

Instructional School Leaders

Instructional School Leaders and School Counselors Collaborate: Maximizing Data-Driven Accountability

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Abstract

The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model (2003) indicates a paradigm shift in school counseling programs from service-centered for some of the students to program-centered for every student. The main question is how students are different as a result of participating in school counseling programs. As a result professional school counselors (PSCs) are posed to demonstrate their contributions to students' academic achievement. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 has led to an intense focus on educator accountability. This study examined whether performance-based, data-driven projects in counselor preparation programs enhance PSCs' abilities to collaborate with instructional leaders and advocate for students' academic achievement effectively.

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Education reform that requires institutional vision is designed to improve student achievement. Members of Congress reauthorized the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 as the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 2002 which has led to the development and establishment of a definition of student achievement that can be measured by state officials. The measurable components are reading scores and mathematics scores of students in the public schools of the United States,

particularly in grades three through eight.

High Stakes Testing (HST) is the term often used to describe the accountability measures that are driving educational reform (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Administrators of public schools strive to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) with the stated outcome of improved student achievement, as measured by reading scores and mathematics scores. Educational support teams are needed to understand and to collaborate on data-driven performance outcomes to maximize accountability. Because each state determines the instrument of measurement for the assessment outcomes in reading and mathematics, collaboration between instructional leaders and professional school counselors (PSCs) may be significant independent variables that impact student achievement within the school learning environment.

Student achievement data must be analyzed to understand where achievement gaps exist and rigorous objectives must be articulated to measure student outcomes (Rosenshine, 2003). While professional school counselors are not specifically mentioned in NCLB, PSCs are in a prime position to assist with both data-driven interventions and data dissemination. As allies, the PSC and the instructional leader can be proactive to foster rigorous academic standards (Capuzzi & Gross, 1996).

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2003), the new question is, Are school counselors prepared to enhance student achievement via a data-driven curriculum? Consequently, the implementation of data-training activities in school counseling preparation

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programs is essential. Counselor education programs have responded to the call for educational reform by including in their counselor preparation programs and field practice a focus on accountability outcomes for services offered to students.

The counselor and the administrator should be prepared through the design of counselor education programs and educational leadership programs to observe the teaching and learning phenomena with a collaborative lens toward connecting the cognitive and affective taxonomical domains for the advancement of achievement for all students (ASCA, 2003; Educational Leadership Constituent, 2002; Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964). Although efforts to develop alliances and to work and to think from a data-driven frame of reference are still a work in progress, if counselor education programs and educational leadership programs were to be designed to prepare counselors and teachers to integrate their own with the other's field, together they could turn a collaborative lens toward improved academic achievement. Yet, the field of education has become defined by the dictates of HST as the barometer for the measurement of student achievement and school building accountability for higher academic performance for all students. Improved academic achievement is the focus for instructional leaders. Thus, collaboration among instructional leaders and professional school counselors (PSC) is an essential relationship for improving services to students. The purpose of the article is to report on study using performance-based, data-driven projects in a counselor preparation program as an enhancement of PSCs' abilities to collaborate with instructional leaders and advocate for students' academic achievement.

Rationale for Data-Driven School Counseling Programs

The inclusion of data training in counselor education programs was for accountability, which is integral to educational reform and to students' academic success. School counselor accountability may be defined as the dissemination of specific information to stakeholders and to supervisors about the effectiveness and efficiency of school counseling services through the use of measurable outcomes (Erford, 2003; Gallagher, 1998; Schmidt, 1993). It is the "show-me" attitude that is used to answer the questions about the effectiveness of school counseling programs to students, families, teachers, schools, and districts (Cobia & Henderson, 2003; Gysbers, 2001;

Gysbers & Henderson, 2002; Thompson, 2002).

This research model began with a focus on training future PSCs to be drivers of accountability because evidence is required to ensure accountability. Examples of typical areas of accountability in schools are attendance, tardiness, test scores, discipline, and detentions (Howley, 1996). Thus, the question was, Are school counselors prepared to be members of the instructional leadership team to promote rigorous data-driven curricula for all students?

Professional Foundation

According to ASCA (2003), PSCs have the knowledge and skills to foster the personal, academic and career development of all students. Specifically, PSCs have the knowledge and skills to address various aspects of human development. In addition, school counselors are both leaders and advocates of students and for students. According to ASCA (2003), PSCs operate from a leadership position, "promote student success," (p. 24) and "help every student gain access to rigorous academic preparation that will lead to greater opportunity and increased academic achievement" (p. 24). One of the purposes laid out in the ASCA National Model is the directive that as advocates, PSCs have the responsibility to articulate and demonstrate an understanding of the impediments to student learning and to student academic achievement. Moreover, PSCs advocate for students by the elimination of barriers to academic achievement via curriculum strategies and professional skills that advance students' ability to negotiate the school environment.

Educational Leadership

Operationally, the collaborative leader is viewed as the instructional school leader who embraces the implementation of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions outlined by both the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards (ISLLC; 1996), and the Educational Leadership Constituent Council Elements (ELCC; 2002). To that end, instructional school leaders are critical of the facilitation of the ASCA framework for comprehensive school counseling programs. Implementing an operational definition of a collaborative leadership model is necessary to the professionals who are engaged in student achievement outcomes. This definition will be instituted in conjunction with the proposed data-driven strategies, which are to align with ISLLC Standards III

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and ELCC Standard III and their relationship with the ASCA National Model's themes of advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and systemic change. This proposed alignment of Specialty Professional Associations (SPAs) standards provides the foundation for professional collaboration between the fields of educational leadership and school counseling. The suggested collaborative leadership definition is driven by the need of public school officials to respond to this era's requirement of high-stakes testing outcomes for student achievement.

Collaborative Leadership Education Model

The collaborative leadership education model proposed by the authors of this research will have two groups of dedicated professionals unite to redouble their efforts toward work with newfound efficiency in attaining their common vision. A shared vision leads to mutual understanding and commitment. All stakeholders share responsibility in advocating for educational quality for all students. That is, inclusion rather than exclusion, a dialog of open problem-solving and the promotion of systemic and long-term versus symptomatic and short-term change (McKibben, 2004). A collaborative model of leadership that includes ASCA's National Model of comprehensive school counseling programs can be linked to ISLLC Standards III and ISLLC Standards IV, and ELCC Standard III. Hence, the recognition of professional standards outlined by these groups may provide the context for the collaboration between educational leaders and professional school counselors. The use of the standards of the SPA promotes the operating definitions for effective collaboration. For example, ASCA's Comprehensive School Counseling Model posits the themes of advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and systemic change. With an awareness of this model by school leaders and the facilitation of a marriage designed for effective enactment, educational leadership collaboration between the ASCA's school counseling comprehensive model and the correlated ISLLC and ELCC standards cited for school leaders can be implemented. The new ambassadors at the district and at the schools within the district can shape an oasis for data-driven instructional strategies to improve academic success for all students. Therefore, a collaborative leadership model is important in that educational concerns are complex and interdependent, and require a system approach with diverse input variables to increase holistic accountability.

Conceptual foundation. The theoretical perspective that

serves as the foundation for this study is embedded within two developmental theorists and one humanistic theorist. In the socio-cultural theory Vygotsky (1962), emphasized how cognitive development proceeds as a result of social interactions between members of a culture. On the other hand, in his psychosocial developmental theory, Erikson (1963) spoke to changes in individual interactions with and comprehension of one another, as well as in one's knowledge of self as a member of society. Conjointly, these two theorists considered the social and cultural factors that affect human development. In addition, in his Client-Centered theory, Rogers (1951) formed the foundation of the therapeutic aspect of the professional development working alliance. The postulates of empathy are unconditional positive regard, genuineness, and congruence (Erickson, 1963; Rogers, 1951; Vygotsky, 1962).

Program Accountability in the ASCA National Model

The ASCA National Model consists of four components: foundation, delivery system, management system, and accountability (Dahir, 2000; Paisley & McMahan, 2001). According to ASCA, professional school counselors must collect and use data to link the school counseling program to student achievement. Accountability measures the effectiveness of school counseling programs. Thus, answers are sought to the question, "How are students different as a result of participating in the school counseling program?"

Why infuse data-driven curriculum into the field experience? Whiston (2005) stated some counselors' reticence in the field toward accountability is due in part to lack of training of PSCs in data analysis and their low level of efficacy as related to data analysis. Therefore, the infusion of more assessment activities and evaluation activities into courses is one strategy that can guide the development and the evaluation of school counselor preparation programs. Data-analysis infusion into courses may be used by school counselors-in-training to evaluate their professional development and to evaluate their need for continuous professional growth. Moreover, the evaluation of data can become the yardstick that is used to measure the need for systemic change, confirm progress, and highlight gaps within the educational environment. Then the process of bridging the gap between success and failure in schools can begin. As PSCs partner with instructional leaders and key stakeholders (persons who

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have a vested interest in guiding the future of an issue or are affected by the issue) to embrace accountability, they also embrace furthering the academic success of every student (Stone & Clark, 2001). Sharing accountability for school improvement with all stakeholders has become critical for the collaborative roles and functions of professional school counselors in our nation's schools.

Research on the accountability need of school counselors. Although ASCA is not a new association, a national model was not developed until 2003 by ASCA leaders to address a comprehensive approach to professional school counselor accountability, management, delivery services, and program foundation. The National Model provides the framework by which PSCs design, coordinate, implement, manage, and evaluate their programs for all students' success. PSCs trained under this National Model are encouraged to switch their current service-centered emphasis for some students to a program-centered emphasis for all students.

Staggering comparisons of minority students to majority students continue to highlight the achievement gaps (Moffett & Persaud, 2005). This gap between minority and majority students is demonstrated in differential graduation rates from high schools and colleges as well as in performance rates in reading and math on national standardized tests. The Education Trust (2003) reported that far fewer Latinos and African Americans than Asians and Whites reach proficient levels in reading and mathematics. National data for 2003 indicated that 61% of African American 4th graders were below basic proficiency in reading and 61% of African American 8th graders were below basic proficiency in mathematics. The same national data survey demonstrated a similar disparity with Latinos; 57% of 4th graders were below basic in reading and 60% of 8th graders were below basic in mathematics. In addition, it was reported that fewer minority students are enrolled in algebra and advanced placement courses. On the other hand, there are elementary, middle and senior high schools where minority students are excelling. Educators cognizant of the importance of a challenging curriculum aligned with standards for all students, who establish clear goals to forward the curriculum, implement data-driven school counseling programs and systematic evaluation for both curriculum and programs are equipped to respond to the question, "How are students different as a result of what we do?" (ASCA, 2003).

The Rationale for the Current Study

The overall goal of the study was to investigate and explore school counselors-in-training level of efficacy in relation to the enhancement of and the advocacy of student achievement via data-driven interventions and curricula. Bandura, (1986) indicated that behavioral performance has a major impact on perceptions of self-efficacy. Specifically, the research questions addressed in this study were:

1. Will there be an increase in the measured perceptions of the participants' self-efficacy beliefs about the development, evaluation, and delivery of data-driven intervention and curricula from pre-course assessment to post-course assessment?
2. Was there a difference in mean scores perception of the participants on the Counselor Candidate Perception Inventory Instrument (CCPII)?
3. Will there be an increase in the measured perceptions of the participants on the desire to share in educational reform accountability via collaboration with instructional leaders from pre-course assessment to post-course assessment?

More specifically, the ASCA National Model emphasized the need for PSCs to demonstrate the effectiveness of school counseling programs by generating data via evaluation of school counseling interventions and of entire programs. Professional school counselors and instructional leaders who possess the skills to aggregate and disaggregate student information would increase their relevant self-efficacy perception to act as advocates to identify and reduce environmental practices that deter equitable access and opportunities for student success in a rigorous curriculum.

Method

Participants

The participants consisted of 20 2nd-year master's degree candidates from three sections of the course titled, "Organization and Administration of School Counseling Programs." The course is a part of a School Counseling Master's Program in a small, historically private Black Catholic University in the southern region of the United States.

More specifically, the participants consisted of 18 women (90%) and 2 men (10%) with a mean age of 36 years; range = 24–55 years. A minority of participants

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(20%) reported that they had completed a master's degree in school counseling, and 80% held a baccalaureate degree.

Self-reported racial characteristics of the sample were 19 African Americans (95%) and 1 White (5%). Approximately 50% of the students reported they had taken a statistics course and 90% reported that they had participated in a research project. Assignment was done through self-selection and was non-random. All students elected to participate in the study.

Design and Procedures

Instrumentation. The researchers developed The Counselor Candidate Perception Inventory Instrument (CCPII) (See Appendix) to gather support for the research questions. The instrument consisted of a demographic section and two content-related sections. The participants used a 4-point Likert scale to rate each item, ranging from 1, which meant *no significance* or *not at all*, to 4, which meant *very much*. Section 1 included six demographic items pertaining to age, gender, race, education level, purpose for degree, and statistics/research experience (SRE). Statistics/research experience included completion of a graduate level course in statistics and research, as well as the number of research projects in which the student participated over the previous 2 years. Education level included two categories: master's degree in school counseling and baccalaureate degree.

The second section of the survey assessed participants' levels of anxiety when analyzing data and the usefulness of data-analysis training. The 9 items addressed anxiety levels as they related to aggregating and disaggregating data and the usefulness of data-analysis training in school counselor preparation programs. The third and final section of the survey asked participants to identify their desire to develop skills in accountability, system collaboration, program development, program evaluation, and program delivery. The final section of the survey assessed the usefulness of data-analysis projects. The CCPII has good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the subcategories ranged from 0.77 to .087.

Project structure. The researchers framed the didactic delivery of the project around six key components: a) developing the survey, b) collecting the data, c) analyzing the data, d) discussing the data, e) writing recommendations, and f) sharing the data. The focus of the class on survey development was to identify constructs

related to the delivery service of four components (curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, system support) and the three domains of delivery services (academic, personal/social, career/vocational) as established by the ASCA. The focus of data collection and data analyses was to develop skills in coding, entering, and interpreting data for and from SPSS.

The teaching process. Each class was formatted sequentially; the researcher called this "facilitating small steps of accomplishments." A typical class included a lecture on one of the aforementioned components (45 to 60 minutes) followed by whole-group collaborations; pair-and-share break-out groups followed according to school level (elementary, middle/junior, and senior). The class concluded with a group check-in, a question-and-answer session, and feedback by the professor. This feedback included how well candidates understood how to collect and analyze data.

Dealing with the challenge. This data-analysis activity required the researchers to increase their ability to discern the students' aptitudes and strengths. As such, the researchers integrated the intelligences within the daily activities that allowed students to go through a vibrant environment which created "light bulb" moments. Those environments led to cognitive, affective, and interpersonal learning moments. Reflection became crucial to the effectiveness of the project.

Researchers and participants reflected on what was learned in each class. Part of the reflection process involved immediate reflection while the class was fresh in everyone's minds; this technique allowed participants to identify what worked and what did not work. In addition, the researchers made a conscious effort to monitor the body language and the facial expressions of each participant. If students appeared to be confused, the researchers provided additional explanations. If the students were obviously anxious, the researchers articulated words of encouragement.

Results

Analysis

Data generated from the survey was entered into a data file. The 9 closed-ended questions were coded based upon the response items presented to the respondents on the Likert scale and demographic information was compiled based upon pre-established response options. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

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12.0 was used to analyze the data.

In order to meet the objective of the study, the researchers employed simple descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations which indicated the results of the Likert ratings on students' confidence and belief in contributing to the accountability for school improvement (see Table 1). A significant difference was found between the before scores ($M = 1.3$) and the after ($M = 2.9$) scores on students' confidence in the development and delivery of data-driven school counseling curriculum. In addition, participants' perceptions on their ability to contribute to the accountability of school improvement indicated that the mean score prior to the activity was ($M = 2.1$) and the after mean score following the activity was ($M = 3.2$).

The qualitative analysis revealed that the most common explanation for participants' confidence ratings of 55% ($n = 11$) was that they found the data-analysis activity to be a considerably positive educational experience and 15% ($n = 3$) found the data-analysis activity to be a very positive educational experience. The second common explanation for students' confidence rating of 80% ($n = 16$) was uncertainty about their ability to aggregate and disaggregate. In explaining the rating regarding their ability to share in the accountability after the activity, participants' most frequent response of 90% ($n = 18$) was from *considerably* to *very much*, as compared to before the activity, *not at all* 20% ($n = 4$), *some* 45% ($n = 9$) and *considerably* 35% ($n = 7$).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Likert Rating (n=20)

	Abbreviated Questions	Mean	SD
1.	Did the assignment cause initial anxiety?	3.20	.89
2.	Did you have anxiety during the project?	2.40	.82
3.	How beneficial was the instruction?	3.35	.49
4.	How beneficial was peer collaboration?	3.20	.83
5.	Did this assignment increase your knowledge about data-driven schooling programs?	3.70	.47
6.	Confidence to develop data-driven programs before assignment?	1.30	.73
7.	Confidence in developing data-driven programs after assignments?	2.90	.67
8.	Belief in ability to share in accountability before activity?	1.20	.75
9.	Belief in ability to share in accountability after activity?	2.60	.73

Note. In addition, when participants were asked whether the assignment increased their knowledge about developing data-driven school counseling programs, all of the participants responded from considerably to very much 100% ($n = 20$). Moreover, when asked about the importance of peer collaboration, 75% ($n = 15$) of the participants responded from considerably to very much, which suggested that learning occurred from group brainstorming and discussions.

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Discussion

Limitations of the Study

With this study, the researchers yielded important information about the influences of perceived self-efficacy, usefulness of problem-based activity, and the desire to collaborate with educational leaders for accountability in an era of High Stakes Testing in school environments. However, the sample size was small and convenient; a more comprehensive conclusion would require further testing. Further, generalizing the current results as a prescription for other counselor education courses with the same focus should be considered with caution. The measures used were created specifically for this study. Finally, future research should reinvestigate variables used in this study with a treatment and control group to increase the reliability and validity of the findings.

Implications for Intervention

In Georgia, the requirements for certification in the fields of counseling and educational leadership include newly implemented certification examinations to assess candidates' knowledge and skills through the Georgia Assessment for Certification of Education (GACE). The ideal is accountability of the professional educators entering the field; therefore, this study has the following implications for Counselor Education Programs and Educational Leadership Preparation Programs:

1. Counselors-in-training are interested in sharing accountability and collaborating with instructional leaders.
2. Counselors-in-training are interested in learning about school counseling program development, evaluation, and delivery.
3. There is a lack of school counseling program development, evaluation, and delivery in counselor education preparation.
4. A joint course with the expected outcome of collaboration between the professional school counselor and instructional leader in data-driven projects should be included in master's degree programs for the fields of school counseling and leadership.

Conclusions

The most important findings of the current study

were consistent with Bandura's self-efficacy theory and indicated that a data-analysis training activity has had a positive impact for school counselors-in-training on their perceptions of self-efficacy to engage in data-driven curriculum development and on their ability to collaborate with instructional leaders. Practice in data analysis increases self-efficacy ratings, which has implications for wide-range training and pedagogical strategies and data-analysis training. Moreover, the qualitative data suggested a concern that might affect students' development, such as misconceptions or fears about aggregating data. In the study, the researchers provided strong evidence that the infusion of assessment and evaluation into school counselor preparation programs would be beneficial to the professional school counselor's new leadership role with an alliance with the instructional leader, given the state of education to transform schools to ensure the academic success of all students.

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