

Toward Culturally Competent School Counseling Environments: Hip-Hop Studio Construction



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Ian P. Levy, Edmund S. Adjapong

Literature on the physical design of counseling spaces suggests that calm and comfortable school counseling offices support students' emotional disclosure. However, many counseling environment design studies fail to consider the perspectives of clients. Scholars have called for school counselors to invite youth to co-create interventions as a means to promote cultural responsiveness and honor students' cultural knowledge. The goal of the current exploratory action research was to bring visibility to the experiences of students who participated in a classroom-based school counseling intervention in which they co-created a hip-hop studio as a social and emotional support space. Specifically, focus groups on the value of the co-creation of a hip-hop studio for urban youth were employed. Results suggested students experienced the studio as a shared space for inclusivity, comfort, and belonging; a place to make their own design choices; and a practice space to garner peer support, engage in personal self-development, and support others.

Keywords: counseling environment, urban youth, classroom-based, hip-hop, cultural responsiveness

The physical design of counseling spaces by counseling professionals has been well explored in counseling literature (Devlin et al., 2013; Liddicoat, 2010; Miwa & Hanyu, 2006; Pressly & Heesacker, 2001). Counselor office design has primarily focused on the counselor's preference for office design and has failed to take into consideration the psychological state of clients who are in pursuit of counseling services (Sanders & Lehmann, 2019). Historically, researchers explored how counselors' control over their office design mitigated stress and increased job satisfaction (Pressly & Heesacker, 2001). Pressly and Heesacker (2001) found that counselors who were unhappy with their office may communicate that frustration to their clients. Further, pleasant environments were found to foster creativity, a sense of well-being, and job satisfaction for practicing counselors (Ceylan et al., 2008).

More recently, school counselors reported that their creation of calm and comfortable counseling offices supported students' emotional disclosure (Cook & Malloy, 2014). Counseling office design elements that have been found to be important for the satisfaction of counselors and clients include overall aesthetics and layout, particularly dim lighting (Liddicoat, 2015; Miwa & Hanyu, 2006; Phelps et al., 2008), as well as access to daylight and space for privacy (Huffcut, 2010). In addition, the layout of a counseling office is strongly correlated with a client's psychological state, suggesting that environmental structure can allow clients to evoke emotions and confront discrepancies in their self-concept (Liddicoat, 2015). Goelitz and Stewart-Kahn (2008) expressed a need for counselors to consider the experiences of their clients when designing a counseling environment. Although research shows that aesthetic changes to a counseling environment can support a variety of client outcomes, a specific process for the creation of counseling offices is missing within the literature (Pearson & Wilson, 2012).

Additionally, given the current body of research, scholars note the importance of creating counseling environments that align with client preferences. A recent qualitative study conducted by Sanders and

Ian P. Levy, EdD, is an assistant professor at Manhattan College. Edmund S. Adjapong, PhD, is an assistant professor at Seton Hall University. Correspondence may be addressed to Ian Levy, 4513 Manhattan College Pkwy, The Bronx, NY 10471, ilevy01@manhattan.edu.

Lehmann (2019) indicated clients reported a sense of comfort when a counseling office felt more like a home or a lounge than like a traditional office space. Research has also emphasized the importance of school counselors developing an in-depth understanding of a client's social context as well as their cultural values and differences (McMahon et al., 2014; Ratts et al., 2016), further stressing a need to understand clients' preferences when designing emotionally supportive environments.

Client-Centered Office Design

Considering office design, Benton and Overtree (2012) posited that an understanding of clients' cultural differences was imperative for making design choices. Similarly, Devlin et al. (2013) found that counselors who displayed artwork from different cultures in their office were perceived by clients as being more culturally competent. Decisions to hang artwork might be based on Ponterotto and Austin's (2005) multicultural competence checklist, which suggested that "the physical surroundings of the program area reflect an appreciation of cultural diversity (e.g., artwork, posters, paintings, languages heard)" (p. 31). Beyond this checklist, however, Benton and Overtree (2012) suggested "no research or detailed guidelines on the critical physical elements to consider in designing a multiculturally friendly office" were available (p. 266). Although not in office design research explicitly, L. Smith and Chambers (2015) recommended school counselors invite youth to co-create counseling interventions as a means to promote cultural responsiveness and honor the cultural knowledge youth bring into counseling sessions. School counselors are also responsible for understanding students in the context of their own environments, in an effort to deploy culturally sensitive interventions (Hansen et al., 2014).

School Counselor Collaboration

When determining how school counselors might best employ culturally sensitive interventions, collaborative efforts are of particular value. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA; 2015) released a position statement suggesting that "school counselors demonstrate cultural responsiveness by collaborating with stakeholders to create a school and community climate that embraces cultural diversity and helps to promote the academic, career and social/emotional success for all students" (p. 24). Ratts and Greenleaf (2018) argued for school counselors to use multicultural and social justice approaches to combat threats to their students' academic, career, and personal/social development. Using these approaches requires that school counselors create school–family–community partnerships to collaborate with all stakeholders in support of equitable and socially just school counseling interventions (Bryan et al., 2019). However, an ASCA (2019a) national dataset suggested student-to-counselor ratios in the United States are 455 students to one school counselor, far higher than the recommended 250-to-1 ratio. These results are not surprising given prior research demonstrating that school counselors are often inundated with large caseloads and non–school counseling duties, which hinders their ability to engage in direct academic, career, and personal/social development services (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Mau et al., 2016).

In response to caseload issues, school counselors are encouraged to collaborate with teachers to provide indirect services to all students (Cholewa et al., 2016). Researchers noted the success of social skills–based classroom counseling to support students' social, personal, and academic concerns (Bostick & Anderson, 2009). A study on classroom emotional climate suggested that classroom environments that promote students' autonomy and expression of ideas are predictive of increased academic achievement (Reyes et al., 2012). School counselors are also urged to act as consultants, supporting teachers in developing interventions within their classrooms to address identified social and emotional needs (ASCA, 2019b). Researchers have recommended that school counselors collaborate with principals on school-wide initiatives that support all stakeholders in delivering the counseling curriculum, noting principal–counselor collaboration as significantly correlated with positive school climate (Rock et al., 2017).

In the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors are urged to use interventions like advisory councils (composed of representatives from all stakeholders, including students) to support student outcomes (ASCA, 2019b). However, the implementation of school-wide school counselor–led interventions lacks a specific focus on cultural responsiveness (Better-Bubon et al., 2016). Therefore, in order to adequately support the academic, career, and personal/social development of all students within a school, school counselors are encouraged to collaborate with ancillary staff who can carry out interventions that meet these developmental outcomes (ASCA, 2019b). In fact, in the current study, a collaboration is explored to support a school counselor—who had a 700-to-1 caseload—with the indirect implementation of a classroom-based school counseling intervention to aid students’ social and emotional development.

Counselor–Advocate–Scholar Model

This study strategically drew upon the counselor–advocate–scholar (CAS) model to engage various school-based stakeholders in the deployment of a culturally sensitive classroom-based school counseling intervention. The CAS model is built on the presumption that counselors who solely use office-bound interventions are unfit to address issues of social injustice (Ratts, 2009). In other words, the issues that Black and Brown youth and other marginalized groups bring into session are not solely internal and are likely symptomatic of larger societal ills that need to be addressed through outside-of-office interventions. Therefore, building upon research that suggests community-based counseling practices are particularly useful in supporting historically marginalized groups (Bailey et al., 2007), Ratts (2009) posited that counselors must hold alternative counseling roles and use interventions outside of the office.

The CAS model indicates counselors should have three roles: 1) the counselor, 2) the advocate, and 3) the scholar. The *counselor* role entails the use of culturally responsive approaches to in-office counseling, which assists clients in analyzing emotional experiences (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Ratts and Pedersen (2014) defined the role of an *advocate* as leaving the four walls of the counseling office to advocate for interventions that transcend talk therapy and address larger systemic concerns. They described the *scholar* role as the ability to research and evaluate one’s own interventions to inform the development of best practices that support clients and their own advocacy efforts. Together these three roles form *multicultural–social justice praxis*, a reminder that counselors must transition between these roles to support clients in navigating internal and external forms of oppression (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014).

Hip-Hop Culture

In pursuit of using multicultural practice in schools, recent researchers have demonstrated that urban inner-city youth identify as part of hip-hop culture and have explored the use of hip-hop pedagogy (Adjapong, 2017; Adjapong & Emdin, 2015). Given the importance of school counselors honoring their students’ cultural knowledge (Hannon & Vereen, 2016), a hip-hop–based school counseling framework can be intentionally used to guide the implementation of the CAS model. Hip-hop culture is rooted in the corralling of a community to combat social inequities (Chang, 2005). The emergence of hip-hop culture was in direct response to the systemic and structural changes in the 1970s South Bronx (Caro, 1975; Chang, 2005). In the midst of an economic crisis, hip-hop culture was conceived by youth who critiqued and commented on social issues facing inner-city communities (Forman, 2002). To support the practice of hip-hop culture, hip-hop often exists within physical spaces, such as block parties, concerts, or recording studios (Harkness, 2014).

Hip-Hop and Spoken Word Therapy

Because of the growing influence of hip-hop culture, many scholars and practitioners have explored the power and potential of hip-hop lyric writing, analysis, and discussion as culturally responsive

interventions in the counseling process (Kobin & Tyson, 2006; Travis & Deepak, 2011; Tyson, 2002; Washington, 2018). This research engendered hip-hop and spoken word therapy (HHSWT), a culturally responsive counseling process whereby students engage in previously validated counseling interventions through the process of writing, recording, and performing hip-hop music (Levy, 2012; Levy & Keum, 2014). The development of HHSWT over time has thoroughly examined varying hip-hop cultural processes and how those might be used inside counseling offices. For instance, HHSWT offers clinicians a set of hip-hop-centered tools that they can use in the counseling process to support youth in exploring difficult thoughts and feelings. These tools include the hip-hop cypher to support group process and sharing (Levy, Emdin, & Adjapong, 2018), creating emotionally themed mixtapes (Levy, Cook, & Emdin, 2018), lyric writing as emotive journaling, and dyadic song collaboration as role-play (Levy, 2019). Each of these HHSWT techniques offers a culturally salient process in which youth of color can disclose and process difficult thoughts and feelings with their counselor. Levy (2019) found a school counselors' use of HHSWT in group counseling inside of a school hip-hop recording studio positively supported students' social and emotional development.

The Hip-Hop Recording Studio

When aiming to design culturally responsive counseling environments, it is important to note that the hip-hop recording studio also has held an important place in hip-hop culture and is largely unexplored in counseling literature. Harkness (2014) defined *the hip-hop recording studio* as a symbolic space or “a zone in which identity and meaning are shaped by social exchanges that occur within a culturally specific location” (p. 85). Harkness locates these studios as “sites for legitimization and personal transformation” where artists convene to collaborate on music as a “means of identity construction and development” (p. 85). Home-studios mark a shift of power into the hands of youth, who have easy access to technology and online media to create and release their own content and shape hip-hop music and culture (Harkness, 2014). Harkness conducted a content analysis of interviews with rappers and producers wherein they describe the value of studios as adapted home environments and places for self-discovery and authenticity. His findings offer insight into how hip-hop practices might be used in the design of culturally responsive environments for urban youth.

Harkness (2014) illuminated that studios are often built wherever they can fit, like inside of a rapper's room, basement, living room, or bathroom. Rappers described the need to have studios be aesthetically pleasing, with foam padding on the walls and dim lighting. For many artists, entering a recording booth to rhyme legitimized their thoughts and feelings and generated “an identity shift where they began to define themselves” (Harkness, 2014, p. 91). Although participants in the Harkness study certainly enjoyed being in recording studios, they were adamant about labeling studios as places where serious work and emotional labor occurred. Inside studios, artists felt required to display authentic reflections of their lived experiences in their music and their environment. Overall, the creation of studio spaces is not about how prestigious they look, but more about whether or not the aesthetics of the environment enable artists to carry out the hard work and emotional labor necessary for the discovery of one's true self.

Purpose of the Present Study

Given that (a) a limited number of studies have explored clients' opinions and perspectives on changes made by school counselors to a school counseling space, (b) most studies focus on designing counseling environments outside of schools, and (c) the school counseling profession lacks research on multicultural office design, there is a need for research exploring the processes by which students themselves engage in the construction of culturally salient school counseling spaces. Consequently, the purpose of this exploratory action research was to illuminate the experiences of urban youth of color who were part of a classroom-based school counseling intervention in which they co-created a space

for social and emotional reflection in an inner-city urban high school. Specifically, this study drew on HHSWT and the CAS model as a culturally sensitive counseling intervention designed to increase understanding of the value of the co-creation of a hip-hop studio as an environment conducive to social and emotional development. The research question that guided the study was: *What do students report experiencing while co-creating the school studio?* Responses from student focus group interviews were used to assess answers to this question, with an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework guiding interview development, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Method

Sample

This study was conducted in an inner-city urban high school in a densely populated city in the northeastern United States. The pseudonym for the high school is Liberty High School (LHS). A teacher at LHS consulted with the principal investigator (PI) of this study, given that he is a school counselor educator and a former school counselor with noted experience in the use of HHSWT and the studio creation process. Specifically, the teacher was interested in integrating interventions into a hip-hop lyric writing elective class that could support students' social and emotional development. The teacher felt the lack of school counselors at LHS created a gap in social and emotional supports and saw students in their classroom struggle academically as a result of unprocessed emotional experiences.

After an initial planning meeting, the PI and the teacher agreed to guide students through a collaborative hip-hop studio construction process as a space to supplement social and emotional support. To garner additional support for this classroom-based intervention, the PI and the teacher attempted to collaborate with LHS' only school counselor, who declined to participate given their large caseload and being understandably inundated. The school counselor's inability to participate further justified the need for the PI to support the teacher and their students. In this sense, a collaborative and indirect approach was explored in which the PI/counselor educator supported a classroom teacher in the implementation of a classroom-based school counseling intervention.

Participants were recruited from a hip-hop lyric writing class where they worked with their course instructor on the co-creation of a school studio following approval from the school district's Institutional Review Board. Students had selected this course from a range of options to fulfill an elective music course credit, a graduation requirement in the northeastern state where this study took place. There were 15 high school students ranging between 14–18 years of age who participated in this study. Neither the course instructor nor the PI had any influence on student enrollment in the class. Prior to their enrollment in this course, the teacher collected all informed consent and/or assent forms from students and parents/guardians. All 15 students agreed to participate in a post-course focus group regarding their experiences co-creating the school studio.

The racial demographic of students at LHS is: 66% Hispanic, 32% Black, 1% Asian, 1% White, and 1% Other. Like many urban high schools in this particular school district, LHS is one of three schools within a larger school's campus. This setup inherently limits the amount of physical space and resources available to students in each school and in many instances forces them to share. LHS is a Title 1 school, and all students qualify for free or reduced lunch. LHS has 700 students and one school counselor.

Measures

Data collection measures in the present study consisted of two post-intervention focus groups, with seven to eight students in each. The PI facilitated each focus group with the aim of exploring participant

experiences during the studio creation as well as assessing how they believed the studio creation process impacted them and might support them moving forward. The PI and the teacher were interested in understanding participants' lived experiences through action research, so an IPA framework was used for interview guide development, data collection procedures, and data analysis. IPA was selected by the PI as an approach to action research that allows researchers to play a role in guiding a process that leads to development of theoretical and practical knowledge (Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007).

The difficulty of action research in this regard is for the researchers to limit their subjectivity, which is why the PI chose not to participate in the intervention and instead facilitated the focus groups. Generally, qualitative methods are most appropriate when engaging in phenomenological research with the PI positioned outside of the intervention (Breen, 2007; Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007). Therefore, a focus group interview guide was developed by the PI to prompt discussion around participant experiences, including perceptions of what they learned in the process as well as what they identified as important to them. However, consistent with IPA standards (J. A. Smith et al., 2009), the semi-structured interview guides were flexible enough to allow participants the opportunity to lead the discussion. The two focus groups both lasted 30 minutes and took place within the recording studio at LHS.

Design

The studio construction process occurred over a 3-month period (September to December 2018) as a classroom-based intervention during a hip-hop lyric writing course taught by the teacher. The course met twice a week for 90 minutes each time. Because of school holidays, the class met for a total of 10 sessions for studio construction. The PI met with the teacher twice in late August of 2018, prior to the launch of the class, to order necessary equipment. Further, the PI met with the teacher once a month over the course of the 3-month study to provide curricular support. The studio construction process was designed to be entirely student driven. Based on research suggesting the cultural importance of the hip-hop studio (Harkness, 2014), the need for client voice in counseling office design (Pearson & Wilson, 2012), and cultural competence literature requiring the co-designing of interventions (L. Smith & Chambers, 2015), the PI believed it was necessary to provide students with total ownership over the studio creation process.

Implementing the CAS Model

The studio construction process was guided by the CAS model, which targeted the systemic concern of school counselor availability and subsequently sought to support students in designing an ancillary space for social and emotional services. Drawing from the advocate role of the CAS model, the PI and the teacher collaboratively advocated for financial support through a GoFundMe campaign on Facebook. This crowdsourced campaign garnered \$900 for school studio equipment. Next, the teacher met with their school principal to advocate for a location where the class could construct a studio. In line with the scholar role, the teacher and the principal were interested in understanding the impact this classroom-based intervention had on their student body. The PI agreed to assist the teacher and the principal in analyzing evaluation data.

The CAS model suggests the importance of culturally sensitive counseling processes. Pulling from HHSWT, a culturally responsive, process-based counseling framework (Levy, 2012), the teacher functioned as a group facilitator who sought to keep the class focused on their group goal of creating the studio. For example, each session began with a group conversation about the plans for that day, asking group members to agree on varying roles they would take during construction. Halfway through each session, the facilitator would bring the group back into a circle to discuss work done, evaluate progress

toward the group goal, and finalize what building would occur for the remainder of the session. Each session would close with a checkout in which the group reflected on how they felt having completed the work, and what changes or additions they wanted to make during the following session. Exploratory activities were also used to allow students to reflect on environments that make them comfortable, spark conversation, and work toward studio completion. As a signature assignment, the teacher pulled from the HHSWT framework and offered students the chance to create a “Where I’m From” song to support students in exploring who they are and what makes them comfortable, to ultimately inform their studio design decisions. Once the studio was developed, students requested assistance in learning how to use studio equipment for recording purposes. Advocating for students’ requests, the teacher asked the PI (as a stand-in for the school counselor) to visit and work with students to support their preparation toward recording their lyrics and teach other students how to record their peers.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected in the present study were analyzed using the IPA framework, a qualitative research approach designed to facilitate understanding of the participants’ worlds and subjective experiences, typically as they relate to a specific event or phenomenon common to all participants being interviewed (Chapman & Smith, 2002). The recorded focus group was transcribed verbatim using InqScribe technology (Inquirium, LLC, 2013). To begin the analysis, the PI read and re-read the focus group interview transcript to build familiarity with the data. Once familiar with the transcript, the PI started with microanalysis, which included making descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments in the right margin of the transcripts (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). J. A. Smith et al. (2009) suggested that *descriptive comments* are those that are focused on the content of the communication, and *linguistic comments* are those that consider the tone and use of language throughout the transcript. *Conceptual comments* are interpreted first through a descriptive lens, and linguistic comments are then considered together alongside the interpretation of the transcript by the researcher. Once microanalysis was completed for the entire transcript, the PI reviewed the notations that had been made to identify initial emergent themes throughout the interview, which were noted in the left margin of the document.

The initial emergent themes for each interview were then compared across individual participants to identify the lower-order themes, which were then combined to inform the identification of the higher-order themes (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). In the final stages of data analysis, emergent themes that represented the lived experiences of participants in the group were situated within the extant literature to offer an interpretation of the experiences through existing theoretical frameworks, a hallmark process of IPA research (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Transcripts were then sent to the second author, who had not been involved in the data collection, to audit identified themes. When discrepancies existed (e.g., different themes were found), researchers engaged in discussion until consensus was reached.

Trustworthiness

To safeguard the trustworthiness of the data, authors engaged in two intentional strategies identified as important for improving the credibility and reliability of the data (Morrow, 2005). First, to ensure the credibility of the data, prior to engaging in data analysis, the PI who conducted the interview engaged in a reflexive process to examine preconceptions about the data in order to bracket those ideas and focus on understanding the lived experiences of the participants. Additionally, to allow for transferability of the research process and results, the authors provided a rich description of the research processes (i.e., methods) as well as the findings that emerged through data analysis (i.e., results).

To improve the dependability of the results, two strategies were employed. First, to improve recall for the participants, they were encouraged to review the video montage of their work building the

studio. Additionally, to minimize the impact of individual bias, the marked transcript was sent to an additional colleague who acted as an outside auditor. Through the aforementioned processes, the researchers believe trustworthiness consistent with standards in qualitative inquiry was achieved (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

Results

The findings of this study are organized by higher- and lower-order themes in accordance with IPA (J. A. Smith, 1996). To elaborate on higher- and lower-order themes, exemplary moments from transcripts that reflect students who participated in co-creation of the school studio were identified. The first higher-order theme was *school studio as shared space*. The lower-order themes that constituted this theme included *feeling comfort and belonging* and *wanting inclusivity*. The second higher-order theme was *student design choices*. The lower-order themes contained within this theme included *designing an authentic studio, needing ownership, and thinking independently*. The third and final higher-order theme was *studio as practice space/lab*. The lower-order themes that comprised this theme included *peer support, opportunity, and supporting others*. Selected student quotes with student pseudonyms are provided below to illustrate each theme.

School Studio as Shared Space

The first higher-order theme, *school studio as shared space*, generally suggested that students experienced the hip-hop studio as a place within the school that they wanted to share with others. An example of a quote that fell within this category is: "So you get to be surrounded by rappers and a community that knows what you're doing, and you get to be upheld by everybody else and you get to share this space with everyone." This higher-order theme, *school studio as shared space*, contained two lower-order themes, which indicated that students experienced (a) *feeling comfort and belonging* and (b) *wanting inclusivity*.

Feeling Comfort and Belonging

The emergence of the first lower-order theme, *feeling comfort and belonging*, indicated that students felt heard and connected to others while creating the school studio. For example, when students were asked to discuss what it was like to co-create the school studio, a student named Jayda responded, "We're just like a little group. A little family. A little rap family." In this example, the student compares their level of connection with her peers to that of a family. When students were asked what it meant to have a studio in their school, Jordan shared, "In my personal opinion, I feel like what it means to me is being able to communicate with others and letting other people hear your voice." Here the student highlights the school studio as an environment where they have the chance to share their "voice" and message.

Wanting Inclusivity

The emergence of the second lower-order theme, *wanting inclusivity*, indicated that students saw the need to create a space that was inclusive of others and that did not revolve solely around their needs and wants. Carlos shared:

I'm still overthinking about what should we do because I feel like different people have certain styles. I don't want to make it all about me. I don't want to make it all about other people. I want to make it about the whole school and what they think about. Because we're not gonna be the only ones in this rap studio. I want to know what they think about and I want to know their perspectives and how they want to do it.

This student recognized that other students from LHS might also want to access the school studio; therefore, they wanted to gain the perspectives of others, beyond their peers who were co-constructing the studio, regarding what should be included. In this sense, students discouraged individual choices because that approach would not create an inclusive space. Another student, Tasha, stated that “for the wall, it was hard to know what everybody likes and the whole school and put it into just one small wall.” Again, students who had the opportunity to co-construct a school studio were thinking about ways to create a space that reflected, represented, and was inclusive of the entire school.

Student Design Choices

The second higher-order theme, *student design choices*, suggested that students experienced being able to make their own design choices during the co-construction process. For example, a particular student quote read:

We just came in here and it was like, everything messed around so we came in with an idea of like, where we think stuff should go, and that’s how we came up with that. Put it on the corner where the studio gonna be.

The student design choices theme contained three lower-order themes which indicated that students experienced (a) *designing an authentic studio*, (b) *needing ownership*, and (c) *thinking independently*.

Designing an Authentic Studio

Within the second higher-order theme, the first lower-order theme of *designing an authentic studio* illuminated that students made design choices in alignment with what they defined to be a professional or culturally appropriate studio environment. One example of a student quote that demonstrates this theme came while a student detailed the process of co-constructing the school studio. Specifically, Jay commented that “it makes it feel like a real studio. When you see rappers in a studio, you see all these lights and it looks professional and stuff, so I think it would make it look like the mood of that.” The installation of colorful LED lights within the school studio supported the students’ feeling that the studio was real or professional. The professional aesthetic that students established with the studio enabled the creation of a particular “mood” that also made the school studio space and experience feel culturally authentic.

Students also chose to infuse their school colors into the design of the studio, reporting that design element as an authentic representation of their school. When discussing the design process, Devante shared: “Yeah, and then like, [the foam pads] matched with our school colors like the purple and the green in the middle represents our school.” Finally, when sharing about the process, Alexandra detailed her most and least favorite moments: “My favorite moment: actually being able to build the studio, the checkered over there, the foam. The most challenging part: missing one day then being lost.” For Alexandra, the foam also functioned as an indicator of an authentic studio space. She also added that missing school made her feel lost or disconnected from the studio construction process, and that was particularly challenging.

Needing Ownership

The second lower-order theme, *needing ownership*, highlighted that students experienced needing ownership of the studio space. When discussing their design process, Gabriel said, “yeah, basically I said like, you put the ‘L’ so whoever comes in here know that Liberty was here first. We created this place. And that was our main point of putting that big ‘L’ right there.” In this quote, Gabriel spoke to the importance of design choices in letting the surrounding community know who was responsible

for the studio's creation. This statement and the theme of needing ownership more broadly suggests that students wanted to feel properly valued and credited for their work and that they also had ownership over their choices and felt able to make their own decisions. This sentiment is further supported by a quote from Rachael:

I know it made me feel like the room was built in our hands. Later on, when everything is done, when people come in, whatever they see is what we all thought of together. We could've had this over there, but we decided to put it over here. It just makes us feel . . . well, it makes me feel like, yeah.

Adding support to Gabriel's statement, Rachael appears to be feeling a sense of pride in laying claim to the thoughts, feelings, and physical work that went into the creation of the school studio.

Thinking Independently

The third lower-order theme, *thinking independently*, highlighted that students had opportunities to think amongst themselves and to troubleshoot and find solutions to problems without relying on the direction of an adult. Carlos reported that "without the adults, I feel like we really had to bring our creative ideas straight from our thoughts on how to make the studio." Carlos believed that without adults walking them through the process of creating a school studio, they were able to showcase their "creative ideas" and pull from knowledge and thoughts they already possessed. Additionally, Alexandra shared:

Well, I'm always used to being told what to do because you would give me an assignment and I'll do it. I can't just think for myself. As you can see, I'm still having difficulty thinking for myself with the wall.

Alexandra highlights that within the traditional classroom lessons, students are always given an assignment that offers directions on how to complete it. When students were given the task of co-constructing a school studio, there were many tasks that could be approached differently, and students were encouraged as experts to think in ways that were independent of adults and pull from within to address their task.

Studio as Practice Space/Lab

The third higher-order theme, *studio as practice space/lab*, suggested that students experienced the hip-hop studio as a place where they could learn to feel more prepared. Student quotes within this higher-order theme included statements like: "If we invite other people from the other school or people in other classes to see us, we're gonna have more . . . prepared. We're gonna be more prepared to do it." This higher-order theme contained four lower-order themes, which indicated that students experienced (a) *peer support*, and (b) *opportunity*, (c) *self-discovery*, and (d) *supporting others*.

Peer Support

The first lower-order theme, *peer support*, suggested that students felt as if the school studio was a location in which they could receive feedback, support, and opportunities for personal preparation from their peers. When responding to a question regarding what students felt they might have learned throughout the co-creation process, Vicki claimed: "This small space is not gonna help me stand up in front of 400 people but bringing little by little people into here while we're rapping or anything, would help me build up more confidence." Although Vicki still felt there was work to do in order to feel ready to share her lyrics with a large number of people, she posited that the studio space

could function as a preparation space for larger group sharing, where peers could help others and boost their confidence. Another student, John, spoke to the experience of individuals who rap within the school studio, reporting that:

The nice thing, after the person's done with the rap, he makes somebody ask what they heard about that person, about learning about that person, that's gonna put confidence in you. Like, they were actually listening. And that makes you want to rap more so people can actually acknowledge your bars.

In this quote, John spoke to the process of sharing lyrics. Specifically, when people share lyrics, John imagined that others would listen carefully to them and then willingly engage in a discussion about what they heard. John believes the experience of sharing lyrics would make people feel acknowledged and have an increased sense of self-confidence.

Opportunity

The second lower-order theme of *opportunity* evidenced that students experienced the school studio as an environment that could offer opportunities for personal advancement in life. When discussing how this school studio might be used within the school, Devante said:

It's hard to find a place to rap. That's 1. 2, they cost too much. And 3, you know people say you can buy a microphone and you can do this, that and the third in your own household. Not a lot of people have money, many people they use the money and give it to their parents, and then if you ask your parents, they're gonna tell you the same thing that they tell every other kid when they want to pursue a hobby: "This is not gonna get you anywhere." 'Cause my parents tell me that all the time.

In this statement, Devante appreciates free access to space where he can pursue his hobby. Within the school studio, there is a perceived potential among students to work toward their own dreams without waiting on financial support or support from anyone other than themselves. Statements like this one suggest that access to the school studio provided students with an opportunity to consider their career on their own terms. A second student, Melissa, builds on this notion of opportunity, suggesting:

So apart from someone finding out their identity with this studio, they could also put their work out there knowing they have a chance to get somewhere. To be very honest, in this decade, everyone has a chance to get somewhere. It doesn't matter if you're good at rapping, bad at rapping, you suck, you great, you can get somewhere. It's all about other people's opinions, it's all about what they like, and if you're liked by the public, then you're gonna get until as far as you can reach.

In this quote, Melissa indicated how a student could use the school studio to garner support from the public to "get somewhere." Within the school studio, students suggested that there is an opportunity for a unique level of access and self-advancement. Further aiding the idea that using the school studio was the desired opportunity for youth, Jay said: "I hate that we only come down here once a week."

Supporting Others

The final lower-order theme, *supporting others*, demonstrated students' intentions and goals of supporting others outside of their class who attended LHS. Jordan shared, "I want to learn how to use all

this equipment. So that in the future other students will be able to be taught how to be using the mixer or putting beats into tracks.” Jordan wanted to be able to support other students outside of his class by teaching the skills that he plans on developing, which included “using the mixer” and “putting beats into tracks.” This expression demonstrated an understanding of the importance of teaching others how to utilize the school studio, which will contribute to the longevity of the space. Gabriel reported that “You teaching them how to rap, how to use the mic, the laptop and all that, that’s just gonna inspire their friends to come. They teach their friends and the cycle just continues like that.” Believing in how beneficial the studio was for them, Gabriel mentioned wanting to support his peers by sharing skills that were needed to effectively run the school studio so it could continue to be used. Gabriel also highlights that teaching others to make use of the school studio space will create a cycle that theoretically will allow students to bring their friends to engage as well. Therefore, not only is the school studio intriguing to students, but it will support their development of skills to maintain its use.

Discussion

This study was designed to increase understanding of the experiences of students partaking in a classroom-based school counseling intervention in which they co-constructed a hip-hop studio. Counseling environment data has suggested that counselors often take the lead on the creation of environments for clients (Pearson & Wilson, 2012), whereas we encourage school counselors to partner with youth in the creation of their own counseling spaces (L. Smith & Chambers, 2015). Broadly, results support the co-construction of school studios as culturally relevant environments that promote social and emotional development, addressing a need in the literature for research exploring multicultural counseling office design (Benton & Overtree, 2012). Further, the use of the CAS model enabled a collaboration in which a classroom teacher deployed an indirect and culturally responsive school counseling intervention to support students’ personal/social development (ASCA, 2019b; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

Student Experiences

Results of this exploratory action research demonstrated that students experienced a sense of comfort and belonging inside the school studio. Similarly, Sanders and Lehmann (2019) indicated that clients felt a sense of comfort when the counseling office felt like a home or a lounge rather than a traditional office space. Further, data from the current study showed that the studio creation process empowered students to advocate for inclusivity in the use of this space for their entire school campus community. This outcome is ideal given that school counselors are charged with activating the entire school community in the deployment of school-wide interventions that support students’ academic, career, and personal/social development (Bryan et al., 2019). In specific comments, youth stated that they would want to locate peers who are in need of help and bring them to the school studio to develop personal/social skills. These statements suggest that after participating in the school counseling intervention, youth voiced that making the studio available to all students would improve the school counseling program at their school. This finding gives credence to the use of advisory councils at schools, with student members, to offer youth a platform to ensure that school counselors and their school counseling programs are serving all students (ASCA, 2019b). Additionally, a bevy of studies emphasized supporting youth in the development of skills as change agents in promoting peace, youth voice, and healing (Allan & Duckworth, 2018; Conner & Cosner, 2016; Levy, Emdin et al., 2018). Overall, the findings are important in that they support the use of studio co-creation as a classroom-based counseling intervention, which research suggests can result in school-wide impact (Bostik & Anderson, 2009).

Another notable finding of this study was students' decisions in creating their authentic and professional school studio. For example, the students' choice to install LED lights provided them with a professional aesthetic and a particular "mood" that also made the school studio space and experience feel authentic. The aesthetics of a counseling environment, particularly interior design choices such as dim lighting, are reported to positively impact clients in session (Miwa & Hanyu, 2006). Similarly, professional hip-hop artists report needing studios to be aesthetically pleasing, pointing to foam padding on walls and dim lighting. For many artists, entering an aesthetically pleasing studio environment was conducive to "an identity shift where they began to define themselves" (Harkness, 2014, p. 91). Student reports regarding the importance of aesthetics in establishing authentic studio spaces are in line with what counseling research suggests is necessary for effective counseling environments both inside and outside of schools (Ceylan et al., 2008; Cook & Malloy, 2014; Huffcut, 2010), as well as what the larger hip-hop community suggests is necessary for personal transformation (Harkness, 2014). Further, scholars have called for school counselors to tailor their interventions to the cultural knowledge and environments of their students (Hansen et al., 2014; L. Smith & Chambers, 2015), particularly when attempting to design multicultural counseling environments (Benton & Overtree, 2012). Evidence from students that the physical space constructed in this study felt like an authentic hip-hop studio suggests that through the use of a classroom-based school counseling intervention, students were able to channel their cultural knowledge and values into the design of a culturally responsive environment that could support their social and emotional development.

An additional finding highlights that youth felt the studio space would allow them to receive peer support that could be generative of improvements in confidence and self-efficacy. Similarly, a systematic review of peer support interventions found that peer educators were particularly effective in facilitating improvements in knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes as well as subsequent behavior change (Ramchand et al., 2017). Findings in the current study aid this supposition, providing evidence of the use of school studios as spaces for peer support.

When reflecting on their engagement in the studio co-construction process, youth reported feeling as if they had been given a valuable opportunity for personal advancement. This finding is particularly important to consider within the context of career counseling work in schools. Lent (2013) encourages counselors to adapt to work in the digital world by preparing individuals for a range of career opportunities. Fostering students' career development is also an expected role of the school counselor and of school counseling interventions (ASCA, 2019b). Students' need for opportunity and career-life preparedness requires counselors to promote students' "alertness to resources and opportunities on which one can capitalize. Most important, preparedness can lead to the use of proactive strategies to manage barriers, build supports, and otherwise advocate for one's own career-life future" (Lent, 2013, p. 7). Further, youth felt an opportunity for personal identity development, aiding Harkness' (2014) argument that studios were spaces for hip-hop-identifying individuals to cultivate a deepening understanding of themselves, and Liddicoat's (2015) position that counseling environments could allow for the positive development of a client's self-concept.

CAS Model to Support School Studio Construction

The findings in this exploratory action research support the implementation of the CAS model as a guide for school counseling interventions. In the current study, with the help of the PI, the course instructor held the counselor role in the use of Levy's (2019) HHSWT framework by facilitating a group process in which students constructed a hip-hop recording studio. Similar to research indicating that school counselors are often inundated with large caseloads and non-counseling duties that strip them of their ability to engage in direct counseling (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Mau et al., 2016),

the school counselor at LHS was unable to support the studio co-construction process. However, to facilitate a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors are expected to collaborate with teachers to indirectly address students' academic, career, and personal/social needs (Cholewa et al., 2016). Therefore, the current study expands upon the implementation of the CAS model by considering the role of collaboration in the school counselor's work, and the activation of the teacher as a key stakeholder (under the guidance of a counselor educator) in facilitating a classroom-based counseling intervention in which youth co-created a school space to support social and emotional services. The teacher and the PI also held the roles of advocates for the successful deployment of the school counseling intervention (studio co-creation). The teacher met with their principal and contacted a counselor educator (the PI), and together with the PI garnered crowdsourced funding for this project. Finally, the scholar role was also maintained by the teacher, who wished to support students' social and emotional needs by creating a school studio, and thus called on the PI to use qualitative measures to evaluate students' experiences during this process.

Limitations

There are a series of limitations to the current study. The limited availability of the school counselor to participate in this study is a limitation, despite the conscious use of collaboration in the deployment of an indirect classroom-based school counseling intervention. The use of the CAS model without a formal school counselor was difficult, albeit consistent with existing research surrounding the lack of time for school counselors to engage in multi-session group counseling work (Kim & Lambie, 2018). Consequently, the findings of the current study fail to offer support for counselors in the use of a direct school counseling intervention. Further, student reports of their experience in the studio co-construction process are subjective in nature. Had LHS provided an intervention to a larger sample of students and administered quantitative assessments, those findings could potentially have aided this study's qualitative conclusions. The small sample size ($N = 15$) of this study is a limitation, as results lack generalizability. Additionally, LHS is an urban school whose demographic information suggests the majority of youth identified as Black and/or Hispanic. Given that the present study examined a sample of mostly non-White urban youth, it is difficult to generalize findings to suburban and rural schools as well as to youth who do not identify as Black and/or Hispanic. Further, each focus group lasted 30 minutes, which could have limited the ability of the seven or eight participants to offer in-depth data. Lastly, the interactive nature of focus groups could have impacted the authenticity of responses from focus group participants (Smithson, 2000).

Implications

There are a number of implications for both practice and research that can be drawn from the current study. The findings in the current study align with the ASCA National Model and hold promise for engaging teachers and students in school-based interventions that promote social and emotional development and are culturally relevant. The ASCA National Model (2019b) calls for school counselors to use indirect approaches to counseling, often those including collaboration with a teacher, to provide supports to all students across the school. This study exemplifies the importance of activating teachers in the use of indirect classroom-based school counseling interventions, particularly when school counselors themselves are not available. The PI's involvement in supporting the classroom teacher in implementation and evaluation of a classroom-based school counseling intervention serves as a call for school counselors to consider partnering with faculty at local colleges/universities to bolster their comprehensive school counseling programs. If available, school counselors themselves are encouraged to collaborate with teachers in the development, implementation, and evaluation of classroom-based interventions that support students' social and emotional development.

The current study used a culturally responsive classroom-based intervention that honored students' cultural knowledge and trusted youth to guide the studio construction process. Youth reported on the importance of the opportunity to use the hip-hop studio to positively impact their school, their peers, and themselves. Counselors need to design social and emotional development supports within their schools that adhere to the cultural realities of their clients (Ponterotto & Austin, 2005) and are thus encouraged to utilize the studio co-creation approach. Beyond hip-hop, however, the current study suggests that youth-driven construction of an ancillary social and emotional support space should be considered for all students from marginalized populations, including youth identifying as LGBTQ.

Implications for direct school counseling practice exist as well. For example, Levy (2019) demonstrated effectiveness of a series of hip-hop-based cognitive behavioral and person-centered counseling interventions on students' social and emotional development. However, few studies have detailed the cultural importance of the hip-hop studio and how its creation might support the future use of culturally competent interventions. Although this study did not explore the use of lyric writing, recording, or performing to address counseling outcomes, students participating in the studio construction process reported wanting to use the school studio to support their peers and their own personal self-development. These findings suggested it is important for schools to consider co-creating school studios as places for school counselors to deploy hip-hop-based interventions for group and individual counseling with urban youth.

The findings in this study can be expanded upon with future mixed methods research that examines a larger sample of students. Quantitative analysis of students' social and emotional development (examining variables like stress, emotional regulation, and executive functioning) during the studio co-construction process is recommended as a direction for future research. Qualitative researchers should consider case studies of students and counselors who engage in the construction of hip-hop studios and small-group work within counseling studies, using more in-depth interviews (lasting longer than 30 minutes) to ensure rich data is collected. There is also value in exploring the multicultural and social justice competence development of both school counselors and teachers who engage in hip-hop-based school counseling interventions.

Conclusion

The goal of this exploratory action research was to illuminate the experiences of urban youth of color who were part of a classroom-based school counseling intervention in which they co-created their own space for social and emotional support in an inner-city urban high school. As described in this article, a limited number of studies have explored clients' opinions and perspectives on changes made by school counselors to a counseling environment (Pearson & Wilson, 2012). Additionally, most studies focus on designing counseling environments outside of schools, and the school counseling profession lacks research on multicultural office design (Benton & Overtree, 2012). Furthermore, ASCA (2019b) advocates for the use of indirect counseling interventions to support the needs of all students, while others urge school counselors to use multicultural and social justice-oriented interventions to identify and address barriers to student development (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). This article highlights the value in using hip-hop studio construction as an innovative approach to a culturally sensitive, indirect, classroom-based school counseling intervention in which students themselves engaged in the construction of an ancillary space to support their social and emotional development.

Conflict of Interest and Funding Disclosure

The authors reported no conflict of interest or funding contributions for the development of this manuscript.

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