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School Counselors and Multiracial Students: Factors, Supports, and Interventions

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Abstract

Multiracial students represent a growing population in school systems today. This diverse group of students and their families may encounter many challenges and race-specific issues in the school setting. School counselors are in a unique position to assist these students and their families become successful in meeting these challenges. The following identifies some of their potential challenges and issues, identifies the role of the school counselor, and provides information on interventions and supports.

School Counselors and Multiracial Students: Factors, Supports, and Interventions

While studies may differ on various aspects of the multiracial population, one point on which all researchers agree is that the multiracial population will continue to increase in the future and that the

needs of this growing population must be identified and met (Choi, Harachi, Gillmore, & Catalano, 2006; Harris, 2002; Harris, 2003; Hays & Erford, 2014; Hud-Aleem & Countryman, 2008; Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012; Pedrotti, Edwards, & Lopez, 2008). In the school setting, school counselors are the professional educators able to help in the identification and meeting of these needs. Through the careful exploration of multiracial factors, school counselors can assist multiracial individuals and their families experience success in the school setting. This process includes working not only with multiracial students and families, but with school faculty, staff, and other members of the community. This paper will address the factors associated with multiracial identity, the role of the school counselor, and interventions and supports designed to address the challenges presented.

Factors Associated with Multiracial Students

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Education added the requirement that state demographic reports include by the 2010-2011 academic year the category two or more races (Institute of Education Sciences, 2007). For the purposes of this paper, the term multiracial is defined as representing two or more races. In its 2012-2013 report on race and ethnicity, the state of Georgia included data on the number of multiracial students statewide and reported an increase from 2003-2004 to 2012-2013 with approximately 3 percent or 48,000 Georgia students indicating multiracial as their race/ethnicity in 2012-2013 (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2013). According to a map representing the data, the counties along coastal Georgia report the highest percentages of multiracial students in the state (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2013).

A number of stereotypes exist regarding multiracial individuals (Harris, 2002). Some of them include the identification of multiracial individuals as being socially challenged and accepted only in the community of the minority parent. Stereotypes negatively impact multiracial students and include complicating the process of racial identity. Racial identity is a concept identified as a critical aspect of individual identity development (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). This process becomes an even more complicated process as children enter the adolescent years. Research has shown that the establishment of a strong racial identity may function as a protective buffer from some problem behaviors experienced by multiracial youth, such as substance use and violence (Choi et al., 2006). Several racial identity development

models address the process of racial identity of multiracial individuals (Harris, 2003; Hays & Erford, 2014). School counselors should be familiar with the various models and know how they can aid the counselor in helping the student through the process of racial identity.

As with all children, multiracial children desire to be accepted by peers and others they come in contact with (Harris, 2002). Research by Holcomb-McCoy (2005) linked higher ratings of self-confidence and self-esteem with multiracial adolescents who experienced a strong feeling of belonging to their ethnic group. In adolescence, children become more aware of the attitudes and beliefs regarding race and ethnicity. This awareness may result in multiracial children becoming more sensitive of how their peers view their racial identity. A study by Maxwell and Henriksen (2012) found that 60% of the school counselors that were surveyed indicated that multiracial adolescents had indicated the desire to be accepted by their peers, parents, educators, and self.

Research regarding whether multiracial students are at greater risk of problem behaviors has had mixed results (Harris, 2002). Simply because a child has been categorized as multiracial does not mean that he or she will experience emotional or behavioral problems (Hud-Aleem & Countryman, 2008). Multiracial children will have different issues to address than monoracial children, but just as with any racial identity situation, if multiracial children receive nurturing and support in their home environment, there is no reason to expect problems related specifically to racial identity development. While some studies contend multiracial children are not at increased risk of behavioral

problems, other studies have found there is increased risk concerns. Some of the behaviors multiracial children have exhibited at school include low academic achievement, poor social skills, problem staying focused and on-task, aggression towards other students, and negative attitude towards adults (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001; Nishimura, 1995). Some studies have also identified multiracial students as being more likely to experience depression, substance abuse, and suicidal tendencies (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). A study by Choi et al. (2006) found that adolescents identified as multiracial were at greater risk of exhibiting problem behaviors (identified as substance use and violent behaviors) than adolescents identified as monoracial. In addition, the study identified multiracial adolescents as being more aware of issues related to race, ethnicity, and discrimination.

Role of the School Counselor

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has developed a framework for school counseling programs that specifically addresses the area of multicultural competence (Bowers & Hatch, 2005). Included in the framework is the mandate for school counselors to work in collaboration with a wide array of stakeholders to meet the personal/social developmental, career, and academic needs of all students. Cooperative relationships must be established with teachers, administrators, parents and guardians, students, and the community to successfully serve all our students. Furthermore, specific competencies in the personal/social standards require students to "acquire the knowledge, attitudes and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others" (p. 106). The competency provides indicators

for the acquisition of self-knowledge and skills that will, fundamentally, assist students develop their racial identity. For instance, one indicator is the identification of values, attitudes, and beliefs, which is a critical part of cultural identity. By utilizing the ASCA model, school counselors assist students with cultural development and life skills necessary to be multiculturally aware and sensitive individuals.

School counselors are in the best position at the school level to assist multiracial students with the challenges they may encounter. In a study by Maxwell and Henriksen (2012), researchers found that experiences of multiracial students are impacted by school counselors, including experiences centered on racial identity (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001; Hays & Erford, 2014; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Moss & Davis, 2008; Pedrotti et al., 2008). While some multiracial students see the school counselor for issues directly related to racial identity, that is not always the case (Hayes & Erford, 2014; Hud-Aleem & Countryman, 2008). School counselors should talk with the student to ascertain why the student has come so the counselor knows what to address. In order to be effective, school counselors must be multiculturally competent to work with students from any cultural background, including multiracial (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001).

School counselors must also take a serious self-inventory and assess their personal feelings, beliefs, and perceptions about multiracial individuals and their families (Harris, 2002). If the school counselor has any biases that may influence the work done with multiracial students and families, those biases must be addressed immediately. For instance, if a multiracial

student is experiencing behavioral problems, the school counselor should not automatically assume it is due to the race of the student; preconceived notions would prevent the school counselor from providing the level of service students need and deserve.

On the other hand, school counselors should assist multiracial students if they present struggles with the process of racial identity. One way to do so is by helping the student become aware of his or her personal feelings regarding being multiracial (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). Research has indicated that early, preventative intervention with multiracial youth regarding the issues related to racial identity may have greater benefit than interventions that occur later, after problem behaviors have started to occur (Choi et al., 2006). This includes discussing the student's personal perception of race, as well as perceptions of how society views multiracial individuals. School counselors should also consider the value of including discussions with the child's parents to gain a better understanding of how the parents have presented the issues of multiple cultures and racial heritage (Winn & Priest, 1993). Research has found that when individuals identify with both races, they are happier than those who identify with only one race (Harris, 2003; Hud-Aleem, 2008). The school counselor can work with the student to foster greater understanding of what the student needs from his or her family and in the school setting to develop a healthy racial identity (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001).

Interventions and Supports

To assist multiracial students and families in the school setting, school counselors may use a variety of interventions and

supports that have been found to be successful with this cultural population. Researchers report that children in a minority culture benefit when counseling allows for the discussion of issues and struggles related to race (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). Through this discussion, students have an opportunity to look at issues related to race and ethnicity closely, which could aid in racial identity development. While some children may be comfortable talking about such issues, there may be some who are hesitant to talk but still want to communicate concerns and questions. Students may communicate more openly and freely regarding racial issues through the use of writing assignments or journaling (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). When journaling is used, students are able to share feelings they may not be comfortable articulating (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012). In addition, bibliotherapy is a good approach to use to help students learn about various racial backgrounds, including that of multiracial.

Narrative therapy is another therapeutic approach that has been found to be useful when working with children experiencing struggles with racial identity (Moss & Davis, 2008). With narrative therapy, storytelling is used to help the child explore his or her concept of self and allows the school counselor to get a better understanding of the child's worldview (Ivey & Ivey, 2003). The child has an opportunity to tell his or her story in any way the child wants and include details about his or her problems. The school counselor listens closely to the story and then uses the story to help the child identify strengths and positive assets that the child can use to overcome challenges. With a multiracial child, mixed heritage may be seen as a challenge or as a negative aspect, but the school counselor

can use the story to help him or her see the strengths of being multiracial. Several possible strengths found in multiracial individuals have been identified through research, including a more accepting attitude towards others (Pedrotti et al, 2008). The school counselor then helps the child construct a restory – a new story that uses the strengths and positive assets that were identified (Ivey & Ivey, 2003). The final step is to help the child change the new story into action, using the strengths and new story as a springboard for change.

Counseling interventions may occur in a variety of settings, including individual, group, classroom, and school-wide. Individual counseling with multiracial students allows the school counselor to build a trusting relationship with the student that may lead to greater communication (Moss & Davis, 2008). One of the therapeutic approaches that may prove effective when counseling multiracial individuals is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) (Nishimura, 1995). Cognitive-behavioral interventions involve helping the student change cognitions and behaviors by identifying negative thoughts or irrational beliefs and replacing them with positive thoughts and corrected beliefs (Mayer, Van Acker, Lochman, & Gresham, 2009). The individual counseling setting allows for students to practice the new behaviors and thought processes they learn through CBT. For instance, if a student has negative thoughts about his or her racial background, the school counselor can help the student identify positive aspects and strengths to combat the negative self-talk. The counselor can then have the student say out loud what he or she could say to combat the negative self-talk. CBT has been found to be effective in the treatment of anger, aggression, anxiety, depression

and suicidality, as well as many other behavioral issues.

Conducting groups that focus on minority cultural identity may also prove to be a beneficial intervention (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). The group setting could provide a safe and comfortable place for students from various minority cultures (or one minority group, such as multiracial) to discuss experiences they have had and to come up with solutions to problems they have encountered. These groups could also be beneficial through the incorporation of role-play activities to practice the solutions (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012). When conducting a multicultural group with multiracial students, the school counselor should be aware of the stereotypes that may be encountered as part of the discussion (Greenberg, 2003). The school counselor should also be able to facilitate the development of the individual group member's racial identity development. Part of the group process may include helping the participants learn more about their cultural backgrounds and how this relates to their own cultural identity.

Classroom guidance lessons that have a multicultural focus are a good way to increase awareness and address issues of racism and negative attitudes of any race, including multiracial (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). School-wide awareness activities are another excellent way to teach all students about various races and to foster a greater sense of cultural diversity and understanding (Moss & Davis, 2008). School-wide activities should include community agencies and school partners so information is shared beyond the boundaries of the school walls. Approaches that educate as many students, school

staff, and community members as possible are important because doing so helps develop an atmosphere of cultural acceptance.

Following the dictates of the ASCA National Model, school counselors work in collaboration and partnership with parents, school staff, and the community. Interventions and supports are not limited in scope to just students. Parents, teachers, and other school staff benefit from information and training as well. Parents often need help in how to assist their child with the development of a strong racial identity. According to Harris (2002), parents of multiracial children have a tendency to approach racial identity in one of three ways: very little emphasis on race, strongly encourage identity with only one race, or incorporate both races in the child's cultural picture. School counselors are in the perfect position to assist parents in understanding the complexities of racial development so identity issues can be addressed in the home as well as in the school setting if necessary. The use of parent workshops that teach parents how to communicate effectively with their child about their racial background is one way school counselors can help educate and support parents (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). Parents may also benefit from learning about the impact that environmental factors can have on racial identity development (Hud-Aleem & Countryman, 2008). Environmental factors that have been identified as being influential are encouraging discussion between parents and children regarding racial heritage, positive attitude of parents about the child's multiracial identification, and presenting integrated opportunities for the child.

Although much attention has been given to the role of the school counselor in assisting multiracial students, it must be clearly understood that teachers and school staff also have a critical role in working with this diverse population as well. Teachers should receive multicultural training that includes the increasing multiracial population (Wardle, 2000). Staff development done by school counselors to address issues related to multicultural competence can assist teachers and other school staff and faculty about issues related to racial identity (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). Information should be provided that specifically addresses multiracial youth and the challenges they may encounter. According to Wardle (1998), staff training should include self-exploration of the attitudes that staff members have regarding multiracial identity and individuals, including interracial relationships; defining the concept of race and ethnicity in a universal frame of reference; providing specific information on how to assist multiracial children and their families develop healthy identities; teaching parent relation skills specific to the parents of multiracial children; and, the historical aspects of multiracial individuals. Staff training can assist teachers and other school staff in gaining the knowledge needed to provide support to multiracial students and their families. In addition, the teacher will gain a better understanding of multiracial issues and perspectives.

Conclusion

The multiracial population has increased in the state of Georgia in the past ten years. As the numbers grow, the challenges and opportunities multiracial students may encounter must be clearly identified, understood, and addressed to ensure the success of multiracial students. While school counselors are in the forefront

addressing the needs of this diverse student population, they also have a responsibility to help inform, educate, and support parents, teachers, school staff, and the community. It is only through this collaborative partnership that multiracial students will be able to reach their full potential.

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School Counselors Role in College Readiness for Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

This article discusses the importance of the professional school counselors' participation in the development of self-determination skills students with disabilities need to transition from high school to college. An intervention is proposed to guide high school counselors' involvement. Strategies to promote college readiness through the development of skills associated with self-determination (i.e., self-awareness, identifying social supports, and effective social skills) are offered. Implications for school counseling practice are discussed.

Keywords: self-determination, students with disabilities, college readiness, school counselors

School Counselors Role in College Readiness for Students with Disabilities

In the United States, graduating from high school and completing some level of post-secondary education is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for success in terms of employment, salary and career choice (Gwynne, Lesnick, Hart, & Allensworth, 2009). However, the majority

of high school graduates, who might have intentions to attend college, are not academically prepared for the rigor of postsecondary education (Conley, 2007). For students who are admitted to college, many come to quickly discover a significant gap between the skills and knowledge they learned in high school versus what their college or university expects them to know. As a result, a high percentage of first year college students find themselves enrolled in non-credit bearing remedial courses with percentages as high as sixty percent in public two-year colleges (Shulock, 2010) and twenty-five percent in four-year colleges and universities (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006). Consequently, taking remedial courses and not being prepared for college can bring about undue stress, broken dreams and an increased likelihood of a student dropping out of college during the first year (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006). The lack of college readiness among college students has become a major challenge for secondary and post-secondary institutions.

These challenges surrounding college readiness are even greater for students with disabilities (SWDs). Whereas college readiness has traditionally been determined