An Exploration of 21st Century School

Counselors' Daily Work Activities

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Abstract

With the current reformation of school counseling and the increasing expectations of school counselors, all counselors' work activities include some Comprehensive School Counseling Program (CSCP) activities. This exploratory study focused on differential patterns among elementary, middle, and high school counselors' daily work activities and on several demographic variables. Significant differences were found across demographic variables for the school counselors and for each of the 20 work activities. Implications for practice, training, and future research were considered.

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Counselors' Daily Work Activities

From the outset of the school counseling profession, confusion regarding the roles and/or functions of school counselors existed (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Gysbers, 2001, Mustaine & Pappalardo, 1996; Scarborough, 2005). Throughout the 20th century, school counseling's foci continually adapted to the needs of diverse students preparing to be productive members of society (DeVoss & Andrews, 2006; Erford, House, & Martin, 2003; Gysbers, 2001). However, despite significant focal shifts within the profession, the work activities of school counselors remained somewhat ambiguous and the practical implementation of school counseling essentially remained the same: an outdated model of reactive school counseling services and activities (Johnson & Johnson, 2003).

Internal debates plagued the profession for decades regarding issues ranging from the appropriate roles of school counselors to the terminology used to describe their daily work activities (Bemak, 2000; Sciarra, 2004). Opinions continue to differ on the emphasis that should be placed on various activities within the overall professional role such as: advocacy (Bemak & Chung, 2005); educational leadership, and reform (Bemak, 2000; Lee, 2005); multicultural advocacy (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005); consultation (Sink 2005a); educations (Stott & Jackson, 2005); multi-system collaboration (Johnson & Johnson, 2003); and counseling (Beale, 2004). Regardless of differing opinions about the work activities of school counselors, one common theme is consistent throughout the school counseling literature: It is now time for us to stand unified as school

counselors and educators and clearly define the specialized work roles and activities of our profession (Bemak, 2000; Dahir, 2000; Gysbers, 2001).

The reformation of education in the United States (i.e., The No Child Left behind Act; United States Department of Education, 2002) furthers the ever-increasing expectations of school counselors (Cunningham & Sandhu, 2000; Gysbers, 2001). As demands increase, so does the need for accountability regarding work activities and how school counselors impact students (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Dahir, Sheldon, & Valiga, 1998; Davis, 2005). However, as work activities and responsibilities, accountability, and performance expectations grow, previous expectations remain in tact (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). This pattern lends to the continued struggle to articulate what school counselors do and how it impacts schools and students, even as the national school counseling profession itself is transformed.

Expectations, Roles, and Best Practices

It is likely that the expectations of school counselors vary from state to state, system to system, from school to school (Sciarra, 2004), and may be based on the perceptions of what school administrators think are appropriate roles (Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). In addition, confusion seems to remain among school counselors as to which roles and functions are appropriate for them (Perusse, et al., 2004). Previous researchers have addressed the issue of how school counselors spend their time. These researchers have consistently found that the reported activities of school counselors may differ from the best practices outlined by professional organizations (Bemack, 2000; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Carter, 1993; Mustaine & Pappalardo, 1996; Scarborough, 2005).

Researchers offered two possible explanations for school counselors engaging in activities that are not endorsed by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) as appropriate for school counselors. The first explanation describes how school counselors indicate that the work activities they are expected to perform (e.g., program coordination, consultation, test administration, etc.) are not consistent with their counselor training, which focused primarily on individual counseling skills (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Carter, 1993; Mustaine & Pappalardo, 1996). This explanation has implications concerning the training that school counselors receive in their formal education versus the actual activities that they perform when they become practicing school counselors. Thus, researchers suggested that in order to address this discrepancy, school counselor education programs need to place more emphasis on the roles of collaboration and consultation (Bemack, 2000; Carter; Perusse & Goodnough, 2001; Perusse et al., 2004).

A second explanation for the difference between actual and preferred activities focuses on the roles of school counselors as dictated by school administrators. In a study to examine the different perceptions of school counselors and school administrators, certain roles deemed inappropriate by the ASCA were deemed both appropriate and necessary for school counselors to perform by school principals across grade levels (Perusse, et al., 2004). This finding was supported by Mustaine and Pappalardo (1996), who found that school counselors indicated that administrators dictated school counselors' work activities and functions, which interfered with them performing their roles in the manners they would prefer. It has been clearly established that the support of school level administrators is extremely important to the

implementation of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCPs; Beale, 1995;

Coll & Freeman, 1997; Perusse, et al., 2004; Ponec & Brock, 2000). In addition,

researchers conclude that professional school counselors should place more emphasis

on the roles their administrators suggest when performing their work activities and

school counseling practice (Bemack, 2000; Hardesty & Dillard, 1994; Ponec & Brock,

2000). A collaborative approach, in which school counselors collaborate with teachers,

administrators, and their constituents in order to implement a comprehensive and

developmentally appropriate counseling and guidance curriculum, is considered integral

to CSCPs (Bemack, 2000; Gysbers, 2001; Sink & MacDonald, 1998).Therefore, it can

be concluded that in order to establish an effective and comprehensive school

counseling program, the discrepancies in understanding the roles of school counselors,

both within the profession and across disciplines, must be clarified.

Although these two explanations encompass the same concern, the activities

that school counselors are expected to perform and the reasoning behind them is quite

different. The implication is that both counselor education programs and school

administrators need to fully understand *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for*

School Counseling Programs® (ASCA, 2003) and make adjustments to their

expectations based on this model. In order to fully prepare future school counselors for

their careers, counselor education programs must incorporate all aspects of the ASCA

National Model into their training goals. The current emphasis of counselor education

programs on individual counseling skills needs to be expanded to incorporate a greater

emphasis on group counseling, consultation, and collaboration with other school staff

(Gysbers, 2001; Sink & MacDonald, 1998). School administrators, likewise, must be

prepared to adjust their expectations to eliminate the non-school counseling activities that school counselors are expected to perform in order to provide opportunities for them to implement a comprehensive school counseling program able to reach all students through the activities endorsed by the ASCA.

The Profession's Answers

In answer to the need for more unified roles and work activities, the ASCA created the *National Standards for School Counseling Programs* (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), which set forth professionally-defined standards over three domain areas (academic, career, and personal/social). The standards outline the skills and competencies students should be able to demonstrate as a result of participating in a CSCP. Furthermore, *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs*® (ASCA, 2003) was published with the goal of providing a framework for a "comprehensive approach to program foundation, delivery, management, and accountability" (p. 9). ASCA's National Model is intended to help school counselors nationwide implement programs that are comprehensive in scope and developmental in nature – and ultimately to aid in defining the specialized daily work activities of school counselors.

As a result of the ASCA's National Standards and National Model, school counselors across the country have implemented CSCPs with competency-based student goals (ASCA, 2003). CSCPs include specialized school counselor work activities such as individual planning, crisis counseling, small group counseling, large group classroom guidance delivery, and collaboration and consultation with other educators and parents. Along with the creation and implementation of CSCPs, the

demand for increased accountability for school counselors' work activities has resulted in researchers attempting to verify the ways in which CSCPs and school counselors impact students' academic outcomes (Brown & Trusty, 2005a; Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997; Lee, 2005; Sink, 2005a). Debates continue concerning attempts to establish a causal link between school counselors' work activities within CSCPs and competency-based goals and student outcomes (i.e., academic achievement) (Brown & Trusty, 2005 a, 2005b; Sink 2005a). However, it is agreed that school counselors' work activities and roles within CSCPs are in the best interest of students (Beale, 2004; Brown & Trusty, 2005a, 2005b; Johnson & Johnson, 2003; Sink, 2005a, 2005b; Sink & Stroh, 2003).

CSCPs and School Counselor Work Activities

In the late 1990s, it was documented that CSCPs needed to shift from a "menu of services" to well-planned, comprehensive, and developmental programs capable of demonstrating efficacy (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Dahir et al., 1998). Further, the ASCA *Professional School Counselor Role Statement* suggests that "Professional school counselors deliver a comprehensive school counseling program encouraging all students' academic, career and personal/social development and helping all students in maximizing student achievement" (ASCA, 2004; please see last paragraph at www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=240). In ideal situations, school counselors are running programs that are: comprehensive in scope, preventative in design, developmental in nature, integral to the total educational program, implemented by state-credentialed school counselors, conducted in collaboration with stakeholders, monitoring student progress, driven by data, and continually evaluated and improved (ASCA, 2003).

Today's highly-specialized CSCPs' services should be equally-accessible for *all* students and delivered by well-trained school counselors. Because it is specially-trained school counselors who create, deliver, manage, and evaluate the application of competency-based CSCPs through their various work activities, school counselors' activities should be modified to eliminate non-guidance activities, decrease student caseloads, and implement a CSCP framework (Vandegrift, 1999). The profession purports that school counselors' daily work activities should be designed to meet competency-based standards identified by the ASCA (i.e., academic, career, and personal/social) and to aid in academic achievement (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Lapan, Kardash, & Turner, 2002; Mariani, 1998). Further, Sink (2005b) indicated that students benefit from the implementation of CSCPs that encompass the "five Cs" of professional school counseling work activities (collaboration, coordination, consultation, counseling, and classroom guidance). However, Foster, Young, and Herman (2005) found that, while students' educational needs were being met, work activities focused on the career and personal/social development domains are not performed as frequently by counselors. They suggested that school counselors examine their daily work activities to determine if they are engaging in activities that promote all of the student-focused domains set forth by the National Standards. As a result, an exploration of school counselors' CSCP daily work activities is both timely and needed; it is important to know the reality of the activities today's school counselors are performing in order to gauge them in relation to those purported in the professional literature and within the National Model. Are 21st century elementary, middle, and high school counselors actually

conducting the work activities suggested within the National Model (ASCA, 2003) and expected in CSCPs?

Purpose of the Study

Due to the current reformation of school counseling and the ever-increasing expectations of all levels of school counselors, the reported non-CSCP work activities they are performing (Bemak, 2000; Coll & Freeman, 1997; Hardesty & Dillard, 1994), the debates and ambiguity that remain in the work roles and activities of school counselors (Duffus, 1998; Hardesty & Dillard, 2004), and the specialized school counselor work activities suggested in the ASCA's National Model (ASCA, 2003), we conducted the present study in order to explore the current reality of CSCP and non-CSCP work activities school counselors are performing regularly. Although not all school counselors are fully implementing a CSCP based on the National Model, the school counseling reformation is prominent nationwide. Therefore, we wanted to explore possible differences across several background variables of elementary, middle, and high school counselors. In addition, we were interested in exploring the differential patterns among elementary, middle, and high school counselors' daily CSCP and non-CSCP activities. The following exploratory questions were addressed in the study:

1. What differences emerge in the demographic background characteristics of elementary, middle, and high school counselors?

2. Do school counselors differ in their work-related activities in relation to whether they were trained in CACREP-accredited programs, whether they were teachers before they were counselors, and whether they were running a CSCP based on the ASCA's National Model?

3. Do elementary, middle, and high school counselors differ in their reported

CSCP and non-CSCP work activities?

Method

Participants

We contacted potential participants for the study through state chapters of the

ASCA and regional and state school counseling email list-serves. The final number of

participants included 388 elementary, middle, and high school counselors representing

over 40 states in the U.S. We distributed a total of 450 survey packets, of which 388

were completed and returned via email, fax, or regular mail yielding a response rate of

86.2%. The resulting sample included 303 females (78.1%) and 85 males (21.9%), of

whom approximately 72 (72.45%, $n = 213$) were between ages 44 and 61 with a median

age of 50. In addition, the total participants' years of school counseling experience

ranged from 1 to 36 years, with a mean of 11.27 ($SD = 8.74$) years. The information in

Tables 1 and 2 offers a complete demographic picture of the school counselors.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire. In order to explore the proposed research questions

we created an extensive demographic questionnaire. We included a number of

background demographic items that enabled us to explore our first and second research

questions. These items included: age; gender; race/ethnicity; educational degree; their

current level of school (elementary, middle, or high school); whether their positions were

full or part time; the type of the school they are employed by (public, private, charter,

etc.); whether they were members of the ASCA and/or their state chapter of the ASCA;

whether they were licensed/certified in their current state as a school counselor;

whether they were teachers before they became school counselors; and whether they were currently implementing a CSCP based on the ASCA National Model Framework (see Table 1). Table 2 presents participants' responses regarding their total years of school counseling experience and of total counseling experience (i.e., school, agency, private practice).

Work Activities Questionnaire. Because we wanted to explore the daily CSCP and non-CSCP work activities of school counselors during the era of school counseling reform, we included a short questionnaire including CSCP-based school counseling work activities that were based on previous research, professional literature, and the ASCA National Model. The resulting items were evaluated by a panel of 14 experts in the field of school counseling consisting of employed school counselors and school counselor educators. Minor revisions were made to the questionnaire based on recommendations from the experts. The final questionnaire included 20 possible CSCP-based work activities that are suggested school counselors perform or regularly conduct in their work environments. The school counselor participants were asked to indicate the specific work activities they participated in regularly in their current school counseling position. One sample activity the school counselors could select from was "Consultation/Collaboration with Parents" (See Table 3 for complete list of activities). Finally, we invited the school counselors to include any qualitative comments concerning their current work environments as school counselors, their daily work activities, and/or the transformation currently advocated in school counseling.

Procedure

We implemented a four-step procedure for the study process. First, we mailed out a mass email consisting of a pre-letter that briefly described the study and asked prospective respondents if they were interested in participating in a voluntary school counselor work environment/work activities study. Second, we emailed or mailed a survey packet to those who agreed to participate. The packet contained a cover letter, the demographic questionnaire, the work activities questionnaire, and return postage for regularly mailed packets. A follow-up email reminder was sent 2 weeks later. We coded materials as they were received from participants and responses were kept confidential.

Results

In order to explore any possible differences in pertinent demographic background characteristics of practicing elementary, middle, and high school counselors, we disaggregated the demographic data we received. Table 1 presents a detailed report of the demographic information we obtained from participants. By examining the descriptive statistics, several notable themes emerged. Despite the increase in male students training to become school counselors, within our sample female school counselors outnumbered male school counselors in elementary (females, n = 108, 81.2%; males, n = 25, 18.8%), middle (females, n = 81, 81.8%; males, n = 18, 18.2%), and high schools (females, n = 114, 73.1%; males, n = 42, 26.9%). In addition, we found that Euro-American individuals (90.3% of total sample) were the dominant racial/ethnic group in our sample of school counselors when compared to other racial/ethnic minority groups (see Table 1).

Over 94% of school counselors reported practicing with Master's degrees, which indicates that most received some of the increasingly specialized training needed to perform the roles and activities expected of school counselors (ASCA, 2003; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Educational Programs [CACREP], 2001). When asked whether they had studied in educational programs accredited by the CACREP, 76.3% of the total school counselors reported they had and 23.7% of the sample stated they had not. Additionally, 94.5% of all school counselors are working in their current positions full time; although, 3% ($n = 4$) of elementary school counselors and 1.9% ($n = 3$) of high school counselors indicated that they were volunteers in their current positions. The majority of the total school counselors were working full time in positions within public K-12 schools (94.6% of total sample). When asked if they were certified as school counselors within their states, 86.1% of the total sample indicated that they were; however, 13.9% of the total school counselors reported that they were not; the majority of those that were not certified were working as high school counselors ($n = 24$, 15.4%).

Interestingly, the total sample was split almost equally when asked whether they were members of the ASCA (51% = yes; 49% = no). Within each of the levels of school counselors, the participants also were almost equally split: 45.9% of elementary school counselors, 49.5% of middle school counselors, and 56.4% of high school counselors were members of ASCA. Also notable was that 4.1% of the total sample indicated that there was no ASCA state-based association available to them in their states. Of those who had access to ASCA state-based associations, the majority of school counselors within each level were members: 69.9% of elementary school counselors, 72.7% of middle school counselors, and 76.9% of high school counselors. A paired-samples *t*-test

was conducted to investigate possible significant differences in school counselors'

memberships within the ASCA and within their ASCA state-based association among

the total sample. There was a significant difference in membership within the ASCA

(*M* = .51, *SD* = .50) and within ASCA state-based associations (*M* = .82, *SD* = .48),

t(387) = -9.89, *p* = .00, partial eta squared = .20. Significantly more school counselors

were members of their ASCA state-based associations than the ASCA.

More school counselors reported having been teachers *before* becoming school

counselors than those who had not been teachers; however, this trend was more

recognizable among high school counselors (yes, *n* = 101, 64.7%; no, *n* = 55, 35.3%;

see Table 1). A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed no

significant mean differences among the three levels of school counselors concerning

whether they had been teachers before becoming school counselors. In addition, 59%

of the total school counselors reported that they were currently running a CSCP based

on the ASCA's National Model. A follow-up one-way between-groups ANOVA revealed

significant differences among the levels of school counselors regarding whether they

were currently running a CSCP, *F* (2, 385) = 3.46, *p* = .03, partial eta squared = .02.

Review of the mean scores indicated that significantly more elementary school

counselors reported implementing a CSCP based on the National Model (*M = .68,*

SD = .47*)* than did middle school (*M* = .52, *SD* = .50) or high school counselors

(*M* = .56, *SD* = .49).

Finally, concerning the demographic characteristics of the three levels of school

counselors, we explored possible differences in their total years of overall counseling

experience and total years of school counseling experience. Table 2 presents the

ranges, means, and standard deviations for each of the groups of school counselors

and the total sample. A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA)

revealed significant differences among the three levels of school counselors regarding

their total years of overall counseling experience, F (2, 385) = 3.75, p = .02, partial eta

squared = .02. Inspection of the mean scores indicated that high school counselors

reported the greatest number of years of overall counseling experience (M = 12.65, SD

= 8.83) and elementary school counselors reported the least number of years of overall

counseling experience (M = 9.87, SD = 8.44). Regarding the total number of years of

school counseling experience, results from a one-way between-groups ANOVA

revealed significant differences among the three levels of school counselors regarding

their total years of school counseling experience, F (2, 385) =6.99, p = .001, partial eta

squared = .04. The mean scores revealed that high school counselors reported the

greatest number of years of school counseling experience (M = 10.61, SD = 8.14) and

elementary school counselors reported the least number of years of school counseling

experience (M = 7.18, SD = 6.81).

In order to investigate the second exploratory research question, independent-

samples t tests were conducted to compare the daily work activities of school

counselors who reported they were trained in CACREP-accredited programs, for those

that were teachers before they were counselors, and for those who were running a

CSCP based on the ASCA's National Model. Regarding school counselors who were

trained in CACREP-accredited programs, the only significant differences found were in

the small group counseling work activity. School counselors who were trained in

CACREP programs (M = .72, SD = .45) reported running fewer small group counseling

experiences for their students than did those school counselors not trained in CACREP programs (M = .83, SD = .38; $t(386)$ = -2.11, p = .03). For school counselors who were teachers before they became counselors, significant differences were found within only one work activity: large group/classroom guidance lesson delivery. School counselors who were teachers before they became school counselors (M = .90, SD = .30) reported engaging in more frequent large group guidance lessons that did those school counselors who were not teachers before becoming school counselors (M = .82, SD = .38); $t(386)$ = 2.37, p = .01). Finally, school counselors who reported running a CSCP based on the ASCA's National Model reported engaging in significantly less crisis response counseling (M = .63, SD = .48) than those who were not running CSCPs (M = .74, SD = .44); $t(386)$ = -2.40, p = .02). Also, school counselors who reported running a CSCP based on the ASCA's National Model reported providing significantly fewer small group counseling experience (M = .71, SD = .46) than those who were not running CSCPs (M = .79, SD = .41); $t(386)$ = -1.91, p = .05).

A series of chi-square tests for independence were conducted to evaluate whether elementary, middle, and high school counselors differed in whether or not they regularly participated in the CSCP-related work activities. Each of the chi-square tests' results were significant and are displayed in Table 3; significant differences were found between each of the levels of school counselors' work activities – both CSCP activities as well as non-CSCP activities (see Table 3 for complete chi-square data for each activity). To further understand the chi-square results, we present the frequencies and percentages of the numerous CSCP-based and additional work activities that the school counselors reported they participate in regularly at their school work sites in Tables 4

and 5. Overall, higher frequencies indicate that a particular level of school counselors (elementary, middle, or high school) reported participating more often in the particular CSCP or non-CSCP work activity (see Tables 4 and 5).

Discussion

With the current reformation of the school counseling profession, school counselors' work activities are recurrently being suggested by several entities both within the school counseling profession and from others outside of the profession. This study explored the current reality of school counselors' CSCP and non-CSCP daily work activities with 388 U.S. elementary, middle, and high school counselors. We explored variations among school counselors across a variety of background demographic variables; whether school counselors differed in their work-related activities in relation to whether they were trained in CACREP-accredited programs, whether they were teachers before they were counselors, and whether they were running a CSCP based on the ASCA's National Model; and whether elementary, middle, and high school counselors differed significantly in their reported daily work activities. Statistical analyses allowed for the exploration of proposed research questions for the total sample, and for the elementary, middle, and high school counselors independently.

Overall, our results indicated significant differences in elementary, middle, and high school counselors' daily work activities in general and in relation to specific demographic variables. The results with our sample support past research that has shown that the majority of school counselors in the U.S. are female and are of Euro American racial/ethnic backgrounds (Baker & Gerler, 2004), which lends support to the efforts of counselor education programs to recruit and support male school counseling

students and students of color. Our results also indicated that over 76% of the sample

attended CACREP-accredited school counseling training programs which was an

expected finding because CACREP reports that the greatest number of nationwide

accredited counselor training programs are those in school counseling (*n* = 176;

CACREP, 2006). This finding indicates that over 76% of the school counselors in the

current study received the basic training required for school counselors today in the

areas of: foundations, contextual dimensions, and knowledge and skills of school

counseling (CACREP, 2001), which should include training in the ASCA National Model.

Interestingly, just over half of the participants were teachers before they were

school counselors. This result aligns with the fact that some states within the U.S.

require individuals to have teaching certificates before becoming school counselors.

More specifically, a greater number of high school counselors reported being teachers

before becoming school counselors. It is likely that these high school counselors had

spent more time working in educational settings as classroom teachers, and eventually

selected to change their career paths after experience with students in classrooms. This

is also evidenced by the fact that the high school counselors in the sample also reported

the greatest number of years of overall counseling experience and school counseling

experience. Some U.S. school districts actually require school counselors to begin at

the elementary level and work their way to middle and high school level positions

(Vandegrift, 1999), which lends support to the current high school counselors' total

years of experience and to the current elementary school counselors' reporting the least

amount of years of overall counseling experience and school counseling experience.

In addition, results indicated that over 73% of school counselors in our sample elected to be members of their ASCA state-based associations while only 51% elected to be members of the ASCA. More high school counselors were members of *both* the ASCA and their ASCA state-based organization than elementary or middle school counselors. This finding may indicate that school counselors believe they receive greater support from their locally-based, state chapters of the ASCA. Within their state organizations, school counselors may be able to network with a greater number of local school counselors and support the model of school counseling within their respective states. Again, high school counselors reported the greatest number of years of total counseling experience and years of school counseling experience which may lead to more high school counselors being active members of both the ASCA and their ASCA-based state organizations.

Overall, significantly more elementary school counselors reported implementing a CSCP based on the National Model than did middle or high school counselors. This finding may be indicative of the greater levels of flexibility elementary school counselors report in their daily work activities as well as their reduced levels of career-related stress (Dixon Rayle, 2005b). In his/her qualitative response, one elementary school counselor stated: "In the elementary school, every day 50% of the day is spent teaching guidance lessons. The other 50% I have a great deal of flexibility in how I serve students, parents, and teachers." In direct contradiction, a high school counselor stated, "The emphasis in high school counseling is on scheduling and clerical work. We should be providing career unites and other classroom presentations. We do not implement a full CSCP because we do not have time or resources to follow through." It is likely that although

elementary school counselors are typically the only school counselor at their respective schools, they are able to implement and follow through with a functional CSCP program and find support for the CSCP from parents, teachers, and administrators.

The findings from our exploratory questions regarding all school counselors' daily CSCP work activities in relation to specific background demographic characteristics revealed unexpected results. For example, school counselors who were trained in CACREP programs reported running fewer small group counseling experiences for their students than did those school counselors not trained in CACREP programs. One of the common core areas of the CACREP's 2001 Standards is group work and small group counseling is also one of the major components of the ASCA (2003) National Model's Delivery System. According to the National Model, all school counselors should be delivering direct services to students through the small group medium (ASCA, 2003).This finding led us to wonder whether school counselors trained in CACREP programs want to spend more time on individual planning and/or large group guidance activities versus running small groups within their schools or whether lack of actual time is the issue. For instance, one school counselor stated: "I would love to have enough time to run small groups for numerous students, but at this time, I must be satisfied with classroom guidance activities." Another stated, "It doesn't take a Master's degree to count credits. I am asking for an administrat to do the bulk of the clerical work in this area so I can have more time for what my strengths are—working one to one or in small groups with students, helping with problems which get in the way of their success."

A subsequent finding was not quite as surprising: school counselors who were teachers before they became counselors reported engaging in significantly more

frequent large group guidance lessons that did those school counselors who were not teachers first. It is likely that those school counselors who were once teachers actually prefer being in the classroom at times and enjoy delivering large group lessons in a format that they are familiar and successful with. For instance, one elementary school counselor stated: "I spent five years as a teacher before I became a school counselor. This year, we have 26 classrooms and I am in each class every week for approximately 30 to 40 minutes. This is my very favorite part of my job!" On the other hand, a middle school counselor stated, "I never taught school and I do not enjoy classroom guidance lessons. I have to spend too much time creating lessons for each different grade level each time I do guidance (twice a month per classroom)." These varying comments lend evidence to our finding that school counselors who were once teachers are spending more time in the classrooms as a daily work activity than those who have never been teachers. In addition, this finding may lend credence to the training of school counselors; those who have never been teachers may need more specialized training in guidance lesson planning and implementation (Davis, 2005).

In addition, school counselors running CSCPs based on the ASCA's National Model reported engaging in significantly less crisis response counseling and significantly fewer small group counseling experiences than those who were not running CSCPs. Again, these findings were unexpected. The ASCA National Model's (2003) Delivery System purports that school counselors should be delivering direct services to students through crisis responsive services as well as small group counseling. However, those school counselors who reported running CSCPs actually reported implementing fewer of these direct services. It is likely that if school counselors are

implementing CSCPs based on the ASCA National Model, their direct services and

planning and management of their programs may actually be proactive; thus, the need

for reactive crisis responsive service may actually decrease. One high school counselor

stated, "With caseloads bordering on 480 students we are not able to implement a

CSCP fully. At times it seems we do crisis management only." This comment lends

additional evidence to the idea that a fully implemented CSCP may lead to more

planned proactive and preventive services versus reactive crisis counseling. It was

unexpected however, that school counselors implementing CSCPs reported offering

less small group counseling experiences. In addition, an elementary counselor stated, "I

am lucky to be an elementary counselor in one building full-time and I am implementing

a CSCP. However, my student ratio is myself to over 760 students. It is hard to

implement a CSCP with ratios like this. I feel like I can't focus on a few things and do

them well. I do not make time for small group counseling because I spend my time in

classrooms and individual meetings with students, parents, and teachers." Small group

counseling in the schools takes a great deal of time for planning and coordination

(Davis, 2005); it is likely that many school counselors implementing CSCPs are electing

to spend more planning and direct service time within the classroom guidance delivery.

Interestingly, the current results indicated that the three levels of school

counselors differed significantly on each of the 20 reported CSCP and non-CSCP daily

work activities (see Table 3). Elementary school counselors reported more time spent in

the following CSCP activities: individual counseling/planning with parents; large

group/classroom guidance lesson delivery; consultation/collaboration with teachers;

CSCP program planning and management; and CSCP program evaluation. In addition,

elementary school counselors reported more time spent in each of the non-CSCP activities: IEP/504 writing and planning; school-wide testing; teachers' classroom coverage; school bus lot duties; and lunchroom duties. Interestingly, some of these findings make intuitive sense while others do not. For instance, the fact that elementary school counselors reported spending less time in non-CSCP work activities may indicate higher career-related stress and lower career-related satisfaction; however, several studies have reported the opposite: elementary school counselors typically report less stress and greater career satisfaction (Coll & Freeman, 1997; Dixon Rayle, 2005b). In addition, the current results align with past research that indicated that elementary school counselors are spending a great deal of time in counseling-related activities with students (Partin, 1993). On the other hand, the elementary school counselors in our study reported the greatest implementation of CSCPs; thus, it would make sense that significantly more of them are spending more time in large group/classroom guidance, program planning and management, and program evaluation (ASCA, 2003). Finally, the fact that elementary school counselors are working with younger students may lend to the finding that these counselors are spending more time with parents and in collaboration with teachers.

Middle school counselors reported more time spent in the following CSCP activities: individual counseling/planning with students; individual counseling/planning with teachers; responsive crisis counseling with students; small group counseling; consultation/collaboration with teachers; consultation/collaboration with administrators; consultation/collaboration with parents; and consultation/collaboration with community agencies. The greatest amount of time middle school counselors spent in non-CSCP

activities was in IEP/504 writing and planning and school-wide testing. Based on these results, it would seem that middle school counselors are spending more time in direct service to *all* stakeholders in and around the school environment when compared with elementary and high school counselors. The middle school counselors in our study reported more time in direct service and planning with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community agency liaisons. Although only 48.5% of middle school counselors reported implementing CSCPs, it would seem that they are spending the majority of their daily work time in some form of direct service (counseling, collaboration, or consultation) with the individuals within their schools. It was previously noted that middle school counselors appear to have opportunities to interact with the multiple individuals within their schools (Duffus, 1998) and our results would indicate this is true for this sample of middle school counselors.

Finally, high school counselors reported significantly more time spent in the following CSCP activities: large group/classroom guidance lesson delivery; supervision of other school counselors; supervision of school counseling interns; and advisory council meetings/planning. Similar to middle school counselors, the greatest amount of time high school counselors spent in non-CSCP activities was in IEP/504 writing and planning and school-wide testing. Based on these results, high school counselors are spending more time in direct service to students within the large group/classroom guidance lesson delivery than in any other direct service component. In addition, high school counselors are spending more time supervising others in order to "pass down" the profession to the next generation of school counselors. Just over 56% of high school counselors reported implementing CSCPs; however, it appears that they spending the

majority of their daily work time in supervision and planning activities versus direct

service activities to students, teachers, or parents. The current results are similar to past

research that indicated high school counselors spend less time with students and most

of their time with administrative and planning activities (Thompson & Powers, 1983;

Wiggins & Weslander, 1986).

Implications for School Counseling Practice and Training

In the era of school counseling reform, numerous entities purport what school

counselors should be doing daily and how they should be spending their time at work.

The current results indicate that school counselors are taking part in many of the

purported professional roles and activities; however, elementary, middle, and high

school counselors' daily work activities indeed differ from one another and do not

completely align with the ASCA National Model. Thus, our findings have direct

implications for practicing school counselors and school counselor training, as well as

future process and outcome research for school counselors' work activities. In addition,

the actual roles school counselors are performing should be considered in the context of

the current professional trends and how students are different because of what they do.

Although CSCPs based on the ASCA National Model include specialized school

counselor work activities such as individual planning, crisis counseling, small group

counseling, and large group classroom guidance delivery, in reality the different levels

of practicing school counselors are devoting varying time to CSCP activities. In addition,

all of the school counselors in our study reported some participation in older, non-CSCP

work activities, as found in past studies (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). The overall

findings in our study indicated that currently, practicing school counselors are not able,

or not electing, to fully implement CSCPs. Because fully implemented CSCPs are designed to impact *all* students, rather than selected groups of students (Brown & Trusty, 2005a), it is possible that the proactive nature of these programs actually decrease the need for crisis response by practicing school counselors. In other words, if school counselors address potential concerns in a proactive manner before they become problems, it may lend to students' academic achievement and persistence in school. We recommend that practicing school counselors examine the proactive programming that they offer within their counseling programs to determine their effectiveness, and that they further use these results in program planning. When effective programming is used, it frees up time to spend in other CSCP activities directly related to student outcomes, such as individual counseling, group counseling, and consultation.

   We further recommend that practicing school counselors examine the student to counselor ratio within their schools and their school districts. Many school counselors reported that, even though they are trying to implement a CSCP, the ratio of students to counselors is so overwhelming that they do not have time to implement some of the components. Although, the ASCA recommends a student to counselor ratio of 250:1 (ASCA, 2003), actual ratios indicate that current school counselors' caseloads are increasing rather than decreasing (ASCA, 2005). During the 2003-2004 school year, ASCA reported a national average student to counselor ratio of 488:1 (ASCA, 2005), representing an increased ratio from the 2002-03 school year. In addition, 28 states reported increased student to counselor ratios, as well (ASCA, 2005). We recommend that practicing school counselors strongly advocate for decreased student to counselor

ratios in order to more fully implement CSCPs. Specifically, while middle and high

school counselors reported that they were implementing certain components of CSCPs,

they also indicated a large amount of time was spent in non-CSCP activities such as

test-administration and increasing student numbers. In an era when accountability is

crucial, providing effective CSCPs can only occur under reasonable and realistic

student to counselor ratios. Through advocacy, perhaps we can change the trend of

accepting additional duties without relinquishing outdated and inappropriate duties.

One realistic barrier to full implementation of CSCPs may be that many school

counselors do not have the training for conceptualizing, planning, designing,

coordinating, implementing, managing, and evaluating CSCPs based on the ASCA

National Model. Counselor education programs must provide specialized training for

school counselors-to-be in school counseling history, systems, current issues, and

CSCP development and implementation. In addition, school counselor training should

be focused on specific work roles and activities found within the ASCA National Model's

Delivery System. For instance, with the current student to counselor ratios previously

mentioned, school counselors should be trained in the practice of efficient use of their

time by conducting small group counseling and large group classroom guidance

delivery that is accessible and efficacious for *all* students. In addition, we believe that it

is within our school counseling training programs that we must first promote the critical

ideas of 21st century school counseling. These ideas of current and futuristic school

counseling are well-documented in the literature and include: the ASCA National

Standards for School Counseling; the ASCA National Model for School Counseling; our

specific roles and CSCP-defined work activities; assertive advocacy for *all* students

including underrepresented populations and students with special needs; advocacy for the school counseling profession; participation and leadership in national and state-level school counseling organizations; classroom management and teaching competence; cultural competence for working with students, parents, and teachers; consultation and collaboration practices; and education and advocacy for the CSCP work activities that we are specially trained to conduct within the school environments. From this list of specialized activities, it is apparent that 21st century school counselors maintain very specialized training and preparation that no other school personnel are trained to manage.

Also, within our training programs, a strong emphasis on multicultural competence for school counselors should be maintained; however, this diversity is not necessarily reflected in the school counselor graduates of these programs. We found that the vast majority of our participants were European American (90.3%) and primarily female. These data are not reflective of the composition of the current U.S. population. Because research has documented that students may be more comfortable with same gender or same racial/ethnic school counselors (Dixon Rayle, 2005a), it is important that school counselors representing a multitude of cultural backgrounds are available. We recommend that training programs increase efforts to recruit students from underrepresented populations and males in an effort to make our profession more representative of the U.S. population.

Finally, while many training programs require a course in curriculum and instruction for school counselors-in-training, these courses are generally combined courses with preservice teachers as well as preservice school counselors. However, we

advocate for training programs to develop new coursework for students who are entering the school counseling field who have not trained as teachers. Such a course could increase neophyte school counselors' abilities to teach classroom guidance lessons and boost their confidence and desire to participate in classroom guidance.

Limitations

Although this study yields an important snapshot into the current work activities school counselors are performing and how they differ across the varying levels of schools, there are limitations that must be mentioned. First, this study represents only one glimpse into a small sample of school counselors' daily work activities that are likely shifting weekly and monthly. Compounded by this work activity fluidity, the questionnaires were all self-report; therefore, we cannot verify that these same school counselors would respond in the same manner at any given time. Therefore, further longitudinal studies are needed in order to document school counselors daily work activities across a specified amount of time. Additionally, the school counselors were solicited for *voluntary* participation through state chapters of the ASCA. Individuals who choose to volunteer in research studies may have biased opinions and experiences they wish to voice – whether positive or negative. Further, individuals who are members of their professional organizations certainly represent a biased sample at best. Therefore, generalizing the current results to other elementary, middle and/or high school counselors across the U.S. should be done so with caution. Finally, the questionnaires were created specifically for use in this study, and although they were based in theory and evaluated by school counseling experts, future studies could further define the reliability and validity of these self-report measures.

Directions for Future Research and Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that elementary, middle, and high school counselors are experiencing their school counseling positions differently, and despite numerous reformation efforts in our profession, not all school counselors are able to fully implement CSCPs based on the ASCA National Model. It is important to re-emphasize that despite the specific educational opportunities school counselors receive in their graduate programs, training needs remain for practicing school counselors in conceptualization, need and rationale, designing, planning, implementation, managing, and evaluation of CSCPs and the National Model. Our exploratory study revealed significant differential patterns among elementary, middle, and high school counselors' daily CSCP work activities and on several background demographic variables. However, we are left with critical questions for future research: What school administrative support exists for school counselors and CSCPs?; What ratio of practicing school counselors are aware of and ready to implement CSCPs?; What are the pre-conditions needed for fully implementing CSCPs?; and How effective are CSCPs in schools where the student to counselor ratio is within the recommended range? It is the time for our profession to engage in the process and outcome research needed to evaluate our CSCPs and daily work activities for the ultimate benefit of our students, parents, teachers, administrators, the future of U.S. education, and most importantly for school counselors and the school counseling profession.

Defining and advocating for what they do daily, fully implementing CSCPs, and engaging in specialized daily work activities, may be a few of the most demanding challenges for school counselors today. The ever-changing social and cultural climates

in the U.S consistently present school counselors with changing, diverse students, parents, teachers, goals, tasks, and challenges. However, this is also an exciting time in the practice of school counseling, in the training of school counselors-to-be, and in the profession's movement to specifically define and advocate for the specialized work activities of the school counselor today and how students are different because of what they do. Results of this study indicate that despite the increasingly better-defined school counseling CSCP work activities based in the ASCA National Model and other research and models, elementary, middle, and high school counselors still struggle to fully implement programs that align with our profession's reformation. Even as our profession is transforming and redefining the roles of school counselors, more must be done. Our hope is that this study allows for a brief picture in time of what school counselors were actually doing across the U.S. during one academic semester. We hope to raise awareness and do our part in taking action to change the day to day experiences in this honorable profession; as one participant so eloquently shared: "No other occupation could be more rewarding for me than working with students as a school counselor and helping them reach their goals in every aspect possible."

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Table 1

Disaggregated Demographic Data for the Total Sample of School Counselors (N = 388)

Demographic Variable	Elementary Counselors (*n* = 133)		Middle School Counselors (*n* = 99)		High School Counselors (*n* = 156)		Percent of Total Sample
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	%
Gender							
Female	108	81.2	81	81.8	114	73.1	78.1
Male	25	18.8	18	18.2	42	26.9	21.9
Race/Ethnicity							
African American	4	3.0	3	3.0	2	1.3	2.3
Euro-American	117	88.0	87	87.9	146	93.6	90.3
International	3	2.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0.8
Latino/Hispanic Amer.	4	3.0	2	2.0	5	3.2	2.8
Native American	2	1.5	4	4.0	1	0.6	0.8
Biracial/Multiracial	3	2.3	3	3.0	2	1.3	2.1
Educational Degrees							
Not Reported	3	2.3	3	3.0	1	0.6	1.8
Bachelor's	4	3.0	0	0.0	1	0.6	1.3
Master's	126	94.7	92	93.0	147	94.2	94.1
Doctoral	0	0.0	4	4.0	7	4.6	2.8
CACREP-Accredited Training							
Yes	100	75.2	76	76.8	120	76.9	76.3
No	33	24.8	23	23.2	36	23.1	23.7
Time Spent at Current Position							
Full Time	121	91.0	96	97.0	146	93.6	93.5
Part Time	8	6.0	3	3.0	7	4.5	4.6
Volunteer	4	3.0	0	0.0	3	1.9	1.8

Table 1 (continued)

Disaggregated Demographic Data for the Total Sample of School Counselors (N = 388)

Demographic Variable	Elementary Counselors (*n* = 133)		Middle School Counselors (*n* = 99)		High School Counselors (*n* = 156)		Percent of Total Sample
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	%
School Type							
Public School	131	98.5	91	91.9	145	92.9	94.6
Public Charter School	1	0.8	5	5.1	4	2.6	2.6
Public Alternative School	1	0.8	1	1.0	1	0.6	0.8
Private School	0	0.0	2	2.0	6	3.8	2.1
State Certified School Counselor							
Yes	114	85.7	88	88.9	132	84.6	86.1
No	19	14.3	11	11.1	24	15.4	13.9
Members of ASCA							
Yes	61	45.9	49	49.5	88	56.4	51.0
No	72	54.1	50	50.5	68	43.6	49.0
Members of ASCA-Based State Associations							
Yes	93	69.9	72	72.7	120	76.9	73.5
No	37	27.8	22	22.2	28	17.9	22.4
Not Available	3	2.3	5	5.1	8	5.1	4.1
Teacher before Becoming a School Counselor							
Yes	71	53.4	53	53.5	101	64.7	58.0
No	62	46.6	46	46.5	55	35.3	42.0
Implementing CSCP Based on ASCA Model							
Yes	90	67.7	51	48.5	88	56.4	59.0
No	43	32.3	48	51.5	68	43.6	41.0

Table 2

Demographic Data for School Counselors' Years of Work Experience (N = 388)

Demographic Variable	Elementary Counselors (*n* = 133)				Middle School Counselors (*n* = 99)		
	Range	M	SD		Range	M	SD
Total Years of Counseling Experience	1 – 31	9.87	8.44		1 – 36	10.97	8.75
Total Years of School Counseling Experience	0 – 31	7.18	6.81		1 – 36	9.21	8.34

Demographic Variable	High School Counselors (*n* = 156)				Total Sample of School Counselors (*n* = 388)		
	Range	M	SD		Range	M	SD
Total Years of Counseling Experience	1 – 33	12.65	8.83		1 – 36	11.27	8.74
Total Years of School Counseling Experience	1 – 33	10.61	8.14		0 – 36	9.07	7.88

Table 3

Chi-Square Results for CSCP Activities School Counselors are Participating In Regularly by Level (Total N = 388)

	df	χ^2	p
Individual Counseling/Planning with Students	2	96.50	.00
Individual Counseling/Planning with Parents	2	23.87	.00
Individual Counseling/Planning with Teachers	2	87.17	.00
Responsive Crisis Counseling with Students	2	170.32	.00
Small Group Counseling with Students	2	20.97	.00
Large Group/Classroom Guidance Lesson Delivery	2	117.66	.00
Consultation/Collaboration with Teachers	2	57.21	.00
Consultation/Collaboration with Administrators	2	11.47	.00
Consultation/Collaboration with Parents	2	52.23	.00
Consultation/Collaboration with Community Agencies	2	49.10	.00
Supervision of other School Counselors	2	16.74	.00
Supervision of School Counseling Interns	2	19.53	.00
Program Planning & Management	2	60.64	.00
School Counseling Program Evaluation	2	10.21	.01
Advisory Council Meetings/Planning	2	61.65	.00
Students' IEP/504 Writing and Planning	2	32.28	.00
School-Wide Testing	2	54.54	.00
Teachers' Classroom Coverage	2	49.56	.00
School Bus Lot Duties	2	114.36	.00
Lunchroom/Cafeteria Duties	2	133.95	.00

Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages for CSCP Activities School Counselors Participate In Regularly by Level (Total N = 388)

Activity	Elementary Counselors (*n* = 133)		Middle School Counselors (*n* = 99)		High School Counselors (*n* = 156)	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Individual Counseling/Planning with Students	89	66.9	99	100.0	62	39.7
Individual Counseling/Planning with Parents	58	43.6	32	32.3	27	17.3
Individual Counseling/Planning with Teachers	43	32.3	61	61.6	11	7.1
Responsive Crisis Counseling with Students	33	24.8	94	94.9	135	86.5
Small Group Counseling with Students	82	61.7	87	87.9	119	76.3
Large Group/Classroom Guidance Lesson Delivery	130	97.7	54	54.5	152	97.4
Consultation/Collaboration with Teachers	133	100.0	99	100.0	121	77.6
Consultation/Collaboration with Administrators	101	75.9	91	91.9	134	85.9
Consultation/Collaboration with Parents	118	88.7	91	91.9	92	59.0
Consultation/Collaboration with Comm. Agencies	29	21.8	64	64.6	84	53.8
Supervision of other School Counselors	47	35.3	22	22.2	74	47.4
Supervision of School Counseling Interns	23	17.3	14	14.1	55	35.3
Program Planning & Management	124	93.2	85	85.9	88	56.4
School Counseling Program Evaluation	88	66.2	51	51.5	75	48.1
Advisory Council Meetings/Planning	12	9.0	42	42.4	81	51.9

Table 5

Frequencies and Percentages for Non-CSCP Activities School Counselors Regularly Participate In by Level (Total N = 388)

Activity	Elementary Counselors (n = 133)		Middle School Counselors (n = 99)		High School Counselors (n = 156)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Students' IEP/504 Writing and Planning	131	98.5	91	91.9	121	77.6
School-Wide Testing	129	97.0	84	84.8	98	62.8
Teachers' Classroom Coverage	87	65.4	47	47.5	38	24.4
School Bus Lot Duties	98	73.7	61	61.6	22	14.1
Lunchroom/Cafeteria Duties	111	83.5	72	72.7	31	19.9

Biographical Statements

Andrea Dixon Rayle, Ph.D., LAC, NCC, is an Assistant Professor of Counselor Education at the University of Florida. Her research interests include adolescents, wellness, mattering, and meaning making, school counseling, school counselor s' work climate, and culturally competent counseling with racial/ethnic diverse individuals. She has published in the areas of wellness in adolescence, meaning and mattering in adolescence, racial/ethnic minority adolescents, Native American issues, multiculturally competent counseling, and the career climate of practicing school counselors.

Jennifer R. Adams, Ph.D., LPCC, is an Assistant Professor of Counseling, Rehabilitation Counseling, and Counseling Psychology at West Virginia University. Her research interests include spirituality and religious issues in counseling, children and adolescents, group counseling, school counseling, referrals within schools, cultural issues in counseling, and systems of care. She has published in the areas of referrals, cognitive behavioral theory, systems of care, and group counseling.