions, applicants gained insights into alumni experiences, fostering a sense of community and providing valuable perspectives on program life. This approach aimed to create a welcoming atmosphere and help applicants envision themselves as part of the program's supportive network. FS described her interview experience:

I remember there was a room where we discussed the different “hats” that we wear. This opened my eyes to the diversity and backgrounds of the people in the room. I recall taking a moment to soak in what the current cohort of student volunteers looked like, the experiences they shared, and how they interacted with us as we waited.

In the instructional practices of the faculty, there's a clear commitment to fostering welcoming and humanizing classroom environments. Through discussions on social justice and antiracism, students were encouraged to express diverse perspectives in a safe space. This inclusive approach, as noted by FS, cultivated an environment where students felt comfortable sharing their insights freely. For JJ, witnessing this approach inspired her to engage in office hours, which she found transformational, especially in terms of mentorship and personal growth within the program. This emphasis on community orientation and inclusivity is echoed in the tailored supports and resources provided by faculty, such as introducing first-generation students to relevant campus resources and offering guidance during orientation to demystify their academic journey. JJ shared how the humanizing and authentic nature impacted her EC identity, “To have faculty who have supported me in the realization that an antiracist EC could exist, and they exist as folx who are of historically marginalized identities, was empowering and inspiring.”

EC Identity Cultivation and Development

The theme of *EC identity cultivation and development* is at the core of the school counselor education program. It focuses on preparing school counselors to integrate an antiracist approach seamlessly as educators and counselors, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these roles. This theme captures the duality of the antiracist EC role and the emphasis on leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change in instructional practices. Students began to conceptualize this identity in their admission statements and interviews, and once admitted, they used the knowledge and skills acquired in class to further develop their identity as ECs. As they assumed a school counselor position, they internalized this identity and sought opportunities to support their ongoing development as ECs. JJ reflected on her experience, noting that one of the application questions prompted applicants to reflect on the school counselor's role in relation to other disciplines, planting the seed for the concept of an EC identity. Faculty actively addressed antiracism and social justice issues through their scholarly pursuits and work as former school counselors. This modeling influenced students as they shaped their identities as antiracist ECs. JJ shared how she felt empowered by the faculty who embodied what it meant to be an antiracist EC, “[Faculty] impacted my decision to seek opportunities to explore my research interests and strengthen my professional skills as it relates to counseling and social justice.”

The program sequence was structured so that students learned the foundations of counseling in Year 1 and gained the experience and skills of an educator role in Year 2, while continuously engaging with antiracist literature, examining social systems, and aligning with professional standards throughout every phase of the program. Courses specializing in college counseling, school-based mental health, and classroom instruction allowed students to embrace the EC Identity. FS described how she applied insights gained to her professional practice, “In [curriculum and instruction course], I appreciated that we learned how to create engaging lessons and engage learners. This reminded me to

think about and meet the different needs of diverse groups when creating and teaching lessons.” FS engages in advocacy, leadership, systemic change, and collaboration in her current practice:

I engage actively in multiple committees at school and district levels. Through my involvement in these committees, I actively champion students, striving to guarantee that their individual needs are addressed. I also play an essential role in the decision-making processes, fostering collaboration with the student, family, staff, and community members to establish inclusive and nurturing environments that cater to the needs of every student.

JAO highlighted the many alumni who go on to embody the themes of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change:

I can’t say enough how proud I am to see and hear examples of alumni going into schools and districts, even in their first year, and putting some of the things they learned or experienced in the program into practice.

The development of an antiracist EC identity also influenced JJ when exploring employment. She ensured that her interview responses included examples that demonstrated the integration of support across all levels, encompassing services relevant to both counseling and education.

Fostering Critical Consciousness and Transformative Action

The theme of *fostering critical consciousness and transformative action* focuses on creating spaces and opportunities for preservice school counselors to critically analyze systemic racism, the impact of racism on education systems and K–12 students, and how school counselors could engage in systemic change. Faculty incorporated critical consciousness and transformative action into admissions by allowing applicants to discuss an equity or social justice-themed case study during interviews, prompting them to identify the systemic issue and propose solutions.

In courses, faculty encouraged students to explore their understanding of social-political systems and actionable steps to dismantle racism. For example, in the course School Counseling Curriculum and Instructional Design, the final assignment involved selecting a topic from a list related to race and racism within education and school counseling. Their objective was to identify a racial equity issue affecting students’ academic, social-emotional, or career development. This included analyzing the systems perpetuating racism, articulating its harmful effects on K–12 students and educators, and proposing actionable steps for school counselors to initiate change. This assignment aimed to empower students to strategically advocate for necessary changes and envision a more equitable future within educational settings. Through this process, students were urged to develop a heightened awareness of the issues at hand to cultivate a critical consciousness that enables them to recognize and challenge injustices within educational contexts and take meaningful steps toward addressing social injustices. JJ shared the benefits of this type of assignment, “We were not only left well informed about how oppression is embedded into the education system, but we also had practical tools and resources on how we, as school counselors, can implement change in regard to each topic highlighted.” Providing preservice school counselors with opportunities across courses to foster critical consciousness and transformative action gave students a sense of responsibility to promote social justice and advocate for inclusivity in their professional endeavors. JJ highlights, “They emphasized the necessity of not only recognizing these issues but also taking meaningful action to challenge and dismantle systemic racism. Their approach was not just theoretical; it was practical, providing us with tangible strategies and skills.”



Discussion

This collective self-study investigated antiracist instructional practices and program structures. A benefit of employing a collective self-study is that it enabled us to examine the impact of faculty

practices on antiracist EC identity development. Antiracist practices can be ingrained across various aspects and multiple phases of a counselor education program. Firstly, it involves faculty developing antiracist structures, policies, and practices within their graduate program. Secondly, it involves faculty engaging in antiracist and culturally responsive andragogy practices. It also involves teaching preservice school counselors how to engage in antiracist work as an educator and counselor in K–12 schools. This project has introduced an additional layer to this work, engaging in a collective self-study for accountability and improved practice.

Until now, we lacked an understanding of its impact on students and the specific conditions influencing them. Incorporating the diverse voices of current and former students as critical friends allowed us to identify elements of our program that impact students' identity development. We identified seven conditions faculty members' antiracist instructional and program practices influence in preservice school counselors' antiracist EC identity. These include: (a) explicit commitment to equity, social justice, and antiracism, (b) diversity of people, (c) ongoing self-evaluation and improvement through transformative dialogue, (d) cultural responsiveness, (e) authentic and humanizing approach, (f) EC identity cultivation and development, and (g) fostering critical consciousness and transformative action. We found students were exposed to these elements before entering the program, during recruitment and admissions, and continuing throughout the program during orientation and coursework.

A key finding from our self-study was that future school counselors started to embrace these principles in their work with K–12 students. As faculty members implemented antiracist structures, policies, and practices within the graduate program and engaged in culturally responsive teaching methods, preservice school counselors integrated these elements into their EC identity and professional practice. Building on Mason et al.'s (2021) revisions to the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI), which emphasize

infusing antiracist practices into school counselor education, our findings further support the importance of embedding these principles into counselor education programs to shape the development of socially just and equity-focused practitioners. As school counselors, they incorporated these principles into their interactions and interventions with K–12 students, thereby extending the impact of antiracist practices beyond the graduate program into the wider educational context. The faculty's modeling and instruction were critical in influencing graduate students. By embodying antiracist principles and providing explicit guidance on implementing them in their practice, faculty members served as role models for graduate students. This recognition expands on the work of Ieva, Hannon, et al. (2021), underscoring the profound influence that intentional and inclusive andragogical approaches can have on shaping the perspectives and actions of preservice school counselors as they engage in antiracist practices. This research also highlights the lasting impact of early program exposure on the subsequent professional practice and antiracist EC identity development of students transitioning into the role of school counselors. Thus, while leadership, advocacy, systemic change, and collaboration are inherent in school counselor professional standards, a specific lens of antiracism is necessary to propel the profession forward and is essential to developing an antiracist EC identity.

The collective self-study and insights from critical friends have provided valuable perspectives into our strengths and ways to enhance them, prompting us to incorporate these findings into program structures and practices. For example, despite initial plans to eliminate a specific segment that is part of admission interview day due to time and resource constraints, learning about its positive impact led us to swiftly reintegrate it into interview day. In response to critical friends' responses in the study, we are also actively working on making our commitment to equity, social justice, and antiracism more explicit prior to admission. By posting sample assignment descriptions to our website, we aim to give prospective students a glimpse into the learning experiences they will engage in alongside

faculty. Further, by adding additional images of cohorts, we hope to enhance prospective students' understanding of the inclusive and collaborative learning environment they may become a part of. Lastly, at the start of their program, we aim to develop more intentional student training regarding how to engage in transformative dialogue in difficult conversations.

Implications

Future attention should be given to incorporating antiracist school counseling practices and competencies into school counselor preparation (Stickl-Haugen et al., 2021). Although a foundation has been established (Ieva, Beasley, et al., 2021; Mason et al., 2021; Mayes & Byrd, 2022), and examples of how antiracist practices are infused into school counselor education programs are documented (Johnson et al., 2023; Malott et al., 2022; Ng et al., 2023), practical and contextually specific strategies are needed. To prepare school counselors to enter the field as ECs ready to provide antiracist school counseling programs and services, counselor education programs must establish structures and opportunities that assist graduate students in developing their antiracist EC identity. Preparing preservice school counselors to engage in antiracist practices while supporting their EC identity development has the potential for a synergistic effect that can better prepare them to enter the field.

Studying non-CACREP programs, especially concerning EC identity and antiracist practices, is imperative for several reasons. Firstly, these programs offer a diversity of perspectives due to their flexibility in curriculum design. For example, the program studied exercised flexibility by adding courses such as college admission counseling, mental health in schools, curriculum instruction and design, and MTSS, fostering the growth of students' EC identity while balancing these dual identities. Furthermore, non-CACREP programs, particularly those situated in minority-serving institutions or communities of color, often have strong ties to their local communities. This connection enables these programs to better understand and respond to the

specific needs and experiences of marginalized populations, serving as vital resources for advancing antiracist initiatives within counseling practice. Ultimately, studying non-CACREP programs prompts a critical examination of accreditation standards themselves. By scrutinizing the strengths and limitations of different models, counselor educators can work toward developing more inclusive and equitable standards that align with the diverse needs of preservice school counselors and K–12 students.

The themes outlined in this collective self-study can enhance and extend existing frameworks for antiracist school counselor education. Firstly, school counselor educators can examine program practices and policies that impact students before, during, and after their program, and can infuse the antiracist practices highlighted in the self-study themes. Secondly, school counselor educators can examine their coursework and infuse antiracist materials, literature, and activities. By incorporating these themes, school counseling programs can ingrain antiracist practices into multiple levels and across multiple phases of school counselor education programs. School counselor educators may also utilize a collective self-study to identify existing elements and areas needing improvement in their specific program and cultural context.



Conclusion

In this article, we sought to understand how school counseling faculty prepare preservice school counselors to engage in antiracist practices. Through this process, we identified areas of strength and areas for improvement. This research suggests ways for counseling programs to reflect on and enhance their practices to foster antiracist EC identities in students. We aim to contribute to the integration of antiracist practices in all counseling programs, ensuring graduates are equipped to engage in this vital work.

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