School Counselors Supporting the Career and College Preparedness of

Students from Poverty: Using the CARE Model

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Abstract

Children living in poverty face challenges progressing through the educational system prepared adequately for college and/or career (ACT, 2015; Newell, 2013). With momentum gained through national movements, such as the First Lady Michele Obama's 2014 Reach Higher initiative, and state initiatives on college and career readiness, a call has been made to close the existing gap between children from poverty and their peers. The author proposes the use of the CARE model (Foss, Generali, & Kress, 2011) for school counselors to address the disparity between the college and career preparation of students from poverty and their middle and upper class peers.

Keywords: school counselors, poverty, college and career, CARE model

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According to the U. S. Census bureau, poverty affects 15.5 million (21 percent) of all children living in the country (U. S. Census, 2016). This is equivalent to an astounding 1 in 5 children. In addition, the highest poverty rates are found among minority children (i.e., Blacks [26 percent], Hispanics [24 percent], and Asians [12 percent], compared to Whites [10 percent]; U. S. Census Bureau, 2016). The total family income and a set of monetary thresholds that vary by size and composition of the family are the bases for the definition of poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

Children who grow up in a household classified as impoverished can face unintentional adverse cultural, environmental, and educational effects (ACT, 2015; Lustig & Strauser, 2007; Odgers, 2015). They also face additional challenges growing up than do their peers living in middle-to high income households (Gonzalez, 2005; Odgers, 2015). For example, the high school dropout rate is higher, and the readiness of those who receive a diploma to undertake higher education or enter the work force is not encouraging (ACT, 2015).

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has asked school counselors to provide services to all students through a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2012). The National Model provides a framework for school counselors to use in designing and implementing a comprehensive school counseling program (CSCP). Further, to ensure that they focus on providing students with lifelong learning competencies, ASCA developed the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success (ASCA, 2014) for school counselors to use in the delivery service component

of the CSCP (i.e., counseling core curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services). This document contains 35 standards that can be applied to the academic, career, and social/emotional domains of the CSCP. In addition, the updated ASCA ethical codes include specific guidelines to help school counselors to behave in a culturally competent manner when providing CSCPs for all students (ASCA, 2016). This intentional focus on the part of the school counseling profession has the potential to mitigate some of the cultural, environmental, and educational barriers faced by students who live in poverty.

Many authors in the school counseling literature have addressed the subject of school counselors who focus on the needs of impoverished students (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Lemberger, Selig, Bowers, & Rogers, 2015), thereby providing additional research and best practices. With the support of the profession, school counselors are in a unique position to provide the differentiated academic, career, and social/emotional services much needed by impoverished children (Cholewa, Burkhardt, & Hull, 2015; Suh, Suh & Houston, 2007).

Other mental health practitioners also have focused on the subject of providing client services to mitigate the undesirable effects of living in poverty (Gonzalez, 2005). Specifically, Foss et al. (2011) introduced the CARE model, a humanistic model that includes a social justice lens, as a framework for counseling services offered to clients who live in poverty. This model may serve as an excellent framework for school counselors to use when developing college and career strategies with their students living in poverty.

The CARE model was created to use in conceptualizing effective counseling strategies for people living in poverty, interventions were developed to address the unique needs of these individuals. In the CARE model, the counselor *cultivates* relationships, *acknowledges* realities, *removes* barriers, and *expands* clients' strengths (Foss et al., 2011). The purpose of this article is to use the four basic elements of the CARE model as a framework to organize and provide purposeful college and career readiness strategies that school counselors can use when working with students who live in poverty. School counselors could use the four model components when providing college and career preparedness strategies to address the unique needs of their students from low income households.

Effects of Students Living in Poverty

Educationally, students who live in poverty lag behind their peers from middle to high income households in such areas as enrollment in core and advanced courses, scores on standardized tests (e.g., SAT, ACT), and high school graduation rates (ACT, 2015). In addition to the negative educational, cultural, and environmental effects these children experience, they also lack college and career readiness. In a growing and increasingly uncertain global economy, this serves to maintain their impoverished status. Students who live in poverty are not always exposed to positive career role models who are progressing on positive career paths (Newell, 2013). Further, with the changing economy, the work skills that their fathers and grandfathers possessed may no longer be in demand (Newell, 2013). Moreover, Eshelman and Rottinghaus (2015) found that socioeconomic status (SES) had a significant effect on the way in which adolescents viewed their occupational futures. Another fact is that when students from

poverty are successful in navigating the educational system college ready, they often experience difficulty doing the same when they enroll in post-secondary education, as this can sometimes be a complex process for students (ACT, 2015). Thus, professional school counselors are in a position to act as change agents (Schnenck, Anctil, Smith, & Dahir, 2010) and advocate for the removal of college and career related barriers.

School Counselors' Role

The changing economy and global workforce affects people from all backgrounds, but is especially true for children who live in poverty. As a regular part of the school counselors' CSCP, evidence-and practice-based college and career interventions can be provided to the entire student body. Nonetheless, because of the current plight of students living in poverty, it is essential to focus specifically on providing them with college and career strategies (ASCA, 2016).

School counselors cannot and should not be expected to serve in this social justice advocacy role alone. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that they involve the community and school system. This shift to infuse culturally specific strategies into school systems and communities can be challenging, especially when the college and career readiness programs that are in place presently do not take into consideration the needs of diverse groups (Stone-Johnson, 2015).

Initially, administrators may resist school counselors' stated need to spend more focused time on underrepresented students when that may divert them from other assigned tasks that are vital to school operations (e.g., monitoring duties, program coordination, course scheduling, etc.). To address this, it is recommended that school counselors begin implementing those strategies that involve collaboration with teachers

and parents, first, while collecting outcome data simultaneously that can be used to advocate for more time to implement additional strategies.

Once school counselors have made such an intentional shift, how do they identify impoverished students in an ethical manner? While it is a violation of students' and parents' privacy for counselors to obtain a list of all students who live in impoverished households, and further, some students are extremely resilient and are not affected by growing up in impoverished households (Brown Henderson, 2016; Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardslee, 2003; Williams et al., 2016), school counselors can use school-wide screening (e.g., needs assessments, grades, students' self-referrals, teacher referrals, parent referrals, etc.) to ensure that impoverished students, who need it, receive specialized career interventions. Further, parents themselves reveal their SES status when they contact the school and/or counselor to request assistance, and these requests allow counselors an opportunity to initiate a warm, supportive relationship with parents in need, thereby conveying the message that they have their child's best interests in mind. Once impoverished students have been identified school counselors can utilize the CARE model to provide effective interventions for students.

The CARE Model

The CARE model introduced by Foss et al. (2011) is developmental in nature and incorporates the understanding that multiple systems affect persons who live in poverty. In addition, when developing the model, the authors took into consideration the fact that impoverished persons have unique needs compared to those from middle to high income backgrounds. Thus, using a social justice and humanistic lens, the CARE

model provides a framework for counselors in various settings to provide differentiated strategies to persons living in poverty.

In the initial stage of the CARE model, cultivating strengths, counselors first explore their own personal biases about persons living in poverty. The counselors are then asked to assess the manner in which they believe in the American dream and have courageous conversations with their clients about the realities of living in poverty; this will help the counselors understand their worldview more fully (Foss et al., 2011).

Components of the CARE model comprise: cultivating strengths; acknowledging realities; removing barriers; and expanding strengths (Foss et al., 2011). The counselor builds a therapeutic alliance with the student while cultivating the students' existing strengths. This not only deepens the counselor/client relationship, but it also aids in paving the way for the counselor to recognize and acknowledge the realities students living in poverty often face. As the counselor and student brainstorm ways to remove barriers, the focus can now turn to expanding the students' strengths (Foss et al., 2011).

College and Career Strategies

Using the CARE model to address the college and career readiness specifically of students living in impoverished households offers a focused way for school counselors to provide intentional strategies that address these students' unique needs. Most importantly, to provide the services needed, school counselors will need to collaborate with the school and community to receive their assistance as well.

The process begins with a review of the school's data. School counselors can look at these data to identify any discrepancies in advanced course work, test scores, grades, retention rates, etc., between students living in poverty and their peers who do

not. This information then can be used to create presentations, brochures, and/or handouts that can be shared with all stakeholders (i.e., community organizations, school boards, school district departments, faculty, parents, and students). This is necessary to highlight any existing gaps that can underscore the importance of providing specialized college and career readiness strategies for students who live in poverty.

School Community Collaboration

To provide specialized college and career services to impoverished students requires a school-community collaboration that includes supportive adults (Gysbers, 2013). Social supports have been proven to increase the college bound culture in a variety of diverse student groups (Williams et al., 2016); therefore, school counselors are well advised to collaborate with as many members in the entire school-community system as possible (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; ASCA, 2012; Legters & Balfanz, 2010). The assistance of all stakeholders at the individual schools is necessary (e.g., principal, assistant principal, school social worker, parent liaison, technology specialist, cafeteria staff, etc.), district departments (e.g., transportation, nutrition, etc.), and community partners (e.g., places of worship, community centers, apartment complexes, homeowners associations, civic clubs, local businesses, museums, etc.).

When considering the adverse outcomes faced by students who grow up in poverty, collaborative efforts on the part of the entire school and community provides a village approach. With such assistance, a college bound culture can be created both on and off campus. The school counselor can assume a leadership role in soliciting other school and community members to help contact and meet with community members (i.e., senior citizens, households without children) and the organizations

aforementioned. This school and community approach can create effective college and career services.

Notwithstanding, it is of utmost importance to include all teachers in the school. For example, Au (2013) suggested that all teachers become involved in improving the literacy of all students, thereby improving their attainment of the writing skills necessary to meet college and career readiness guidelines as outlined by such entities as the Common Core State Standards. Newell (2013) indicated that career and technical education (CTE) teachers should fill the gap when school counselors may not be providing career and college readiness skills to all students. She described experiences of collaborating with school counselors to provide college and career preparedness skills. Further, the assistance of teachers and teaching support staff can play a vital role in planning individual services (Martinez, 2013). Some schools have set aside a specific period within the school day during which teachers can provide advisement services (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012). Teachers can be a tremendous asset in assisting school counselors with college and career preparedness. Therefore, counselors must work closely with teachers to build and maintain a collaborative relationship.

The parents' role can be the most influential in students' lives as it relates to college and career readiness (Lee & Ransom, 2011). Students, themselves, have articulated the important role that their parents played in their college and career aspirations and achievements (Flowers, 2015). Therefore, it is very important to involve parents early in the college and career readiness process of preparing their child for college and a career.

Cultivate Relationships

School counselors have an ethical mandate to promote an environment that is culturally competent so that students and parents alike feel welcome and safe (ASCA, 2016), and they can develop culturally competent ways to cultivate relationships with parents who live in poverty. A focus on building positive relationships with these parents can be cultivated if all school staff treat them with dignity and respect. If necessary, the school counselor can provide multicultural and sensitivity training for faculty and staff.

School counselors acknowledge that the needs of parents with a low socioeconomic status vary depending on where they live (i.e., rural, urban, different regions of the U.S., etc.). As part of building a collaborative, supportive relationship between the school and parents, counselors can conduct a needs assessment to determine the specific needs of their impoverished parents. Such needs assessments can provide counselors with information on the realities and barriers that these parents face. Once they have obtained this information counselors can explore ways to provide to mitigate the barriers identified. The next sections will provide some strategies that can be used based on the results of the needs assessment.

Acknowledge Realities

The current economic conditions, coupled with a global economy, affect most households; however, this can be especially true for those living in poverty. School counselors can invite various community agencies to collaborate with them to provide parent workshops/information that address their specific needs while keeping in mind the flexibility mentioned previously (i.e., varied locations, times, and formats). Community organizations that range from those that provide necessities, such as food,

clothing, shelter, and transportation, to those that provide school supplies to companies that offer job training, as well as and community college courses, can provide much needed services to help parents address the realities of living in poverty.

Further, school counselors can form partnerships with community mental health professionals and organizations (i.e., community recreation agencies, places of worship) to provide free parent workshops and/or support groups that address self-efficacy and wellness.

Remove Barriers

The CARE model emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in the preparation of college and career readiness strategies. Therefore, strategies such as a) academic advising with students and their parents; b) parent conferences; and c) parent workshops (e.g., FAFSA night, graduation plans, requirements of study, employment trends) are beneficial ways to include parents in their child's college and career preparedness (Newell, 2013). Barriers faced by parents can include, a) transportations problems; b) leaving work early or arriving late; c) problems with day-care for younger children, or d) the need to prepare dinner for the family during the evening hours when most parent workshops are held. Therefore, the school counselor is advised to work with other professionals who can help them in overcome these barriers. For example, the counselor and other professionals together could a) offer flexibility when scheduling events (e.g., Saturdays, before and/or after work hours); b) offer workshops in the community (e.g., apartment complexes, places of worship, community centers); c) provide child-care; d) provide written materials translated in the primary language for parents whom English is a second language; and e) provide meals at events. An

intentional focus on addressing these barriers can convey the message to parents that they matter and that their unique needs are valued. These actions could promote greater involvement on the part of parents living in poverty.

Expand Strengths

Parents can be invited to contribute to the school culture based on their strengths (e.g., sewing, teaching, decorating, and volunteering). Members of community organizations can be asked to contribute services to the school, students, and their parents, (e.g., school supplies, tutoring, career day speakers, police talks, community safety, and drug prevention).

The implementation of a school wide focus on the part of the school counselor enables all stakeholders to become aware of counselors' services. A review of the literature indicates that students sometimes are unaware of the college and career services school counselors provide (Gallant & Zhao, 2011). Therefore, counselors are encouraged to publicize their services to their student body often and in varied ways (e.g., brochures, classroom lessons, newsletters, and letters).

Counseling Core Curriculum

School counselors plan and deliver school counseling core curriculum to all students, often in conjunction with the classroom teacher or other school personnel (ASCA, 2012). This delivery aspect of a CSCP ensures that all students receive school counseling services in the academic, college and career, and personal/social domains (ASCA, 2012). Specifically, in the college and career domain, school counselors are advised to provide evidenced-based and best practice strategies for all students. Within

the model of providing services to all students, school counselors are expected to focus on the unique needs of impoverished students in their schools (ASCA, 2016).

Lombardi, Seburn, and Conley (2011) identified a) goal-setting, b) persistence, c) study skills, and d) self-monitoring skills as academic behaviors associated with positive college and career preparedness. Additional topics have been identified as supporting college preparedness, and can be presented as part of the core curriculum include a) understanding the nature of college; b) recognizing that a college education may be important to future success; c) acquiring positive perceptions and aspirations about college; d) preparing academically for college admissions; and e) setting short- and long-term goals (Radcliff & Bos, 2013). These topical lessons can be presented by the school counselor and/or the classroom teacher.

Teachers are vital to a CSCP. For example, "The Career Institute consisted of a series of interventions that helped middle school students relate personal, social and academic considerations to college and career" (p. 1, Schaefer & Rivera, 2012). These activities were accomplished with the involvement of the classroom teacher during the school's advisory program (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012). Teachers' involvement can play an especially important role in helping the counselor address the needs of poor students. Moreover, Au (2013) stated that including teachers in the process promotes a more collaborative effort.

Cultivate Relationships

School counselors who form a personal relationship with students that promote their success both in and out of - school can be very beneficial to students' college and career readiness (Lapan, Wells, Peterson & McCann, 2014). Counselors and teachers

can collaborate to build culturally competent alliances with poor students during classroom lessons. School counselors can lead the way in improving awareness of culturally competent ways to build relationships with students – especially those living in poverty, on the part of not only teachers, also the entire staff.

Acknowledge Realities

In acknowledging the realities of the obstacles impoverished students face, school personnel will need to understand the way in which the students' living conditions may have affected their self-efficacy, academic performance, career aspirations, wellness, and ability to complete homework, and build relationships etcetera. This requires non-judgmental listening and acceptance on the part of all school personnel involved with the students.

Remove Barriers

Once school personnel have identified the realities of the obstacles faced, they will need to work collaboratively to remove those barriers (e.g., after-hours access to technology, additional tutoring, and transportation). Turner and Conkel (2010) addressed the barriers of adolescents living in an inner city successfully. Once the authors identified the barriers the students developed the strategies and supports they needed to overcome them. Identifying the realities of the college and career needs of students living in poverty and then addressing these barriers are important steps in providing culturally responsive counseling services to students from low SES households.

Expand Strengths

As part of the school counseling core curriculum, counselors can use a variety of strategies. However, the most important component is the counselors' mental outlook. Looking through a culturally sensitive lens can help them see students' strengths. Classroom lessons can be presented with a focus on the diverse student learning strategies. For example, are lessons chosen that allow students to engage through poetry, writing, singing, researching, using technology, presenting, working in groups, and/or working alone? The goal is to present lessons in a variety of ways to capture not only the students' learning style, but also their strengths and talents. Teachers have been trained to work with diverse learners, modify lessons, use multiple intelligences, Bloom's Taxonomy, etc., in their preparation programs. School counselors could collaborate with teachers to choose, develop, and present lessons in the classroom that expand the students' existing strengths and help them gain further knowledge in the area of career and college readiness.

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Small Group Counseling

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Small group counseling is an efficient way for school counselors to provide additional specialized services to a variety of students. Some students may benefit from a more intimate setting with the counselor and others who share similar interests and concerns. Providing impoverished students with small group counseling that focuses on college and career preparedness (e.g., psychoeducational, self-efficacy) has the potential to meet some of their most significant needs.

School counselors can use data related to college and career readiness to inform the need for small group counseling. Pre-and posttests can be administered to the

entire student body during classroom lessons. The counselor can identify the students who may benefit from services that are more specialized because they lack specific necessary skills, and invite to participate in small group sessions in which early intervention and continuous monitoring can take place (ACT, 2015).

Cultivate Relationships

As mentioned previously, school counselors are trained in culturally competent ways to build therapeutic alliances with students. This makes them well suited to use these skills to cultivate meaningful relationships with students who live in poverty. During small group sessions, counselors can use their skills to not only cultivate relationships between themselves and the students, but provide strategies to enhance the relationships among group members.

Acknowledge Realities

During the formative stage of group counseling, school counselors can strive to create a safe atmosphere for all students. The students can then experience a cohesive environment that is warm and accepting. Students, who feel supported, are more likely to feel safe to share some of the realities of their lives.

Remove Barriers

Once they have shared these realities, the counselor can develop strategies to address their barriers to college and career preparedness (e.g., self-efficacy, academic performance, inability to complete homework). Although the barriers that impoverished students face are unique and depend on various factors, strategies such as a) homework clubs; b) providing access to the library after school hours; c) seeking

funding for necessary school supplies; and d) identifying and connecting with career role models are strategies that may be addressed.

Expand Strengths

A solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) theoretical approach that focuses on clients' strengths is well suited for school counselors. With this approach, school counselors can use techniques such as a) the miracle question; b) identifying small improvements; c) cheerleading; and d) scaling to help group members identify and build on their current strengths (Sklare, 2005). With expanded strengths, students living in poverty can experience a greater sense of empowerment.

Individual Counseling/Planning

School counselors can use individual counseling/planning for those students who can benefit from more individualized services. Some students may present with issues that cannot be discussed in classroom or small group sessions because of concerns about confidentiality, in which case they could benefit from individual sessions with the counselor. Further, some students may face challenges that prevent them from responding to lessons presented in the classroom (e.g., writing college essays, completing financial forms). In the absence of other professionals (e.g., college access personnel), the counselor's individual attention to these students can prove beneficial.

Cultivate Relationships

A one-on-one format offers more confidentiality than the counseling methods discussed previously. School counselors can focus on establishing a therapeutic alliance with individual students built upon a greater sense of confidentiality. Counselors have the ability and time to listen attentively, demonstrate unconditional positive regard,

and allow the student to explore topics specific to their individual circumstances. When the counselor applies these strategies in culturally competent ways, it increases the likelihood of establishing a warm, supportive environment.

Acknowledge Realities

Students living in poverty often face obstacles that their middle to upper class peers do not face (Odgers, 2015). As mentioned in the small group section, once a collaborative, warm, relationship exists, students are more likely to feel free to discuss the realities they face living in poverty. This can be especially true in individual sessions where students are not worried about others' potential judgments.

Remove Barriers

Students who require individual counseling/planning in college and career readiness have unique barriers that their peers do not face. These can be explored with a culturally competent school counselor during individual counseling/planning sessions. Once explored, the barriers can be addressed and individualized strategies can be developed.

Expand Strengths

During the individual counseling/planning sessions, the counselor can listen and assist the student actively in identifying their strengths. Using a SFBT approach and techniques, the counselor and student can collaborate to identify ways in which the student can expand on their strengths.

Directions for Future Research and Summary

The CARE model is a conceptual model that was created based on literature from the field about persons living in poverty (Foss et al., 2011). It is not a research-

based model. Therefore, the usefulness of the model for adequately addressing the needs of students living in poverty has not been proven.

Students who live in poverty typically face a variety of challenges that affect their health, emotional well-being, and academic preparation (ACT, 2015; Lustig & Strauser, 2007; Odgers, 2015). All of these factors can limit their college and career preparedness. School counselors are in a unique position to provide a CSCP to all students (ASCA, 2012), within which they can focus intentionally on students living in poverty.

The CARE model was presented as a conceptual framework for implementing effective counseling strategies for people living in poverty. The model focuses on a) cultivating relationships; b) acknowledging realities; c) removing barriers; and d) expanding strengths. School counselors can use this model to conceptualize and provide culturally competent interventions to address the college and career needs of K-12 students who live in poverty. In this article, the four components of the CARE model were presented and college and career strategies were suggested that school counselors could use in the delivery component of a CSCP.

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