

Running head: Counselors' Role in a Changing, Diverse Society

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ABSTRACT

School Counselors' roles have changed with the challenges of today's population. School counselors are support staff with high student-to-counselor ratios. Counselors are not only present in junior high and middle schools; they now service elementary schools. School counselors need to be aware of the demographics of the changing student populations and resources in order to provide multicultural guidance and obtain needed skills. Counselors need preparation in order to provide services for the changing, culturally diverse populations.

Discussions include familiarity with the demographics of the changing student populations and resources to provide multicultural guidance and obtain needed skills.

Counselors' Role in a Changing, Diverse Society

Counselors' roles have changed with the challenges of today's population. Counselors are not only present in junior high and middle schools; they now service elementary schools. School counselors are support staff with high student-to-counselor ratios. The ratio of reported 100,052 guidance counselors in public schools is, on average, 477 students per counselor (Young, 2001-2002).

Counselors provide a diverse array of services to assist students including advising in academic, social, and behavioral matters as well as developmental issues (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003). The counseling relationship is formed upon trust and caring. Leadership through counseling and guidance fosters "enduring values, and honest, open communication" (Stephenson, 2004, p. 1). According to Cunningham and Cordeiro (2003),

Counselors provide a diverse array of services to help students, including advising in academic, social, emotional, and behavioral matters. They address a wide array of issues such as course selection, vocational placement, college selection, parental divorce, dating, loneliness, study habits, controlling aggressiveness, violence, depression, and many other developmental issues. (p. 236)

Counselors also develop relationships among students through large group, small group, and individual counseling sessions. Stephenson (2004) stipulates that a leader's action set the tone for the caliber of the relationships and quality of communications. The quality of communication establishes a connection between counselor and student. The relationship that develops is a process that advances through various stages. Stephenson (2004) insists that leaders should ensure a climate of trust and compassion, based on open communication that expands

from spoken communication to the act of listening, and use appropriate measures derived through learned information. With drugs, poor parental skills, abuse, homelessness, death, and other issues, there is great need for school counseling services. Leadership for counselors dictates that counselors provide services, address relevant issues in the school environment, and provide positive role modeling for students and staff.

National Populations

Counselors may need more preparation and skills in learning to deal with diverse populations. The nation is continually changing with one third of the country's total population as a minority with numbers that will continue to increase (U. S. Census, 2006). This implies that counselors may interact with a changing population for which they must possess multicultural knowledge and competencies.

The country is also undergoing increases in crime. Nationally, the estimated number of arrests for drug violations increased from 1.69 million in 2003 to 1.75 million in 2004 and the number of adults in corrections systems has increased from 6.34 million in 2003 to 6.99 million in 2004 (The White House, 2006). Drug violators and adults in correctional systems may be parents with children in the school system.

Types of Cultures

There are various types of cultures. The definition of the word "culture" rests on two different levels: (1) culture as a reflection of ethnic heritage, national origin, religious affiliation, and the history and body of achievements of a demographic group and (2) the same word culture encapsulate a pervasive social problem that affects large numbers of people. Scott and Borodovsky (1990) explain the various types of cultures relevant to counselors and their students. They indicate that there should be an acknowledgment of numerous cultural, ethnic,

and/or racial differences that exist as daily realities for the culturally different client (such as incidents of racism, discrimination, and dealing with neighborhood problems such as drug dealers) of which the member of the dominant culture has little awareness.

The counselor must have a working knowledge of these differences, not only as they pertain to her or his client as a member of a specific cultural, ethnic, or racial group, but also as they pertain to the client as an *individual* whose identity is intimately and intricately bound up in a specific culture, ethnic group, and/or racial group. In essence, this would entail a two-fold understanding: the client as a member of a culture different from that of the counselor *and* (perhaps more important) the client as an individual reacting to, from, and within her or his specific environment/culture. Hence, the counselor must acknowledge that he or she is faced with (a) a client whom he or she must get to know; (b) a culture that he or she must learn about; and (c) an individual client whose thoughts, feelings, and conceptions about her or his culture must be understood as they pertain to the client specifically. (Scott & Bordoysky, 1990, Counselor Role Taking section, ¶ 1)

The implication is that school counselors must deal with and work within the bounds of various types of cultures.

Counselors' Intrinsic Requirements

The counseling profession requires counselors to “address the significance of ethnicity in the development of the students they serve” (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005, ¶ 5). Certain meanings, attire, and communication patterns may be prevalent in certain cultures and counselors must maintain cultural awareness to interact with various populations deriving meaning and emotional interactions that will benefit the client. According to the National Board for Professional

Teaching Standards (2002), school counselors are knowledgeable concerning appropriate counseling strategies for diverse populations, and adjust their counseling styles and techniques to respond effectively to the needs of students whose worldviews and cultural experiences differ from the dominant culture.

The presence of multicultural knowledge may be crucial in discerning how counselors work with students and may play an important role in counselors' ability to empathize and address the mental health concerns of culturally diverse students (Constantine & Gainor, 2001). The evolution in the diversity of student population challenges counselors' communication skills. Of the data reported for 47.4 million students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, White non-Hispanic students made up the majority of students (60.3%), followed by Black (17.2), Hispanic (17.1%), Asian/Pacific Islander (4.2%), and American Indian/Alaska Native students made up 1.2% of the public school population (Young, 2001-2002). Pope-Davis, Liu, Toporek, and Brittan-Powell (2001) emphasize that much of the multicultural counseling research highlights the need for counselors to become culturally competent in addressing the needs of diverse communities. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards also indicates (2002) that school counselors should be knowledgeable concerning appropriate counseling strategies for diverse populations and adjust their counseling styles and to respond effectively to the needs of students whose cultural experiences differ from the dominant culture.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2002) specifies that "Accomplished school counselors select and recommend research-based instructional materials and experiences that promote positive images of people of varying races, genders, religions, cultures, and physical and mental abilities" (p. 30). Since, school counselors should provide and

select a positive curriculum for all people; then the expectation is that school counselors must possess multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness. Counselors need to be knowledgeable in delivering appropriate counseling services to diverse student populations. Counselors may then in turn facilitate students' needs in acquiring multicultural knowledge and awareness so that they may interact socially and culturally with others to enhance students' daily lives.

Counseling Population in Relation to the Student Population They Service

National statistics provide data on populations that school counselors serve, yet, there appears to be no data from national statistics regarding school counselors' ethnicity. Research indicates the number of school-aged students from diverse backgrounds is increasing, yet, the majority of teachers and those in teacher education programs continue to be predominantly White (Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, 2005). Constantine and Gainor's (2001) study included both components of multicultural knowledge and awareness as well as emotional intelligence but could not address ethnicity due to an insufficient number of minorities in the sample population. A later study by Constantine (2001a) also factored in race and ethnicity. The study revealed that counselor race or ethnicity contributed a significant variance. The conclusion was that Black American and Latino American counselor trainees received ratings significantly higher in multicultural competence than their White American peers.

Support Diversity

School counselors can support diversity and enhance the understanding of cultures in various ways. School counselors may support diversity through speakers, sponsoring an awareness group, pursuing professional development, and presenting guidance lessons. The expectation is that school counselors utilize specific strategies that encourage respect for

individual differences related to culture, gender, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, disabilities, and other factors (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2002).

Speakers

School counselors can bring in speakers of various ethnic groups to share their rituals and culture. Counselors or speakers can address issues concerning diversity at a Parents' Night or PTA meeting. Counselors may become involved in hosting a culture night for the school and community. Through the culture night, students and families may discuss their country of origin (Hodgkinson, 2000) and open a dialogue with other families and staff.

Establish an Awareness Group

Sponsoring an awareness group may prove an option for students and teachers to develop tolerance, acceptance, and cultural understanding. School counselors must also recognize that students with different backgrounds may require unique types of counseling interventions (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2002). Through an awareness group, counselors may employ strategies that recognize diversity and embraces approaches that support the worth, dignity, and potential of individuals within all contexts (ACA, 2005).

Professional Development

School counselors need to access professional development that encourages diversity, knowledge, and awareness. According to Cho and De-Castro-Ambrosetti (2005), to address the needs of an increasingly diverse population, it is imperative that those involved incorporate measures that prepare them to instruct culturally and linguistically diverse students in urban and suburban settings. Counselors may attend professional development workshops and conferences on diversity. School counselors may also provide professional development for teachers concerning diversity. Cho and DeCastro-Ambrosetti (2005) found that new teachers have limited

cultural knowledge and teaching experience and feel ill equipped in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. Counselors may fill that gap by gaining professional development on diversity and passing on the information to staff and students.

Guidance Lessons on Diversity

Many counselors provide discussions and learning opportunities on various topics and issues through guidance lessons to students. School counselors may provide specific guidance lessons that address diversity and ethnicity issues. According to Zimmerman, Aberle, and Krafchick (2005), "Schools provide an ideal venue to initiate discussions related to diversity because they represent the first social settings where children interact with others who may not be of the same socioeconomic class or race" (para 3). School counselors should "select and promote counseling and teaching materials that positively depict children and adults with exceptionalities and that avoid using gender-specific terms and racially stereotypical language" (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2002, p. 30). School counselors may make a list of successes for various ethnic groups (Hodgkinson, 2000) and include role-plays, discussions, and classroom activities that represent various cultural perspectives (American Counseling Association, 2005). School counselors must design guidance lessons that will provide discussions and learning opportunities that promote positive growth on topics and issues of diversity.

Conclusion

School counselors' roles have changed with the challenges of today's population. School counselors must address and meet the needs of today's changing society. Discussions included familiarity with the demographics of the changing student populations and resources to provide multicultural guidance and obtain needed skills. These resources include supporting diversity

through various venues such as hosting speakers, sponsoring an awareness group, pursuing professional development, and presenting guidance lessons. Counselors' investment and support through these types of cultural programs may provide the impetus for accepting and supporting diversity.

The nation is continually changing with one third of the country's total population as a minority and the continuing growth of Hispanic and Black populations (U. S. Census, 2006). School counselors' multicultural knowledge and awareness may influence and effect their interactions with culturally diverse students. This implies that counselors will interact with a changing population for which they must possess multicultural knowledge and competencies.

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