

# Advancing One's Understanding of School Counseling

## Advancing One's Understanding of School Counseling Through Publication: The "What" and "How" of Writing an Article

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### Abstract

Writing for publication is a great privilege and one that should be approached deliberately as well as innovatively. As experts in our respective fields, writing for publication is an opportunity to share original thoughts, take positions, and/or report findings as well as simultaneously advance foundational knowledge in our areas. The power and influence of such scholarly pursuits should be taken seriously. More specifically, one's efforts should be well thought out and demonstrate a willingness to take risks by legitimately suggesting a novel idea or an approach to the epistemology of school counseling. The following commentary reflects my paradigm for evaluating manuscripts and characterizes the "what" and "how" of writing for publication.

### The "What"

When contemplating the "what" of writing for publication in the area of school counseling, it is advantageous to consider efforts that involve data. The current culture of education is replete with terminology such as *data driven*, *decision-making*, *evidence-based practices*, *standards*, and *rubrics*. Furthermore, school counseling cannot avoid the influence of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and therefore must consider the value of how data commingles with school counseling.

Projecting, collecting, analyzing, and using data for many counselors is a daunting task and can feel anticcomplimentary to what we really enjoy doing. However, the more we work with data and write about how to use data effectively to inform school counseling, the more data becomes demystified. This is not to say that position papers or theory-driven work is less valuable, but wrestling with, and writing about data can offer tremendous risks and rewards. Therefore, I enjoy reviewing

manuscripts in which authors have used data to support or validate their efforts and desire to share these great ideas and approaches with colleagues via publication.

According to Stone and Dahir (2007), "data brings our attention to issues that require schoolwide conversations and planning" (p. 18). I believe this assertion can be extended more specifically to school counseling. Data demands attention and often facilitates meaningful dialogue around school counseling and what does or does not constitute a "best practice." By publishing empirically-based articles, not only does one continue the process of demystification, but one also encourages discourse that can lead to well informed decisions and planning.

Stone and Dahir (2007) offer the following benefits associated with data: (a) data can accurately present the current situation of student challenges and accomplishment in critical areas, (b) data can assist in identifying the needs of students on your caseloads, (c) data can reveal school and/or system wide challenges that affect success, and (d) data helps to identify and eliminate barriers. These qualitative findings should be evidence enough that writing data-based articles is not only an acceptable risk, but a necessary one when writing for publication relative to school counseling issues.

### The "How"

My consideration of the "how" is a two pronged discussion. The first prong deals with "how" does one access meaningful data to write evidence-based articles. The second prong offers a glimpse into what I hope to experience when reviewing a manuscript.

First, given the numerous challenges associated with writing evidence-based articles, it would behoove future authors to consider collaborative ventures. As Viccora (2007) suggests, join forces with data-savvy partners

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such as faculty at universities and colleges. Counseling is a relationally-based field and writing in such a way can be mutually beneficial for countless stakeholders. Furthermore, Stone and Dahir (2007) remind us that many school counselors have access to meaningful data right under their noses. Examples would be management systems or databases that include demographic information, course information, and copious student information. These positions suggest that writing evidence-based articles does not require an experimental design, nor does it require one to reinvent the wheel. Simply expound upon existing data and open the readers' minds to new and exciting ideas.

The second prong involves the approach to writing that I hope to find when reviewing a manuscript. Overall, I enjoy reviewing a manuscript that contains passion for the subject matter, conviction of thought, and brevity. I would encourage authors to take risks and follow their heart. Our greatest work comes from articulating that which we love. I would also encourage authors to venture into uncharted territory. One does not always have to agree with the status quo and while incremental ideas have great value, bold ideas facilitate substantive changes. Finally, I think the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association's* (APA, 2001) concept of *economy of expression* is fundamental to quality writing. "Say only what needs to be said. The author who is frugal with words not only writes a more readable manuscript but also increases the chances that the manuscript will be

accepted for publication" (p. 34).

## Final Thoughts

It is a tremendous joy and honor to be an external Review Board Member for the *GSCA Journal*. The professional counselors of Georgia do incredible work and will continue to do so well into the future. I look forward to reviewing further manuscripts and sincerely hope the above words can be of assistance and/or guidance. My thoughts and positions are by no means absolute, and only represent guiding principles I use when reviewing manuscripts.

## References

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