School Counseling Students' Perceptions of an Advocacy Course: A Pedagogic Case Study

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Abstract: The purpose of this pedagogic, single case study was to determine a) how students described the role of school counselors, and b) how students perceived their efficacy to serve as future advocates at the conclusion of participating in an advocacy course. Data were coded through a constructivist paradigm using interpretive analysis. Three major theme categories emerged including (a) developing a personal understanding of advocacy; (b) emotional arousal paired with the emergence of advocacy dispositions; and (c) efficacy for future advocacy.

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Professional school counselors are uniquely positioned to be leaders and advocates for educational equity and reform in twenty-first century schools (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019a; 2019b). Although school counseling literature is replete with ethical, moral, and professional imperatives for advocacy (ASCA, 2016, 2022; Feldwisch, 2016; Moss & Singh, 2015; Reese, 2021), there is sparse research highlighting evidence-based methods or pedagogical strategies used by school counselor educators to teach advocacy in graduate-level counseling courses. Further, there is little scholarship demonstrating how students change as a result of such courses. Barrio-Minton et al. (2014) reviewed 230 articles published on counselor education and found most articles focused in areas outside of pedagogy (i.e., content, techniques). Less than 10% of articles focused on pedagogy, none of which were advocacy related (Barrio Minton et al., 2014).

Despite a dearth of literature in this area, Decker et al. (2015) offered suggestions for teaching advocacy and social justice skills through critical pedagogy strategies that raise awareness of social issues and foster an imperative to act. Decker et al. (2015) recommended experiential activities, volunteer opportunities, reflections, use of contemporary media, and real-life advocacy work. In this article, we provide a description of a course designed to promote advocacy dispositions, skills, knowledge, and efficacy, in which Decker's critical pedagogy strategies were utilized. The purpose of this article is to report findings of a qualitative focus group of students' perceptions about the course.

Literature Review

Macrosystem changes in the complex and pluralistic nature of society have resulted in greater diversity in today's school systems (Curry & Milsom, 2021). In 2015, Colby and Ortman (2015) wrote that although schools have historically represented the demographic composition of a primarily white,

Protestant majority, they estimated that by 2050 nearly 52% of students in the United States (U.S.) will be of ethnic and minority group status. By 2022, the National Center for Education Statistics found the population of white students in public schools to have dropped to 46%. To meet the divergent needs of students in U.S. schools, school counselors need to be aware of the social inequities that exists across the multiple student populations they may encounter (e.g., income, gender, ability, race). Advocacy is a necessary practice for addressing such inequalities (Gilfillan, 2018).

School Counselors as Advocates
School counselors are expected to be proficient in program development and evaluation, career and college readiness and academic planning, and student social emotional growth and well-being (ASCA, 2019a). Moreover, ASCA *Ethical Standards* (2016) decreed that school counselors advocate for students that are marginalized in school systems. Indeed, the need for school counselors as an advocate for students and for the profession is well-documented throughout the counseling literature (Cigrand et al., 2015; Crawford et al., 2014; Moss & Singh, 2015; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018; Trusty & Brown, 2005; Young et al., 2015).

The counseling profession has made great strides in providing advocacy frameworks for counselors to apply to their work with clients (ASCA, 2019a), yet it is critical that counselors are intentional about continuously working toward social improvement and justice. A primary purpose of advocacy in school counseling practice is to remove barriers to student academic achievement through ensuring all students have access to rigorous curricula, career, and post-secondary preparation (Author, 2017; Gilfillan, 2018). Equally important, school counselors advocate for equity and fairness as it pertains to the under- or overrepresentation of marginalized groups in special programs (i.e., special education, gifted education, honors, advanced placement [AP]; ASCA, 2019a; ASCA, 2018). Beyond the ethical implication of advocacy as standard practice in school counseling, ASCA noted that advocacy is an expected core competency of counselor training programs that adequately prepare future school counselors (ASCA, 2020). Similarly, advocacy is a key professional knowledge and skill listed in the entry-level specialty area for school counseling in the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs standards (CACREP, 2016).

Advocacy Pedagogy: Models and Competencies
The ASCA *Ethical Standards* (2016,2022) addressed school counselors' role in removing educational barriers that impact students' academic and career potential. Trusty and Brown (2005) illuminated three advocacy competencies of successful school counselors: dispositions, knowledge, and skills. Advocacy knowledge included advocacy models, systems change, dispute resolution, and parameters. Advocacy skills included collaboration, problem-solving, assessment, and organization (Trusty & Brown, 2005). However, advocacy dispositions took primacy in Trusty and Brown's (2005) competencies because they are presumed to precede and are an indispensable element of knowledge and skills.

Four disposition competencies were suggested by Trusty and Brown (2005). The first was an *advocacy disposition,* or a genuine concern for others. The second was a *family support/empowerment disposition* where the counselor recognizes that parents-guardians are a key support for their children and extends empathy and empowerment to the family. The third is a *social awareness disposition*, or a concern with eliminating systemic barriers for all people. The fourth is an *ethical disposition* where the counselor places a high premium on professional codes of ethics. Trusty and Brown (2005) contended that

promoting these dispositions would increase the likelihood that advocacy skills will follow (Trusty & Brown, 2005).

Additionally, students in the course that was the basis for this study were taught the American Counseling Association's (ACA) *Advocacy Competencies* (Lewis et al., 2002; Toporek & Daniels, 2018). These competencies cover the following key areas: client/student empowerment, client/student advocacy, and community collaboration (Lewis et al., 2002). Thus, the models and competencies were complementary to each other and used as the foundational pedagogy to design a school counseling course with the purpose of enhancing students' understanding of advocacy in practice and efficacy to become advocates. However, Trusty and Brown's model (2005) was used as the primary course framework because their model is school counseling specific. The purpose of this study was to determine how students perceived their participation in an Advanced School Counseling course designed to promote advocacy knowledge, skills, dispositions, and efficacy.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

The primary theory used to design this study was Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory applied to the task of advocacy. Bandura's (1977) theory is considered a seminal work in education but has widely influenced mainstream culture for concepts such as role modeling, observation, and the importance of direct experiences that lend to deep learning. Bandura (1977) asserted that people develop self-efficacy—a determination about their ability to be successful—and that this self-assessment of their success trajectory impacts the degree of effort individuals invest in overcoming difficulties (i.e., persevering) (Curry & Milsom, 2021). Therefore, individuals' self-efficacy toward specific tasks (i.e., school counselors advocating for systemic change) promotes persistence toward meeting goals. The development of self-efficacy encourages individuals to endure stress in order to attain goals. School counselors with greater advocacy efficacy may persist as advocates for change, even when they struggle, if they perceive they are capable of eventual success.

There are four sources of efficacy expectations: (a) performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) emotional arousal as described by Bandura (1977). *Performance accomplishments* are the most dependable source of efficacy expectation, as they are based on the lived experiences of the individual (e.g., field experiences, internships; Bandura, 1977). As individuals experience success, and subsequent mastery, they are more likely to attempt future tasks that require difficult skills related to mastered skills. *Vicarious experience* is the second most dependable producer of efficacy expectation; an individual seeing someone else in a similar position be successful promotes the idea that they can do it, too. Giving future school counselors access to advocacy role models is crucial to their future development of advocacy competencies. *Verbal persuasion* includes communicated support and is the third most dependable source of efficacy expectancy (Bandura, 1977). Bandura noted that persuasion could produce short-lived efficacy expectancy if it was undermined by disaffirmation experiences. For example, if a school counseling student was encouraged to advocate for a client, but the advocacy effort was unsuccessful, then the student might be less likely to pursue advocacy efforts in the future. The last of the sources of efficacy expectancy is *emotional arousal*. Emotions indicate to individuals how much stress they can endure. For example, school counseling students experiencing anxiety prior to advocating may perceive themselves as incapable of a successful advocacy outcome.

Study Rationale and Research Questions

Although counselors are expected to be advocates (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018; Toporek & Daniels, 2018; Trusty & Brown, 2005; Young et al., 2015), there is a dearth of pedagogical research on how to effectively teach pre-service counselors the skills of becoming advocates. This course was developed to help students learn how to become advocates, something not often addressed in literature. However, recent literature within the profession has highlighted the importance of teaching advocacy to promote antiracism, social justice, diversity, equity, inclusion in K-20 schools (see Holcomb-McCoy, 2022; Kishimoto, 2018; Mason et al. 2018). This study was conducted to determine how students perceived their participation in an Advanced School Counseling course designed to promote advocacy knowledge, skills, dispositions, and efficacy. The research questions were:

1. How do students describe the school counselor's role as an advocate after participating in this course?
2. How did students perceive changes in their ability to advocate after participating in the course?

Methods

We chose a qualitative, pedagogic case study design, used in the exploration of a time bound, curriculum phenomenon (how students perceived learning in an advocacy course) to draw information for further course development and design. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), case studies involve the collection of multiple sources of data, collected in a bounded system (i.e., a case), over time. For this case study, the course and students in the course are treated as one total case rather than multiple cases. The rational is that the phenomenon being studied is the course and students' perceptions of the course, not individuals in the course per se. Therefore, gathering the input of the students was important, but focus remained on the course. The time bounds of this case study were one semester (14 weeks, the length of the course).

The Advanced School Counseling Course

The graduate-level, experiential course was taught at a large, public university in the southeast U.S. The purpose of the course was to develop school counseling students' advocacy dispositions, awareness, knowledge, skills, and efficacy. The course was pedagogically designed by the instructor to reflect the ASCA (2019a) National Model and to focus on the role of school counselors as advocates. As previously mentioned, Trusty and Brown's (2005) advocacy model and the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis et al., 2002; Toporek & Daniels, 2018) were used to design the course, and Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) was used as a theoretical framework for both the course and this study. Course activities and projects were intended to allow students to address social concerns in the local community. The class met once per week throughout the semester for three hours. Class activities and assignments are described in the following section.

Course Activity 1: Transportation

During the first week of the course, students attended a public information forum targeted toward informing citizens about the future of the local public transportation system and what might be done to ensure public transportation service was continued as a commodity for all. An explanation of the inefficiencies of the current public transportation system were discussed, critical problems to stakeholders were examined, and testimonies were given by individuals who relied on transportation (e.g., people who had to ride two to three hours to get to work, etc.). An estimate of the cost of fixing the city's transportation issue was also discussed, and charts of tax increases and millage were distributed. When students returned to class the following week, transportation issues impacting parents and

students in schools were discussed including the potential impact on the parent-school relationship. Students examined how parents who do not attend school functions were sometimes labeled by school faculty and staff as disengaged. Students then discussed how a systemic/structural issue, like a dysfunctional public transportation system, can create inequities for students and families in schools and, thus, an issue that lowered a family's social capital. The class discussed how empathy for parents and accommodating parent schedules allowed for relationship building and greater access for parents to be engaged in their children's education. Students were given a follow-up transportation assignment that allowed them to experience how some parents might struggle navigating through our city with the public transportation system (Appendix A).

Course Activity 2: Service Learning

Another course assignment included visits to two different soup kitchens. One soup kitchen was located in a food desert on the north side of the city and was operated in an all-Black church in a low-income area. The soup kitchen at the church was supplied through church member donations only, operated only on weekends, and served individuals living in the local neighborhood, children, and the elderly. Children could come to a Saturday morning tutoring program and receive breakfast and meals for the weekend. Church membership was not required. The second soup kitchen was a full capacity soup kitchen in a large urban area run by a Catholic organization, which served lunch every day and provided a sack dinner. Over 300 meals were provided every day of the week. Students served at both locations, then read articles and listened to National Public Radio (NPR) podcasts on poverty, living wages, and the growing number of children and youth living in poverty. Students turned in reflection papers on the experience.

Course Activity 3: Legislative Action

Other course activities included attending an advocacy institute that the instructor of the course held in conjunction with faculty in social work and educational leadership. Students in this course joined with students in classes from those programs and spent a day together (6 hours) learning about their unique roles in schools, how bills become laws, how to contact state and U. S. congressional members, and how to write a compelling letter or email to their representative. Students were placed in heterogeneous groups by discipline and given educational issues that they worked on collaboratively to problem-solve. Following, the collective group of students spent a day at the state capitol with the instructors from the advocacy institute (including the first author, Jennifer Curry). Students prepared elevator pitches for specific bills and practiced pulling representatives from the floor or committee for bills if they wanted to ask their legislators to vote in a particular way. A second trip to the capitol was made by students in this course to hear their instructor testify as an expert witness on an enumerated anti-bullying bill for K-12 schools.

Course Activity 4: Advocacy Projects

Although there were other course assignments, the culminating learning experience was an advocacy project. Beginning the second week of the course, the students brainstormed approximately 20 social concerns affecting PreK-12 students, locally and nationally. Each week they refined the list until three projects were chosen, and each member of the class selected the project they felt most compelled or inspired to participate in. Each group wrote an eight- to ten-page review of the problem using data to describe the scope of the issue and evidenced-based interventions to provide resolution. Students had to identify key stakeholders and make a presentation about their findings. Students wrote an advocacy

action plan, and by the end of the course, steps toward completion of the project had to be documented. The three projects are described in Table 1.

Table 1

Advocacy Projects

Group	Project
Group 1: *Enumerated Anti-bullying protection for LGBTQ Youth*	This group researched enumerated anti-bullying laws and worked with a state representative on a bill put forth in the legislative session. A presentation was made to [the State's School Counselor Association] Board as they were asked by this group to join a coalition in support of the bill. The bill did not pass; a competing anti-bullying bill did pass and was enacted (non-enumerated). These students were present during a senate hearing and provided written statements in favor of a specific bill at the hearing.
Group 2: *Development of Green Spaces, Safe Routes to Schools*	This group conducted research on green space development in the urban areas of the city and joined a coalition for safe routes to schools. A presentation was made to a local school board to support safe routes to schools which supports a healthy lifestyle for kids and requires law enforcement to provide more attention and protection for making walking routes safer for school age children. https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/Safe-Routes-to-School-Programs
Group 3: *Public Transportation*	This group conducted research on models of effective public transportation. They joined with [a local coalition] to support a tax increase that would provide a new infrastructure for public transportation in the city. Presentations were made to multiple community groups (churches, civic organizations) throughout the city.

Three students chose to participate in Group Advocacy Project # 1, two students participated in Group Advocacy project #2, and three students participated in Group Advocacy Project #3. Because each project was unique, the workload for each was also unique. Students met with the research librarian during class time to learn how to look up literature and primary source data related to their projects. Group #1 helped write pieces of testimony used by the first author during expert testimony and submitted testimony statements during a house committee hearing on an Enumerated Anti-Bullying bill. Group #2 presented their findings to a local school board using models that were successful in other states and districts. The school board was already interested in Safe Routes to Schools Programs through the U.S. Department of Transportation. The students in this group worked with a local physical education teacher to develop this presentation and co-presented the benefits of these programs with the teacher. And finally, Group #3 presented a tax increase for the transportation system to groups throughout the parish

and noted the need for parents to have improved transportation to schools for educational purposes (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, extracurricular activities).

Data Collection

Data used for this study came from three sources related to the experiential activities listed above: (a) transportation assignment papers, (b) the reflection journals from the soup kitchen service-learning activities, and (c) a transcript from a focus group interview conducted at the conclusion of the course. The focus group was conducted to gain insight about students' perceptions of the course and their understandings of advocacy. The focus group was chosen for data collection, as it allowed students to process questions as a group; the other forms of data collection were from individual sources.

Participants

This study involved a single case (one course, with eight students and their projects). All students agreed to participate in the study. The participants (*N*=8) were students enrolled in a graduate-level school counseling advocacy course. Participants held different enrollment statuses, including full-time student (n=6), part-time (n=1), and non-matriculating (n=1). Except for the non-matriculated student, all participants were enrolled in a school counseling graduate degree program. Participants were majority white, non-Hispanic (n=7) and one African American (n=1). One participant identified as male (n=1) and all others identified as female (n=7). The group ranged in age from 23-38 years old (*M*=26). See Table 2 for a description of participant backgrounds and pseudonyms assigned.

Table 2

Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Race	Background
Tammy Bosworth	25	Female	White, not Hispanic	2 years of middle school teaching experience with Teach for America in high poverty schools, significant experience developing and leading service organizations
Simon Bergeron	38	Male	White, not Hispanic	10 years of elementary teaching experience at a private elementary school
Kylie Johnson	23	Female	African American	1 year of teaching experience in public elementary school
Allie Parsons	27	Female	White, not Hispanic	5 years of experience with private industry
Abigail Prince	24	Female	White, not Hispanic	No work experience, prior student athlete
Jessica Timmons	24	Female	White, not Hispanic	Prior work experience as a student worker in accounting for a TRIO program
Katrina Wilson	23	Female	White, not Hispanic	No work experience, prior student athlete
Holly Williams	26	Female	White, not Hispanic	3 years of work experience as an administrative assistant in school district

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were made by the instructor to ensure that students were not coerced into study participation. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained, and students were given an informed consent protocol at the conclusion of the course; participation was confidential and voluntary. A licensed professional counselor facilitated the focus group after the course ended, and final grades had already been submitted. Rigor and trustworthiness were established through various methods including member checks of the transcript, triangulation of data by using multiple data sources (i.e., coursework, reflections), and observational memos completed after course activities by the instructor. The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Analysis

We used a constructivist paradigm to analyze the data based on the work of Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2009). A constructivist paradigm is part of a larger interpretivist approach in qualitative research. Because the meanings made by the students during (based on assignments, reflection papers) and after the course (through the focus group) were laden with social phenomena, this approach seemed most fitting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009). To allow the instructor to focus on the course and learning process, none of the data collected was reviewed for analysis until a full month after the conclusion of the course.

Data analysis occurred in three stages: (a) a priori deductive coding based on our theoretical model (Bandura, 1977), (b) open coding based on emergent meanings shared by the participants in their writing and in transcripts, and then (c) axial coding based on the connections between related codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through the axial coding phase, concepts were refined into categories. The researchers looked for possible close relationships among categories and the development of propositional statements that determined inclusion. Categories were refined until possibilities for seeing new themes emerge were exhausted. Once theoretical saturation occurred, and no new categories or information emerged from the data, the categories were constructed into final themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Findings

Data analysis included triangulation of the focus group transcript with reflection papers and course assignments. After exhausting the codes and collapsing into categories, three major themes emerged including: (a) Developing an Understanding of Advocacy; (b) Emotional Arousal, Promotion of Empathy, and Growth of Advocacy Dispositions; and (c) Feeling Efficacious to Advocate in the Future.

Theme 1: Developing an Understanding of Advocacy

At the end of the semester, students' responses revealed changes in their understandings and self-identities as advocates. Within this theme, two subthemes emerged: (a) advocacy and systemic thinking and (b) advocacy as a strategic and planned process. Responses shifted from vague pre-conceptions to broader end-of-course conceptualizations of advocacy. Students reported gaining clarity about what advocacy means. An example of the early preconception of advocacy was given by Abigail in her transportation paper when she thought about what advocacy was, "Yeah, I think it was just very broad for me like I pictured it as just stepping up for someone else." Abigail's comment typified many students'

early understandings in that their knowledge of advocacy was limited to the idea of verbally taking a stand on an issue rather than having methods, procedures, or competencies to advocate. By the end of the course, students' conceptions of advocacy demonstrated a deeper level of development and insight. Students' ideas appeared to crystallize. Holly journaled, "Now I have definite terms of what advocating means, what I need to do and what I need to say to get my point or opinion across." During the focus group, Katrina reflected on how her perspective of advocacy had changed,

> I used to think of the 1960's, hippies, protest lines…Now I understand what really goes behind that, you know? All the studies, the research… It's a very systematic process the way you go through it, it's organized… when you know the facts and you know the way to present those facts to get the type of outcome that you might want, it's different. And what surprised me most is that you're more emotionally tied to it.

Katrina's acknowledgment of an organized, systematic process that requires disciplined research was a shift in thinking for her. Her reference to 1960s protesters rather than advocacy as an everyday tool of counseling was also common among students. They began to see advocacy as many varied activities: research, conversations, letter writing, and more.

Subtheme 1: Advocacy and systemic thinking
Students also distinguished between advocacy in the context of the school and advocacy within other contexts that influence the lives of children (i.e., legal system, communities). For example, in her soup kitchen reflection, Allie wrote,

> Before, I think that I considered what it was that I could do for my students within the confines of the school as a future counselor. But after taking this course, I see advocating as something on a way broader scale, I realize now that I will be part of a community.

While evidence of systemic thinking appeared in students' responses as early as the initial assignment, this type of response increased as the semester progressed. Students saw their school counselor identities within the parameters of the school but also saw them as encompassing an expanded community role. In discussing advocacy for families, Holly exemplified this by stating, "It is also my duty to make teachers and administration aware of the difficulties faced by parents." Allie, echoed this sentiment,

> I agree. Before this course I was just thinking about students. I think that I understand it now as more of a global issue. We're not going to be in the school just advocating for the students, but we also need to advocate for our co-workers or for the parents.

Students' comments also reflected an understanding of how integral systems were to children's development and how school counselors, as advocates, need the community to fully affect positive changes in children's lives. Simon acknowledged during the focus group,

> One of the things that we've realized is that the community is tied to the schools, and if I'm a counselor, I need the community if I want things to get better for each child. I probably knew that before, but now I realize it on a whole new level because I witnessed it in this course. So now I know it's those systems that [instructor's name] kept talking about. I have to be able to work on

policy and legislation, and honestly, that was eye opening for me, I just hadn't thought of it and wouldn't have known how to do it before.

Subtheme 2: Advocacy as a strategic and planned process

Throughout the course, students learned that advocacy was a planned and purposeful activity. Students discussed learning an advocacy model (Trusty & Brown, 2005) and watching the model put into place by their instructor. Admittedly, prior to taking the course, none of the students realized there were actual methods, or a process, by which to approach advocacy. When speaking about watching the expert witness testimony for a house bill in which the instructor was the main expert witness, Jessica explained,

> It's a process…strategic, step by step. Systematic. It's actual steps, not just research, it's planned. You know where you are going to go, who is going to speak first and second, and what they are going to say. If it's going to be successful, more likely than not, it's going to be very organized, choreographed, planned. Not random.

Abigail responded,

> I was surprised how much you have to understand politics… and you have to line up a strategy. When we went to the legislature and watched how Representative ___ called up the witnesses and how each person testified about a different thing and what data they presented. It was so coordinated and effective. I thought advocacy just happens on the spur of the moment.

Thus, learning about advocacy (Trusty & Brown, 2005) and then witnessing and practicing advocacy allowed students to better understand the methods and strategies involved. This allowed students to identify some of the knowledge and skills necessary for their future work as school counselors.

Theme 2: Emotional Arousal, Promotion of Empathy, and Growth of Advocacy Dispositions

Throughout the course, students learned about systemic barriers that promoted social inequities. This caused cognitive dissonance and fostered a breadth of emotions in the participants. Participants expressed a range of feelings in relation to the assigned activities including guilt, anger, sadness, worry, and embarrassment. Jessica wrote about her frustration with having to figure out the limited and vague transportation schedule,

> I was so frustrated doing this assignment! I realized that if I had to take public transportation from my home to anywhere in this town, I would spend hours every day just trying to get somewhere. There's a lot of factors that you have to think about before judging others. I had no clue how hard it was just to get around. Often people assume someone just doesn't want to work or doesn't want to go to college when, in reality they have no way to get there. That's something that I learned from this assignment!

Similarly, Allie reflected in her journal about her privilege,

> I feel guilty and embarrassed that I've had an easier life than so many others. It's easy to blame people for what they don't have. That's what I realized. It's even harder to realize you might not have earned everything you do have.

In addition, empathy for others' lived experiences emerged. Trusty and Brown (2005) noted that school counselors should have an awareness of and empathy for students' families. Student responses in reflection papers indicated shifting perspectives after their second experience volunteering in a soup kitchen, which encompassed interactions with the local community. In their personal reflections, students expressed how their assumptions were challenged and their sensitivity towards the effects of systemic poverty increased. While at the soup kitchens, participants witnessed many visitors in need of food who arrived in work uniforms, an indication that they clearly had jobs. This was a surprise to some participants who had assumed otherwise. Other soup kitchen visitors arrived with children. Abigail's response also indicated a shift in her worldview of systemic poverty and suggested an increased social awareness. She wrote in her soup kitchen reflection about her experiences and listening to podcasts about poverty,

> The stereotypes I had about people living in poverty were just so wrong…and were completely disproven by my experience in the soup kitchen. You can be working full time and not make a living wage. This is an idea I had never considered.

Tammy's soup kitchen reflection demonstrated sensitivity toward the importance of familial support in a child's success, *"*The only guaranteed way for a child to break the cycle of poverty is to excel in school, but a child in poverty can't excel in school when their most basic needs aren't being met.*"* In the focus group, Tammy indicated that, *"*This semester has changed both my perceptions and my assumptions about the poor…Experience is better than inference.*"*

> During the soup kitchen visits, students either served food or distributed greeting bags to visitors. The two visits enabled students to witness the hardships faced by families. Kylie journaled, "Rather than judging families and labeling them as lazy or careless, I will consider the hardships they deal with daily... It is my job to try to understand."

Sometimes emotions, empathy, and the development of advocacy dispositions collided into new realities. These realities were not necessarily positive or negative but were key in shaping the contexts of an individual's understanding of his or her future work and personal relationships. However, at times, these realities were harsh, even painful. Consider this excerpt from a reflection, written by Jessica, in which she described a defining moment that caused great cognitive dissonance, a host of emotions, and a potential new reality (note that the italicized words were underlined in Jessica's journal by Jessica for emphasis):

> After the transportation meeting, I was so excited. I understood things that I had seen and heard about. Like why certain people don't get jobs and remain unemployed and why some people don't go to college because they can't get there, and why some parents don't visit their children's schools for parent/teacher conferences and so much more. A thing like transportation affects every aspect of a person's life and the community. When I left the meeting, I called my mom; she is a fifth grade teacher… I told her all I learned, and she was silent on the other end of the phone. After, she said, 'None of that is true. If there is a will there is a way. *They* don't work because *they* don't want to. *They* don't come to the school for parent/teacher conferences because *they* don't care about *their* kids' education. I've worked with *them* for years. Trust me, this is how *they* choose to live, it has nothing to do with transportation or resources.' I was stunned. They? They who??? Then it dawned on me. All these years, my own mother has said the kinds of things that hold children and families back. My mother loves me and is a good mom, but the truth is, she and

my dad are racist. They are racist. Racist. Even writing it changes something for me. Yet, I have listened to this same talk for years and it never occurred to me. I feel guilty. Ashamed. Complicit. But what is really hard is that now I know that in order to advocate in my professional life, I also have to be willing to speak my new truth in my personal life. I know this won't be easy.

In her reflection, Jessica conveyed a sense of disillusionment and disappointment with her mother. She went so far as to label her parents' behavior (racist) and to locate her new reality as someone who recognized a double bind: a different truth from her family of origin that will place her in a position of advocacy against her parents' beliefs. By acknowledging her own feelings (guilt, shame, fear), she appeared to be going through a personal transformation. Jessica recognized the potential personal cost and discomfort that may unfold in her future. Other participants similarly expressed guilt for their own privilege in journals and in the focus group, and others expressed a concern about how their families might respond to their advocacy efforts.

Theme 3: Feeling Efficacious to Advocate in the Future
The most dependable producer of efficacy expectancy is performance accomplishment (Bandura, 1977). Students in this course reported multiple events where they practiced what they learned in class. The practice they gained included writing an advocacy project with an advocacy plan based on Trusty and Brown's model (2005), organizing social activity, providing testimony to a senate house committee, working in a soup kitchen, and providing information presentations to pre-service teachers. Simon stated,

> The project was obviously the big one. You know, picking a topic, and coming up with a plan. We were all able to do something outside the classroom to advocate, to get our hands dirty, and work with something that was real-world, applicable, timely. Without opportunities, like going to the transportation meeting, the legislature…our projects wouldn't have been the same. We wouldn't have understood advocacy.

Students also reported feeling more efficacious about their future work as school counselors, as demonstrated in this comment by Abigail, "Since I have learned more about poverty, and specifically seen the faces of poverty at the soup kitchen, I feel more comfortable working with students from poverty." Observing that the process of advocacy had a method helped students feel more efficacious about being advocates in the future. Kylie wrote, "I used to think advocacy was something that just happens spontaneously. Now I know there is a process and an approach I can use." As a group, they mentioned numerous times that they would be able to follow this process and use the model (Trusty & Brown, 2005) because they had the opportunity to witness it and to put it into practice. Katrina, wrote in a reflection,

> The difference between this course and others I have taken is that I am leaving with real experience and for me, I know I can take what I've learned and put it into action, not perfectly, but I know I can do it. I didn't read about being an advocate. I became one.

Through having an opportunity to become an advocate, Katrina asserted she would advocate again in the future. Others echoed this sentiment.

Discussion

Research question one was: How do students describe the school counselor's role as an advocate after participating in this course? Our findings indicated a progression from students entering the course unaware of systemic oppression issues towards students leaving the course with a heightened awareness of the need for school counselors to actively participate in social justice advocacy. Responses also indicated acknowledgment of how extant worldviews shifted in relation to greater immersion into social justice activities, such as classroom assignments and direct participation in community-related events. Typically, behavioral modifications manifest when disequilibrium occurs between what is perceived and what is happening in reality (Kohlberg, 1981). The course described in this study was designed to promote critical pedagogy and disequilibrium related to advocacy, similar to the pedagogical strategies described by Decker et al. (2015). The assignments and out of class experiences produced a disequilibrium in students' perceptions of social justice, leading to expanded conceptions of students as future advocates. Awareness seemed to precede an ethos of caring and a disposition for advocacy (Theme 1) as well as a new, deeper understanding of others' lived experiences (Theme 2). Students demonstrated an awareness of how systems impacted the development of children and ways that school counselors need to think systemically to produce positive outcomes for children and youth. It is noteworthy, that the students also developed an awareness that school counselor advocacy across multi-systems such as within mesosystems (e.g., advocating for teachers, students, parents) and at the exosystemic level (e.g., policy, legislative action, and political activism), was equally important as individual advocacy to produce change. Their understanding of the school counselor's role as a community change agent was influenced by an understanding of action at these multiple levels.

Our second research question was: How did students perceive changes in their ability to advocate after participation in the course? Like Trusty and Brown's (2005) assertion, students in this course appeared to first have emotional arousal and disposition changes that then accommodated growth around knowledge and skills. What appeared to effectively produce this mechanism of growth was the opportunity to experience, firsthand, social change organizations, legislative action, and to participate in advocacy projects that students developed themselves (Decker et al., 2015). In turn, this seemed to promote a sense of efficacy for future advocacy behaviors. However, at this time, it is not known if that momentum in advocacy disposition gains was maintained once students exited the course or the program. Follow-up research would be important to determine if perceived gains produced behaviors aligned with advocacy dispositions once students were in the school counseling role. Although students expressed self-confidence and dispositions towards future advocacy, sustaining those dispositions within systems where they may or may not have support would be more telling about the impact of the course.

These findings add to the extant body of literature on advocacy and the continual call for research that provides data and a critical understanding of school counselors' cultural competence and advocacy skills (e.g., Hipolito-Delgado, et al., 2021; Reese, 2021; Simons, 2021). School counselors' positionality is important when working cross-culturally; becoming self-aware and gaining skills to work with students of all cultures is critical. Because privilege can eclipse our understanding of social equity, graduate students need opportunities to engage in building awareness in meaningful ways.

Although this work lacks an explicit analysis of ethnicity and class, it is important to acknowledge the relationship as it relates to any discussion of counselor identity. The literature shows student-counselor identity does influence the mediation of experience in educational contexts, as counselors serve

as cultural bridges between students living in poverty and cultural resources. Without greater awareness and the development of knowledge and skills for effective advocacy, inequity will continue to be reproduced in schools.

Limitations

As with all research, this study has numerous limitations including a small number of participants and, due to the nature of qualitative research, the results are not generalizable. Additionally, all the data is self-reported by the participants. A final limitation is that one element of data, focus group data, is subject to groupthink, a phenomenon that occurs when group members are more focused on maintaining cohesion and agreement rather than pursuing individual ideas or thoughts within group discourse (Nyumba, et al. 2018). Thus, participants may have openly stated matching and congruent ideas with other group participants or remained silent, even if they had competing or dissenting thoughts or ideas.

Pedagogical Implications

Implications exist for the pedagogical strategies employed in this class. Due to the social justice orientation of this course, critical pedagogy (CP), with origins in Paulo Freire's original works (1970), was developed. Within CP, social and political discourse are part of the curriculum where students openly discuss and analyze their own perspectives. Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, 1993, 2000), aimed to transform educational processes, along with dialogue, aimed at viewing the oppressed as human (Freire, 1970, 1993, 2000). One example of political and social praxis in the Freire tradition from this course was immersing students into a culture of poverty. This immersion was consistently reinforced through student assignments and readings, reflective journaling, participation in transit reform consortiums, and a class service project involving multiple visits to the soup kitchen, all of which were credited by students for their learning the knowledge and skills of advocacy. In other words, praxis or *doing* was related to *knowing.* As stated by Simon, "Talking about advocacy and reading about it is not a way to prepare future school counselors. If I hadn't had this course, I know I wouldn't be ready to advocate. I can say that with certainty." Freire (1970, 1993, 2000) suggested that *action* is critical to social justice and critical pedagogy. He suggested, "Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (Freire, 2000, p. 88). Most importantly, learning that their fellow humans didn't somehow deserve poverty, weren't somehow choosing poverty, was an awakening for the students in this course. Further, recognizing that they somehow were not deserving of their privilege was also an awakening.

However, we wish to acknowledge that, although this course did have many perceived successes, a course like this is risky. Instructors implementing such courses should review university policies on students traveling for course assignments (i.e., university required field trip insurance), and should consider the implications of taking students into situations they may or may not be prepared for. Processing these interactions is essential. In this course, reflection journals were used, and students often emoted in these journals. Journaling has been shown to be effective practice; writing assignments reinforce synthesis of material (Mar Lorenzo Moledo, et al. 2021). It is important that the instructor does not become a counselor for the students but does give useful and constructive feedback for personal growth on assigned journal writings.

Because learning is a dialogical process in which students participate actively, it was important to make the classroom safe and free of judgment. Class size is shown to affect student participation. The total number of students in this class was eight. This class was a seminar class where conversation was nurtured, and the class size allowed for intimacy. In turn, students could be open and honest. When implementing such a course, instructors should consider how they will handle voices of dissent from the group, individuals who find the activities too discomforting, and alternative assignments for students who cannot attend events held during night or early daytime hours.

Regarding the advocacy projects, students in the course brainstormed and initially created a list of 27 advocacy potential advocacy projects. To create the initial project list. They eventually chose the three projects that were most meaningful to them. Resources used to complete the projects included a research librarian, assistance and collaboration with a physical education teacher in a local school district, two local political leaders who were co-authoring an enumerated anti-bullying bill, and a coalition of supporters for a local transportation tax. These local partners helped support students and their projects and were collaborators throughout the semester. Noteworthy, these partners were located after students chose their projects as was an organic part of the project. It's possible that we may not have been able to locate some of these partners/projects and may have needed to pivot to other projects had we not found support.

Other pedagogical considerations include choosing assignments that best align to the activities. In this course, students had course readings, discussions, watched TedTalks, listened to podcasts, NPR reports and more. However, there were also assigned readings relevant to the ASCA National Model (2019a), the ASCA School Counselor competencies (2019b), and the ASCA Ethical Standards (2016, 2022). By aligning this course to standards of the school counseling profession, we hoped that students would recognize how course content and projects would translate to their future responsibilities as school counselors. For college instructors, making choices that connect course content to future employment skills, mindsets, or expectations may help students build efficacy to perform in those roles in the future. By seeking to understand gaps in novice employees' performance, college faculty can develop courses through pedagogy that critically engages the needs of their particular fields.

Beyond pedagogical choices, faculty need to commit to developing courses that go beyond typical content instruction and move toward action. However, it is important to acknowledge that counseling faculty may have limited exposure to these instructional methods. Most accredited counseling education doctoral programs that train counselor educators focus on the CACREP (2016) standards. The standards denote the skills and competencies needed to become counselor educators. During their doctoral programs, most counselor educators are taught how to teach counseling skills, how to provide clinical supervision, and how to effectively research counseling issues. Although standards of advocacy, ethics, social justice, and more, are discussed as content, opportunities to apply such content are often limited. Therefore, learning how to teach students to embrace roles beyond counseling takes extra effort and research. By researching student outcomes, we might add to the literature, supporting both our students and colleagues.

Summary

In this article, we discussed a single pedagogic case study investigating students' perceptions of a course designed to promote advocacy dispositions, knowledge, skills, and efficacy. Students appeared to understand the process and strategies of advocacy and were able to connect systems theory and advocacy

activity to their future role as school counselors. Limitations included focus group data collection, students' self-report, sample size, and the lack of formal follow-up measures. Pedagogical implications were also provided. As future school counselors continue to be called upon as systemic change agents and advocates, school counselor educators will need to think of ways to innovate how to prepare our students for these roles.

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Appendix A. Transportation Assignment

How Easy Is It to Get Around Our City?

Using **only** public transportation (no family member with a car, no uber, bicycle, etc.) complete he following assignment: For each scenario answer questions a-d. Be prepared to share your findings with the class at our next meeting.

Scenarios:

1. Your child attends [redacted] Middle School. He has gotten sick. It is 10:30 a.m. and the school has called insisting you come get him. From your home, figure out transportation.
2. You have just gotten a job at the WalMart in Siegen marketplace working 3rd shift from 10p.m.-7a.m. unloading the freight truck. From your home, figure out transportation.
3. Your child has gotten caught with a weapon on school grounds. There will be a hearing for him at the [redacted] School Board on Thursday afternoon at 2:00. The school board is expecting you to be there, figure out transportation.
4. Your child is struggling in math at [redacted] Middle Magnet. His teacher has requested you meet her for a conference after school on Monday at 2:30. She can only stay until 3:15. Figure out transportation.
5. Your child has had a toothache for 3 weeks. The school nurse has found a doctor in [redacted] who will see your child for free. The clinic is on [redacted] street and an appointment has been set for Friday at noon. Figure out transportation.
6. Your child's school is having an open house (choose an elementary school in your own area). The open house begins at 6 and will end at 8. Figure out transportation.
7. Your child has been chosen for a scholarship to science camp. Transportation is not provided. The camp will be held at [redacted]. The camp is from 8 a.m.-2:30 p.m. for two weeks in June. The child must be dropped off and picked up each day by you. Figure out transportation.

Assignment Questions:

a. Approximately how long will it take you to get where you are going and back home?
b. What is the distance between your home and the closest bus pickup? What is the distance between your destination and the closest drop off point?
c. Would you realistically make it to your appointment? What factors would you weigh in considering whether or not you would put out the effort to make your appointment?
d. What kinds of assumptions may people make about you if you don't make your appointment?

How might transportation impact your ability to effectively parent a school age child?

How does this activity help you conceptualize your role as the school counselor and your position in a school working with parents, teachers, administrators, students?

Appendix B. Ted Talks, National Public Radio (NPR), and Podcasts

NPR

Talk of the Nation*:* Neal Conan (Host); Patricia Cohen, Sudhir Venkatesh (Guests)
Reconsidering The "Culture of Poverty"
http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130701401&ps=rs

All Things Considered: Guy Raz (Host); Gibson, Brown and Stewart Families (Guests)
New Face of Homelessness: The American Family http://www.npr.org/2010/12/25/132329741/New-Face-Of-Homelessness-The-American-Family?ps=rs

NPR: Kirk Siegler and Linda Wang
California Housing Crisis: Working but On The Brink Of Homelessness
https://www.npr.org/2018/04/16/601970552/californias-housing-crisis-working-but-on-the-brink-of-homelessness

TED Talks

Mia Birdsong (2015): *The story we tell about poverty isn't true*
https://www.ted.com/talks/mia_birdsong_the_story_we_tell_about_poverty_isn_t_true/transcript?referrer=playlist-the_quest_to_end_poverty&autoplay=true

Richard Wilkinson (2011): *How economic inequality harms societies.*
https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_wilkinson_how_economic_inequality_harms_societies?referrer=playlist-the_quest_to_end_poverty&autoplay=true

Kandice Sumner: *How America's Public Schools Keep Kids in Poverty*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O7BMa9XGXE

Podcasts

Planet Money (NPR): Sarah Gonzalez, Sally Helm
Counting the Homeless
Episode: https://www.npr.org/2019/05/17/724462179/episode-913-counting-the-homeless

Unaffordable and Sheltered
Unaffordable: The Perfect Storm (July 22, 2019)
https://www.npr.org/podcasts/803569988/un-affordable-and-un-sheltered

Reflection Questions:

- What were your perceptions of poverty prior to serving in the two soup kitchens?
- What skills did the individuals serving in the soup kitchens display?
- What did you notice about the attitudes of the people serving in the soup kitchens?

- What is different or the same about your perceptions of poverty now?
- How did the TED Talks, Podcasts, and NPR articles inform your understanding of macrosystems issues and poverty?
- What skills do you need to work effectively with children whose parents work but do not make a living wage? What skills do you need to work effectively with children who live in poverty?
- What skills/attitudes do you already possess to work with students from low-income?
- What knowledge or information would help you work more effectively with families facing the struggles of poverty?
- Since you have learned more about poverty this semester, how confident do you feel working with students from low SES?
- In what ways did the NPR readings confirm or disaffirm what you saw at the soup kitchen?
- What do people in schools (teachers/administrators) need to know about poverty that you have learned this semester?
- How are you different as a person from this experience?