

Counselors' Role in a Changing, Diverse Society Revised

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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. 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. This discussion includes revised research, familiarity with the demographics of the changing student populations, and resources to provide multicultural guidance and obtain needed skills.

Keywords: school counselors, multicultural, diverse populations, guidance, demographics, students

Counselors' Role in a Changing, Diverse Society Revised

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). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) (2015) also report a high national student-to-counselor ratio of 482 per counselor for public schools. The ASCA recommend that "schools strive to maintain a 250:1 student-to-counselor ratio" (NACAC & ASCA, 2015, p. 2) with only three states achieving the proportion (2015).

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. 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). The U. S. Census (Colby & Otman, 2015) projects that by 2044, more than half of all Americans will belong to a minority group. This implies that counselors may interact with a changing population for which they must possess multicultural knowledge and competencies. According to Constantine and Gainor (2001), school counselors who are unaware of cultural differences in expression of feelings may erroneously interpret or even pathologize behaviors in some students of color. "As a result, these students may feel that their mental health issues are not being understood or addressed in culturally sensitive ways" (Constantine & Gainor, Discussion section, para. 3). Individuals with oppressed identities may experience discrimination, which may affect their self-esteem leading to depression and anxiety (Chan, Cor, & Band, 2018),

The country is also undergoing disproportionate figures concerning race and incarceration. Incarceration data from U. S. Dept. of Justice Program Bureau of Justice Statistics (Zeng, 2018) indicates that of the reported inmates (per 100,000), 187 were White, 592 were

Black, 182 were Hispanic, 401 were American Indian/Alaska Native, and 26 were Asian. This information from the Bureau of Justice Statistics is alarming considering approximately half the prison inmates were minorities (Zeng. 2018) in contrast with data from APA indicating that approximately 61% of the U.S. population classifies as White (APA, 2019). Many adult minorities in correctional systems may be parents with children in the school system. With drugs, poor parental skills, abuse, homelessness, oppression, death, health crisis, and other issues, there is a substantial need for school counselors aware of multicultural issues.

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. Culture is also described as the worldview through learned and transmitted beliefs, values, and practices, including (APA) 2002 Guideline) religious and spiritual traditions (Delaware University Blog, 2014). It may encompass a way of living through historical, economic, ecological, and political forces on a group (APA 2002 Guideline) and expanded to include sexual orientation, gender, age and maturity, and even geographic location.(Delaware University Blog, 2014).

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, neighborhood, and drug problems) 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, para 1)

The realities of an interdependent and changing world precludes that counselors may experience limitations in their ability to provide effective interventions for culturally diverse populations in global communities (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2013). The implication is that school counselors must deal with and work within the bounds of various types of cultures.

Multicultural

With the changing diversity society and the identification of individuals identifying with more than one race and/or ethnicity, multicultural counseling is relevant for all populations. According to the Delaware University Blog (2014), defines multicultural counseling is as the action that occurs when the counselor works with a client from a different cultural group and the effect of interactions within the counseling relationship. This definition expands to include dissimilarities in religion and spirituality, sexual orientation, gender, age and maturity,

socioeconomic class, family history, and even geographic location (Delaware University Blog, 2014).

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, para 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 regarding appropriate counseling strategies for diverse populations, and adjust their counseling styles/techniques by responding to the needs of students whose worldviews and cultural experiences are different from the dominant culture. However, counseling interns' racial-ethnic backgrounds and experiences may have an effect on multicultural training outcomes (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2013).

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

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). APA (2002) indicates that minority students are underrepresented at all levels of the psychology program, especially at the doctoral level. APA “estimates that 84% of “active psychologists” are White compared to 61% of the U.S. population and 80.5% of the APA Council of Representatives in 2016 were White psychologists

[APA, 2018b]" (APA, 2019, p. 15). Data USA (2017) indicates that 61.9% of Counselors are White (Non-Hispanic) and 19.4% of Counselors are Black (Non-Hispanic).

Studies that include ethnicity in relation to multicultural knowledge can be important in elevating the understanding of diversity. 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 study by Constantine (2001) 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. Although small, a study by Merrill-Washington (2008) findings revealed the relationship between ethnicity and multicultural knowledge and awareness scores.

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).

Counseling programs can support diversity. Racial/ethnic minority students progressive fail to become psychologist possibly because of personal, environmental reasons, discrimination, or barriers due to external constraints (APA, 2002). There is a need for inclusion of a more diverse population of school counselors because the underrepresentation of minority teachers,

counselors, and principals as role models create a serious problem in contemporary schools (Fusick & Bordeau, 2004). Researchers, institutions, and organizations may provide more opportunities for ethnically diverse school counselors to participate in research, which may offer the possibility to gain new concepts, approaches, and information regarding their ethnic worldview (Merrill-Washington 2008).

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. Through the changing accelerated pace of work, families, and schools, many meetings may move to an online format.

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). With the proper protocols and standards, school counselors can sponsor virtual culturally diverse awareness groups with other schools across the world. 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

Counselors need to access professional development that encourages diversity, knowledge, and awareness. Counselors with multicultural competence have knowledge of other cultures and the willingness to gain further knowledge (Greene, 2014). Multicultural learning experiences that are developmental, sequential, and build upon levels of counselor competence may provide a foundation for developing comprehensive approaches to cultural competency-based training (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2013). 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. “Educators, trainers of psychologists, psychological researchers, providers of service, and those psychologists implementing organizational change are encouraged to gain skills to work effectively with individuals and groups of role play” (APA, 2002, p. 7). School counselors can access videos and podcasts on a variety of counseling topics such as diversity through the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (2019).

Guidance Lessons on Diversity

Many counselors provide discussions and learning opportunities on various topics and issues via 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, 2012, p. 37).

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 (ACA 2005). Counselors must design guidance lessons that will provide discussions and learning opportunities that promote positive growth on topics and issues of diversity. They may access numerous websites and school based group and classroom lessons from a variety of technological sources including curriculums from the ASCA (2019) website resources page.

Discussion

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. The focus of the discussion included familiarity with 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 guidance lessons. The global world of technology provides the means and support of virtual programs and resources for school 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). Counselors who have multicultural competence are aware of their own cultural background, their potentially biased attitudes, cultural background of the client, and the affect on the counseling relationship (Greene, 2014). 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. Counselors with multicultural competence have knowledge of other cultures and the ability and willingness to gain further knowledge as necessary.

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