

School Counselor Perceptions and Attitudes About Collaboration

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Abstract

The American School Counselor Association's increased focus on collaboration in the schools indicates the importance of this activity. School counselors are charged with constructing collaborative relationships with stakeholders focused on academic success for all students. This study explores K-12 school counselors' perceptions and attitudes about collaboration in one southeastern state through survey research methods.

Results show that school counselors collaborate regularly and with various stakeholders. School counselors indicated the terms *needed*, *preferred* and *valuable* most strongly expressed their attitudes toward collaboration. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: School counseling, collaboration, semantic differentials, attitudes, perceptions

School Counselor Perceptions and Attitudes About Collaboration

In the past several years the role of school counselor has undergone substantial transformation (see American School Counselor Association; ASCA, 2005). Counselors' roles were primarily administrative and reactionary, responding to immediate needs of school administrators and students. Today, school counselors are deeply-rooted in proactive, system-wide, programmatic involvement that reaches all students. School counselors are not only advocates for school reform, but also collaborative leaders, at the center of interactions between all stakeholders (ASCA).

Recently, the mantra of new directions for practice has resounded throughout the professional literature (Aldeman & Taylor, 2002; Bemak, 2000; Green & Keys, 2001; Walsh, Barrett, & DePaul, 2007). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005) is asking school counselors to embrace collaborative leadership. The recent publication of the School Counselor Competencies (ASCA, 2008) reflects the growing emphasis on collaboration to promote equal access and opportunity for all students. School counselors are charged with challenging the status quo by building collaborative relationships that mobilize human resources in support of academic success for all students, regardless of cultural background and socio-economic status (Education Trust, 2003). Through their collaborative efforts, school counselors act as dynamic change agents in partnership with other stakeholders, promoting systemic change and equal access to opportunities for all students (Clark & Breman, 2009). In an effort to assist the successful integration of this new policy, this study explored the perceptions and attitudes school counselors have about collaboration.

Collaboration is seen as essential to the academic, career, and social/emotional development of students in the American educational system. Students today face complicated daily challenges, and anti-social and maladaptive behaviors put them at great risk for failure in academic, social and occupational endeavors (Bemak, 2000; Buchanan, 2008). Poverty, violence, substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, along with other harmful behaviors are systemic factors that impact students' academic success (Bemak). Increasing responsibility is being delegated to the public schools to address family and societal concerns (Evans & Carter, 1997); however the scope and magnitude of the challenges are beyond schools' ability to address as a sole institution. Successful collaboration among stakeholders is necessary to address these modern day challenges.

Collaboration in the Schools

Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB; U.S. Department of Education, 2001) education literature has explored the factors helping and hindering the success of school collaboration. Griffin, Jones, and Kilgore (2006) qualitatively explored pre-service special education teachers' experiences and attitudes about collaborating with other school personnel during their student-teaching semester. The study revealed that frequent communication, joint concerns and goals, family involvement, and supportive school climate positively affected school collaboration. A lack of common knowledge, understanding, expectations, role perceptions, time limitations, conflicting goals, and failure to follow through on decisions were cited as obstacles to collaboration. Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2007) explored factors affecting school counselor involvement in collaborative relationships. They found school climate,

role perceptions, self-efficacy beliefs, attitudes, and perceived barriers related to collaboration all affected overall involvement in collaborative relationships. A third study (ASCA, 2009) looked at principal-counselor relationships. Principals and counselors rated mutual trust and respect, a shared vision, and combined decision-making as important, while lack of trust and time were the biggest barriers to effective collaboration (ASCA). Finally, Carlton, Whiting, Bradford, Dyk, and Vail (2009) examined university-community collaboration and found shared vision about the effort and recognition of key collaborators was most influential in affecting collaborative success. Overall, evidence indicates that perspectives about collaboration directly influence the intent to collaborate and the potential success of collaborations.

The ASCA National Model (2005) states that school counselors' primary responsibility is to develop programs that respond to the academic, social/emotional and career needs of students. It is virtually impossible for school counselors to create a truly comprehensive counseling program that addresses these different components without fostering collaborative relationships. In fact, Keys and Green (2005) suggest collaboration is the foundation on which a developmental school counseling program is built; however, there is little empirical data identifying school counselors' perceptions of, and attitudes about, the collaborative process.

Defining Collaboration

A variety of definitions and several working models for implementing collaboration exist. Most definitions contend that collaboration is voluntary (Friend & Cook, 1992), interactive (Keys & Green, 2005), ongoing (Lawson, 2003), inclusive (Anfara, et al., 2008; Baker, et al., 2009), and requires commitment (Cahill and Mitra,

2008; Rubin, 2002) to a common goal (Friend & Cook). A key feature of collaboration is recognition that all stakeholders have a unique knowledge base and perspective equal in value and importance to the process. For this study, we chose the definition offered by Friend and Cook, "Interpersonal collaboration is a style of direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in sharing decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 5).

Models for collaboration include several analogous characteristics. We used the Friend and Cook (1992) model because of its universality and it frequently appears in school counseling literature (Keys & Green, 2005). Friend and Cook assert collaboration is a means for solving problems and obtaining goals through a voluntary process whereby two or more stakeholders come together as equally valued participants to work on a mutual goal. Collaborating stakeholders share their resources and assume joint decision-making responsibility (Friend & Cook). Collaboration is an interpersonal communication and problem solving strategy that allows school personnel to pool their resources whereby stakeholders feel empowered and vested in the institution and/or cause toward which they are working, often resulting in greater productivity and positive outcomes (Friend & Cook).

School Counselors as Collaborative Leaders

Keys and Green (2005) recently applied the Friend and Cook (1992) model to school counseling. As members of school leadership and student support teams, school counselors already collaborate with family members, principals, teachers, and other support staff to develop and implement school-wide programs, classroom and individual student activities to improve student outcomes. For example, counselors strategize with

classroom teachers to work toward improving student grades and test scores. While teachers contribute expertise in their related subject area, counselors contribute their expertise in behavior management (Keys & Green).

Given their training and knowledge, school counselors are uniquely situated to take the lead in institutional, systemic change supporting the collaborative process (Kaffenberger, Murphy, & Bemak, 2006) required to address the numerous social and academic concerns that impact student success. School counselors are trained in collaborative techniques such as group work, communication and listening skills, and systemic issues that make them well-suited to collaborative ventures (Keys & Green, 2005). Additionally, they understand how to collect and utilize relevant data and work from a perspective of promoting equal access and success for all students. School counselors as collaborative leaders in school reform and advocacy for all students are clearly established. However, school counselor perceptions toward collaboration and their behaviors regarding collaboration have not been adequately explored. Therefore, we identified two gaps in the current literature on collaboration: 1) What are school counselors' beliefs and attitudes about collaboration?; and 2) What are the initial actions school counselors take when faced with a potential collaborative effort? The focus of this study was to explore the first question by conducting a preliminary investigation of school counselor perceptions and attitudes toward collaboration.

Method

Participants

School counselors in a southeastern state were contacted via a statewide listserv. Approximately 2000 school counselors are employed in the state, with 1200 of

these being members of the listserv. All 1200 listserv members were sent an email requesting their participation in the study. Of those, 268 members completed the survey for a 22.3% response rate. Due to the possibility of attrition, job changes, and technology issues, however, it is unknown how many of these actually received the email, so only conservative estimates of response rate can be provided. Respondents were mostly female (89%). Ninety-one percent (91%) identified as Caucasian and 7% identified as African American. Most (93%) reported at least 3 years of school counseling experience. Respondents were split among the different grade levels: 33% at the elementary level, 14.5% at the middle school, 37% at the high school, with the remaining participants in K-8 schools. Demographically, 22% were from urban schools, 36% from suburban schools, and 42% from rural schools.

School counselors provided additional information about their sites and their school counselor training. Forty-three percent (43%) indicated they were the only school counselor at their site, and 24% reported having one additional counselor at their school. Nearly half (46.5%) reported their site was a Title One school, indicating many of their students came from low-income households. Most (81%) indicated they had been at their current site for at least 3 years. As for training, most (74.3%) received training in the ASCA National model, with just over half (56.1%) having learned of the Model during graduate school.

Instruments

The survey consisted of three sections. In the first section, participants were asked about their level of collaboration at their sites. Questions asked how often they collaborated (never to always), with whom they collaborated (from a list of seven school

stakeholders plus open-ended response prompts for other collaborators), and with whom they most often collaborated (forced rank order from list of seven school stakeholders). In the second section, we included a short demographic survey. Finally, in the third section, we provided a semantic differential scale measuring attitudes about collaboration. We designed a short vignette on collaboration to address the second gap in the literature (school counselors' initial actions taken when faced with a potential collaborative effort) and is, therefore, not included in this study.

Semantic differential scales. Semantic differential scales include an attitude to be measured, polar opposite adjective pairs, and a five-to-nine step scale (Isaac & Michael, 1997). Typically, a seven-point scale is used, with the center position considered neutral; the center point receives a score of zero. The three positions to the negative side of the word pair, receive scores of -1 to -3, while the three positions to the positive side, receive scores of +1 to +3 (Isaac & Michael). Word pairs are selected through topical research and must be opposites. Approximately half of the positive words are to be placed at the left side of the scale and half to the right to avoid habitual answering. Finally, pairs are to reflect four main types of factors, including evaluative (good-bad), potency (strong-weak), activity (active-passive), and miscellaneous items specific to the construct. Semantic differential scales are considered less biased in measuring attitudes about psychological constructs than Likert-type scales (Friborg, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006).

Attitudes about collaboration scale. As we found no semantic differential scale measuring attitudes about collaboration, we designed this scale specifically for our study. We used the design criteria provided by Isaac and Michael (1997) along with

semantic differential scales from other studies as guides. To begin gathering possible word pairs, we identified terms Friend and Cook (1992) used to describe the facets of collaboration. For each facet, we recorded the positive term and used an antonym finder to identify its polar opposite. This yielded 18 word pairs (see Table 1). As these terms were based on an accepted and widely used definition of collaboration previously applied to school counseling, the semantic differential instrument content validity is firmly grounded in existing literature.

Next, we turned to semantic differential word pairs used by other researchers (Armer & Thomas, 1978; Norbergh, Helin, Dahl, Hellzen, & Asplund, 2006; Pierce, Sydie, Stratkotter, & Krull, 2003) to identify additional pairs applicable to attitudes about collaboration. Unlike the words selected based on Friend and Cook (1992), these word pairs had previously been coded into the three types of semantic differential factors and most were used in multiple studies, adding to instrument construct validity. Each researcher independently coded each word pair as evaluative, potency, activity, (previously established coded categories) or miscellaneous. Next, we met and compared results. When a disagreement in coding occurred, we referred to the original word pair source and discussed the coding options until an agreement was reached. If we could not agree, we eliminated the word pair. The final scale included a total of 33 pairs, with 10 coded as evaluative, 8 as potency, 7 as activity, and 8 as miscellaneous.

Next, we presented the semantic differential scale to a group of eight counseling and research experts. They found the scale to be representative of collaboration and suggested several additional word pairs. The experts noted no major concerns about the existing pairs.

Table 1*Word Pairs From Friend & Cook's Explanation of Collaboration*

Definition	Word Pair	Type of Semantic Differential
"...between at least two coequal parties...Collaboration requires parity among participants" (p. 5-6)	Equal – Unequal	Miscellaneous
"Collaboration is a direct interaction..." (p. 5)	Direct – Indirect	Miscellaneous
"Attention, willingness to learn, and desire to understand are important elements...[and] accurate understanding is required to build and maintain a relationship. (p.45)	Attentive – Absent	Activity
"Perhaps the most pronounced theme...is the absolutely essential requirement for openness." (p. 80)	Open – Closed	Miscellaneous
"...each individual...has resources to contribute that are valuable for reaching the shared goal...the type of resources professionals have depends on their roles and the specific activity...all the participating individuals are accountable for outcomes" (p.8)	Inclusive – Exclusive	Miscellaneous
"Professionals who anticipate collaborating must believe that the results of their collaboration are likely to be more powerful and significant than the results of their individual efforts..." (p. 8)	Preferred –Undesirable	Evaluative
"A final prerequisite for collaborative interactions is effective listening...good listening is essential for obtaining adequate and accurate information...necessary for continuing the collaborative activity." (p. 46)	Heard – Undetected	Potency
"Individuals who collaborate value this interpersonal style." (p. 8)	Valuable – Worthless	Evaluative

Definition	Word Pair	Type of Semantic Differential
"Professionals who collaborate trust one another." (p. 9)	Trustworthy – Untrustworthy	Evaluative
"In addition to understanding the type of problem to be solved collaboratively...you are faced with a crucial decision prior to beginning problem solving: is this a problem we should solve?" (p. 53)	Needed – Unnecessary	Evaluative
"Keep communication meaningful...by judging the amounts of information wanted by the people with whom you are interacting." (p. 81)	Meaningful – Pointless	Evaluative
"...parties voluntarily engaged in..." (p. 5)	Voluntary – Forced	Activity
"successful collaborators are people who communicate that they are nonjudgmental and nonevaluative about others (p. 78)	Neutral – Subjective	Miscellaneous
"All information can be categorized by...its domain, which is either overt or covert...in the covert domain, such as one's opinion or affect, is private and idiosyncratic." (p. 40)	Overt – Covert	Potency
One critical dimension...in collaborative activities is its locus indicating whether the information refers to the locus on self or the locus of others. " (p. 39)	Others – Self	Miscellaneous
"A sense of community evolves from collaboration...The willingness to work toward a common goal is accompanied by a decrease in concern about individual differences." (p. 9)	Joint – Unilateral	Miscellaneous
"Using a systematic approach for problem solving is beneficial in addressing both proactive and reactive problems...less time may eventually be required for resolving reactive problems so that more proactive problem solving is possible." (p. 53)	Proactive – Reactive	Activity
"...engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal." (p. 5)	Common – Unshared	Activity

A pilot study was then conducted with 11 second-semester school counseling internship students from four different master's programs. Participants completed the entire survey, indicated the time needed to complete the survey, and rated its clarity. Pilot study participants noted the directions for each section were clear or very clear and most found no questions confusing. Two participants mentioned that some of the semantic differential word pairs were vague or hard to answer and recommended reducing the number of word pairs. Since this is a study of attitudes toward collaboration and semantic differential word pairs are intended to provide responses based on their own feelings and opinions, researchers did not consider ambiguity or vagueness an issue to be addressed. After completing the pilot study, researchers conducted the main study. For the full study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .92, indicating strong evidence of reliability.

To increase validity support for the survey, we conducted a principal components analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation using the eighteen Friend and Cook (1992) items. After removing one poorly correlated item (subjective-neutral), we obtained a three component solution in which all three components had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, with 56.02% of the variance explained. Ten of the items clearly loaded on one of the three factors, and five others cross-loaded slightly on two items. Factor one, *interpersonal*, included four items related to connectedness with others, along with four additional items that cross-loaded on two factors but had higher loading on the *interpersonal* factor. Factor two was labeled *evaluative*, with three items clearly loaded and one item moderately loaded, all related to overall evaluation of collaboration. Finally, factor three was labeled *engagement*, and included three items related to

involvement in and enthusiasm for collaboration. These results suggest additional support for this instrument as a valid measure of attitudes on collaboration.

Procedures

Following completion of the pilot study, the survey was sent to school counselors on the statewide school counseling listserv. Interested counselors accessed the web-based survey through a password protected server. A brief introduction to the survey and an informed consent document were provided at the beginning of the survey. Participants were able to withdraw from the survey at any time without penalty. As an incentive, the researchers gave participants completing the survey the option to participate in drawing to win one of three \$50 gift cards.

Results

Results from the general questions about collaboration and the semantic differential scale are presented. Data from the vignettes are not part of this study. Descriptive and quantitative statistics are provided.

Participation in Collaboration

Most of the participants reported collaborating regularly. Participants gauged how often they collaborated as a professional school counselor on a seven-point scale, with higher numbers indicating more collaboration. The mean score was 5.4 ($SD = 1.1$), indicating the participants perceived that they collaborated fairly regularly. Participants also noted with whom they collaborated. Most responded they collaborated with multiple stakeholders, including teachers (97%), administrators (97%), parents (94.4%), other school counselors (88.8%), students (87%), school support staff such as the social worker, psychologist, and Project Grad workers (84%), and community agency

personnel (77.3%). A few participants included additional stakeholders with whom they collaborated, including universities, counseling supervisors, coaches, student resource officers, and local businesses.

Participants were given seven stakeholder groups and asked to rank order with whom they felt it is most important to collaborate (1 = most important, 7 = least important) and were instructed to assign each ranking only once. Teachers were ranked as the most important group overall ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.37$), followed by administrators ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.56$) and students ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 2.04$). Community agency personnel ($M = 5.94$, $SD = 1.40$) were ranked as the least important group with whom to collaborate, followed by school support staff ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.56$).

Attitudes About Collaboration

Attitudes about collaboration were measured through a semantic differential scale. Participants indicated their attitudes by selecting from one of seven options related to strength of beliefs. Higher mean scores indicate more defined attitudes about collaboration.

Rankings for each attitude are presented in Table 2. Three words had mean scores above 2.0, indicated a strong preference. These were *needed*, *preferred*, and *valuable*. Eleven other words had mean scores above 1.5, suggesting moderate attitudinal beliefs for *meaningful*, *positive*, *attentive*, *trustworthy*, *successful*, *active*, *open*, *practical*, *powerful*, *dynamic*, and *joint*. Alternatively, six words had mean scores below 1.0 (or -1.0), indicating a nearly neutral attitude for the items *neutral*, *stable*, *simple*, *others*, *overt*, and *smooth*.

Responses were examined using multiple ANOVAs by school level to determine differences in attitudes about collaboration in elementary, middle, and high school counselors. Significant differences were found for only one item pair, *needed-unnecessary*, with elementary and middle school counselors ($M = 2.39$, $SD = .71$) believing more strongly than did high school counselors ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.04$) that collaboration is needed ($F = 6.05$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Due to participant homogeneity in ethnicity and gender, no comparisons were made for these groupings.

Table 2

Semantic Differential Ratings, From Highest to Lowest Strengths in Attitude (-3 to +3)

Negative or Weaker Word	Mean Rating (SD)	Positive or Stronger Word
Unnecessary	2.28 (.87)	Needed
Undesirable	2.24 (.82)	Preferred
Worthless	2.13 (.94)	Valuable
Pointless	1.96 (1.01)	Meaningful
Negative	1.88 (1.15)	Positive
Absent	1.87 (1.08)	Attentive
Untrustworthy	1.85 (1.07)	Trustworthy
Unsuccessful	1.80 (1.11)	Successful
Passive	1.80 (1.14)	Active
Closed	1.79 (1.07)	Open
Impractical	1.69 (1.06)	Practical
Powerless	1.68 (1.16)	Powerful
Static	1.65 (1.11)	Dynamic
Unilateral	1.55 (1.31)	Joint
Unshared	1.49 (1.11)	Common
Exclusive	1.47 (1.38)	Inclusive
Indirect	1.47 (1.10)	Direct
Reactive	1.47 (1.58)	Proactive
Weak	1.46 (1.22)	Strong
Undetected	1.42 (1.05)	Heard
Indecisive	1.34 (1.20)	Decisive
Unpleasant	1.31 (1.15)	Pleasant
Forced	1.19 (1.42)	Voluntary
Vague	1.14 (1.34)	Defined

Negative or Weaker Word	Mean Rating (SD)	Positive or Stronger Word
Unequal	1.12 (1.45)	Equal
Argumentative	1.06 (1.20)	Harmonious
Constrained	1.05 (1.26)	Free
Rough	.94 (1.27)	Smooth
Covert	.81 (1.28)	Overt
Self	.72 (1.52)	Others
Complex	.66 (1.58)	Simple
Changeable	-.44 (1.51)	Stable
Subjective	-.23 (1.36)	Neutral

Differences by reported level of collaboration were also examined. Participants who rated their level of collaboration as a six or seven were placed in a separate group ($n = 140$) and compared to those who rated their level of collaboration as one-five ($n = 128$). Differences by individual items also were found for only a few items. Participants who indicated a higher level of collaboration had higher mean scores for the attitudes of *preferred* ($M = 2.36$ vs. 2.10 , $F = 6.61$, $df = 1$, $p = .01$) *trustworthy* ($M = 1.97$ vs. 1.71 , $F = 4.02$, $df = 1$, $p = .04$), *pleasant* ($M = 1.46$ vs. 1.15 , $F = 4.91$, $df = 1$, $p = .03$), *practical* ($M = 1.81$ vs. 1.55 , $F = 4.09$, $df = 1$, $p = .04$), and *common* ($M = 1.66$ vs. 1.30 , $F = 7.18$, $df = 1$, $p = .01$).

Discussion

Results demonstrate the use of and attitudes toward collaboration in schools with various stakeholders and lend support to the Friend and Cook (1992) model, used as a basis for this investigation. Results are discussed in terms of descriptive findings, semantic differential scale findings and as related to the Friend and Cook model. It should be noted that a moderate percentage of school counselors responded to the

survey, limiting the ability to generalize results to all school counselors. These results should be considered in the context of a preliminary study.

Respondents indicated they collaborated regularly and with various stakeholders in the school at percentage levels above 77% (i.e., teachers and administrators, parents, other school counselors, students, school support staff, and community agency personnel). It appears school counselors perceive they establish fairly diverse and comprehensive collaborative stakeholder networks. This result suggests that these school counselors are embracing ASCA's (2005) call to collaborate more in their work.

When respondents ranked collaborators by importance, they included teachers, administrators, and students as most important. This may suggest school counselors perceive it is most important to collaborate with those constituents most closely involved with day to day school functions and those who most directly impact student education on school grounds, with the exception of school support staff who were ranked as least important. Parents and community agency personnel ranked in the middle of the continuum. These latter two groups are traditionally located off the school campus and may require additional effort to contact and communicate (e.g., email, phone call, additionally scheduled meeting, etc.). Alternatively, school-based collaborative groups, such as S-teams or other groups designed to address student behavior problems, typically include teachers and administrators but are less likely to involve community agency personnel or parents, so the results may be indicative of this instead.

Based on the mean results, it appears these school counselors have positive evaluative beliefs about collaboration. The three strongest attitudinal beliefs about collaboration were all positive evaluations of the activity. Clearly, school counselors

believe in the power of collaboration and agree with the value ASCA has placed on it (ASCA, 2005). Alternatively, the participants suggested that collaboration was not an easy or smooth task. This is evident by their weaker attitudes towards words such as harmonious, smooth, free, equal, defined, pleasant, and simple. It may be a simple acknowledgment that working with others can be difficult, or it could be that school counselors have not had successful collaborative ventures in the past.

In examining the word pairs derived from Friend and Cook (1992), eight appear in the top 14 attitudinal beliefs about collaboration. These school counselors appear to agree with Friend and Cook on some aspects of collaboration, including attentive, open, preferred, valuable, trustworthy, needed, meaningful, and joint. These strong attitudinal beliefs mirroring the definition of collaboration might suggest that school counselors are aware of what collaboration involves. For example, they understand and believe that collaboration is a positive activity (preferred, valuable, needed, and meaningful) that involves working with others (joint, open) and accepting others (trustworthy, attentive).

Ten of the word pairs from Friend and Cook (1992), however, were not included in the strongest attitudinal beliefs about collaboration. Several (common, inclusive, direct, proactive, heard) were rated fairly strongly, suggesting the respondents somewhat believed in these aspects of collaboration. Other words, though, were rated more weakly. These include voluntary, equal, overt, others, and neutral. Friend and Cook describe collaboration as needing to be without a power differential (equal), not obligatory (voluntary), known to others (overt), focused on others (others), and unbiased (neutral). Successful collaboration ventures described in recent research (Amatea, Daniels, Bringman, & Vandiver, 2004; Staton & Gilligan, 2003) echo the need for shared

power, mutual agreement, and the focus on others. Therefore, it is of concern that participants did not have strong beliefs about these items as related to collaboration. Possibly, it is another indicator of the difficulty of successful collaboration, or perhaps, the results suggest that the ideal of collaboration is not what these counselors see as the reality they have experienced.

When findings are compared with Friend and Cooks' (1992) collaboration definition, Griffin, Jones and Kilgore's (2006) five facilitators of school collaboration (i.e., frequent and often informal communication, common concern for the student, common goals, family involvement and school climate that supports collaboration) and school counselors' positioning as an ideal collaborative leader, questions can be raised regarding attitudes and facilitative factors needed to implement collaboration at different school levels. What additional efforts do school counselors need to take in order to better include school support staff, parents and community agencies in the collaborative process? What can school counselors do to encourage all stakeholders to feel like equally valued participants working on a mutual goal? How can school counselors take a lead role in identifying the resources and decisions that school support staff, community agency personnel and parents bring to a collaborative relationship?

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

As with all research, limitations specific to this study exist. The sample was limited to school counselors registered on a listserv from a single state in the southeastern United States. School counselors who took the time to respond may value or highly regard school collaboration, thereby skewing the sample. As suggested previously, the moderate number of survey respondents limits the generalizability of the

results to all school counselors; however, findings provide initial evidence that school counselors perceive themselves as actively and regularly collaborating with key stakeholders in the school. Finally, we piloted a new instrument for the purposes of this investigation. Although the instrument and results show promise, it has not been widely used and requires further trials to establish validity and reliability.

Implications for Researchers

Some logical considerations for future research include refining the instrument, with special attention to clarifying the lower scoring word pairs. Future research could further establish instrument validity and reliability using larger samples of school counselors. Additionally, surveying a stratified sample of school counselors identified as highly successful collaborators by their peers/colleagues to identify attitudes in this select group would provide specific information about successful collaboration in the schools. Expanding the investigation to other school stakeholders would also illuminate similar and different perceptions and attitudes toward school collaboration.

Implications for Practitioners and Educators

Practitioners can benefit from the results of this study by considering their own attitudes toward collaboration. They may also consider the attitudes of those they work with, and how these attitudes may affect collaborative efforts. For example, Amatea et al (2004) interviewed potential collaborators to assess their original beliefs about collaboration in order to know where to start with training on collaboration. Similarly, Staton and Gilligan (2003) assessed student beliefs about collaboration before teaching collaborative strategies. Understanding attitudinal beliefs can be a first step in successful collaboration.

Both practitioners and educators can also use the results to identify potential attitudes that might hinder the collaborative process. Being aware in advance that school counselors may believe collaboration is not highly voluntary, equal, or neutral is important. Proactive measures can be instituted to avoid augmenting these attitudes. Also, collaboration can be recognized as not always free from conflict and a difficult process at times, but one that is viewed as needed, meaningful, valuable, and positive. Teaching counseling students about the difficulties that may arise while also highlighting the positive nature of collaboration may help them reconcile negative attitudes about collaboration. Similarly, starting a collaborative effort by acknowledging potential sources of difficulty can help build trust, rapport, and a feeling of togetherness. Attitudes about collaboration can be an important aspect of the collaborative process.

The topic of collaboration has recently received much attention in the professional school counseling literature. Few researchers, however, focus on school counselor perceptions of and attitudes toward collaboration. This paper examined those perceptions and attitudes in school counselors from a single state. According to this initial study, school counselors have positive attitudes toward collaboration and believe it to be necessary, meaningful and valuable. We hope this study acts as a springboard for greater research into the understanding of and beliefs about collaboration among school stakeholders.

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