

**School Counselor Collaboration with Language Interpreters:**

**Results of a National Survey**

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### **Abstract**

In an effort to increase knowledge of current school practices with regard to the use of language interpreters, experiences in collaborative work with interpreters were assessed through a national survey. Outcomes indicated a perceived need for more interpreter assistance, with many indicating a need for full-time language services. Bilingual staff members (e.g., secretaries or janitors) were most frequently identified as performing interpreter services. Primary challenges regarding the collaboration included limited interpreter skills or training, interpreter inability to manage emotional session content, and interpreter alteration of counselor commentary or assumption of control of counseling sessions.

Key words: counseling, interpreter, English language learners, ELL, school counseling

## **School Counselor Collaboration with Language Interpreters: Results of a National Survey**

Over the past 30 years, the foreign born population has tripled in the United States and continues in growth (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). This is a heterogeneous group, present in all areas of the country and with a wide range of needs and language skills. In the year 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau identified approximately 47 million individuals as English Language Learners (ELLs; U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). ELL has been defined as “non-native speakers of English who experience difficulty in learning academic content when taught in English” (Martinez, p. 187, 1998). Young in age, there are approximately 5 million ELL students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through grade twelve settings (Kindler, 2002). They are the fastest growing subpopulation within the schools (Kindler, 2002), currently accounting for 10% of the student population (U. S. Department of Education, 2006).

Issues affecting ELL students are numerous and include social, linguistic, psychological, and cultural adjustment (Bemak & Chung, 2003; Portes, 1999). Considering their unique role as liaisons between the school and students' home lives, school counselors are particularly well positioned to assist ELLs with such challenges. In fact, ethical standards of the American School Counselor Association (2005) specifically recommends that school counselors attend to ELL students' needs, with recommendations that services are provided in a language comprehended by the client. To accomplish such a feat, counselors may need to enlist the services of a trained interpreter (Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, & Yoon, 2007).

Interpreters are individuals professionally trained to translate a spoken language (Lopez, 2002). Their primary role is to bridge the language and cultural gap that exists between client and counselor or, in a broader sense, between two larger entities such as the family and the school system (Goh, Dunnigan, & Schuchman, 2004; Hillier, Loshak, Rahman, & Marks, 1994). The presence of a language interpreter in counseling settings has been found to increase client comfort and willingness to return for services (Hillier et al., 1994). Within the schools, interpreter presence can be particularly advantageous in reducing student and parent isolation, increasing client ability to access academic and non-academic services (Goh et al., 2007). Interpreter assistance can also increase parent involvement in their child's educational process, a key factor that has been found to facilitate student educational achievement (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Hong & Ho, 2005).

The American Counseling Association (2005) has mandated that all interpreters be *qualified*. Authors across various counseling disciplines have described qualified interpreters and interpretive practices. For instance, experts state that interpreters must be trained, and they must be an objective party, as opposed to the use of untrained volunteers or family members. Interpreters should ideally possess both dialectical and cultural knowledge according to each client (Amodeo, Grigg-Saito, & Robb, 1997; Fradd & Wilen, 1990; Goh et al., 2007; Paone & Malott, 2008). School counselors should receive training to allow them to understand the importance of advocacy for employment of professionally trained interpreters in their districts. School counselor training can also increase awareness of any challenges related to collaboration with

interpreters that could negatively affect services for ELL students and their families (Lopez, 2002; Ochoa et al., 2004).

Authors have posited that current interpretive practices within the schools are fraught with challenges, particularly in regards to employing untrained language interpreters (Goh et al., 2007; Lopez & Rooney, 1997; Ochoa, Riccio, Jimenez, Garcia de Alba, & Sines, 2004). However, literature related to school settings is limited and has primarily focused upon school psychologists' use of interpreters in the translation of psychological or behavioral assessments (e.g., Ochoa et al., 2004; Rogers & Lopez, 2002; Rogers et al., 1999). As a result, little is known regarding actual school counselor-interpreter collaborative practices. It is unclear whether school counselors have access to interpreter services and, if so, whether those individuals are trained language professionals. If they do not have trained interpreters in their settings, who interprets for ELL students and their families? Also unknown is the level of training or information school counselors have received regarding effective collaborative practices with interpreters and what, if any, challenges are experienced by school counselors in their work with language interpreters.

In an attempt to determine the nature of such collaboration, a survey was created and implemented nationally across public schools. The authors sought to determine if school counselors were engaging in best practices (e.g., employing professionally trained language interpreters) and to discover any barriers preventing effective collaboration. Inquiry also assessed any training received by school counselors regarding work with interpreters. Suggestions were then made for addressing any

identified challenges that could limit the effectiveness of counseling interventions for ELLs.

### **Counselor-Interpreter Collaborative Challenges**

Studies and theoretical literature regarding counselor-interpreter collaborative challenges have principally focused upon work with school psychologists or community mental health professionals. However, that literature is also viable for school counselors in understanding best practices and challenges regarding language assistance. For instance, authors have posited the need for employment of professional interpreters who possess adequate linguistic skills, particularly regarding dialect and vocabulary unique to each client's origins (Baxter & Cheng, 1996; Farooq & Fear, 2003; Langdon & Cheng, 2002). Indeed, interpreters may speak the client's language but lack comprehension of his or her cultural norms or socio-political experiences (Lopez, 2002). Cultural norms can include greetings, displays of expression, and expectations regarding gender and familial roles, physical contact, and parenting practices (Sue & Sue, 2008). Hence, counselors should ideally advocate for the employment of interpreters with country-specific knowledge of their clients' cultures.

Additional complexities that may arise with interpreter collaboration include the risk that interpreters may deliberately or mistakenly alter counselor or client commentary, perhaps with the intention to protect the client or counselor (Amodeo et al., 1997; Barik, 1994; Farooq & Fear, 2003; Langdon & Cheng, 2002; Lopez, 2002; Vasquez & Javier, 1991). The interpreter may assume control of meetings, taking on the role of counselor and giving advice not generated by the counselor (e.g., Baxter & Cheng, 1996; Farooq & Fear, 2003; Kaufert & Koolage, 1984). He or she might over or

under-react to the emotional content of the sessions. Such mistakes are particularly prevalent for interpreters who lack understanding of the counseling profession and his or her own role as interpreter (Acevedo, Reyes, Annett, & Lopez, 2003; Darling, 2004).

Counselors who receive training regarding effective collaborative practices can be made aware of these potential challenges and can be better prepared for intervening in, or preventing, such problems. Counselor training regarding effective collaboration can also increase awareness of how counselors can impede interpreter services. For instance, the chance for interpreter errors may increase if the counselor speaks too quickly, in long sentences without pausing frequently, or applies professional jargon that is difficult to translate (Farooq & Fear, 2003). Errors can also occur with use of certain concepts or phrases that are not easily translatable. Challenging concepts include proverbs (e.g., he who hesitates loses), emotional undertones (e.g., sarcasm), and humor (Langdon & Cheng, 2002).

Hence, there are a multitude of potential challenges and best practices regarding school counselor-interpreter collaboration. Studies in community settings or with school psychologists have found that those challenges can be exacerbated when working with untrained professionals, particularly with use of friends, staff, or family members as interpreters (Amodeo, Grigg-Saito, & Robb, 1997; Fradd & Wilen, 1990; Goh et al., 2007). The following survey has been applied nationally to assess actual experiences for school in counselor-interpreter collaborations. Are best practices being applied (e.g., use of trained interpreters, with training of school counselors regarding the collaborative venture)? In addition, what are the collaborative challenges that exist, if any, for school counselors in their work with language interpreters?

## Method

### Participants

Participants were identified with an attempt to include the major geographical regions across the U.S. (e.g., South, Northeast, Northwest, Midwest, and West). Participants were selected based on their residency in a city with either the greatest density or the greatest growth of ELLs in their region, as identified through U.S. Census data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Although high in ELL numbers, California and Florida schools were omitted due to the inability to access contact information for school counselors. Hence, participants were school counselors from the following U.S. locations: New York, NY; San Antonio, TX; Chicago, IL; Denver, CO; Las Vegas, NV; Seattle, WA, and; Albuquerque, NM. Email addresses were obtained through an internet search, as well as through phone calls to the schools or school district offices.

Of the 1144 persons who received the survey, 213 responded, yielding a response rate of 18.6%. Of the respondents, 157 (73%) were women, 42 (20%) were men, and 14 (7%) did not specify. Of those, 53 (26.5%) were from Arizona, 36 (18%) from Washington, 26 (13%) were from New York, 23 (11.5%) were from Illinois, 21 (10.5%) were from New Mexico, 21 (10.5%) were from Nevada, and 20 (10%) were from Colorado. Of the 198 respondents who chose to report their age, 22 (11%) were under 30 years old or younger, 57 (29%) were in their 30s, 43 (22%) in their 40s, 59 (30%) in their 50s, and 17 (8%) were over 60 years old.

Participants predominantly identified themselves as Caucasian ( $n = 119$ , 60%), with others reporting as Latino/Hispanic ( $n = 47$ , 24%), African American ( $n = 21$ , 11%), Asian ( $n = 8.4\%$ ), Native American ( $n = 1$ , 0.5%), and multiethnic, ( $n = 1$ , 0.5%). Sixteen



individuals chose not to report their race. Twenty five participants (15%) indicated that they held a doctorate degree, 139 (85%) indicated a master's degrees, and 49 chose not to respond. Regarding grade level of work setting, 85 (40%) participants identified as working in high schools, 54 (27%) in elementary schools, 32 (16%) in middle schools, 20 (10%) as working in kindergarten-through-middle school settings, and 9 (4.5%) in middle and high schools combined.

The largest portion of respondents (n = 149, 70%) reported working in an urban district, while others (n = 34, 16%) reported working in a suburban district. Nine (6.1%) worked in a mixed district and nine (4.1%) worked in a rural district. The largest portion reported working in a low-socioeconomic district (n = 119, 55.9%), 42 (19.7%) reported working in mixed socio economic district, 32 (15%) reported a middle income district, and five (2.3%) worked in an upper income district. After English, school counselors reported Spanish (n = 180) as the most common language spoken by students in their districts. There was a total of 45 other languages noted, with Chinese (n = 63), Arabic (n = 56), and Vietnamese (n = 47) as the next most frequently used.

### **Instrumentation**

The study was conducted in accordance with the procedures approved by the researchers' Institutional Review Boards. A web-based survey was developed by the authors and was administered in March 2008, through Survey Monkey ([http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=\\_2bdAw1YNQafi\\_2bhKewJZ5\\_2b7A\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=_2bdAw1YNQafi_2bhKewJZ5_2b7A_3d_3d)). The survey solicited information from school counselors regarding interpreter need, practices, challenges, and training. A small pilot (N = 10) study was initially conducted with school counselors in various geographical settings in order to determine the

appropriateness of each item on the survey. No changes were suggested by pilot participants.

### **Procedure**

Participants were contacted three times during the course of the study, once as an initial invitation, a second time as a reminder, and a final time as a follow-up procedure (Dillman, 2000). Time length to complete the survey was approximately 15-20 minutes. Twenty seven survey questions (available from the authors upon request) were in a multiple choice format while one question was in a Likert-style format. In addition, three items allowed for written responses.

Survey questions were developed through an extensive review of the literature that identified best practices and challenges in counselor-interpreter collaboration (e.g., Acevedo et al., 2003; Amodeo et al., 1997; Anderson, 1976; Barik, 1994; Baxter & Cheng, 1996; Darling, 2004; Dezelueta, 1990; Farooq & Fear, 2003; Kaufert & Koolage, 1984; Kline, Acosta, Austin, & Johnson, 1980; Lopez, 2002; Lopez & Rooney, 1997; Paone & Malott, 2008; Raval, 1996; Tribe, 1999; Vasquez & Javier, 1991). Specifically, the bulk of the literature has applied studies or theory to the phenomenon of community counselor-interpreter collaboration, asserting the need for employing trained interpreters and identifying challenges experienced by community counselors in collaboration with interpreters. Additional literature has asserted the need for training interpreters to work specifically in the school setting. Hence, the prior literature was used to create questions for school counselors, in an effort to identify actual school-setting practices with interpreters. Examples of specific questions addressed in the survey are as follows:

1. Do school counselors perceive a need for language interpreter assistance? Are those needs being met (including funding or support for professional interpreters)?
2. What level of professionalism do interpreters possess? Are they trained as interpreters, and are they perceived as competent?
3. What is the nature of counselor-interpreter collaboration in the schools? For instance, how do counselors obtain interpreter assistance, the ease of obtaining services, time required of interpreters, and nature of services needed (e.g., testing, family meetings, home visits, etc.)?
4. What are the challenges experienced by counselors in working with interpreters? This includes the barriers to receiving interpreter services.
5. What kind of training are school counselors receiving regarding work with language interpreters?

## **Results**

Questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine interpretive practices within the schools. Overall, respondents perceived a need for interpretive services in the school. When asked, 70% of respondents indicated a perceived need (yes,  $n = 149$ ) and 30%, no ( $n = 63$ ). For those who indicated a need, 51% ( $n = 66$ ) of respondents indicated there was a need for full time interpreter services. Forty nine percent of the participants ( $n = 63$ ) indicated a need for part time services.

In an average month, participants reported how often they worked with an interpreter. Of the 199 people who responded to this question, 29% ( $n = 58$ ) indicated less than once a month, 9% ( $n = 17$ ) indicated once a month, 28% ( $n = 55$ ) responded a

few times a month, 19% (n = 38) said weekly, and 9% (n = 31) indicated daily contact. The researchers asked the respondents if the amount of interpreter assistance received was adequate. Forty-nine percent (n = 101) of respondents indicated that the amount of interpreter assistance received was adequate, 39% (n = 80) indicated not adequate, while 12% (n = 25) marked that the question did not apply to them.

Research question two addressed the nature of services. Respondents were asked to choose as many categories that were represented in their school setting. Responses indicated that bilingual staff members (defined as secretaries or janitors) were the most frequent persons acting as interpreters. Over half (54%, n = 114) of school counselors reported bilingual staff members as most frequently used for interpreter assistance. The next most frequent persons acting as interpreters were teachers (n = 100) and the student him/herself (n = 88).

Participants indicated for which kinds of topics interpreter services were most needed and were permitted to indicate all that applied. As the greatest need, parent meetings were noted by 90% (n = 180) of the respondents. Seventy-six percent (n = 152) indicated a need for interpreter assistance to address academic issues, and 65% (n = 131) cited a need for meetings regarding personal issues. Questions regarding protocol in locating and securing interpreter assistance were also asked. Results revealed that 50% (n = 107) had no designated interpreter; 17.5% (n = 16) indicated there was an office for the interpreter in their building; 14% (n = 30) indicated the interpreter made regular visits to the site; 5% (n = 1) indicated there was an off-site interpreter; 9.8% (n = 21) indicated the need to contact the interpreter via phone or email; and 18.2% (n = 39) chose not to respond to the question.

The level of ease in accessing designated interpreters was also assessed. Thirty-one percent (n = 29) indicated that they could access language assistance easily (timeline defined as 'moments'), 29% (n = 27) as fairly easily (defined as 'within a few hours'), 25% (n = 23) as less easily (within several days), and 15% (n = 14) as difficult (several weeks). Those individuals who indicated that it was difficult to obtain services were asked to state in writing what they did to help their clients. Written responses included variations of, "wait" until services were available, "use a student," or "[do] anything we can do."

Participants were asked to choose all barriers in receiving language assistance that applied to them. Those barriers included (a) a lack of funding for interpreters (n = 53), (b) little or no advocacy for hiring a trained interpreter (n = 54), and (c) key people in the district didn't believe interpreters were needed (n = 21). One participant expressed her frustration with those barriers, indicating in writing, "I do not have any other resources from the school or district. I believe that I am doing a disservice to the student and parents, but I resort to using the student as an interpreter."

In regards to the question of having access to trained versus untrained interpreters, the majority of school counselors (56%, n = 119) indicated that they did not know if those who interpreted had received professional interpreter training. A large portion of respondents viewed interpreters in their settings as competent. Of the 200 who responded to the question of competency, 72% (n = 145) cited interpreters as competent, 26% (n = 52) indicated sometimes, and 2% (n = 3) said no, they were not competent. Question three was also concerned with how interpreters were funded. The

majority of that funding came from the districts (18%,  $n = 38$ ); however 41% ( $n = 87$ ) of respondents said they had no idea where funding came from.

Multiple challenges (also see Table 1) were identified in counselor-interpreter collaboration. Although most respondents indicated more than one challenge in their setting, the most common responses included (a) the interpreter altered the content of information ( $n = 45$ ); (b) the interpreter was unable to emotionally manage the session content ( $n = 40$ ); (c) the interpreter's language skills were inadequate ( $n = 33$ ); (d) the interpreter assumed the role of counselor or took control of the session ( $n = 29$ ); and (e) the interpreter lacked basic skills necessary to work with persons in a counseling setting ( $n = 26$ ). Additional responses can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

***Challenges Related to Work with Interpreters***

Challenges	n
Interpreter altered content of information	45
Interpreter unable to emotionally manage session content	40
Interpreter's language skills inadequate	33
Interpreter assumed role of counselor/took control of session	29
Interpreter lacked basic skills necessary to work with persons in a counseling setting	26
Interpreter lacked cultural understanding	20
Counselor did not have a chance to get to know the interpreter well enough	17
Interpreter gave incorrect information to the client	13
Interpreter breached confidentiality	12
Interpreter lacked understanding of the school setting/ counselor setting	5
Interpreter presence in the room detracted from the ability to form relationship with the client	3

The final research question addressed what types of training school counselors received regarding work with language interpreters. Of the 200 persons who responded to the inquiry, 11% (n = 21) indicated that they had received training regarding effective work with interpreters while 90% (n = 179) did not. With respect to how the training was funded, several indicated receiving money from more than one source. Five indicated that they paid for training themselves, and 10 indicated that the school district paid. Out of the 20 who responded to the question of whether they felt the training was adequate, 18 said yes, and 2 said no.

### **Limitations**

This study presents multiple limitations. A small geographical area was surveyed, as the study assessed practices in only five states within the United States. The information collected was self-reported. Hence, it is possible that participant selection was nonrandomized, presenting potential response bias (Sprinthall, 2003). Those who chose to respond may have been more likely to have perceived a need for interpreter services, and so outcomes may not reflect the experiences of many school counselors.

When working with surveys, researchers rely on the willingness of others to obtain information (Dillman, 2000). Although Schaefer and Dillman (1998) have recognized that online survey elicit lower response rates, the response rate for this project (18.6%) was even lower than desired by the researchers. Potentially, non-responders may have been those who lacked ELL students in their settings, and so they saw no need to answer the survey. Non-response could have also been due to the many roles school counselors play, contributing to a lack of time and availability for research involvement. The use of a survey via internet may also have contributed to a

lower response rate, as school districts often filter emails that originate from unknown addresses.

Unfortunately, although researchers attempted to reach at least one state in each region of the United States, we were unable to access school counselor information in both Florida and California (two states with high concentrations of ELLs in certain geographic regions, particularly in regards to Spanish speakers). This is a serious issue in being able to generalize the findings across school settings nationally. We cannot assume all of the challenges cited in findings here are present in those states with higher ELL population, although, in regards to national Spanish-language counselor assistance, data indicates that there continues to be a very low number of Spanish-speaking counselors available to students (President's Advisory Commission, 1996).

### **Discussion**

This study delineated current counselor-interpreter collaborative practices in the school setting. Findings indicated a perceived need for more interpreter services, with many participants indicating difficulty in accessing an interpreter. In addition, multiple counseling professionals in this study cited that non-trained persons as interpreters at their sites were commonly used, which increases risk of interpretive error and violations of ethical issues (Lopez, 2002). These are troubling issues in the schools, when considering that counselors are frequently the main persons expected to intervene during times of crisis, including life and death situations. Inability to work with ELL clients due to a shortage of, or incompetent, interpreter services could present a serious problem.



Barriers to receiving language assistance by counselors were primarily cited as limited support, including a lack of support for funding or advocacy for the hiring of professionally trained interpreters. We assert that school counselors will have to advocate for themselves to receive necessary language assistance, as administrators will likely not understand the many risks related to working with untrained interpreters or even the ethical risks of using friends, family members, or staff members to aid in interpreting. School counselors could join with other counselors across the district in this effort. They can educate administrators regarding the need, emphasizing the potential risks or liability issues in using untrained individuals as interpreters, particularly with regard to confidentiality issues and crisis situations (e.g., child abuse, severe illnesses, and suicidal ideation of students).

School counselors could also build and support a case for professional interpreter services through surveying colleagues in the district to demonstrate specific needs. Compelling numbers or facts gleaned from a survey, such as the total number of times per day an interpreter is needed across the district, could be presented to administrators. Reporting the number of non-English speaking parent-student meetings and the nature of the meetings (e.g., crisis situations, academic issues) could also bolster advocacy efforts. Conversely, the survey could be designed to increase school counselor awareness and support of the issue, as many counselors in this study indicated that they themselves had not received training regarding the topic.

In addition to educating administrators and fellow school counselors about the need for professionally trained interpreters, counselors must also propose funding ideas, as a lack of funding was identified by participants in this study as a major

challenge in securing interpreter assistance. Funding might come from grants or out of monies allocated to hiring staff or supporting ELL students. School counselors could identify districts that currently provide such funding, to determine best practices not only in securing monies but also in hiring, training, and supervising interpreters. Such information could be presented as a model to be emulated.

Several findings provided direction regarding interpreter training. For instance, findings from this study indicated a need to prepare interpreters for assisting with both academic and mental health issues. Counselors also cited collaborative challenges related to the interpreter assuming control of sessions or interpreter lack of basic skills for counseling settings. Hence, those aspects should be addressed during interpreter training, from defining the school culture, policies, and procedure, to identifying basic counseling skills and the differing roles of the counselor and interpreter. Training could be provided by the district coordinator or by a counselor within that district who felt qualified. Such a person could also provide ongoing supervision, to reemphasize skills, workplace culture, and expectations. Ideally, that person would be released from counseling duties for a certain number of hours in order to undertake such a task.

School counselors in this study also noted that some interpreters were unable to manage emotional session content. To address this problem, school counselors could provide pre-and-post-session debriefing, which can be beneficial for many reasons. Counselors could use pre-session meetings to review the goal of the session, practice topics or terminology that may be new or difficult for the interpreter, and to check in with his or her comfort level regarding the presenting issue. Pre-session meetings are also a good place to review the tenets of confidentiality (Goh et al., 2004).

Post session debriefing allows counselors and interpreters to examine the quality of their collaborative work, including discussions of any challenges that arose related to interpretation. Such meetings also give counselors time to elicit interpreter feedback regarding cultural nuances related to the case that the counselor may have missed, whereby the interpreter can add any cultural expertise she or he may possess. Most importantly, debriefing sessions can be used by the counselor to ascertain any distress experienced by the interpreter in relation to difficult session content (Raval, 2005).

Finally, an interesting finding of the study was the fact that, in spite of the many challenges noted by counselors in relation to work with interpreters, nearly half (49%) of the participants in this study cited satisfaction with their current interpretive services. We posit that the perception of satisfaction, in spite of the many challenges noted, may reflect a lack of knowledge regarding best practices (e.g., the importance of using trained interpreters and supervision and training of language professionals to work in school counseling settings). School counselors may be unaware that trained interpreters are less likely to commit the errors noted in this study (e.g., taking over sessions, overreacting to emotional content, etc.).

Indeed, when informed regarding effective interpretive collaborative practices, school counselors may realize additional mistakes untrained interpreters are making. For instance, subtle but meaningful mistakes made by untrained interpreters may include waiting too long before interpreting counselor commentary (increasing the likelihood of misinterpretation), demanding regular counselor and client eye contact (therefore lessening the working alliance formed between client and counselor), and seating themselves inappropriately in the counseling session (e.g., making themselves

part of the circle, as opposed to removing themselves slightly; Farooq & Fear, 2003; Stansfield, 1980).

Training for school counselors regarding effective collaboration with interpreters would ideally have been offered during their master-level programs. However, only 9 participants reported receiving such training during their education. Hence, post-master's training should be sought by school counselors who lack exposure to the topic. Options include contracting a community expert to be brought in to the district, potentially identified through community mental health agencies. Trainings may also be offered at community mental health centers. In addition, counselors can increase their knowledge and understanding of the collaborative process through reading the written literature (e.g., Paone & Malott, 2008; Farooq & Fear, 2003; Lopez, 2002; Vasquez & Javier, 1991).

In considering the above implications, suggestions may not be generalizable to those states not included, such as Florida and California. In spite of the low response rate and lack of inclusion of two states with larger ELL populations, outcomes do, however, provide guidance in basic interpreter challenges (including the need for counselor advocacy) and are strengthened through their corroboration with prior literature indicating similar interpreter challenges experienced in community mental health settings (Acevedo et al., 2003; Amodeo et al., 1997; Barik, 1994; Baxter & Cheng, 1996; Darling, 2004; Farooq & Fear, 2003; Kaufert & Koolage, 1984; Langdon & Cheng, 2002; Lopez, 2002; Vasquez & Javier, 1991).

In addition, although California has one of the largest ELL populations in the nation, with 56 different languages spoken by students, a document by the California

State Department of Education addressing language interpreter services in the California schools (2006; <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/qualityindicators.pdf>) recognized that, “California has no comprehensive written policy or standard procedure for recruiting, assessing, utilizing, and compensating qualified translators and interpreters in kindergarten through grade twelve educational settings” (p.1). The document goes on to indicate that practices regarding interpreter services for schools in the state are “inconsistent” and, in some cases, “inadequate.” It is telling to note that no such document could be found by Florida’s Department of Education, which had its focus, instead, on deaf interpreter standards and services. Hence, California and Florida may indeed experience similar challenges as reported by other schools in the nation, in this present study.

### **Suggestions for Counselor Educators**

Experts in cross-cultural counseling have noted the importance of counselor training regarding effective work with interpreters (Sue & Sue, 2008). However, the majority of study participants indicated an absence of training while in their master-level programs. It is uncertain why their counselor programs lacked such training. It may be due to the large number of topics to be covered in counseling courses, resulting in only briefly touching upon the topic or in omitting it entirely. Instructors also may chose to omit the topic due to a personal lack knowledge, experience, or understanding of interpreter-counselor collaborative practices. In the latter case, instructors themselves may need to seek additional training themselves to be able to address the topic in the classroom.

Regarding educational practices, we recommend that counselor educators infuse the topic across their master-level curriculum. Although space in this article is too limited to describe specific training recommendations, essential content should delineate appropriate interpreter services, the challenges in collaborative work with interpreters, effective practices before, during, and after sessions with interpreters, and ways to intervene in problem situations (for an extensive review of suggestions, see Paone & Malott, 2008). Counselor educators should also encourage school counselors to assume an advocacy role for professional interpretive services and provide students literature and facts to support the endeavor.

### **Recommendations for Research**

There is a continued need to determine best practices for school counselors working with interpreters across a greater range of states. For instance, research could assess which school districts are providing professional language assistance in the most effective manner possible, how those districts secure funding, and how they train and supervise interpreters and school counselors. Effective working models could be used as an advocacy tool for counselors in other districts. Also, a more intensive study of current practices is suggested, examining the impact of the use of untrained interpreters upon counseling outcomes in school settings. What are the differences in schools that use professional interpreters versus those that do not? What are potential issues, such as client harm or liability issues, that have been experienced in past practices with untrained interpreters (or where interpreter services have been completely unavailable)?

Finally, researchers assessing interpretive services for counselors in community settings have found counselor resistance to, or discomfort with, work with interpreters (Kline et al., 1980; Raval, 1996). School counselor resistance to or lack of understanding of the need to use professional interpreters should also be assessed to determine if one of the barriers to obtaining professional language services in school settings is the school counselor him or herself.

### **Conclusions**

Findings from this study lend an initial understanding of interpretive practices in schools across the nation. A need for interpreter services in community mental health settings has long been recognized; however, there has been limited commentary on the absence of those same services in the nation's rapidly diversifying school systems. Outcomes from this study lend support for increasing school counselor advocacy for professional interpreter services in the schools. For young persons and their families to receive social, emotional, and academic support from school counselors, the call for professional language assistance in school settings must be heard and honored.

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