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Promoting Social Justice With Wisdom and Data

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Closing the academic achievement gap has become the central topic in the professional school counseling discourse and has redefined the role of school counselors as advocates for social justice. Students of color, second language learners, and low-income students do not perform as well as middle and upper socioeconomic and White students academically or on standardized high-stakes tests. The traditional role of the school counselor may have inadvertently contributed to maintaining the status quo of inequities related to sustaining schools where race and class are tied to students' successful academic performance or school failure. Part of this pernicious problem stems from the school counselors' traditional service orientation, where they have not been trained to use data systemically in promoting access, equity, and rigorous educational opportunities for underserved, underrepresented, and underperforming students (Cox & Lee, 2007; Erford, 2007; Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, & Yoon, 2007; House & Martin, 1998; Jackson, Holt, & Nelson, 2005; Stone, 2003). The transformed role for school counselors defines an ethical obligation to use data to measure the effectiveness of their actions, programs, or interventions (Dimmitt, Carey, & Hatch, 2007).

In their new role, school counselors are now defining themselves as social justice advocates capable of transforming the educational and social disparities youth face. School counselors are now determining what they can do to define and take specific actions to construct developmentally appropriate and culturally competent schools where all students are invited to live up to their full academic, career, and personal/social potentials (Cox & Lee, 2007; Erford, 2007; Dimmitt et al., 2007; Jackson et al., 2005).

Addressing the academic achievement gaps between lower and higher socioeconomic classes, and Euro-American students and students of color is the principle focus in efforts to transform school counseling (Erford, 2007; Education Trust, 2000; Goh et al., 2007; Hatch, Holland, & Meyers, 2003; House & Martin, 1998; Stone & Dahir, 2006). Addressing the achievement gap is a systemic effort that includes incorporating insights from diverse professional disciplines that assert that merely focusing on individual change protects and maintains the status quo and fails to promote the well-being of all students (Potts, 2003; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006). Real change begins by looking at where the school counseling profession is implicated in maintaining problems; school counselors have started to wrestle with their role in fostering inequities inherent in the status quo. Genuine efforts are taking place to transform the school counselor's role by advocating for programs grounded in developmental and cultural competence, equity, social justice, and using data to promote the well-being of all students (ASCA, 2005; Bemak & Chung, 2005; Dimmitt et al., 2007; Erford, 2007; Galassi & Akos, 2007; Jackson et al., 2005; Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001; Schiele, 2000; Simcox, Nuijens, & Lee, 2006; Stone & Dahir, 2006).

Efforts to transform school counseling programs and to promote educational success can be tied to metaphors people use to make sense of their world and discussions that tie wisdom to educational practices (Craft, Gardner, & Claxton, 2008; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). School counselors can tap the practical wisdom of students' cultural experience, cultivate students' developmental competence, and use data that illustrates how student needs are met (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). This article offers a perspective on how practical wisdom can guide professional school counselors in using data and taking actions directed to address educational gaps found in populations of underserved, underrepresented, and underperforming students. As referred to in the article, practical wisdom is connected to diverse traditional cultural ways of using metaphors and talking about education for the head, heart, and hands. Practical wisdom is learned by doing and takes into account "motivational and contextual factors that are likely to engender or thwart wise thoughts and actions" (Craft et al., 2008, p. 4). Practical wisdom includes the current push for school counselors to use data to promote student knowledge, attitudes, and skills, as well as the understanding using data is a craft skill that takes experience (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2005; Campbell & Dahir, 1997). By linking the traditional metaphor of head, heart, and hands to knowledge, attitude, and skills, school counselors will be able to connect to multicultural practical wisdom in new ways.

As operationalized in this article, practical wisdom is tied to traditional forms of holistic education that use head, hands, and heart learning metaphors (Carver & Enfield, 2006; Letseka, 2004; Schiele, 2000; Sharra, 2006; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). These simple head, heart and hand metaphors create greater flexibility in speaking to diverse groups about knowledge, attitudes, and skills students need to be successful. For instance, Benard (2004) asserts that promoting resilience requires balancing the external protective factors of care and support, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation. Benard's constructs are easily connected to traditional educational metaphors; care and support links with the heart or attitude, high academic expectations connects with the head or knowledge, and opportunities for meaningful participation attaches to the hands or skills. For school counselors, the head, hands, and heart

metaphors become tools for promoting programs that balance care and support, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation for all students. In a study of 104,554 students using data from the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), Hanson, Austin, and Lee-Bayha (2004) concluded, “Schools providing caring, supportive, and challenging environments have great potential to help students improve academic performance” (p. 12).

Practical wisdom is a cultural construct and can be connected to multicultural counseling and to promoting greater effectiveness in practice, training, and empathy (Galassi & Akos, 2007; Hanna, Bemak, & Chung, 1999; Potts, 2003), as well as to traditional metaphors and culturally appropriate forms of teaching (Carver & Enfield, 2006; Craft et al., 2008; Letseka, 2004; Potts, 2003; Sharra, 2006). This article uses metaphors seeped in practical wisdom that can be linked to practitioner efforts to promote social justice in a matter that systematically reduces the academic achievement gap. The remainder of the article explores the use of practical wisdom and metaphors in diverse cultural contexts, followed by a discussion of a systematic approach to using data to reduce the achievement gap that grows out from the core metaphors. The article concludes with suggestions for school counselors to tap their culture, community, and wisdom to ensure that all students are afforded opportunities to live up to their potential by being immersed in programs that cultivate knowledge, attitude, and skills that are aligned with head, heart, and hands.

Tapping Wisdom in Diverse Cultural and Community Contexts

The wisdom construct has been tied to the importance of understanding the qualities of effective counselors in multicultural contexts (Hanna, Bemak & Chung, 1999). Practical wisdom has been linked to craft knowledge that is cultivated via mentorship and experience that encourages “empathic, perceptive, flexible, and improvisational human interaction” (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010, p. 284). Wise multicultural counselors are mindful that their effectiveness is related to being culturally empathic, compassionate, self-aware, tolerant, accepting, and essentially, dialectical thinkers who can cut to the core of issues related to social justice. Wise multicultural school counselors recognize that they and their counselees exist ecologically in multiple contexts at any given moment, and that the primary task is to help all students tap their learning power within supportive learning communities. Multiple ecological variables may pull both the students and the school counselors in numerous directions. For instance, some African-American students may live in a community plagued by substance abuse and violence, yet be unaware of a larger history of abuse perpetrated against the African-American community (Miller & Garran, 2008; Potts, 2003; Schiele, 2000). The school may then label students as “at risk” and put them into school-based prevention programs that target individual behaviors, attitudes, and/or personal skills, while maintaining a depoliticized status quo that ignores the sociopolitical forces that shape the students’ lives (Potts, 2003). In fact, schools can become colonizing forces that prompt forms of rebellion rather than communities that foster personal and social liberation (Potts, 2003). School counselors concerned with social justice are thus challenged to tap individual and practical wisdom while constructing pathways to well-being and liberation (Benard, 2004; Ivey, 1995; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006).

Such a stance is avoided by some because it takes awareness and courage for school counselors to take up roles as participatory leaders who advocate for social justice and direct action (Arredondo & Perez, 2003; Bemak & Chung, 2005; Galassi & Akos, 2007; Helms, 2003; Lewis & Borunda, 2006; Schiele, 2000).

Cultivating such a stance begins with an understanding that practical wisdom is not located in one culture or one way of seeing, speaking, or doing but is learned by moving wisdom beyond European-American traditions into learning from Buddhist, Native American, African American, and other ways of being (Craft et al., 2008; Hanna et al., 1999). While moving beyond a singular focus on European-American traditions, it is crucial to draw out what is best in all traditions and unique in others. For instance, school counselors working with African-American youth might explore indigenous African psychology, and develop an understanding of *uMunthu*, a Malawian concept of being human and that valuing other people is essential to one's own identity, wherein "You are, therefore I am." That is, *uMunthu* (or in South African, *ubuntu*) embeds the individual in the communal and binds the individual to what happens to the whole community; the group influences the individual and the individual affects the whole group. Traditional *uMunthu* education is holistic, and directed toward using the head, heart, and hands metaphors in teaching. In education for the head, youth are taught knowledge about history of the community; for the heart, youth are guided in character development; for the hands, youth are taught technical skills, such as weaving baskets. Potts (2003) asserts that African history and its wisdom teachings provide more resources for young African-American youth than psychoeducational prevention interventions focused on individual behaviors and decision-making skills.

As important as it is for diverse communities to draw upon wisdom embraced by the community, wisdom or folk psychology is not contained or limited to a singular community or moment in history (Bruner, 1990). Wisdom found in the Native-American community is different from wisdom in the African-American or European-American communities. Wisdom expressed hundreds of years ago might have to be adjusted to new historical conditions and defining common ground with diverse groups. For instance, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) used the same head, heart, and hands metaphors described above in talking about Swiss education. In a different cultural and historical context, Pestalozzi asserted that "life is education" and that there must be "equilibrium and harmony of our powers"; those powers being the head, heart, and hands (Robinson, 1977). Pestalozzi was concerned with the intellectual, moral, and physical education of children. Traditional wisdom metaphors using the head, heart, and hands found in *uMunthu* and Pestalozzi's pedagogy can be reframed for today. Darling-Hammond's (1998) concern with children's knowledge, attitudes, and skills can be easily connected to the head, heart, and hands metaphors. Pestalozzi sought the "equilibrium and harmony of our powers" because too much emphasis on one, such as the head, took from the other two. Current educators have the same concerns that will be explored later in the article.

Supporting the potential for traditional *uMunthu* head, heart, and hands metaphor's capacity to foster African-American identity, emphasis on head, heart, and hands education is fostered in mainstream schools in other forms, as well. For instance, head, heart, and hands metaphors are found in 4-H Youth Development Programs and have connections to John Dewey's philosophy of education (Carver & Enfield, 2006). The first emblem for the organization was a three leaf clover, signifying the head, heart,

and hands; the fourth leaf was added later, first to extol “hustle” and then changed to represent “health” (Rud, 2006). In 4-H Youth Development Programs, education for the head, heart, hands, and health is experiential and requires community involvement. This helps youth connect their knowledge, attitude, and skills to actions supporting full lives in a democratic society.

Though emerging from different cultures, both traditional *uMunthu* education and 4-H provide opportunities for children to develop their potential within supportive communities. The goal is not either-or but both-and, and more. The notion enables school counselors to use such language to connect with cultural, community, and historical metaphors and sources of wisdom. The metaphors enable school counselors to take action directed to help all youth develop balance of their head, heart, and hands in their own unique way.

Connecting Practical Wisdom to Data and the Achievement Gap

Boosting academic achievement is a positive national priority directed toward helping all students live up to their greatest potential. However, if too much emphasis is placed on head, academics, or high expectations, it may create imbalance and reduce time set aside for heart and hands education (Benard, 2004). Further, if inadequate emphasis is placed on heart and hands, it could result in barriers to academic achievement. It is not an either-or; rather, all three must be balanced to improve behavior change and academic achievement. School counselors are challenged to work with other stakeholders to advocate for learning communities that balance head (knowledge/high expectations), heart (attitudes/care and support), and hands (skills/opportunities for meaningful participation) education. By creating, advocating for, and evaluating developmentally supportive and empowering learning environments, guidance curriculum, prevention and intervention activities, etc., school counselors can contribute to nurturing students’ healthy development and life success. To accomplish this goal, school counselors need tools, data, and courage to advocate for a wise balance where cultural stories and local data are integrated in order to draw upon the strength of culture and the data necessary to advocate for measured change. For example, Hatch’s (2005) Conceptual Design and ASK (Attitude, Skills, and Knowledge s) technique provide counselors with tools aligned with the practical wisdom of the head, heart, and hands that turn holistic balance into advocacy for creating schools that serve as viable learning communities for all students.

Evolving From the ASCA National Model

The ASCA National Model describes three types of data: standards and competency data, achievement related data, and achievement data. *Standards and competency* data are measured by assessing if students have learned the knowledge, attitudes, and skills the standards recommend. *Achievement related* data are the types of information that research tells us contribute to achievement (such as attendance rates, drug and alcohol use, school safety, enrollment in rigorous course, etc.). *Achievement data* are the big ticket items – those that are found on-line in the achievement database (e.g., graduation rates, course completion rates, SAT/AP scores, state wide testing passage rates, etc.; ASCA, 2005; Dimmitt et al., 2007).

The ASCA National Model also describes three ways to collect evaluation data: process, perception, and results data. *Process* data provide evidence that an event occurred and accounts for who received services, activities, or lessons, when the services were delivered and for how long. Process data answer the question: “What did the counselors do and for whom did the counselors do it?” *Perception* data tell what students think (attitude or belief), know (knowledge), or can demonstrate (skill) as a result of a lesson or activity. *Results* data provide evidence that the activity or intervention either has or has not positively influenced the students’ ability to utilize knowledge, attitudes, and skills to change their behavior (ASCA, 2005). Attitude is easily related to heart, knowledge to head, and skills to hands.

The Conceptual Design (Hatch, 2005; Dimmitt et al., 2007; see Figure 1) provides a practical model school counselors can use to wisely guide their use of data by laying out visually the relationship between the types of data (standards and competency, achievement-related, and achievement), and the ways we evaluate data (process, perception, and results). Figure 1 reads left to right and represents an action framework connecting what counselors do (process data) to the attainment of specific student competencies (measured with perception data), and behavior change, leading to an improvement in results (achievement related data and subsequently in student achievement data). For example, when a school counselor teaches a guidance lesson on conflict resolution in the 7th grade, counselors might assess if students acquire 1) the *attitude* that they believe it is important to solve problems peacefully, 2) the *skill* of role playing steps to conflict resolution, and 3) the *knowledge* of where and when to seek help when needed to avoid a conflict. In this scenario, the goal of the lesson would be to support the reduction of discipline referrals and suspensions leading to improved school climate (achievement related data), which in turns supports improved student academic performance (achievement).

The conceptual diagram also reads right to left. When students (or groups of students) are not performing to expectation on achievement data elements, it would be appropriate to inquire what achievement-related data elements are lacking (attendance, behaviors, course enrollment, homework completion, etc.). Once identified, the next inquiry (moving left in the diagram) would be to look at the perception data to discover what is needed: Knowledge (Head)? Attitude (Heart)? Skills (Hands)? Once determined, moving left again to the process data, an intervention could be designed to address the specific need. When students struggle academically, they are routinely assigned remedial courses or tutoring, when in fact the barrier may be motivation or anxiety. Or conversely, perhaps students are placed in a counseling group to improve motivation when the issue may be that they need tutoring. Furthermore, perhaps the students do not need tutoring or counseling for motivation, rather they have irregular attendance, are afraid of math, or do not feel safe at, or connected to, school. All too often, the intervention is decided for students before the specific barrier is identified. Struggling students, individuals who come to school counselors from many diverse backgrounds and experiences, are often provided interventions without taking time to consider the particular needs emerging from students’ unique world. By using the conceptual diagram, school counselors can cultivate practical wisdom in enacting systemic interventions that integrate the head, heart, and hands and target students’ needs.

Telling a Story with ASK

Conceptually, the importance of using data has been established but the practice of using data lags behind. The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) calls for school counselors to measure perception data when teaching a lesson. The ASCA National Standards also state “students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills that lead to effective learning in school and across the lifespan” (Campbell & Dahir, 1997, p. 17). Yet, practitioners need more tools regarding how to measure knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

ASK is a simple tool for helping school counselors assess school counseling lessons or activities (Hatch, 2005; Dimmitt et al., 2007). Using the acronym ASK (Attitude, Skills, and Knowledge), rearranged from the ASCA National Standards version of knowledge, attitudes, and skills, reminds school counselors to ASK or measure what students learn after they participate in lessons and/or activities conducted as part of the school counseling program. ASK perception data is used to determine whether (a) students’ *attitude* or beliefs have changed or shifted, (b) students can demonstrate a *skill*, or (c) students have increased their *knowledge* as a result of the activity or intervention. ASK assumes that the deepest learning integrates attitude, knowledge, and skills. If only one of the three is addressed or measured, students will be less likely to demonstrate the learning behaviors being sought. In terms of pedagogy and practice, ASK holistically integrates the practical wisdom of heart (attitude), hands (skill), and head (knowledge).

The cultivation of this wisdom is useful but school counselors have an obligation to create a research base showing what works (and does not work) in practice. Since there is a lack of research about ASK, practitioners are encouraged to use a modified case study approach to explore what can work to improve school counseling practice. For example, Silva’s (2005) ASK intervention study provides an example of practitioner efforts to use data to change the results of a school counseling program. Silva’s professional story illustrates how ASK was used to integrate the wisdom of heart, hands, and head to promote social justice in a multicultural school. In reviewing the data for the percentage of students meeting the state college preparation requirements, Silva (2005) recognized an achievement gap between Filipino, European-American, Latino, and African-American students in her school district. Forty-three percent of Filipino females compared with 17% of Latinos, 22% of European-Americans, and seven percent of African-American students met the college prep requirements upon graduation. Further, Filipino females met the requirements at a much higher rate (53%) than Filipino males (30%). Silva used this data as leverage to convince staff that school counselors needed to increase the number of guidance lessons in the classroom and to measure results of the guidance lessons.

In using ASK to guide her assessment of the impact her series of guidance lessons had upon students, Silva (2005) found that on the pretest, most of the students (64%) *knew* the subject requirements (math for instance) and 74% *knew* that in order to go to college they must complete the college prep requirements, yet that only 30% of the students *believed* taking college prep courses was important. As a result, the school counselor revised the guidance lessons to specifically address the *belief* concern. Silva broke the students into cultural and gender groupings and included activities designed to address the cultural beliefs students had about attending college and the barriers that

students perceived to exist for them institutionally, thereby addressing the attitude/heart component regarding completing college preparation courses and, for these students, addressing the heart was the pathway into helping them overcome barriers.

Silva's (2005) results showed that after the guidance lessons, 80% of the students *knew* the subject requirement, 92% *knew* that in order to go to college they must complete the college prep requirements, and that 82% of the students *believed* taking college prep courses was important. Silva then collected data on how many students selected to enroll in college prep courses. As a school counselor, Silva's goal was to increase the number of students who elected to take more rigorous coursework, with the intention to increase the percentage of students graduating college eligible. Of the 108 students in this counselor's caseload, 106 enrolled in college prep courses and of those, 56 enrolled in AP/Honors. Much additional support (head, hands, and heart) would be required for these students risking to take more rigorous courses, but the importance of the work is the school counselor's decision to examine the data, address the gaps, speak to the heart, and encourage the students to move towards rigor with the goal of improving the percent who graduate college eligible. Silva's example serves as one practitioner's story about using ASK to develop a program and approaches to enable all students to integrate their heads, hands, and hearts. A description of Silva's intervention is available on the Center for Excellence in School Counseling and Leadership (CESCaL) web site (<http://www.cescal.org>). Along with Silva's example, a variety of PowerPoint samples (referred to as Flashlight PowerPoints) illustrate how other practitioners took action to promote social justice in alignment with the ASCA National Model. In other words, practitioners working within the profession have a platform to share the results and practical wisdom of school counselor activities and interventions that touch students' head, heart, and hands. Such efforts to advocate for change include practitioner action research (Rowell, 2005, 2006), as well as other platforms focused on helping school counselors see their work as an ever-evolving process seeking to expand social justice in schools.

Conclusion

Practical wisdom was described as a multifaceted construct that informs school counseling's social justice mandate. Such wisdom draws upon multicultural and professional metaphors in order to balance the head, hands, and heart learning and to promote programs that balance care and support, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation for all students. This article provided three pathways for school counselors when intervening with students who face significant achievement gaps. First, as school counselors are preparing themselves as professionals concerned with social justice, they are encouraged to integrate the heads, hands, and hearts of all students. Second, school counselors and other educators are encouraged to look carefully at the data found in their schools to determine the best actions regarding how to address all students' learning needs, particularly those traditionally underserved, underrepresented, and underperforming. The Conceptual Design and ASK technique presented in this article offers a pathway for school counselors to promote social justice by assessing the impact of what all students receive from the school counseling program. In addition to using data to guide their practice, practitioners are encouraged to share the results of their

work with other practitioners. School counselors are challenged to broaden and deepen their understanding of what works to help all students, particularly those students who do not see the head, heart, and hands connection between their culture and what they see being taught to them in school. Third, school counselors who construct programs grounded in social justice are encouraged to cultivate their own cultural wisdom and to seek out the multicultural wisdom found in the community where they practice. As school counselors become more competent and confident, they will emerge as advocates in the school systems and communities they serve. Ideally, no culture's wisdom will be left behind.

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Figure 1. Conceptual diagram

