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School Counselors' Self-Efficacy and Training Needs When Working With The K–12 Latino Student Population

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Abstract

According to the U.S. Department of Education, Latinos represent the second largest racial/ethnic group enrolled in public K–12 schools (25%). Yet, little is known about how school counselors see their ability to work with Latino students. Thus, we asked school counselors to tell us how they view their ability to work with Latino students on 16 different tasks. Using these same tasks, we asked them about their inservice needs. The top task in terms of ability was: conceptualize Latino students' cultures as different rather than deficient. The top three training needs were: (a) use functional Spanish to work more effectively with the Latino population, (b) understand how the students' Latino cultural heritage impacts their education values, and (c) interpret Latino students' nonverbal body language and its significance in counseling. The school counselors also identified the training modalities they would be willing to use: "anytime Web" (71%), "in person" (70%), and "live Web" (50%).

Keywords: school counseling training, self-efficacy, multicultural awareness, Latino, Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test

Identifying the training needs of school counselors goes all the way back to Frank Parsons' (1909) foundational work on the field. Gilbert Wrenn's (1962) mid-century classic on school counseling also highlighted training needs. Each of these seminal texts pointed to changing economic and social conditions as driving the need to reconsider training needs. In the present time, shifting demographic trends in the K–12 system call for a new reconsideration of training needs; in particular, school counselor training needs in regard to Latino students.

There exists a large achievement gap for Latino youth in the American K–12 system. The existence of this gap has been extensively documented (Dickson, Zamora, Gonzalez, Chun, & Callaghan, 2011; Reed, 2015). Gándara and Contreras (2009) attributed low academic performance rates to the lack of cultural understanding, sensitivity, and academic support of the Latino student population in the K–12 school system. They indicated that school personnel's lack of professional multicultural training when working with the Latino student population affects the Latino student population's ability to succeed in school. As both Parsons and Wrenn noted in their respective times, a gap exists between counselor knowledge and skills and the demands of the present educational environment.

The research literature on topics relevant to a study on this research gap fall into four areas. These four areas are: (a) the nature of multicultural training needs and of multicultural counseling self-efficacy, (b) counselor ethical imperatives and addressing training needs, (c) research on school counselors' efficacy and training needs in working with the Latino student population, and (d) educational barriers for Latino students that occur outside of the classroom. After these four areas are addressed, the research questions for this study will be specified.

Conducting training needs assessment with school counselors has a long history. Kirk (1956) reported on improving school counselor practice through needs assessment in the middle part of the 20th century. Needs assessment can be defined as a formal process that “involves comparing performance with stated intended competencies—by self assessment, peer assessment, or objective testing—and planning education accordingly” (Grant, 2002, p. 157). Bandura's influential theory of self-efficacy has been applied to counselor professional behavior (Bandura, 1977; Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005). Bandura defines self-efficacy as the belief that one can perform the behavior required to attain a certain outcome (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy in counselors has been linked to a large number of important professional practices and attitudes (Dillon et al., 2015).

According to the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model (2012), school counselors are well positioned to lead efforts to lessen the barriers that this population faces in school. Also, they are obligated to do so as determined by the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2010), which indicate that school counselors should work as advocates and leaders on behalf of students in the school. This role presents opportunities for school counselors to advocate for the Latino students by educating school personnel about Latino culture (Dickson et al., 2011; Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, & Yoon, 2007; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Indelicato, 2006).

There exists little research on school counselors' efficacy and training needs in working with the Latino student population. Constantine and Yeh (2001) stated the possibility that school counselors may be providing services to the minority population

that is beyond their level of expertise. Bandura (2006) indicated that in order to identify patterns of strengths and limitations in a specific skill, researchers should explore the professionals' perceived self-efficacy levels. He defined perceived self-efficacy as a "judgment of capability." This type of self-evaluation can help school counselors identify and better understand their strengths and limitations in the area of working with the Latino population.

Educational barriers for Latino students also occur outside of the classroom. In particular, lack of family-school involvement (Smith-Adcock et al., 2006). Smith-Adcock et al. (2006) indicated that Latino students often hesitate to seek out assistance because they find it difficult to rely on relationships for help or support beyond their family. Yet school-family engagements run up against the same barriers of language and culture mentioned earlier (Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008; Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero, 2010). In particular, the lack of English language ability can limit Latino parents' school involvement if they do not have the necessary support from the school to minimize this barrier (Ryan et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). Research also indicates that the lack of parenting involvement in the Latino population could be attributed to the lack of knowledge this population has of the school system and educators' expectations of parents (Kuperminc et al., 2008). The rapid growth of the Latino population in schools requires school personnel to be culturally competent, especially school counselors.

Given the aforementioned rationale and literature, a study was designed to examine school counselors' perceived self-efficacy and training needs when working with the Latino student population. This study was guided by four research questions. The first was: For school counselors, what are the top three ranked training needs in reference to working with Latino students? The second was: In reference to counseling Latino students, in what five skill areas do school counselors report the most confidence? The third was: In reference to counseling Latino students, what is the rank order of acceptable training delivery modalities? The fourth was: In reference to counseling Latinos students, do school counselors rank confidence versus training needs differently?

Method

Design

This study employed a cross-sectional observational design (Jepsen, Johnsen, Gillman, & Sørensen, 2004). Participants were surveyed following Dillman's Tailored Design Method (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). For reasons that will be noted later, only late respondents ($n = 107$) were used for the inferential statistics involved in answering research question #4. As such, a *post hoc* power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). The power analysis was for Means: Wilcoxon signed-rank test (matched pairs). The effect size was determined from group parameters. The following input parameters were employed: (a) number of tails = 2; (b) $d_z = 0.346$; (c) $\alpha = 0.05$; and (d) sample size = 107. The G*Power 3.1 output included an actual power of 0.93.

Participants

Participants were active school counselors from a state located in the Pacific Northwest. Surveys were e-mailed to all school counselors working in the public schools of that state ($n = 1,701$). The first author constructed the list of potential participants using data provided by educational service districts and local school districts. Fifty e-mails were inaccurate and were bounced; thus, the final total was 1,661. The number of participants returning a survey was 293. Of that number, a total of 238 provided usable surveys. Thus, the return rate was 14%. This population included school counselors from all three levels: elementary (30%), middle school/junior high (29%), and high school (41%). The participants were predominantly female (78%). School counselors with 10 or fewer years of professional experience comprised 53% of participants. The mean score of school counselors' professional experience was 5.6 with a median of 5, mode of 11 and standard deviation of 3.48. School counselors of color represented 17% of the sample (Latino = 9%, Asian American = 2%, African American = 3%). Only 13% of the participants reported speaking Spanish.

Given the low return rate, an early/late responder analysis was completed. This method defines late responders as those who respond to the last survey prompts. Respondents were divided into early or late following Lindner, Murphy, and Briers's (2001) Method #1. In this case, there were 131 early responders (first two survey prompts) and 107 late responders (last two survey prompts). The reason for this division is that late-responders can serve as a proxy for non-responders (Miller & Smith, 1983; Oppenheim, 1966; Pace, 1939; Welch & Barlau, 2012). In terms of self-efficacy rankings, there was no difference between early and late responders (Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, $Z = -1.13$, $p > .05$). However, in terms of training needs, there was a difference in the ranking of the items between early and late responders (Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, $Z = -3.44$, $p < .05$). As such, for the analyses conducted for research questions #1, #2 and #4, the results from only the late responders were used.

Measures

Demographics survey. The demographic information section included the following questions about participants: age, gender, race, years of working experience as a school counselor, estimate in percentage of Latino students in their district, work setting (elementary, middle school, junior high, high school), and Spanish fluency.

Self-efficacy and in-service training needs survey. This assessment tool was designed to examine the self-efficacy and perceived needs of school counselors working with the minority Latino population. This measure adapted and augmented the 75-item counselor training needs assessment tool developed by Carey and Reinat (1990). The items for the revised and augmented instrument can be found in Table 1. The following items were Latino-specific revisions from Carey and Reinat: 7, 9, 20, 21, 23, 24, 27, 35, and 50. The rest of the items were created by the first author to represent the universe of skills and knowledge needed by school counselors to be effective with Latino students. These items were drawn from the following sources: (a) professional literature on Latino student population academic failure, (b) the ASCA National Model, and (c) the ASCA Ethical Standards. The items covered six areas: (a) career counseling; (b) school behavior issues; (c) cultural awareness and sensitivity; (d) community outreach and advocacy; (e) evaluation, assessment, and interpretation; and (f) professional competence. The

assessment tool was screened and revised by four certified school counselor professionals and four school counselor educators. They provided feedback, which was then utilized to add, drop, or edit items to create the final questionnaire.

Table 1

Ranks and Raw Counts of Training Needs and Self Efficacy

Item Text (Question #)	Training Needs Rank (count)*	Self Efficacy Rank (count)*
Use functional Spanish to work more effectively with the Latino population. (#16)	1 (38)	11 (9)
Understand how the students' Latino cultural heritage impacts their education values. (#3)	2 (15)	13 (8)
Interpret Latino students' nonverbal body language and its significance in counseling. (#15)	3 (13)	9 (10)
Develop college, vocational, and career readiness in Latino students. (#2)	4 (12)	15 (7)
Understand how the students' Latino cultural heritage impacts their educational goals. (#4)	4 (12)	9 (10)
Connect with community organizations that support Latino students' development. (#8)	4 (12)	16 (2)
Use counseling techniques that are culturally appropriate when working with Latino students. (#11)	4 (12)	3 (15)
Include Latino students' cultures in conceptualizing Latino students' problems and needs. (#12)	8 (11)	7 (11)
Understand how standardized testing and assessment instruments have critical limits when applied to Latino students. (#13)	8 (11)	6 (12)
Involve my school administration and staff effectively in addressing and supporting the educational needs of Latino students. (#14)	8 (11)	4 (14)
Support Latino parent(s) in the college admission process. (#1)	11 (10)	13 (8)
Understand the impact of discrimination and racism on Latino student development. (#7)	11 (10)	4 (14)
Represent Latino students' needs effectively to school and community leaders. (#9)	11 (10)	11 (9)
Incorporate positive role models for Latino students in school activities. (#10)	11 (10)	7 (11)
Understand how my own cultural values, stereotypes and biases may influence my work with Latino students. (#5)	15 (8)	2 (17)
Conceptualize Latino students' cultures as different rather than deficient. (#6)	16 (7)	1 (40)

* Raw number of count of late responding participants answering 100 with their radio button selection

Items in both the training needs and self-efficacy sections were rated on a 0- to 100-point Likert-type scale. In terms of training needs, each item was rated on a 10-unit interval to identify the professional perceived in-service need. The three rating anchors were: 0 = no need, 50 = moderate need, and 100 = high need. In reference to self-efficacy, the same items were rated on self-efficacy (perceived confidence) using 10-unit intervals with three anchors. These anchors were: 0 = cannot do at all, 50 = moderately can do, and 100 = highly certain can do. This self-efficacy rating scheme closely follow the self-efficacy scale contraction detailed in Bandura (2006).

In-service delivery modality survey. This survey consisted of one item. This item asked participants to select all of the delivery modalities which they would be willing to use. The options were: (a) in person, (b) live Web, (c) anytime Web, and (d) other.

Procedures

Survey process. The steps of the Tailored Design Method (Dillman et al., 2009) were executed. These steps included: (a) an initial e-mail invitation was sent; (b) approximately one week later, a follow-up e-mail (#1) was sent; (c) approximately two weeks after the first contact, a follow-up e-mail (#2) was sent; and (d) three weeks after the first contact, a final contact e-mail was sent to request completion of the survey. The initial e-mail invitation provided the participant with basic information about the purpose of the research and established its legitimacy as well as the risks of participation. The informed consent section explained to the participants their rights as research participants and that if they decided to participate, the assurance that their responses would be anonymous and confidential, emphasizing the seriousness of confidentiality. One week after the initial e-mail, a follow-up thank you e-mail was sent to all members of the sample. The thank you follow-up e-mail expressed appreciation for responding to the questionnaire and served as a reminder to those who had not. Two weeks after the original e-mail, a second follow-up e-mail was sent to non-respondents. Lastly, three weeks after the initial contact, a final follow-up e-mail contact took place. This final follow-up was sent to those who had not responded.

Survey administration and design. The survey was administered via the online survey platform Qualtrics (2015). For each item, the participant could select a radio button option that best described their answer. For example, in the self-efficacy and in-service training needs survey, the 10-point intervals described earlier were represented by radio buttons such as 0, 10, 20, and so forth to 100.

Data Analysis

For research questions #1 and #2, the descending rank order of items was calculated and reported. Rank order was determined by the raw number count for highest interval option (i.e., radio button for 100). For research question #3, the descending rank order of items was calculated and reported. Rank order was determined by the number of participants endorsing the delivery model as acceptable, with the highest number ranked first. For research question #4, difference in rankings between need and self-efficacy were determined by Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test (Siegel & Castellan, 1988).

Results

To address the first research question, school counselors were asked to rate their training needs in reference to working with Latino students in a Likert-type scale as described above. The top three most desired training topics (in descending order) by the school counselors in this data set were: (a) Question 16 -- Use functional Spanish to work more effectively with the Latino population, (b) Question 3 -- Understand how the students' Latino cultural heritage impacts their education values, and (c) Question 15 -- Interpret Latino students' nonverbal body language and its significance in counseling.

The second research question sought to identify how school counselors rate their level of self-efficacy in regard to counseling Latino students. The top three items (in descending order) were: (a) Question 6 -- Conceptualize Latino students' cultures as different rather than deficient, (b) Question 5 -- Understand how my own cultural values, stereotypes, and biases may influence my work with Latino students, and (c) Question 11 -- Use counseling techniques that are culturally appropriate when working with Latino students.

The third research question addressed participants' perceptions of acceptable in-service delivery modalities. Participants were asked to identify the type of training delivery modality they would be willing to use. The most endorsed choice was "anytime Web" with 71 %, the second was "in person" with 70%, the third choice was "live Web" with 50%, and the last choice was "other." In "other," participants identified additional training modalities: "book, PowerPoint, attend a training outside my school, in service for clock hours/credit, fliers, readings, and open to in-service by any modality."

The purpose of the fourth research question was to examine if there was any difference between the rankings of self-efficacy and training needs. A Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test using late responders was not significant ($Z = -0.28, p > .05$).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived self-efficacy and training needs of school counselors when working with the Latino student population. In order to assess potential perceived needs and self-efficacy, this study used a self-efficacy and training needs assessment tool consisting of 16 questions connected to specific school counseling skills.

The most desired training topic involved the use of functional Spanish to work more effectively with the Latino population. School counselors identified their lack of Spanish language knowledge as a barrier affecting the work they do when working with Latino students. They perceived a need for training on functional Spanish language skills to help school counselors effectively counsel Latino students. This basic language skill may help the minority Latino student population feel connected and understood by their school counselor. Moreover, research emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in the students' education for academic success and how there is a lack of parental involvement in the Latino population (Kuperminc et al., 2008; Ryan et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). However, surveyed school counselors did not identify supporting parents of Latino students as one of the greater needs nor creating career readiness in Latino students, even though this is what school counselors are trying to accomplish in

order to close the achievement gap. This information represents a gap between perceived needs and evidence for the needs. According to Rokeach (1971), the importance of bringing to light inconsistency on self-reporting is to increase participants' awareness and in turn, areas in which they can improve. Therefore, one of our aims is to create awareness in school counselors by reporting their perceived training needs in contrast with evidence for the needs.

Even though most school counselor programs provide a multicultural course as part of counseling training, the findings of this study suggest that school counselors have a desire for additional training to provide deeper cognitive knowledge and a more specific set of skills on how to work with the Latino student population. Also, participants desire training that will help them better understand the nonverbal body language of Latino students as well as appropriate counseling techniques to help them be culturally sensitive to the Latino minority population.

In terms of the self-efficacy results, the school counselors reported having the greatest self-efficacy with their ability to conceptualize the Latino students' cultures as different rather than deficient. The findings of this study revealed that the school counselors have self-efficacy in regard to working with Latino students in the areas of cultural awareness and evaluation/assessment interpretation. This result suggests that the school counselors in the data set have made positive steps to move beyond the cultural boundedness described by Wrenn (1962).

Bandura (1993) identified a link between perceived self-efficacy and the individual's behavior. His research indicates that "the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal aspirations people adopt and the firmer is their commitment to them" (Bandura, 1993, p. 118). School counselors' perceived self-efficacy could increase their motivation on how to support the academic development of students. This information could be of possible benefit to school counselor associations planning in-service trainings. Perhaps training more focused on where school counselors have noted the greatest need can help these professionals better address the barriers that the Latino students are facing.

School counselors identified "anytime Web" training as their top training modality choice. This high interest for online professional development demonstrates a need for training delivery that is flexible so school counselors can have time for training. Online delivery provides trainers with a greater geographic reach. Also, training is not limited to professional conferences. One online option could ease the school counselors' task of following the professional and ethical obligations they have for being culturally competent in how to work with the diverse population of Latino students.

Multicultural training for school counselors may help improve the services school counselors provide to the minority Latino student population. Further, making web training accessible for all school counselors in the state may increase their level of expertise to more effectively work with the minority Latino population and may make a positive impact on the academic achievement of the Latino student population.

This study found no statistical significance between school counselors' ratings of their training needs and self-efficacy. It is important to note that training needs were seen as high in many areas where self-efficacy was also strong (e.g., Question 11 -- Use counseling techniques that are culturally appropriate when working with Latino students). The ASCA Ethical Standards (2010) expect school counselors to be culturally competent

in working with diverse student populations. Those expectations may have affected participants' responses. Thus, the similarity may be explained by the Subject-Expectancy Effect (i.e., Rosenthal Effect; Weber & Cook, 1972). One possible implication of the results from this study was the suggestion that training is desired even in areas where self-efficacy was rated as high.

There are eight limitations that should be noted. First, the school counselors in only one state were surveyed. Thus, the extent to which the results can be generalized to other states is unknown. Second, the study utilized a survey instrument that limited the participant's opportunity to provide more specific information in regard to their Spanish language ability. Some research participants reported being confused and others frustrated with the limited range of responses for the question (i.e., "Do you speak fluent Spanish?"). In future research, more choices need to be provided to give participants a better range in which to mark their Spanish language ability. Third, the survey used a 0-to 100-point Likert-type scale. Even though this scale aligns with a 10-point scale, some participants expressed confusion selecting a number higher than 10. Fourth, the survey instrument did not request information on where the participants resided in their state. Thus, the extent to which the result can be generalized to urban, suburban, or rural areas is unknown. Fifth, the list of the participant population included e-mails that were not up-to-date. We obtained e-mail contact information for the school counselors from state and regional governmental agencies. While this approach provided the greatest number of active school counselors, it was not 100% accurate, for these agencies had incorrect e-mail addresses for many counselors. Sixth, e-mail delivery affected research participation as well. It was brought to the researcher's attention that in some school districts, the e-mail invitation to participate in the research was blocked by the district's Internet security or in some cases was sent to junk e-mail. Finally, it must be noted that the data is based off the "late responder" data set. While the relationship between late and non-responders has been well documented, there always exists the possibility that this late responder group was an outlier in some unknown manner.

The implications of this study for the profession of school counseling are many. Outcomes from this study suggest the need for multicultural training in the counseling field. More specifically, this study identifies school counselors' needs for training in areas that may help them work more effectively with the Latino student population. This study may also provide efforts for counselor educators and governmental agencies to design training programs that will meet the needs of school counselors on how to work more effectively with the Latino student population. They can address the training needs identified by this study by using different preferred training modalities that can be delivered as a Web-based online professional development course or live during a state association conference. Such a course would be accessible to all school counselors at their convenience.

Researchers may want to examine the school counselors' perceived training needs when working with the Latino student population by exploring the Latino students' perception of their school counselor's knowledge of the Latino culture and ability to counsel them. The findings from such a study may provide useful information in regards to better understanding counselors' self-perceived needs and ability versus student perceptions of school counselor ability. This study also identified the preferred training modalities of school counselors. Researchers should also consider examining the

accessibility and effectiveness of online training versus in-person training. Such research may help identify the most accessible training modality and its effectiveness.

This study represents a first effort to identify school counselor training needs and self-efficacy in reference to their work with Latino students. Interestingly, school counselors desired more in-service training even in the areas where they stated some perceived self-efficacy. The school counselors in this study also noted the acceptability of online training delivery of such in-service training.

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