SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS INVOLVEMENT IN LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES AT THEIR SCHOOL SITES

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ABSTRACT

Effective leadership comes from different educators on school campuses, including school counselors (SCs) and special education (SE) teachers. Recent studies showed how important and effective school counselor and special education teacher leaders can be at school sites. Having a shared or collaborative leadership model supports diversity and equity in schools. To better support the collaborative nature of school leadership, this project focused on: What levels of leadership do special education teachers and school counselors exert at their school sites? This study explored both the effectiveness and importance of special education teachers and school counselor leaders through a literature review and qualitative semi-structured survey. The participants surveyed were currently working in K-12 schools as counselors, special education teachers, and principals. Findings showed how school counselors and special education teacher leaders work with principals to help increase the culture of success at schools.

Keywords: *S*chool counselors, special education teachers, administrators, leadership, collaboration, equity, diversity, justice

Introduction

School leadership is not accomplished independently of others. The work of meeting the needs of students, supporting teachers with effectives strategies, and having a mindset that creates success in schools is best accomplished through a collaborative approach. Leadership activities on a school campus come from a range of school personnel. Decisions that affect student academic success and safety are made by principals, teachers, counselors, librarians, coaches, and others. In reviewing studies over the past decade of teacher and SC leaders in K-12 schools, there has been an increase in the number of them who are involved in leadership activities. According to Ziomek-Daigle, McMahon, and Paisley (2008), SCs in today's schools are more often working as educational leaders to promote academic achievement by collaborating with school administrators and classroom teachers to provide a climate of belonging for all students. Kohm and Nance (2009) found that teachers who have the opportunity to exert leadership through collaboration at their school have been observed as having an increase in involvement in all aspects of the school. Now more than ever, both classroom teachers and SCs find themselves more involved in leadership roles at their school sites.

Mason and McMahon (2009) report that "leadership is an essential skill for SCs working in the 21st century" (p. 102). Additionally, Kohm and Nance (2009) found that "the cynicism and defensiveness that hamper change decreases," when SCs are seen as leaders on a school campus (p. 68). While leadership activities for SCs and SE teachers are not necessarily considered to be administrative or managerial in nature, they are nonetheless often seen as administrative duties (Stone & Dahir, 2015). These administrative tasks can include such activities as testing coordinator and overseeing student services, however, most often SCs and SE teachers are not seen as leaders on campus. The purpose of this study was to take a closer look at the role SC and SE teachers play in their involvement in leadership activities at their school sites. The study looked at current school administrators' views of SC and SE teacher involvement in shared leadership. In addition, perceptions of success when SC and/or SE teachers work with site administrators to lead schools were explored. The research question that guided this study was "What levels of leadership do SCs and SE teachers exert in their school sites?"

Leadership for this study refers to both collaborative and transformative leadership styles. Shields' (2012) study on transformative leadership was utilized as a way to gauge or measure the various types of leadership that participants found themselves involved in. SCs and teachers as collaborative leaders comes from the work that Stone and Dahir (2015) have done, which concur with our findings thus far. In addition, through extensive interviews with SCs, SE teachers and designated administrators, we hope to shed further light on how preparation programs can better prepare SCs, SE teachers, and administrators to work together for the benefit of all students. Because of these findings and others, it was decided to examine the literature further to help ascertain whether SCs and SE teachers, specifically in Southern California K-12 schools were involved in more leadership activities than in previous decades. In addition to the literature review, an empirical study was conducted with current principals, SCs, and SE teachers in the three counties of Southern California (Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Riverside) to find out what their thoughts were about SCs and SE teachers and their leadership involvement at school sites. Despite growing perceptions and use of SCs' and SE teachers' role as leaders in their respective site, little is still known about how individual disciplines perceived themselves and others as leaders. Consequently, it was agreed that this study will explore how SE teachers, SCs, and administrators perceived the role and responsibilities of school leadership.

Background for the Study

Traditional Role of School Counselors

The traditional roles of SCs can vary depending on the expectations of site administrators. However, there is a framework from the American School Counseling Association's (ASCA) National Model (Figure 1), as to what roles SCs should be involved in as shown below. Following the ASCA National Model not only helps SCs better understand their roles, but it also helps teachers and site administrators with their understanding of SCs' many roles. The collaborative approach referred to in the ASCA National Model helps administrators, SCs, and teachers to work together for the overall mission of the school. This should also involve all the key stakeholders of a school site, including the SCs, since collaborating with teachers provides a learning climate for all students. This requires educators at a school site to be willing to be change agents and to implement student-oriented programs effectively.

Figure 1
ASCA National Model

Fullan (2007) believed an effective change agent possesses skills in three main capacities: developing relationships of trust, communicating the change vision effectively, and empowering others to take-action toward change. SCs working directly with teachers and administrators can help everyone be visionaries by collaborating with each other. Change-agents have not succeeded by working alone but rather building a culture of shared leadership with distributed ownership and common communities of practice (Levenson, 2014; Trybus, 2011).

With today's youth facing complex demands academically, personally, and socially, it has never been more important to involve SCs in helping students obtain skills for addressing the many issues they face in the 21st century. By being more actively involved in leadership activities, SCs can better collaborate with administrators to address these complex demands of students.

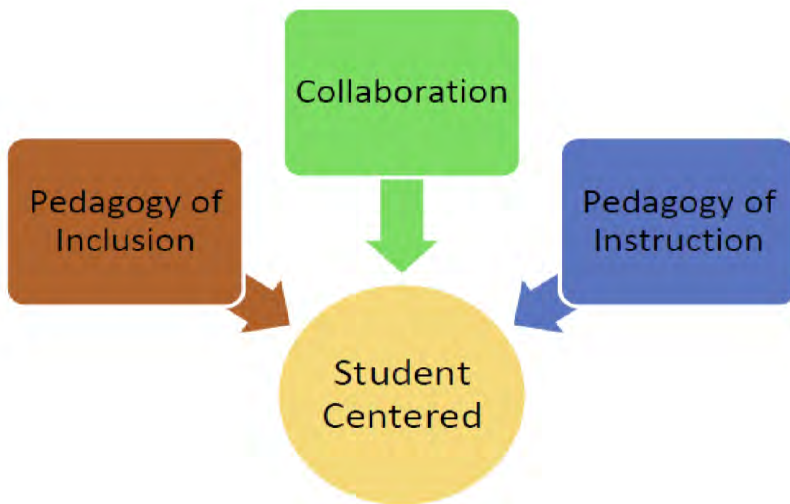**Traditional Role of Special Education Teacher**

The many roles and responsibilities of SE teachers can be difficult to define and are often dependent on grade level, severity and types of disabilities, and the needs of a school site. However, for most SE teachers, there are some commonalities in terms of their tasks, knowledge, standards, and competencies, and these have been outlined by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC). Most notably, the role of a SE teacher can no longer narrowly be focused on planning and working with a specialized group of students, such as teaching in their subject areas, behavioral, social emotional, and vocational skills; co-teaching with other teachers and service providers; adapting assessment, curriculum, and instruction; Individual Education Plans (IEP); behavior support plans; and other duties within the school such as 'recess duty' just to name a few (Brownell et al., 2005; Brunsting & Sreckovic, 2014; Wasburn-Moses, 2005).

The duties and responsibilities of these SE teachers continue to evolve and change based on current needs at the school, district, state, and federal levels. For example, current reforms that focus on student outcomes may affect the entire SE system (President's Commission on Excellence in SE, 2002; NCLB, 2002). In today's workplace, the SE teacher's roles extend beyond their classroom teaching responsibilities (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Cavendish & Espinosa, 2013; Klingner & Vaughn, 2002). Adding to the roles mentioned above, SE teachers continue to work in a variety of settings (home, hospital, school, and community) across different sectors (private, public schools, county, and agencies) with various disciplines (behaviorist, SCs, speech/language pathologists, occupational/physical therapists, home/hospital care provider, transportation personnel, administrators) (Brownell et al., 2010).

Aside from their own classrooms, SE teachers continue to work in the general education classes and co-teach with, assist, and/or consult with general education teachers (Panayiotis et al., 2012; Voltz, 2001; Winn & Blanton, 2017). They are often assigned to other leadership roles, including being mentors to new teachers (Crockett, 2002; Duffy & Forgan, 2004); taking on administrative roles during IEP meetings; providing school-wide professional development trainings in instruction; and participating in administrative decision-making such as the school-wide implementation of curriculum-based assessments and school-wide behavioral management plans (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Margolis & Doring, 2013). Jacobs et al. (2014) argued that as change agents, SE teachers perform duties as a mediator and collaborator between various therapists, specialists, and personnel. They also act as collaborators between general and SE teachers to meet the needs of students, especially those who are fully included in the general education setting. Additionally, SE teachers often serve as "informal leaders" who "articulate a sophisticated understanding of how their schools and district function organizationally and politically" (York-Barr et al., 2005, p. 193). Mastropieri (2001) also affirms the notion that SE teachers must show competency at everything they do including pedagogy in instruction and behavioral management, curriculum adaptations, and overall, meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of students with disabilities.

Figure 2 illustrates that although SE teachers' duties and responsibilities are complex and impact all disciplines at various levels, their focus has always been and continues to be the well-being of the students, academically and social-emotionally. It is the "vision, direction, and plans for special education teacher leaders, as collaborators and advocates across multiple levels within their educational systems to leverage the social, structural and fiscal resources to the benefit of students with disabilities" (Billingsley, 2007, p. 166).

Figure 2
Special Education Framework

School Leadership: The Principal

Leadership is often defined as a process of influencing the behavior of individuals and groups in the attainment of specific goals (Yukl, 2006). The questions of who exercises influence, how goals are defined and who moves the organization's individuals and teams towards these goals have been researched extensively by both theoretical and empirical examination (Bass & Bass, 2008; Yukl, 2006). This study narrows the perspective on leadership research to specifically look at leadership practices in 21st century educational organizations (Leithwood & Sun, 2009; MacBeath, 2009). This leadership process among and between educators to accomplish a common objective offers people the opportunity to perpetuate and form just and equitable systems. School leaders have four domains of practice: 1) setting directions, 2) building relationships and developing people, 3) developing the organization to support desired practices, and 4) improving the instructional program (Day et al., 2011). Throughout these four domains of practice, Leithwood (2019) discusses nineteen specific practices associated with the work of the school leader. When thinking about the leadership practices of principals, the following nine practices were examined: identify specific shared short-term goals, create high performance expectations, communicate vision and goals, build collaborative culture and distribute relationship, connect the school to the it's wider environment, maintain safe and healthy school environment, staff the instructional program, provide instructional support, and monitor students' learning and school improvement progress (Leithwood, 2019). This article takes a more narrowed look at these specific practices from the domains of practice where SCs and SE teachers are a part of the decision-making process for student success.

The job of the school principal has become increasingly complex. Historically, principals have found themselves engaged in both managerial and political tasks (Cuban, 1988). They are also called upon to be the instructional leaders of their site (Leithwood et al., 2004; Tillman, 2005). Additionally, principals find themselves developing support services to assist low-income students, English language learners and special education students (National Research Council, 2003). In this age of accountability, principals have responsibilities imposed on them by policy

makers for transforming schools on multiple conflicting avenues to increase academic achievement for the students they serve.

One theme found in effective educational leadership models is the idea of using transformative and collaborative concepts that focus on increased academic achievement (Bass, 1985). An example is the transformative leadership model where the practice of establishing effective relationships for all students' success is accomplished by fostering socially just beliefs and practices in schools (Shields, 2012). Shields (2010) explains, "Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise, not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others" (p. 559). This educational leadership model offers educators the opportunity to perpetuate and form just and equitable systems among and between educators moving towards common objectives.

Collaborative Leadership Models

Shared leadership assists capacity building within schools and contributes to school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Harris, 2004). It decentralizes leadership in schools and empowers others to lead (Harris & Muijs, 2005). Leadership as a collaborative endeavor has become a priority because of the complex societal, political, and economic issues that schools are facing (Crawford, 2012). Slater (2005) states that educational policies and practices demand educators to have a better understanding of collaboration and the essential place it holds in school transformation. Hence, various models of collaborative modalities in educational leadership are seen in schools today. Models such as distributed, flexible, transformative, and relational leadership are not only needed in schools but should be the priority of schools (Harris, 2009; Shields, 2010).

Transformative Leadership Model

From the literature review in the areas of equity and social justice, Robinson (2011) reported, "meaningful discussions about educational leadership for social justice and educational equity might inform leadership practice and policy with regard to addressing diversity, multiculturalism, and inequality in education in the United States and abroad" (p. 52). According to Irby, Meyers, and Salisbury (2019), even when leaders are not focused on anti-racist or social justice leadership, there is ample K-12 education research that advances the field's understanding of how to utilize these concepts to organize and develop schools. To further promote social justice and equity when thinking about the levels of leadership involvement by SCs and SE teachers, we used the Transformative Leadership model (Shields, 2012) as a framework of collaborative leadership focused on social justice and equity. There are eight tenets in the Transformative Leadership framework developed by Shields (2012). All tenets address leaders' disposition and behavior when working to create equitable and socially just school settings. The eight tenets are: 1) The mandate to effect deep and equitable change; 2) The need to deconstruct and reconstruct *knowledge frameworks* that perpetuate inequality and injustice; 3) Focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice; 4) The need to address the inequitable distribution of power; 5) Emphasis on both private and public (individual and collective) good; 6) Emphasis on interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness; 7) Necessity of balancing critique and promise; and 8) The call to exhibit moral courage (Shields, 2012, 2019). From the eight tenets, three (#1, #7, # 8) aligned with the data gathered from SCs as leaders and five (#1, #2, #4, #7, & #8) aligned with data gathered from SE teacher leaders. When tenets of Transformative leadership

are exhibited by SCs and SE teachers in collaboration with school administrators, a more equitable and socially just culture is fostered on school campuses.

Methods

A mixed methods cross-sectional survey design was used to analyze the perceptions of K-12 SC, SE teachers, and administrators about leadership on their campuses. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), survey design is useful when assessing information at a particular point in time to "examine current attitudes, beliefs, opinions and practices" (p. 415). Cross-sectional research is focused on data collection that takes place at a single point in time for participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2019), in as much this research does not measure change over time. An online survey, created by the researchers, containing both quantitative and qualitative questions, was used to ascertain the perceptions and understandings of the participants.

Participants

The sampling method used was purposeful sampling selected from K-12 special education teachers, school counselors, and administrators. An email invite with a link to the survey questions was sent to approximately 150 potential participants and yielded 34 respondents. Special education teachers ($n=8$), school counselors ($n=13$), and administrators ($n=13$) working in K-12 education in Southern California from San Bernardino County, Los Angeles County, and Riverside County participated in the study. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants. Most notably, the participants seem to mirror the racial/ethnic diversity of the Southern California region, with white folks making up slightly half of the sample (48%), followed by Hispanics (24%), African Americans (12%), and Asians (8%). Almost 60% of the sample was female, and most participants (93%) held graduate degrees.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics (n = 34)

Characteristic	Percentile
Age	
25-35	11.1%
36-45	37.0%
46-55	37.0%
Over 55	14.8%
Gender	
Female	59.3%
Male	40.7%
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	12.0%
Asian	8.0%
White	48.0%
Hispanic	24.0%
Other	8.0%
Highest Level of Education	
Bachelor's	7.4%
Master's	85.2%
Doctorate	7.4%

The majority of participants worked in their role for 10 years or less, with 25% having worked for less than 5 years. Their previous roles included being a teacher (37%), SC (22%), and SE teacher (11%). The participants worked in school sites located in urban (33.3%), suburban (44.4%), and rural (22.2%) schools. Participants were working at all levels of K-12 education at the high school level (45%), at the elementary level (33%), and a smaller proportion (22%) worked in an intermediate school. School size varied from small--educating less than 99 students--to larger sites with 2000 or more students.

Instrument
The survey instrument was developed by the researchers based on a literature review and the collection of feedback received from presentations and discussion with focus groups at two different peer reviewed education conferences. Two of the researchers reviewed the questionnaire to provide feedback on clarity and completion time. The survey was held online using Survey Monkey, and the link was distributed in a password-controlled link. The survey instrument contained 18 questions and required approximately 15 minutes to complete. The questions developed for this survey were both quantitative using a Likert scale and qualitative using open-ended questions to gather perceptions of participants on the topic. Questions (*n=12*) were used to gather demographic information in three categories. The first category asked questions about their professional history (*n=4*), the second category of questions asked for personal non-identifying information (*n=4*), and the third category of questions gathered information about the site of employment of participants *n=4)*. Examples from each category is as follows:

a) Professional History: county of current employment, current roles, and number of years in current position
b) Personal Information: age range, gender, ethnicity, level of education
c) Site of Employment: school demographics, type of school, size of school.

Questions 13-18 asked for specific information pertaining to the leadership activities that school counselors and special education teachers found themselves involved in. Each of these questions collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Questions 13 and 14 asked about the leadership duties that they found themselves involved in. Questions 15 and 16 asked about the frequency of leadership involvement and questions 17 and 18 asked about their perceptions of their leadership involvement's impact on school success. Questions 16 and 18 asked for explanations and perceptions of the participants.

Data Collection and Analysis
The collection of data was through an informed consent-based online survey from April 2018-August 2018. The survey was distributed through Survey Monkey to a potential participant list gathered from public records. Quantitative questions included an ordinal response format (e.g., a Likert-type scale) and responses were rounded to the most significant digit. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize survey responses and summary statistics as raw number and/or mean and are reported where appropriate. A qualitative thematic analysis using Nvivo, constant comparison, was constructed from de-identified written responses to open-ended questions.

Results and Discussion
A total of 34 responses were collected for a response rate of 36% with 68% of participants being female and 32% male. When asked how involved SCs and SE teachers are in leadership duties at the school, over 65% of the total participants responded with "often/regularly," while only 11% responded with "rarely" involved, and no one responded "never." When asked how often they think SCs and SE teachers should be involved in leadership at their school site, over 84% stated that their colleagues should be involved on a regular basis. Over 96% felt that having SE teachers and SCs involvement in leadership activities enhance the success of their school site. After an Nvivo data analysis of the qualitative data, the following four themes emerged: 1) There was general agreement from most current and former K-12 educators that SCs and SE teachers should both be encouraged and supported in assuming leadership duties; 2) Effective leadership can come from other educators on campus rather than solely from the "designated administrator;" 3) Collaborating with administrators increased energy and creativity in all educators on school campuses; and 4) Responsibility in promoting academic success for students rests in the hands of *all* educators at the site.

Agreement for SCs and SE teachers in Leadership Roles
Nearly 85% of participants (*n=*29*)* stated SCs and SE teachers should regularly be involved in leadership, and the remaining five participants stated that they are sometimes involved as opportunities are provided. All SC respondents (*n=*13*)* thought that teachers and counselors should be involved often/regularly in leadership activities such as being involved in school leadership teams, leading out in college and career readiness, acting as liaisons with parents, and heading various professional development trainings related to current mental health issues.

Based on the SE teachers' (*n=*8) responses, they played a leadership role at their school on a regular basis outside their instructional time in their classroom. The participants reported

spending most of their time on the Student Services Team, where they provided academic, social, and emotional input, and curriculum and instructional adaptations for students at risk of failing. SE participants also reported involvement with the development and implementation of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which is a proactive approach to promote school safety and promote positive behaviors school-wide. Finally, participants reported attending mediation meetings and playing a role in adapting assessments and curriculum for the school. Principals (n=13) participating in the study stated that SCs and SE teachers should be involved in leadership at their schools on a regular basis. In their response to the question why, they referenced John Hattie's research (Visible Learning, n.d.) on collective efficacy as a factor influencing student achievement. One participant stated that, "Shared leadership draws on the collective genius of the school." Another participant spoke about the idea of recognition since SCs and SE teachers are already doing the work of leadership. All participants in one way or another spoke about how the principal cannot do this work alone.

According to Shields (2020), Tenet 4 (The Need to Address the Inequitable Distribution of Power) challenges the idea of shared power. One way to address the inequitable use of power is to ensure the power is used in a collaborative way with others. When leading, giving voice to others and working together with them rather than exerting power over them are ways where inequitable distributions of power can bring balance. Two examples of this found in our results include the role of administrator given to SCs and SE teachers for IEP meetings and when they are included in the decision making for special education concerns. One participant talks about how they are the "go to" person on their campus for all special education matters.

Effective Leadership Can Come from Other Educators on Campus

About 65% of respondents (n=22) found themselves involved often/regularly in leadership activities, and 23.08% (n=8) stated that they often find themselves involved in leadership activities. Participants found themselves involved in activities related to Student Services (25%) providing academic, social, and emotional input; Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (15%); and multiple areas (44%) of leadership activities. There was general agreement from the respondents that school counselors be encouraged to become more involved in leadership duties at their school sites. However, this will not likely occur, unless the SCs themselves advocate for assuming more leadership.

Only about 50% of participants reported that SE teachers and SCs should take on leadership roles and responsibilities on a "regular/often" basis. However, most of the participants recognized the benefit of involvement especially as it pertains to helping students succeed and the collaboration between colleagues. However, some participants were concerned with one's "lack of experience" especially when one is required to serve. Lieberman and Friedrich (2010) support this concern that teachers are thrown into a leadership position regardless of their readiness or preparedness. Furthermore, SE teachers often find themselves as the only special educator at their school site and therefore are asked to take on more leadership roles even in their first year of teaching. However, many SE teachers have been shown to thrive in these leadership roles and become more active and effective leaders at their site over time (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010). Many of the principals spoke about how the responsibility of student success is dependent on all stakeholders at the school. Additionally, another participant stated, "Teachers, counselors, attendance clerks, security, library techs…all impact student life and implement the school plan."

Tenet 7 (Necessity of Balancing Critique and Promise) calls school leaders to critically look at their school for inequities in discipline, grading, assessment, opportunities, placement, and

services to assess the needs of their school. SCs and SE teachers are called to act in a manner that dismantles these inequities and promote an inclusive and more equitable campus culture. SCs, SE teachers, and site administrators spoke about how they are responsible to make sure that students are provided access to support and opportunities that increase their chances of success. They speak about how, through collaboration, decisions that create inclusive and equitable practices for special education students in the areas of placement, services, and access are designed to meet students' needs and promote academic success.

Collaborating with Administrators Increased Energy and Creativity

The SC respondents mentioned the importance of collaborating with administrators to increase their involvement in leadership as being key to their involvement. One respondent added, "When they are working collaboratively it definitely benefits the school because their impact influences and drives to a common goal." Several respondents thought administrators would have more buy-in into the SC state standards if there were more collaborative leadership between counselors and administrators. Two of the principals talked about how collaborative leadership creates ownership, builds confidence and expertise, and supports the overall vision of the school. The understanding that they as principals need help to lead their school was clear and emphasized in their responses. They made statements that expressed their commitment to a collaborative model of school leadership where SCs and SE teachers would be included in the decision-making.

In looking at Tenet 2 of Transformative Leadership (The Need to Deconstruct and Reconstruct "Knowledge Frameworks" that Perpetuate Inequity and Injustice), participants deconstructed the idea that principals are the sole leaders on school campuses and reconstructed their understanding that through collaboration, principals can better lead schools. Their responses indicated that through this understanding of collaborative leadership, SCs, SE teachers, and principals bring increased equity to the school culture. Examples of this are found in the responses that suggest participation in Student Success Teams (SST); mediation, especially during Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings; participation in and planning of school-wide or district-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

Responsibility in Promoting Academic Success for All Students

Roughly 96% (*n=33*) agreed that SCs and SE teachers enhance the success of the students at the school. They need to promote their expertise in working with a variety of mental health issues, and they need to be present in the lives of students and teachers. Several of the respondents said they thought leadership should be a "mindset" and way of thinking for school counselors, as they do their jobs. A respondent said, "because the counselor is involved in various aspects of leadership, the counselor will have valuable leadership input towards student's success at the school, thus the success of the school as a whole." Additionally, most of the respondents felt it is the responsibility of all educators at a school site to lead out in promoting academic success for all students. Finally, several respondents discussed how bringing administrators, SCs, and SE teachers all together in a leadership team would help everyone in the school stay focused on the all-important issue of student success. One respondent summed his comments up by stating, "by working together creates a positive working environment, engagement with others, and a synergy that is not present in individual endeavors."

Most participants agreed that the involvement of SE teachers and SCs enhanced the success of their school site, however, this may not seem to align with their previous response on the level of involvement (i.e. regularly or often vs. sometimes). While seeing the importance of this work,

many SE teachers may also be conflicted because taking on leadership roles and responsibilities can take a tremendous amount of time and energy. As previously mentioned, many saw the benefits to student achievement and well-being when SE teachers and SCs were involved in leadership roles and activities. One participant commented that "sometimes administration becomes detached from classroom activities and the students…so it is more effective when teachers are actively involved as they are more in tune with the daily academic and cultural challenges." Another question asked to the principals was, "Do you feel that teacher/counselor leaders enhance the success of your school?" Ninety-nine percent of the principal participants said, "Yes." When asked why, the principals responded by placing the students first. One participant stated that, "In general, good decisions are made when the decisions are made by those closest to the students." Another stated, "Teachers are directly responsible for supporting students on a daily basis in their academic achievement and counselors do the same as well as helping students in other areas." One principal alluded to the fact that SCs and SE teachers have specialized training of which the principal only has peripheral knowledge.

In addition, participants' responses of using a collaborative leadership model where all students have what they need to succeed aligned with Tenet 1 (The Mandate to Effect Deep and Equitable Change). The National Equity Project (2012) defines equity in schools as giving students what they need to succeed. The participants reiterate the importance of decisions coming from all stakeholders at the school site to support student success. When SCs, SE teachers, and site administrators commit themselves to work collaboratively for student success, they answer the call to effect deep and equitable change in their schools. SCs and SE teachers found themselves doing the work in student services in the following areas: providing academic, social, and emotional input; curriculum; and testing adaptations, which included examining students' readiness skills for careers and college.

The final tenet is Tenet 8 (The Call to Exhibit Moral Courage), which calls for a commitment to transforming school campuses to be equitable, inclusive, and socially just spaces of learning. Courage is needed in all areas of transforming education when working to create spaces where students can learn and find success. When working in a collaborative team, the idea of combined leadership creates spaces where site administrators can rely on and work with others who are committed to equitable educational spaces. SCs and SE teachers bring expertise and skills of which the site administrators may have limited knowledge. One principal spoke specifically about how they depended on the SCs and SE teachers at their site for their expertise, knowledge, and skills in areas where the site administrator was less confident. This type of collaboration reaffirms and supports the commitment of the site administrator to continue to work towards equitable and socially just education for all students.

Limitations

One limitation was that the size of the sample was small. With the limited number of respondents, results may not truly reflect the perceptions of all SCs, SE teachers, and site administrators within the Southern California counties that were surveyed. Another limitation was the time of year in which the survey was distributed to potential participants. Despite several attempts to recruit participants, recruiting before and after the summer break limited the rate of return of responses. As a result, the limited data collected was not generalizable to the larger group.

Conclusions: Implications and Recommendations

As stated in the preceding sections, implications to this study are preliminary, but key findings that linked to transformative leadership tenets have emerged, which necessitates further research. The significant themes found in relation to SCs and SE teachers as school leaders are 1) encouragement and support in assuming leadership duties; 2) recognition that SC and SE teachers are leaders; 3) collaboration with administrators increases energy and creativity; and 4) shared responsibility promotes academic success for all students. While SCs and SE teachers' roles and contributions in leadership are beginning to be recognized at some school sites, it continues to be minimal. Daily contact with students, other professionals, and instructional programs place SCs and SE teachers in a unique position to influence how the school can better meet the needs of students and administrators alike (Jacobs et al., 2016; Lampert, 2002, 2011; Printy et al., 2009; Wenner & Campbell, 2016). Additionally, leadership by SCs and SE teachers is recognized as a critical factor in meeting the recent federal and state educational mandates. Especially in these unprecedented times of COVID-19 and civil unrest, it is even more critical that SCs and SE teachers have a voice in the decision-making process at school sites to promote equity and socially just educational practices for all students.

In response to the research question, "What levels of leadership do SCs and SE teachers exert in their school sites?," we found that they can exert leadership in a variety of ways. From a social justice and equity viewpoint, having SCs and SE teachers work collaboratively with school administration aligns with the transformative leadership paradigm and addresses the need for systemic and equitable change in education. Shields' (2018) transformative leadership framework calls for leaders to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequality and injustice, whereby the roles of SCs and SE teachers get redefined to promote equity for student success. Having SCs and SE teachers lead in collaboration with administrators is a deliberate act to address inequitable distributions of power in the education system, empowering SCs and SE teachers to have a leadership voice. It is not enough to critique the status quo of the role played by SCs and SE teachers. It is imperative to "offer a promise or possibility of something better" whereby change takes place to ensure equity in addressing the needs of schools (Shields, 2019, p. 141). The final tenet discussed the call for moral courage, which is especially important for SCs and SE teachers as they commit to being equitable and inclusive leaders at their school sites.

Furthermore, SCs and SE teachers display leadership as they advocate for their students. Given the number of students and families living in such turbulent times, due to the current pandemic, SCs and SE teachers have an opportunity to lead in a way that helps build coping strategies for the many issues or crises they are facing. However, as advocates for all students, it is incumbent that SCs and SE teachers first view themselves as leaders and champions of student success. It is imperative that SCs and SE teachers make themselves visible at their school sites as they work collaboratively with students, parents, teachers, and all other stakeholders. Having a collaborative model of leadership at the site level benefits students and enforces a school culture that is equitable and socially just.

In conclusion, recommendations for future iterations of this study may include follow-up interviews seeking deeper understanding of how SCs and SE teachers navigate in the space of leadership. There is a need to look closer at the challenges and expectations that SCs and SE teachers have and are held to when in leadership roles. A recommendation for further study of how SCs and SE teachers utilize the Transformative Leadership Model at their school sites to impact equity and socially just practices is needed. Another recommendation on the detailed activities that SCs and SE teachers enact in leadership practices would clarify if collaborative modes of

leadership can be successful. Taking a closer look at the effectiveness of SC and SE teachers engaged in collaborative leadership is also recommended. Also, it is recommended to look at the specific skills, talents, and knowledge needed by SCs and SE teachers to be effective leaders at their school site. A final recommendation would be to look at the types of support SCs and SE teachers need to be effective as educational leaders in a collaborative model.

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