

Considerations for Elementary Schools and University Collaborations: A Guide to Implementing Counseling Research

Joel H. Muro

Texas Woman's University

Victoria K. Stickle

University of North Texas

Lamar Muro

Texas Woman's University

Pedro J. Blanco

Texas Woman's University

Mei-Hsiang Tsai

National University of Tainan

Abstract: *University-school collaboration can extend past the notion of simple shared resources in order to connect ideas, share talents, and solve problems mutually. It also provides fertile ground for counseling researchers to obtain, analyze and disseminate data. University-school collaborations signify a connective relationship between two vital and influential institutions, and yet they also represent a plethora of arduous and intricate tasks and responsibilities in order to provide a successful research environment. This article offers an elucidation and delineation of those necessary tasks by offering a comprehensive checklist, providing shared personal experiences, and exploring relevant issues.*

Keywords: *School university collaboration, research implementation, counseling project checklist*

Introduction

With educational funds becoming scarce through state and national sources, schools and universities share the pressure of finding new and inventive ways to enhance student learning experiences and the overall educational environment. This charge comes despite dwindling availability of time, trained staff, or accessible funds in the public school systems and university settings. It may also be seen as an opportunity to implement research studies while assisting beleaguered schools. By using the university-school collaboration model, these often isolated organizations could converge to form the mutual goals of shared responsibilities, combined resources, and joint accountability, which could possibly create a unified system designed to meet the increasing needs of school children (Palladino-Schultheiss, 2005).

University-school collaboration may extend past the notion of simple shared resources in order to connect ideas, share talents, and solve problems mutually. It also provides fertile ground for counseling researchers to obtain, analyze and disseminate data. The partnership, then, may simultaneously provide benefits to the organizations and the individuals that inhabit them. This article specifically discusses the process, merits, and drawbacks of engaging in university-school collaboration with research potentials by providing readers with a template for implementation in order to establish similar projects within their counseling programs. In addition, the authors of this work include their own experiences when planning and executing such a project. Our experiences mirror the checklist (Figure 1) to show our successes as well as pratfalls.

Introduction to Collaborations

There are a growing number of schools reaching out to professionals in the higher education community for the purpose of establishing relationships characterized by service and research. Upon formation, these relationships can coordinate resources from the university which include benefits to a school-based treatment structure in order to address issues that are important to the individual student, the invested educational institutions, and the community at-large (Stickle, Muro, & Blanco, 2013; Walsh, Barrett, & DePaul, 2007). Many university-based counseling programs have the opportunity to offer outreach and treatment as an early intervention to school children who may not receive services otherwise. These programs may also simultaneously build learning experiences for counseling trainees in a community environment that is realistic, diverse, and cross-cultural. In this way, these agencies collaborate with similar objectives, comparable goals, and mutual advantages to create a rewarding partnership that provides effective, helpful, and well-timed services.

Benefitting the Schools and Their Communities

Existing vanguards for mental health interventions for children are typically school staff members; they represent the first point of contact for children and families in need despite overwhelming numbers and underwhelming resources. Unfortunately, current trends in academic environments require that school employees focus their time and efforts on closing achievement gaps. With this directive spearheading most curriculums, children with unmet needs continue to be thwarted by mental health-related barriers. In turn, their education suffers.

Collaborative projects, such as what the authors are proposing, can create direct services for specific children with unmet needs in an environment that contains the essential elements of consistency, availability, and dependability. An additional benefit to challenged learners is the presence of individuals who are adjunct to the learning experience, struggling children can engage in prosocial activities that may decrease behavioral issues, foster resilience, and enhance the overall learning experience (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Bryan & Henry, 2012). In addition, through testing, suppositions may be made about the impact such collaborations might make as well as exposing students to research studies in which they can participate and summarize findings.

The advantages offered to children and schools from the support of supplementary resources, services, and opportunities afforded in the collaborative approach are invaluable. They suggest an increase in academic achievement (Blanco & Ray, 2011); and they also may strengthen bonds in relationships between parents, teachers, students, and communities. Researchers have suggested that children and their families who receive services in the schools are more likely to perceive the schools as a support network for assistance while school staff experience less stress and incidences of feeling ‘burned out’ (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004). Moreover, many parents may also struggle with issues of time, resources, and comprehension of mental health services. Due to caregivers’ knowledge deficit related to counseling possibilities, the presence of university professionals in the schools provide trustworthy, qualified, reputable individuals whose availability, flexibility, and education may increase the likelihood of consistent attendance and outside support (Evans & Weist, 2004).

The authors, in their preparation for implementing their study which was folded in with checklist (Figure 1), looked at such collaboration as a win –win for the schools and the university. The university would be getting research produced, counselors in training in the community, and a chance to build positive regard for the institution of higher learning. The schools would be receiving professional, knowledgeable counselors (the authors) and counselors–in training who would be easing the burden on the school counselor in each school.

What is Good for the School is Good for the University

As local schools continue to seek programs that may improve and expand their mental health programs, universities are given the opportunity to broaden their training and educational experiences by implementing research initiatives through the collaborative design. Essentially, counseling students would be conducting action research and providing empirically-supported interventions and services under the supervision and guidance of university supervisors with the ultimate goal of gaining valuable experience and gathering essential empirical data (Evans & Weist, 2004). Providing direct services in the schools challenges students to implement their knowledge and training and establish new relationships while concomitantly living the experience of initiating research. These projects promote professional development by helping students learn a process that makes it seem possible for them to visualize conducting independent research in their future careers (Espido-Bello, 2006).

The scholarly remunerations for universities and counseling professionals who are involved in this activity are vast; actively engaging in the community provides insight and awareness to mental health issues or trends worthy of consideration. In addition, it provides opportunities to increase public awareness about the make-up and benefits of empirically-supported approaches such as those presented in this article (Evans & Weist, 2004; Fall & Van Zandt, 1997). The nature of the collaborative approach is to support common counseling interventions, such as in-vivo learning, early assessment, and community-based referral. For the counseling researcher, these projects allow for valuable data collection and provide relevant populations for study.

For example, the authors in this article chose to implement a play therapy-based research initiative in which a group of university professionals and Master’s-level counseling students (counselors–

in-training) provided direct play therapy services to children in the schools while assessing academic achievement, anxiety, and self-concept in a pre-test, post-test research design. Our experience in launching and completing such a project can serve as a foundation for others who wish to take similar measures. Additionally, this article and its subsequent resources are intended to be adaptable to organizations outside the collegiate environment that are interested in engaging in a similar approach. Throughout the remainder of the article, we offer our experiences as well as some of our successes – and limitations – when undertaking such an effort.

Pitfalls and Obstacles

The primary mission of many schools is improved academic achievement and an increased graduation rate; the notion of outside influence can be perceived as threatening as it is appealing to school administrators or districts under time constraints and performance pressures. Teachers, administrators, and parents are often disconcerted by projects that require extra scheduling, classroom disruptions, or additional communication efforts, and they may even resent the need for additional assessment or outside 'help'. Similarly, universities may struggle to find the adequate managing costs, training resources, and competent supervision needed to implement a viable intervention and research design. It can be challenging to even seasoned researchers and counselor educators, who are sometimes unfamiliar with the complexity and culture of the school environment, to effectively align research, school ideas, and priorities democratically. In addition, there appears to be a necessity with balancing the demands of time versus efficiency and managing any unanticipated consequences following the impact of the research findings (Coburn, Bae, & Turner, 2008; Kuriloff, Reichert, Stoudt, & Ravitch, 2009). Although there is a wealth of current literature intended to provide advice or tips on successful collaboration (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Borthwick, Stirling, & Cook, 2000; Bryan & Henry, 2012; DeVaney & Brendel, 2001; Espido-Bello, 2006; Hooper & Brandt-Britnell, 2012; Kuriloff et al., 2009), these authors endeavor to present and detail a straightforward and thorough guide, including a checklist and timeline.

Introduction of the Project: The Significance of Topic Selection

The genesis of a similar collaborative project requires familiar steps that begin with the basic necessity for a research question and topic. Selecting a research topic represents a major function of the collaboration process: it effects the district approval and entry process, development of the research team, selection of assessment instruments, research design, therapist training modalities, and decisions for dissemination of research results. It is vital to select a topic that encompasses contextual issues related to the school mission, district goals, and overall community environment in order to ensure the establishment of an ongoing effective relationship within the entire school hierarchy (Kuriloff et al., 2009; Palladino-Schulthesis, 2005). For the purposes of this article, these authors chose to focus their research goals on demonstrating an improvement in academic achievement through the use of providing a counseling intervention, play therapy.

Palladino-Schulthesis (2005) offered several relevant questions worth considering in this process, including the following: What are the needs of the school? How can the university help? What can the program do for the school and the children? What will it cost in time and resources?

University professionals may also consider using online resources to discover relevant research trends, or they could narrow their choices by conducting written or online surveys, hosting focus groups, holding meetings with parent-teacher organizations, or attending local community events (Bryan & Henry, 2012).

The authors chose to work with three Title I elementary schools (to qualify for Title 1 funds, at least 40% of students must enroll in the free and reduced lunch program.) in a southern school district in the United States. Because Title I schools are usually replete with numerous challenges, the authors wanted to best serve the community by giving to those public schools that were in need of such interventions. The authors investigated the hypothesis that providing play therapy would improve academic achievement in first grade students. This was done using three measurements tools, 59 participants (a control and experimental group), and a research team of graduate assistants to see the children in individual play therapy. (Figure 1-Step 1).

Each school chosen was based on the designation of Title I qualification. Each participating school had one school counselor on staff; at times the ratio of counselor to student exceeded 1:500. Because the school counselors were also given the charge of standardized test coordinators, there were extreme burdens facing the individual who was also in charge of assisting the children emotionally. The authors realized the team could then assist the school with children who were experiencing various emotional maladies, freeing the school counselor to do guidance lessons and testing duties. As part of the research agreement, counselors in training would see first graders as well as other children in other grades who were in need of mental health services. This allowed the team to conduct research while also addressing one of the needs to the schools.

All of the materials used in the play therapy rooms were provided by the University as well as Parent/Teacher Associations (PTA). The schools were able to provide services to the children at no cost to the district. The authors had written several grants to obtain the necessary remuneration for cost of toys, art supplies, etc. The schools were able to provide space – sometimes an unused classroom; other times a converted storage room or even a closet.

The multicultural facets to such a study were considered. The team was able to provide services to African Americans, Asian Americans, Caucasians, and Latinos. While this demographic was not used in any of the subsequent research articles, the team addressed the population base of both the community at large as well as each school's need.

The research itself lasted for the fall semester; however, the team stayed in each school for the entirety of the academic year. The schools were so pleased with the efforts of the authors and the team that we were asked to return the following academic year. Other schools in the district reached out to the authors to initiate a similar program in their schools; even some rural schools expressed an interest in receiving services.

Initiation of the Project: Establishing Connections

In actuality, it is beneficial to be aware of the process of submitting proposals to a school district. This method varies from district to district and state to state. Sometimes there are pre-existing

relationships in counseling or community programs that already use schools as practicum or internship training sites, and sometimes there are school counselors who remain professionally involved with university staff members, such as former student-professor relationships or membership in professional organizations and societies (Palladino-Schulthesis, 2005).

These relationships can often represent springboards for researchers and university or community professionals less familiar with the intricacies of school culture. Regardless of pre-established connections, discussing the possibility of research mandates a certain level of organization and preparedness. There may be a need to meet program goals, such as obtaining funds and getting approval from the school district and university review board.

Researchers have found that the most common factor in school resistance stems from attempts to apply research strategies that are incompatible with school culture. Therefore, reframing the discussion around childhood achievement was especially advantageous (Hooper & Britnell, 2012). Gaining the support of the school district primarily relates to a correlation which emphasizes the benefits and importance of the school's role as a partner and co-creator and acknowledging and normalizing fears and concerns regarding time, resources, and the qualifications of the research team (Hooper & Britnell, 2012). By simultaneously conveying respect for the needs of the school and focusing on the advantages, such as more effective structures for delivering student services and additional time for school counselors and administrators, researchers are more likely to experience flexibility and openness on the part of school officials (Walsh, Barret, & DePaul, 2007). The authors had completed several projects on academic achievement and play therapy within the last five years; the research conducted provided results which suggested that there is a positive correlation between achievement and those students who participated in play therapy.

For university faculty, the establishment of this collaborative project was an arduous and time-consuming task. In terms of creating a viable and parametrically sound research design appropriate for working with children, these authors found that one of the more predominant but less acknowledged limitations relates directly to the availability, applicability, and affordability of assessment instruments. The choice to work with children requires special attention to assessment limitations, such as age or language limits, and the ability to find affordable, relevant instruments compatible with both research questions and targeted age groups is unexpectedly problematic.

For example, the authors chose to explore academic achievement, anxiety, and self-concept in first- and second-grade students using play therapy as a treatment modality within a pre-test/post-test research design. The decision for topic selection was rooted in three considerations: developmental appropriateness of the social-emotional measures, the cost and availability of assessments, and the language and age barriers stipulated by the instrument creators.

Following this structure, the university staff began initiating the procedures needed to deliver direct services to children in the schools. Developing a staff during this time will inevitably be essential to the approval process. Therefore, recruitment of team members began early in order to obtain the necessary paperwork for school volunteers and research requirements, such as human participants training courses, which may be needed for university and district approval. Frequently, proposed research projects struggle to meet the standards of qualified research review

boards, such as human subjects protection (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). A common reason this transpires is due to different understandings or expectations of what research is or a lack of clarity in describing research procedures, informed consent, participant and researcher roles, and the potential for conflicts of interest (Kuriloff, Andrus, & Ravitch, 2011). By executing recruiting early, we found that once the schools were ready for our presence, we were able to immediately begin offering services.

The lead author of this work established relationships with the school district administration as well as with the school counselors employed at the various schools (Figure 1-Step 2). In fact, two of the three counselors were former students of the counseling program the lead author currently coordinates. The school superintendent was approached, as well as the director of counseling and each individual school administration team (a significant number of meetings, Figure 1-Step 3). Once the schools were amenable to having our daily presence in their building, the authors moved to next step, recruitment of counselors in training (Figure 1 – Step 4).

The authors recruited research team members for the study by making announcements in graduate level counseling classes. This informal recruitment tool noted that this involvement offered nascent play therapists a chance to experience a research study as well as obtain hours necessary for graduation in the chosen discipline. The response was positive, though not every respondent was able to meet the hours needed to work with children in schools. The students who chose to participate filled out the necessary background checks, were approved by the school district, and met with the school counselor at the school to which they were assigned (Figure 1 – Steps 5-6).

The authors chose to provide ten weeks of bi-weekly play therapy treatment to children during the Fall semester and then, following post-test administration, provided play therapy to children in the control group and to those children recommended for therapeutic follow-up from the previous semester (Figure 1-Step 7). This is concordance with previous studies done regarding play therapy in the schools (Blanco & Ray, 2011; Muro, Ray, Shottelkorb, & Smith, 2006; Ray, Muro, & Shottelkorb, 2004).

The research team consisted of 20 play therapists in training (counselors-in-training) as well as the ensemble of authors. The authors conducted several training sessions for the administration of measurements, play therapy interventions (in conjunction with a semester long class), and paid assiduous attention to the checklist created by two of the authors (Blanco & Tsai, 2008) (Figure 1- Step 8).

Setting Up the Project: Preparing to Deliver Direct Services

Following the completion of district and university approval, school personnel and researchers began the process of identifying potential participants. At this stage, the selection process is dependent on consultation with viable vetted individuals who can assist in the communication process with teachers and parents. The authors collaborated with school counselors to meet with teachers, select classrooms, and administer letters and forms from the research team. (Figure 1-Step 9). Additionally, the university research team was oriented to the schools and trained in terms of school procedures and proper communication lines.

The Internal Review Boards (IRB), having authority to approve research involving human subjects, of the district and the university expedited the application process. The authors were prepared for any questions raised by either board and found the process easily resolved. The authors had completed several similar studies that mirrored this one; thus, there were several examples of previous reviews that were of invaluable assistance (Figure 1-Step 10).

It is important to mention that, when working with children, the informed consent process is filtered through assent (i.e. the child's verbal agreement to participate) and formal parental consent (Bélanger & Connelly, 2007). Identifying possible elementary students who could participate in this study proved to be one of the more challenging aspects of this scholarship (Figure 1-Step 11). The authors met with every first grade teacher at each school to explain the research - a bi-weekly intervention to the experimental group of play therapy during the fall semester; the control group and the experimental group would receive weekly services in the spring semester. At times, teachers were reluctant to send home the consent forms, release their children from the classroom for the necessary 30 minutes sessions, or expected the counselors in training would be able to "fix" the problems the children were exhibiting in the classroom.

Some teachers were accepting of the presence of graduate student counselors in training, others could be at times hostile. We endeavored to be respectful of every teacher – we offered to speak to the PTA as well as the faculty at large following the analysis of results to our study. Some bristled at the fact that the sessions were being recorded – a necessity for the authors to supervise those beginning counselors and help them improve their Play Therapy Skills.

The informed consent letter is often comprised of summary points found within the IRB application, including: the purpose of study, time commitments, a description of the assessments, any potential risks and benefits, confidentiality and dissemination procedures, and researcher contact information. Upon receiving informed consent from parents, the researchers began administering pre-test assessment measures according to time availability. This is an important time to begin establishing warm, receptive, working relationships with teachers, who may still feel apprehension and ambiguity towards the research process. By conveying qualities of openness, consideration, accessibility, and flexibility, team members assisted the project by being an unobtrusive, supportive presence (Figure 1-Step 12). Upon completion of the pre-test instruments, the project then engaged in collaboration with teachers, team members, and other education providers to create a schedule and identify a room for counseling. Space in an elementary school is a valuable commodity, especially an area that requires sessions be private, unheard, and uninterrupted. Therefore, authors established furnished playrooms in large closets, portable classroom buildings, and multi-use storage rooms to ensure a dedicated, confidential therapeutic space (Stickle et al., 2013) (Figure 1-Step 13).

After pre-testing, the researchers began to score assessments (Figure 1-Step 14), assess viability of possible research participants, and assigned participants to groups, according to the research design. This project implemented an experimental treatment-waitlist control group design in which half the children received services immediately and the other half received therapeutic intervention services after post-test assessment. The subjects were assigned to groups regardless of their scores. During this stage researchers entered pre-test scores into a prepared database that

stored the data until posttest assessments were completed. The researchers coordinated with the school to create a schedule for the intervention for the treatment group. Coordinating the team member's availability with that of the school staff can be a trying and difficult task given the seemingly interminable tugs on a school child's schedule (Figure 1-Step 15). Schedules and policies vary somewhat from school to school, depending on the age group; therefore, it is important to note that consistency is particularly difficult during these times: the first or last few weeks of class, during grading or testing periods, near school holidays, and the occasional school-wide event, such as field trips or pageants (Kuriloff et al., 2009).

The authors were able to secure a sample size of 60 first graders in the three schools. (Figure 1-Step 16.) The pretesting commenced, with the counselors in training doing the significant amount of testing, though on occasion, the authors would be utilized if necessary. Upon completion of the testing, the team members were assigned their children (with coordination with the school counselors) – both the ones in the study and the ones who were not in first grade but being seen (Figure 1-Steps 17-18).

The authors then began the task of setting up the playrooms used in play therapy – done so the teachers could see it if they wanted, but to also be ready when the sessions began. This process of play room creation gave the counselors in training ownership – they were part of the team as well as being part of research that might contribute to children's academic and emotional welfare. While we were setting up the play rooms, we also were able to give site training at the elementary schools to the counselors – policies of the schools, hallways, classroom locations, etc. –and introduce the counselors to the teachers and administrative staff (Figure 1-Step 19).

At this juncture, we had addressed more than half the step on the checklist.

Implementation of the Project: Providing and Maintaining

With the foundational work achieved, the research project moved into the next phase: securely positioning all counselors-in-training in the schools – usually done by a background check by local law enforcement. Following background checks and final approvals, the counselors-in-training are assigned their children and times for the counseling sessions (Figure 1-Step 20). The authors notified all invested parties that treatment was ready to begin (Figure 1-Step 21). The authors and counselors-in-training then began treatment (Figure 1-Step 22). Considering the consistent and reliable nature of the school environment and the need for additional child-based research, these projects have the potential to exist indefinitely therefore supporting working relationships throughout the school is essential. As the team conducted their therapeutic sessions, it was imperative to continue conveying a sense of involvement and receptiveness with teachers, parents and other school staff. Team members meet once a week to discuss any concerns, issues, or suggestions. Additionally, it was helpful to have university team members maintain the counseling room, ultimately reducing additional strain on school staff and demonstrating a sense of helpfulness and dedication. (Figure 1-Step 23.)

As mentioned previously, the authors in this article chose to employ master's level counseling students as both researchers and play therapists. Supervision included integrating professional

awareness and clinical skills into practice while also continuously therapeutic relationships (Ray, 2004). The process of self-reflection, continual exploration, and systematic critique of their work were common charges (Kuriloff, Andrus, & Ravitch, 2011). The authors would routinely contact

School Research Project Checklist

Considerations for School Research:

What needs to be done for School District and/or University

	√	Implementations	School	University
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Decide the school research topic		√
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Find school connection (school counselor/principle)	√	
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Discuss possibility of conducting school research	√	√
4.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get approval from school district (be aware this process might take several weeks)	√	
5.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop research team (trainees/therapist)		√
6.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have research team members fill out the volunteer background application	√	
7.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Create the research design		√
8.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have research team members complete the Human Participant Protections Education online course		√
9.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop informed consent forms (students/parents/teachers)		√
10.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Complete and obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB)		√
11.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify possible participants (create sample)	√	
12.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Distribute consent forms to participants	√	
13.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Give out pre-test assessments to participant who have given consent	√	
14.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Score pre-testing		√
15.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Coordinate team member's availability and develop schedule for sessions.		√
16.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Screen out participants, and assign randomly to groups (This varies upon research design).		√
17.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inform school contact of who needs to be scheduled for play sessions vs. those who are identified to receive services later.	√	
18.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have members of the research team offer assistance to the school contact in scheduling sessions.		√
19.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up the counseling room.	√	√
20.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Offer training to research team. This includes orienting the therapists to the school, the research contact, and school procedures.		√
21.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have school contact inform teachers that the project is ready to begin.	√	
22.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Begin treatment.	√	√
23.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conduct a weekly meeting with research team to discuss concerns.		√
24.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check in with school contact weekly to discuss concerns.	√	
25.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have research team become responsible for maintaining playroom and preserving therapeutic environment.	√	√
26.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Complete counseling sessions.		√
27.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have therapist create recommendations of participant.		√
28.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Begin post-testing.		√
29.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Score post testing, analyze data and interpret results.		√
30.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meet with principal and school contact and discuss results.	√	√
31.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Discuss future projects with school contact.	√	√

Figure 1. School Research Project Checklist

school officials to ensure there were no concerns, though this was not performed as frequently as needed. (Figure 1-Step 24.) The counselors-in-training were given the charge of ensuring a clean, safe, welcoming play therapy room was presented to all participating children. Therefore, there were consistent cleanings and organizing of the play materials (Figure 1-Step 25).

Sessions were conducted and completed within the allotted time allowed. Counselors –in-training made summary reports to parents, giving an explanation of treatment and possible further counseling if needed. (Figure 1-Step 26-27.) The authors and the counselors in training then began the post testing of all participants (Figure 1-Step 28).

Aftercare of the Project: Disseminating Results and Planning for the Future

Once we completed all of the sessions by early December, the authors began the process of post testing and analyzing the results (Figure 1-Step 29). University researchers scheduled a meeting with the school contact to discuss the results and any potential for projects in the future (Figure 1-Step 30). It is therefore recommended to own the results and prepare for the possibility of rejection when meeting (Kuriloff et al., 2009). It was reasonable that teachers might fear that they would be scrutinized or identified as less competent based on their students' scores, while, likewise, administrators assumed that they have an invested interest in receiving only positive results (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2003; Kuriloff, Andrus, & Ravitch, 2011). By owning the results and acknowledging and normalizing these fears, researchers were in a position to assist school administrators and teachers who may be resistant to acknowledging necessary improvement. As noted earlier, the authors offered to speak at various school events. The authors were approached to speak at Parent Teacher Associations as well as elementary school faculty meetings. While the authors have only spoke at two (one PTA, one faculty meeting), the questions posited by those in attendance seem to follow some similar themes: is it possible to have more sessions with more students? Is it affecting other facets of behavior beyond academic achievement? Is there any supporting data that the improvement in academic achievement is related to classroom instruction? The meetings were well attended, with nearly 40 teachers, administrators, and administrative staff at the faculty meeting, close to 70 at the PTA. The authors were not met with any discouraging comments; in fact, many of the attendees were quite supportive and wanted their children to participate in similar studies. We listened to feedback as to how we could strengthen our part in the process, and we offered suggestions to ensure less inconveniences. A new study is now underway, in the same schools with the addition of one new one, and is being planned for the next academic year as well (Figure 1 – Step 31).

Research projects such as these provide the wealth of data needed to publish several empirically based research articles. The university team members were challenged with the task of writing an articulate and concise paper that adequately showcases the problem at-hand and benefits of the approach while clearly delineating the research procedure and results. These authors found that researchers can narrow their choices of academic journals and publications by closely examining their mission statements and previous relevant publications to find those that align with the article's research goals.

Additionally, university professionals and counseling students can be afforded professional development opportunities by submitting proposals to professional organizations for conference presentations. By sharing findings and experiences within related professional organizations and societies, universities can increase awareness and knowledge of their approach, contribute to current counseling practice, and promote the university at-large. These types of experiences contribute to the vitality of both the school and the university and create valuable experiences for counseling students (Borthwick et al.,2003).

Once the research team settled in at the schools, minor problems were encountered. For example, one teacher who did not see children's behavior improve within the first month of this intervention began to act as a hindrance to the counselors'-in- training efforts. Another issue noted was non-English speaking pupils. Some children spoke only Spanish which limited the researchers' capacity to give feedback to the counselors-in-training since there was a lack of understanding of what the child was saying in the recorded sessions. The authors learned a valuable lesson; when selecting subjects, the use of English speaking subjects only or a bilingual supervisor is important.

The authors of this work have completed several articles related to this study as well– at the time of this article there were six manuscripts under review by various journals, such as the *Journal of Research Administration*, the *International Journal of Play Therapy*, the *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling* and the *British Journal of Play Therapy*.

The collaboration with the schools has resulted in the authors being sought by other schools in the district as well as rural school districts, to develop a similar therapeutic intervention program as described in this paper.

The Data and Analysis

The data proved to be rich with opportunities to examine academic achievement with students who receive play therapy services. There was a statistically significant increase in the experimental group (n=29) on the Early Achievement Composite of the Young Children's Achievement Test (YCAT) when compared with the children on the waitlist control group (n=30). From pretest to posttest, students who participated in play therapy scored statistically higher on the Early Achievement Composite than those in the waitlisted control group. On the basis of mean scores from pretest to posttest on the Early Achievement Composite, the play therapy group had a 5.42 increase in their mean scores compared with a 1.9 point increase for the waitlist control group. These were better than expected. However, it bears noting that according to Green and Christensen (2006) children who participated in play therapy had higher levels confidence. Nonetheless, the authors were pleased in seeing fruition in a work that was temporally consuming.

Of course, a larger sample size would have been welcomed, though the authors were limited with time, space, and available counselors-in-training. A larger budget would have been of great assistance; as noted earlier, all sessions were recorded and the counselors-in-training were forced to use their own equipment. An increase in funding would have also allowed for the authors to hire outside supervisors for the counselors-in-training, thereby allowing the authors to attend to more administrative details as well as preparing literature reviews for upcoming documents.

With so many people having a stake in this project (parents, school counselors, school administrators, district administrators and the authors), a more streamlined form of communication would have been of great benefit. In fact, as the authors prepare another study, they were able to procure support for a graduate assistant whose responsibility is to communicate with all parties involved.

Summary: In Conclusion

While there exists an extensive literature regarding university-school collaborations, all of which differ in their approach and purpose in writing, most simply provide suggestions, recommendations, and delineations of characteristics regarding successful collaboration between organizations (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Borthwick, Stirling, & Cook, 2000; Bryan & Henry, 2012; DeVaney & Brendel, 2001; Espido-Bello, 2006; Hooper & Brandt-Britnell, 2012; Kuriloff et al., 2009). Many of these articles shared common suggestions, such as creating a blue print with written descriptions of each member's role for the organization of the project, and yet there seems to be an absence of clear, concise, instructive material intended for propagation (DeVaney & Brendel, 2001). The primary purpose of this article was to meet that very need. The School Research Project Checklist (Figure 1) inventories the implementations and considerations needed for both the school and university in order to create convergence for school, community, and university professionals alike. Although these resources may give the impression of isolated responsibilities or clear divisions, there are many responsibilities that mandate continuous communication and cooperation in order to ensure that goals and responsibilities remain shared and mutual. University-school collaboration projects symbolize the harmony and unity envisioned in the positivistic ambition of creating holistic approaches to enhancing the lives of all children as well as providing necessary data that can assist meaning making in the collaborative research project(s).

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Dr. Joel H. Muro, LPC

Associate Professor and Counseling Coordinator
Department of Family Sciences
Texas Woman's University
304 Administrative Drive TWU Denton, Texas 76204
Telephone: 940 898 2705
Email: Jmuro@twu.edu

Victoria Stickley

Doctoral Student
425 South Welch Street
Department of Counseling and Higher Education
University of North Texas
College of Education, Matthews Hall, Room 214, 1300 West Highland Street
Denton, Texas 76203

Dr. Lamar Muro, LPC, CIT

Assistant Professor
Department of Family Sciences
Texas Woman's University
304 Administrative Drive TWU Denton, Texas 76204
Email: Lmuro1@twu.edu

Dr. Pedro J. Blanco, LPC-S, RPT-S

Assistant Professor
Department of Family Sciences
Texas Woman's University
304 Administrative Drive TWU Denton, Texas 76204
Email: Pblanco1@twu.edu

Dr. Mei-Hsiang Tsai, NCC, RPT

Learning Guidance and Assistance Division,
Center for Teaching and Learning Development, NUTN
Chief, Learning guidance and assistance division
National University of Tainan
Address: 33, Sec. 2, Shu-Lin St. Tainan, Taiwan 700
Telephone: 886-2-2133111#783
Email: mhtsai@mail.nutn.edu.tw

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