

“EVERYONE IN SCHOOL SHOULD BE INVOLVED”

Preservice Counselors’ Perceptions of Democracy and the Connections Between Character Education and Democratic Citizenship Education

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This qualitative study examined preservice school counselors’ perceptions of the meanings of democracy; their perceptions of the skills, attitudes, and abilities required of citizens within a democratic society; as well as school counselors’ potential roles and involvement in democratic citizenship education in public schools. Results were that this set of preservice counselors regarded access, advocacy, and activism as major democratic principles. They expressed that connection to democracy and the larger world, communication of ideas and opinions, and competence with regard to essential democratic skills are necessary skills in democratic citizenship education that school counselors can facilitate. Implications for the involvement of school counselors in democratic citizenship education through the implementation of character education in schools are discussed.

As we progress through the first decade of the twenty-first century, it is clear that our society and our schools continue to evolve and change at a rapid pace. Our increasingly diverse student bodies throughout the country reflect a

myriad of needs in the interrelated areas of educational achievement, social-behavioral adjustment, and career development (Clark & Breman, 2009; Wittmer & Clark, 2007). The demographics of our population are shifting

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with an increase in the numbers of school age children, as well as increases in racial and ethnic diversity (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2006). The percentage of Caucasian students dropped from 78% to 57% from 1972 to 2004, while the proportion of Hispanic students during that period jumped from 6% to 19% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006) and accounted for 50% of the population growth in the United States from July 1, 2004-July 1, 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). The number of children aged 5 to 17 who speak a language other than English at home more than doubled between 1979 and 2004 increasing from 3.8 million to 9.9 million (NCES, 2006).

Statistics indicate that the poverty level in the U.S. has risen for the fourth year in a row, with 18%, or 13.5 million children, under the age of 18 living below the federal poverty level (National Center for Children in Poverty [NCCP], 2008). Poverty can impede children's cognitive development and their ability to learn and can contribute to behavioral, social, and emotional problems (NCCP, 2008). Urban schools, which often have large poor and minority student populations, have significant and unique issues that need to be addressed by educators (Lee, 2005). Such statistics paint a picture of a rapid change in demographics with a number of challenges, including issues of social justice, equity and access to higher education, motivation and educational persistence, and rights and responsibilities of citizens in a changing world.

Recent legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) have provided the legal foundation for schools to improve educational outcomes for *all* students (Felton, 2005; Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006). As the pressure to meet higher academic standards for all students has increased, the corresponding pressure on educators to produce results has also increased (Clark & Breman, 2009). Public education has undergone reform efforts in the

past generation to respond to school and societal issues of academic achievement and educational persistence, as well as positive behavioral outcomes, social justice, and civic pride and responsibility. Two curricular areas, character education and democratic citizenship education, encompass complementary tenets and goals for educating students in public schools. We believe that collaboration between teachers and school counselors in these areas can offer strength and support to the principles they share for the purpose of educating our students to be contributing and productive, educated members of a rapidly changing society.

It is important to note that this collaborative effort is not a brand new idea. As early as the 1970s, Mosher and Sprinthall (1970, 1971) presented a rationale for the "hidden curriculum" within schools, which focused on students' attitudes, values, and perceptions. They asserted that personal/psychological education was taking place within schools that allowed students to understand themselves in relation to others, to recognize their talents and competence, and to develop a sense of worth (Mosher & Sprinthall, 1970). The authors advocated for school counselors to act as social agents in order to help transform democratic schools by promoting a different approach to the problems of schooling by focusing on the personal/psychological education of students as a curriculum objective. They also outlined a new curriculum of psychological education that included experience-based learning laboratories, peer counseling, cross-age teaching/learning, improvisational drama, film and communication, and self-analytic groups (Mosher & Sprinthall, 1970, 1971). Mosher's and Sprinthall's curriculum ideas were predecessors of the more recent work by Hayes and Paisley (2002) and the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (Education Trust, 2003), which suggest that transforming the education of school counselors will prepare them to become educational leaders who serve as advocates for the equitable treatment of all students. Recently, Hayes and Paisley suggested a

systems-oriented approach that allows twenty-first century school counselors to work towards democratizing schools and highlights the role school counselors can play as advocates for social change to benefit all students. Today's school counselors are expected to act as leaders, educators, collaborators, consultants, and as social agents of change in order to promote rigorous academic standards, but also to promote the teaming between teachers and school counselors for character and democratic citizenship education (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2005; Hayes & Paisley, 2002).

As counselor educators and social studies educators, we perceive the overlap and complementary components of character education and democratic citizenship education in creating an optimal learning environment in public education—one in which the importance of character development, becoming a productive member of a democratic society, and contributing to the common good within a larger community are both rights and responsibilities. To this end, we hope to identify and highlight common ground for preservice teachers and preservice school counselors in their respective training programs to strengthen their educational background and commitment to developing and delivering character and democratic citizenship education programs to their K-12 students. Although there has been much written about each of the separate fields of character education and democratic citizenship education, there has not been a study that has examined in-service or preservice school counselors' perceptions of democracy and their roles in students' democratic citizenship education. Therefore, the focus of this study was to examine preservice school counselors' perceptions of the skills, attitudes, and abilities required of citizens within a democratic society, as well as their potential roles and participation in democratic citizenship education in public schools. First, we will review some basic tenets of character education and democratic citizenship education to further an

understanding of the purposes of each, as well as areas in which they overlap.

CHARACTER EDUCATION

There are many definitions of character education, but most outline teaching moral codes, caring, and ethics across the cognitive, affective, and behavioral functions and including/modeling by the schools' administration, faculty, counselors, staff, parents, and community in the effort (Anderson, 2000; Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2006; Bulach, 2002; Kirschenbaum, 2000; Leming, 1997; Lickona, 1996; McKay, 2002; Pearson & Nicholson, 2000; Prior, 2007; Williams, 2000).

Generally, when we speak of character, we are referring to the nature of an individual to make ethical and conscientious decisions, ethically act on those decisions, and to treat themselves, other human beings, and the community at large with dignity and in respectful ways. As Berkowitz and Bier (2004) state:

What we really mean in this field when we invoke character is socio-moral competency. Character is the complex set of psychological characteristics that enable an individual to act as a moral agent ... seven psychological aspects of character are identified: moral action, moral values, moral personality, moral emotions, moral reasoning, moral identity, and foundational characteristics. (p. 72)

Proponents of character education programs generally concur that there are a few *universal* traits constituting good character and among these are responsibility, honesty, respect, fairness, trustworthiness, caring, justice, civic virtue, kindness, empathy, self-respect, self-discipline, and courage (Anderson, 2000; Cali, 1997; Lickona, 1996; Pearson & Nicholson, 2000). Pearson and Nicholson further state the character attributes generally correspond to how the individual relates to self (responsibility, self-respect,

self-discipline, and courage), others (honesty, respect, kindness, empathy) and the community at large (fairness, justice, civic virtue).

Howard, Berkowitz, and Schaeffer (2004) write that the general consensus in the education community has moved from questioning if character education programs were appropriate into what *kind of* character education should we teach. Howard et al. classify the various approaches into 10 different foci of character education programs. These are: (a) moral reasoning—cognitive development; (b) moral education—virtue; (c) life skills education; (d) service learning; (e) citizenship education—civics education; (f) caring community; (g) health education—drug, pregnancy, and violence prevention; (h) conflict resolution—peer mediation; (i) ethics—moral philosophy; and/or (j) religious education. All character education programs tend to emphasize at least one of these approaches while some integrate different combinations (or all) of the approaches into a more comprehensive character education program (Howard et al., 2004). Similarly, Althof and Berkowitz (2006) distinguish between moral and character education and identify how each is necessary in citizenship education. Moral education aims to promote students' moral development and is found to overlap character education. Thus, character education, as a broader concept, is comprehensive and can include a number of foci and strategies.

Williams (2000) states that successful character education programs have vision, standards, expectations, implementation criteria, leadership, resources, training, partnerships, and assessment. Basic components of good character education programs involve adult modeling of traits, using literature, direct study of virtues, service activities/opportunities for students, creating and operating in effective school climates, and continually encouraging the students to develop their own intrinsic motivations, understandings, and meanings of good character (Lickona, 1996; Ryan, 1996). For example, Manzo (2005), in a national study of American high schools, found that

service-learning helped increase students' sense of civic and social responsibility and citizenship skills, improved school climate as well as respect between teachers and students, decreased tardiness and discipline referrals, and increased academic achievement. Additionally, interpersonal development as well as the ability to relate to diverse groups was reported.

Furthermore, in an increasingly complex global and multicultural society, it is important to adapt our education programs with changing times (Changwoo & VanSickle, 2003). Issues should be approached from interdisciplinary perspectives in order to develop and highlight feelings of empathy/interconnectedness of our students to others around the world as well as in our own country (Changwoo & VanSickle, 2003; Manzo, 2005; Scott & Jackson, 2005). Myers (2001) offers that such education can be made more salient for students by using current events (local, regional, national, and international) to highlight important ethical and moral values.

Character Education programs have become commonplace and are frequently implemented either through comprehensive school counseling program initiatives or through curricula related materials, usually in the area of Social Studies (see Florida Department of Education, 2009). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has included in the *National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* the important themes of leadership, advocacy, collaboration and teaming, and systemic change (ASCA, 2005). School counselors in partnership with school principals are positioned to lead and facilitate the implementation of comprehensive, developmental, school-wide school counseling programs (Clark & Stone, 2007; Stone & Dahir, 2006). Scott and Jackson (2005) found that using service-learning concepts as part of comprehensive guidance programs helped middle school students meet goals related to academic learning, career and personal/social development, and multicultural/global citizenship. Middle school students who

received the guidance curriculum instruction through their service learning class and then taught a similar curriculum to elementary students, reported learning character education skills and how to be better citizens, in addition to being academically successful. For comprehensive character education programs to succeed, they need effective leaders who fulfill a variety of roles (De Roche, 2000). Leaders must be visionaries, missionaries, consensus builders, knowledge sources, standard bearers, architects, role models, risk takers, communicators, collaborators, resource providers and evaluators (De Roche, 2000).

Research has shown that positive classroom and school climate can promote academic achievement and problem-solving skills (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2006; Cohen, 1999; Dodd, 2000; Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum, & Schuyler, 1997; Pasi, 2001; Scott & Jackson, 2005; Wittmer & Clark, 2002). A cooperative environment can have substantial effects on the cooperative behavior of the students, increasing feelings of empathy for others, reducing intergroup tensions and antisocial behavior, improving moral judgment, and building positive feelings toward others including those of other ethnic groups (Joyce, Showers, & Rolheister-Bennett, 1987). Further, by creating nurturing environments, educators encourage children to want to come to school, thus improving attendance and motivation to learn (Glasser, 1997; Kohn, 1996; Manzo, 2005). An educational model promoting a positive school climate and an ongoing emphasis on respect for one another is one way to help reduce the alienation that contributes to student loneliness, potential violence, school drop out, and school failure (Pasi, 2001; Wittmer & Clark, 2002).

DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Likewise, democratic citizenship education has had similar tenets in teaching children about living in and contributing to a demo-

cratic society. Dewey (1916, 1927) argued the school should be a democracy in microcosm, where pupils learn particular processes, values, and attitudes to live effectively as citizens. Democracy, to Dewey, largely meant a form of active community life—a way of being and living with others. Moreover, he emphasized that democracy entails certain habits of the mind that must be cultivated throughout citizens' lives as they participate in various institutions and groups in which they have a voice in setting goals, sharing knowledge, communicating, and taking direct action. Most importantly, Dewey envisioned democracy as a creative and constructive process for which citizens needed practical judgment, a shared fund of civic knowledge, and deliberative skills and dispositions - much of which must be learned in schools.

Parker (1996a, 1996b) has continued to raise important questions about what it means to educate children "for the demands of an increasingly diverse society that is struggling to realize the democratic ideal" (1996a, p. 2). He argues that our view of citizenship in the U. S. must not be based upon national homogeneity; it must be pluralistic and allow for a wide range of cultural and ethnic identities. In other words, we must strive for "democratic political community within cultural pluralism" (1996a, p. 20). For Parker, the central citizenship question is: "How can we live together justly, in ways that are mutually satisfying, and that leave our differences, both individual and group, intact and our multiple identities recognized?" (1996b, p. 113).

Indeed, Parker asserts that the school's "first moral obligation" is to give children an education that will equip them to take advantage of their citizenship (1996a, p. 2). According to Parker, schools already possess the "bedrocks of democratic living - diversity and mutuality" (1996a, pp. 2, 10). His conception of democratic citizenship education values direct involvement in public life, pluralism, and democracy as a way of life involving "deliberation, action, and reflection" (p. 121). He argues for a discourse of "responsibility,

negotiation, and obligation” aimed at creating a “broad political comradeship” (creating the political “one” out of the cultural “many” (p. 117).

Another conception of democratic citizenship education that informs our framework is that of “critical democracy.” Critical democracy implies a moral commitment to place the public good over individual power and privilege (Barber, 1984; Dahl, 1982; Gran, 1983). It implies an effort by citizens to address meanings of deliberation, civic responsibility, social equity, group conflict and cooperation, community, individual rights, institutional organization, public interest, and the distribution of power (Barber, 1984; Ventriss, 1985).

Goodman (1992) views critical democracy as part of a broader notion of care, justice, common concern for the social good, and a restructuring of economic, social, and political power. Democracy, he states, is “incompatible with racism, sexism, and poverty” and must enfranchise more people for democratic participation (p. xv). An essential aspect of critical democracy for Goodman is the “tension between the values of individuality and of community” (pp. 8-9). In a democracy, he asserts, it is important to lead a self-determined life, to promote freedom as well as diversity and self-expression, but there must also be an ethos of connectedness to others and collective and public action on social problems.

In Goodman’s (1992) view, democratic citizenship education prepares children for intellectual awareness of the world, encourages active participation in promoting democracy, develops their individuality, and fosters their concern for their own well-being as well as that of all living beings (p. 25). Children learn these values when a “connectionist orientation” is at the center of their education (pp. 28, 30). According to Goodman, critical democracy requires that children learn critical literacy and inquiry, meaningful dialogue skills, a sense of agency, the discourse of public association and social/civic responsibility, concepts of individual freedom and social justice, and

participatory action grounded in a commitment to eliminating prejudice and oppression.

Purpose of the Study

The beliefs and lessons from Dewey, Parker, and Goodman remain applicable in today’s increasingly multicultural society in our country, and now, as much as ever, students need to learn how to function and contribute as citizens in a democracy. There is overlap between the goals of character education and democratic citizenship education, and we believe that collaboration among social studies teachers, who teach democratic citizenship education, and school counselors, who are involved with character education programs, would be optimal in working with students in teaching and applying the principles of these fields.

Like Dewey and Parker, we assume that public schools are microcosms of society—laboratories for children to learn what democracy means. In order for educators to help students construct sophisticated conceptions of democracy, then they must hold sophisticated conceptions. We also believe that although there is common ground between democratic citizenship education as taught by social studies teachers, and character education as the primary domain of school counselors, for the two to collaborate within these complementary fields it is essential to discover what conceptions and understandings school counselors in training may have regarding democratic citizenship education principles.

A fundamental influence on how democracy is learned in school is school professionals’ understandings of democracy. Previous ethnographic research conducted with social studies teachers, for example, indicates their influence in socializing young people into the values of democratic citizenship, at least within their communities (Lortie, 1975; McNeil, 1986; McPherson, 1972; Peshkin, 1978; Stake & Easley, 1978). Although such values are developed in many contexts—family, religious institutions, the media, peer

groups—the learning environment created in the school remains important. Many aspects of this environment have received attention, for example, the ability of educators to possess and provide certain kinds of “civic knowledge” and the capacity of schools to socialize students into democracy and to cultivate students’ political attitudes (Ehman, 1980a, 1980b; Hahn, 1988; Guyton, 1988). Such research has not been conducted on either in-service or preservice school counselors, although their role in the development and implementation of character education programs is recognized in the character education literature. As a first step in exploring the potential role of school counselors’ involvement and collaboration with social studies educators in citizenship and character education, we researched the perceptions of preservice school counselors about the skills, attitudes, and abilities required of citizens within a democratic society as well as their potential roles and participation in such education in public schools.

Because this study focused on the perspectives and understandings of the participants, the researchers used a qualitative design to elicit and analyze the participants’ perceptions of democracy. The researchers examined the following questions: (1) What are preservice school counselors’ perceptions of what democracy means?; (2) What are their perceptions of the skills, attitudes, and abilities required of citizens within a democratic society?; and (3) Do their perceptions relate in any way to their professional goals in working with children?

METHOD

Theoretical Framework

According to Babbie (1983), qualitative research is “the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observation for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships” (p. 537). The authors of this study chose a qualitative design because

of the preliminary nature of the research, which focuses on a heretofore unexplored topic: the perceptions of school counselors regarding democracy, democratic citizenship education, and their roles in it. A qualitative design provided the researchers with a flexible framework for their inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and with a means of “provid(ing) perspective rather than truth, empirical assessment of local decision makers’ theories of action rather than generation and verification of universal theories, and context-bound explorations rather than generalizations” (Patton, 1990, p. 491). Moreover, “Qualitative methods permit the evaluation researcher to study selected issues in depth and detail” (p. 165). Through interviews and questionnaires, the authors sought to convey a “rich description” of the participants’ perceptions and the influences on these perceptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In keeping with the tenets of qualitative research, the authors do not present a fixed “truth” about the participants; their intent was to learn about the issue into which they were inquiring and to stimulate further inquiry (Stake, 1995).

Data Collection and Participants

The idea for this study arose from the first author’s visit to a counselor education doctoral seminar at a large state university in Florida in the fall of 2006. The course instructor was interested in her research on democratic citizenship education and invited her to discuss this research with the doctoral students. A 2-hour conversation ensued in which the students expressed great interest in the topic and wondered if there should be more opportunities for school counselors to become involved in the democratic citizenship education mission of schools.

Subsequently, the first author talked with the coauthors about her experience in the doctoral seminar, and they agreed that it would be worthwhile to investigate this issue, particularly in regard to the connections that might be made between character education (a school

counseling focus) and democratic citizenship education (a social studies education focus) with a view toward integrating these two areas as part of the broader mission of schools. The second and third authors, both school counseling faculty members, suggested that a good place to begin would be exploring the perceptions of MEd/EdS students who were nearing the end of their school counseling training programs because these students were placed in their clinical practice field placements in various local schools.

It is important to note that this MEd/EdS school counseling training program requires 72 graduate credit hours, is nationally accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), and typically takes students 2½ to 3 years to complete. The students complete their required coursework in the first year and a half of the program and then complete two separate clinical placements over two semesters (one practicum and one full-time internship). The clinical placements usually take place in the students' last two semesters of their training, and during both semesters they receive weekly individual and small group supervision from doctoral students and faculty members as well as a supervision seminar. The participants in this study were enrolled in the supervision seminar; they comprised both practicum (part-time first field placement) and internship (full-time second field placement) students. Participants had completed the nine required CACREP core classes for all counseling students, and Counseling Children and Counseling Adolescents as required for the school track students. All were concurrently enrolled in or had previously completed the Organization of School Counseling Programs course.

Regarding our sample of student participants for the current study, the authors elected to conduct a group discussion within the school counseling students' who were currently in their clinical placements because they were the students who had context of the school environment at their daily practicum

and internship school sites; thus, the authors believed this sample of students would have insights into the study's topic. Accordingly, the data sources for this study comprised a set of biographical questionnaires and one large group discussion with student participants in their weekly group supervision seminar. In addition, the authors ensured through the human subjects review process that the students were not expected to participate in the group discussion, but that participation was voluntary and that their names would not be collected or shared in any other format. In addition, the professor who led the group discussion was not a counselor education faculty member, and no counselor education faculty members were present during the student' participation. Therefore, the students were assured that their participation, or lack thereof, would have no effect on their grades or progress in their programs in the current course or in subsequent courses.

After permission was granted by the university's human subjects review board, completion of questionnaires and the group discussion took place during one class period for approximately 2 hours. Thirteen students participated in the discussion. Two students were absent on the day of the discussion; none of the students present opted out of the discussion. The fact that the first author, who was in a different department from the counselor education program and knew none of the participants, would administer the questionnaires and lead the group discussion facilitated the human subjects approval. The first author was able to ensure anonymity and to clearly convey to the students that the data collection had no bearing on their coursework or grades. The other two researchers knew and taught the student participants, and thus disqualified themselves from conducting the group discussion.

The researchers developed the short biographical questionnaire in order to ask students their age, ethnicity, and gender, as well as to seek more substantive information about courses they had taken in civics or government in high school and/or college and about other

possible influences on their views of democracy and democratic citizenship (e.g., family, media, religion, etc.) (see Appendix A). The students were asked not to write their names on the questionnaires. Participants took a few minutes to complete the questionnaires at the beginning of the class meeting.

The questionnaire revealed that of the 13 participants, there were 2 White males, 1 Hispanic male, 1 Hispanic female, 8 White females, and 1 female who self-identified as multiethnic. Eleven participants were in their 20s (ranging from ages 23-29), one was 30, and one was 45. Also on the questionnaire, eleven participants mentioned having taken an American government course. Of these 11, 4 specified a high school/12th grade government course. Two mentioned having taken a political science course in college. Two did not list any government course. Eleven also listed any and all courses they had taken within the social studies realm, including U.S. history survey courses in high school and college, college and high school Economics survey courses, college Western Civilization courses, and high school courses in World History and Geography. One student listed courses in Comparative Religions and in Humanities, while another mentioned a college history course on the 1960s.

The interview protocol for the group discussion consisted of eleven questions (see Appendix B). The questions elicited participants' perceptions of what democracy meant; their perceptions of what it meant to be a citizen of a democratic society, including their perceptions of rights and responsibilities; their perceptions of how citizens should participate in democracy and what it meant to "get involved"; their perceptions of what role schools should play in fostering good citizenship in students and whether they thought there were things schools could do differently; their perceptions of what (if anything) they believed their specific contribution as a school counselor should be in the process of fostering good citizens; possible collaborative activities they could do in schools to foster good citizenship

in students; and how the theme of good citizenship related to their overall goals for what they wanted to accomplish as a school counselor. The entire class meeting was audiotaped and transcribed, resulting in 27 pages of transcript. A doctoral student assistant from the counselor education program also took written notes throughout the duration of the class meeting.

Data Analysis

The researcher who conducted the group discussion and the doctoral student who took notes summarized the information from the 13 biographical questionnaires and submitted the results to the other two researchers for verification. Then, all three researchers analyzed the group discussion data in three phases. In the first phase, each researcher independently read through the transcript and written notes, collating and summarizing the participants' responses and placing them under headings that corresponded to the interview questions. The researchers then met to compare and discuss their summaries. In the second phase, the researchers independently conducted a systematic content analysis of the data, looking for patterns and general categories of responses, and identifying major emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). They met again to compare their findings and discuss the categories and themes they had identified. In phase three, they shared research memos they had written independently, compared their analyses, and came to a consensus on the major themes and issues from the data with respect to the participants' perceptions of democracy and democratic citizenship, and of the roles of schools and school counselors in democratic citizenship education.

The current study utilized an audit trail to establish dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In qualitative research, dependability is strengthened by providing a rich description of the research process used to generate and interpret data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The audit trail included the initial summaries and research memos at each

stage of analysis. The doctoral student who took notes performed a member check by providing input on the accuracy of the interview data and by suggested and confirming themes in the data. All three researchers reviewed each stage of the study, including data collection and analysis, to establish dependability. After establishing that the research process was correctly and consistently applied to the research questions, the researchers and the doctoral student confirmed the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) in order to create investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1984; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that the results were obtained from a relatively small population that was geographically limited. The extent to which the findings transfer to other school counseling graduate students is a question for which additional research must be done, although these findings can potentially provide insight that may prove beneficial in the field of school counseling. A second involves the setting of the group discussion with participants in their seminar classroom. Although the instructor and the second and third researchers were not present, the setting itself may have restricted the forthrightness of the participants' statements.

RESULTS

The researchers obtained data on the participants' perceptions of the meaning of democracy. In addition, the researchers learned what this group of school counselors-in-training thought about the skills, attitudes, and abilities required of citizens within a democratic society and how their perceptions related to their professional goals in working with children. Several major themes emerged from the systematic and thematic analyses of data. However, first we will highlight some additional pertinent information from the biographical questionnaires that students completed: the

potential influences on their perceptions of democracy and democratic citizenship.

Questionnaire Data: Influences on Preservice Counselors' Perceptions of Democracy and Democratic Citizenship

Family. Family seemed to exert the greatest influence on the participants' perceptions of democracy and democratic citizenship; 12 of them mentioned it. Two referred to an ethnic or cultural family identify as important; one said that "growing up in a Catholic family" had influenced her political views, while another talked about "growing up in a Hispanic family and following the Democratic views and perspectives of living in the U.S." Three simply listed "family" or "parents." All others described various family dynamics that influenced their thinking. One said, "My family is fairly liberal and I've taken a lot from them"; another described "taking on my family's point of view before gaining/identifying my own view"; yet another stated that "my family's views shaped my views as a younger child, but my own experiences now shape my views." Another participated elaborated that:

My parents have very different views than I do. They voted for Bush and supported the Iraq War. I believe in peace and truth and I value integrity, which I do not believe has been upheld in the past eight years of my political involvement with our country.

The other three participants mentioned such things as: "conversations in the family about democracy and political views," a family that "rarely spoke of politics and when they did discussions got heated," and a family that "taught me that I have a voice in democracy, and how to use it."

Travel. Seven participants listed travel as an influence. One expressed:

International travel (and the Baha'i faith) has given me a global perspective, a concern for all people both within and outside the USA ... there are many injustices in

government and society causing some to feel hopeless and a great deal of suffering.

Two mentioned trips to Washington, DC, with one participant saying the trip had sparked her interest in government and politics to see "all the history there." One mentioned "seeing the way other countries are run," while another listed travel to Germany. Another described travel within the continental United States to each state and "interacting with the various people living in the U.S., experiencing the different views and perspectives"; the final participant wrote about travel across the Eastern United States "to see various people and groups that make up our country."

Religion. Six participants listed religion as an influence on their perceptions of democracy and democratic citizenship. One mentioned "growing up in a Catholic family," one mentioned the Baha'i faith, two simply listed the word "religion," and one said "religion" and "my personal values and ethics." One participant stated "religion," and also said, "I believe the religious right-wing sect of our country dominates the voters' beliefs and influences who they elect."

Academic Experiences. Five participants listed academic experiences and/or teachers. Two simply listed "teachers" or "education." Another mentioned that he "took a great history class in college with a professor who challenged a lot of the status quo." A third specified "my teachers and counselors" and "learning about the Gore/Bush election during government class in my senior year of high school." Finally, one described "counselor training, especially the crisis center training, where I heard a lot of differing views on citizenship and I saw how democracy is not always fair."

Media, Friends, Community Service, and Other Influences. Six participants listed some type of media influence. Of these, three simply said "the media"; one stated "the way the media portrays our country and our leaders"; one mentioned "news and comedy about news programs"; and one listed television and newspapers. In addition, three participants men-

tioned friends as an influence, including one who wrote about "friends in the military who talk of their duties." Community service or volunteer experiences influenced three participants. One said she had participated in a year-long volunteer program after college "where I met a lot of liberal thinkers who constantly debated history, current events, and politics."

One participant mentioned that conversations with people from other countries had impacted her perceptions of democracy, while another described living in San Francisco and "attending many protests and rallies and becoming informed by fellow college students and friends throughout my stay in California."

Group Discussion Data: Themes in Response to Research Questions

Two sets of recurrent themes emerged throughout the group discussion. The first relates to how this group of school counselors-in-training *perceived* democracy in terms of *access*, *advocacy*, and *activism*. In other words, they emphasized U.S. citizens' access to information and to the rights guaranteed for all, both of which they considered the foundation of the U.S. government system. Further, the participants seemed to have the perception that when all citizens have access to information and equal rights, they have a basic responsibility for advocacy—to educate themselves, and to speak out to make their views known—and a more advanced responsibility for activism and for getting involved in the democratic system. The second set of themes addressed what the participants perceived as the roles of U.S. public schools and school counselors in the democratic citizenship education of K-12 students: *connection* to democracy and the larger world, *communication* of ideas and opinions, and *competence* with regard to essential democratic skills.

Perceptions of Democracy

Access and equal rights of all citizens. Equality in terms of access to information and

to the rights guaranteed for all citizens appeared to wield the greatest influence on the participants' perceptions of democracy and citizenship. Participants agreed that democracy encompassed equity for all U.S. citizens in regard to access to information, voting rights, civil liberties, freedom of expression, access to participation and being a part of a majority-rule system, and freedom of religion. For instance, one participant stated, "I think everyone should have equal access to information and to voting." Another stated, "In some countries like Australia ... citizens are penalized if they do not vote ... everybody has a voice and they all participate." Another added: "I think about having a voice, that everybody has a voice ... your views being considered or having the potential of having an impact." Several participants mentioned the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing freedom of expression. Another participant stated that "freedom of religion (is a) First Amendment kind of freedom that involves your ability to express yourself freely in a democratic society."

Other participants had a different emphasis—for example, the idea of the right or freedom to not participate as a reasonable part of democracy ("You have the right not to participate and to not think about your government or anything, just be yourself"). Another asserted that, "All of those rights have limits though. You have the right to freedom of speech, religion, voting—but to a certain extent, before the law will come in and tell you that you can't do that." Finally, another participant pointed out that there are numerous instances where freedom of speech and religion may seem to conflict with democracy when individuals' actions are considered illegal in the United States (e.g., speaking your mind and then getting fired from a job, or polygamy as a form of religious freedom).

Advocacy and Activism. Several participants stated that in a democratic society, all citizens have a basic responsibility for advocacy and a more advanced responsibility for activism. One participant stated, "I think it's

your responsibility to voice how you feel about something because in a democratic society it's about the majority rule, so if you really feel strongly about something it's your responsibility to get that out there." Another added, "(It's your responsibility) to know your rights. To know which ones you have and what you don't have." The same student suggested that all citizens should be active in society and educate themselves about their rights, which should be learned in school. Interestingly, another participant added that there is a cultural dimension to "knowing your rights," because individuals living in varying socioeconomic conditions may view their "equal" rights differently based on their life experiences.

Many participants agreed that citizens in a democratic society should be activists by speaking out on the issues and making their personal views known to others in a variety of ways such as voting, public assemblies and demonstrations, and potentially educating others through volunteering in community and/or civic groups. One participant asserted the importance of "volunteering in any aspect that they're interested in or in any way they feel might contribute to the better well being of society and humans." Another participant added, "If you find something you care about, then you can just work hard at certain things you're involved in because there's always going to be something going on."

Perceived Roles of School Counselors in Democratic Citizenship Education

Connection. Participants asserted that school counselors can aid in connection and community-building through helping students develop pride in democracy and in facilitating students' sense of connection and purpose to the larger world and to society. One participant stated, "They (students) can participate at the lower level of student government that can teach them the basics of the larger scale of government that we live in." Another participant mentioned helping students get involved in community and advocacy groups as a means

for educating students on how they can "own" their ideas and then take those ideas and help to bring about change in the world.

Communication. Participants especially seemed to agree that school counselors are in critical positions for fostering good citizenship among K-12 students through helping them to formulate and express their opinions on important issues. For instance, one participant stated, "Students can approach the powers that be, like the school board, and have their voices heard that way, or write letters to the newspaper and have their voices heard." Other participants agreed that school counselors have the expertise to help students learn how to communicate positively and democratically in these instances. One mentioned that school counselors can facilitate responsible civil discourse in classroom settings: "This idea of having a democratic classroom (means that) students feel like they have a voice ... kids participating in establishing ground rules, or if they feel they are being treated unfairly they have some recourse." This same participant added,

I think of the classroom as being sort of a microcosm of the world, so the teacher is in charge, and if you feel like that's kind of a fair kind of relationship, maybe that will extend to the workplace when they graduate or get out there, as well as feeling like the system works—as opposed to feeling disenfranchised or that "it just never works" or "it doesn't matter what I do, I can never get ahead."

Another participant stated, "I think it's important to teach them (students) and help them learn to advocate for themselves in a nonaggressive manner so that teachers will not shut them out but remain open to helping students learn democratic communication."

Competence. Participants mentioned that teachers and school counselors can model good citizenship skills, such as civil and fair treatment of others in both interpersonal interactions and classroom activities. School counselors in particular can model democratic problem-solving strategies and conflict resolu-

tion skills in which everyone can be involved, and lead discussions on the importance and benefits of following rules in a civil society. One stated:

As a school counselor, I would be able to maybe go alongside and say this is what we do next ... and help them through the process. If it's a case of discipline and they (students) felt they were treated unfairly, that would be a great opportunity for them (teachers) to say "okay, well let's sit down, all parties involved, and have everyone's voices heard."

However, one participant voiced her concern about the lack of good citizenship education at the elementary school level: "One of the months is Citizenship Month'... I was there during citizenship month and don't remember really seeing any of that being fostered, even with the little kids." In fact, some participants noted the absence of social studies in the elementary curriculum because of the standardized testing mandates that necessitated more time for reading, writing, and math. Particularly, some noted cultural differences between low income and more affluent schools—that is, students in more affluent schools might be receiving some social studies instruction, whereas students in low-income schools might not have any opportunities for instruction or role modeling in the areas of democracy and democratic citizenship.

Other participants mentioned the opportunities school counselors had for encouraging democratic skills and awareness through student government participation, community service projects, the use of technology to educate students on what is happening in the world, and other types of experiential hands-on learning, such as mock trials or mock governments. One participant stated, "If you're going to learn how to become an active citizen, (you need) to actually have some experiential learning in school to learn what that might look like." Participants suggested that school counselors could play stronger roles in creating character education programs that actually show teachers how they can incorpo-

rate good citizenship practices into their classrooms. One stated:

Everyone in the school (should be involved). It's not just that "I am the counselor; I'm the one who's going to do it." But have the administration behind you and support you and say, "Yes, we support you and we want this to happen" and be excited about it.

Finally, participants mentioned the importance of "extracurricular" activities, including inviting community activists and other interested citizens into the school for both student and parent education. One mentioned the need for funding so that schools could sponsor trips to state capitals or Washington D.C. as forms of democratic citizenship education. As one participant stated,

I think it is important for students to find some sort of passion or pride in something, some sort of civic duty ... identify something that's important to you outside of your school, that's beyond you, that's larger out there ... an activity or some sort of volunteering.

This participant added that school counselors are in a position to "invoke some sort of passion or help them (students) find that to some degree."

DISCUSSION

We found the results of this study to be encouraging with regard to the potential role of school counselors in promoting democratic citizenship education as part of character education programs in schools, and with regard to the opportunities for preservice school counselors to participate in such experiences. The participants in this study—none of whom had a specialized background in political science or civics—articulated solid perceptions about democracy. First, the participants mentioned common features of political democracy (Diamond, 1996; Fishkin, 1991) and had good factual knowledge about American government.

They said that voting was essential, but they also went beyond this basic component of democratic citizenship. More importantly, many of them perceived democracy as a *value* and as a way of living with others, and demonstrated a good grasp of diversity, community, connectedness, and deliberative discourse. They also emphasized that children should learn certain skills that would facilitate problem solving for the good of society. Importantly, a number of them mentioned the significance of taking appropriate social action or becoming involved in public life. Direct action is significant because its existence refutes the notion of "political spectatorship" (Parker, 1996b, p. 121) and advances a more active role for citizens. Participants also seemed to perceive the importance of balancing the values of individuality and community—that individual wellbeing and commitment to the public good do not have to be mutually exclusive (Goodman, 1992).

There appeared to be no relationship between our participants' social science coursework and their perceptions of democracy. Some of them took history or political science courses on the college level; some of the participants took no social science courses beyond high school. Nonetheless, for the purposes of carving out a potential role for school counselors in democratic citizenship education, this issue may not matter. It seems possible that the perceptions of democracy that these participants acquired from family, religion, culture, travel, and life experiences—as much as anything they learned in their K-12 schooling or college courses—shaped them in powerful ways.

Counselor educators interested in cultivating interest in democratic citizenship education among their preservice school counseling students appear to have the twofold challenge of finding ways to explore their students' perceptions of democracy, and finding ways to integrate democratic citizenship education experiences into their course curricula. Some new preservice school counseling experiences might be the key to exploring this potential

role. Preservice school counselors may be able to participate in a "civic apprenticeship" that, according to Parker (1996a), cultivates democratic competencies and habits of mind, as well as gradually initiating children into the democratic community and into increasingly critical levels of civic competence. School counselor educators can promote democratic citizenship education in their training programs by modeling service learning opportunities for preservice counselors and including units on character and citizenship education in their classes, as well as in supervision of school practica and internship experiences. They can also collaborate with social studies educators to plan joint seminars or training sessions to introduce these topics to both preservice counselors and preservice teachers. Modeling such collaboration at the university level will set the stage for future partnerships between school counselors and teachers as they begin their professional lives.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, the ASCA *National Model for School Counseling Programs* (2005) puts forth four major themes for successful school counseling programs: advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and systemic change. School counselors are to work to promote and support academic achievement, personal and social development, and career planning for *all* students. Specifically, they serve as leaders in the school to promote access and opportunities for higher education, career development, and the fostering of good citizenship while in K-12 schools and long after graduation. As the ASCA *National Model* (2005) recommends that school counselors spend the majority of their time in direct services (e.g., individual planning, small group counseling, and large group guidance lessons in classrooms) with students, it is logical that one vehicle for doing so would be in large classroom groups, particularly in collaboration

with teachers in curricular areas such as social studies, which can include both character education and democratic citizenship education principles and themes. Because such principles are applicable to *all* students, it is vital that as educators we work together on their application in schools. Thus, there are important roles, collaborative niches and implications for school and university level educators in both social studies and counseling curricula implementation.

It is possible that many American preservice counselors perceive access, advocacy, and activism as major aspects of democracy and democratic citizenship. In any event, according to the ASCA, these school counselors will eventually be in pivotal roles—at a critical time in our nation's history—that influence the character education of the next generation of U.S. citizens. Thus, the authors recommend that preservice school counselors' perceptions of American democracy, their perceptions of the skills, attitudes, and abilities required of citizens within a democratic society, and their perceptions of their potential roles and involvement in democratic citizenship education in public schools could be further emphasized in their education and training.

APPENDIX A

Biographical Questionnaire

You don't have to list your name, but please provide the following biographical information:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Ethnicity
4. What government and/or civics classes have you taken in high school and/or college?
5. Besides classes you've taken, what other influences have shaped your views about democracy and democratic citizenship?

APPENDIX B

Semistructured Group Interview Questions

1. What does democracy mean to you?
2. What does it mean to be a citizen of a democratic society? What are your rights and responsibilities?
3. How should citizens participate in democracy? What does it mean to “get involved?”
4. Based on your views of what a good citizen is, what role should schools play in fostering good citizenship in students?
5. Based on your experiences, do you think there are things schools could do differently?
6. What do you feel your specific contribution should be as a school counselor in the process of fostering good citizens?
7. Based on what you’ve said about your role in developing good citizens in schools, what are some possible collaborative activities you could do in schools to foster good citizenship in students? With whom would you work?
8. Reflecting on our conversation so far, how does the theme of good citizenship relate to your overall goals for what you want to accomplish as a school counselor with your students?

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