TENNESSEE COUNSELING ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

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TENNESSEE COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

JOURNAL

Letter from the Editor:

Dear Reader,

On behalf of the Tennessee Counseling Association and the Tennessee Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, I am pleased to offer you the 2015 edition of the Tennessee Counseling Association Journal. We hope the information presented contributes to your knowledge regarding counseling. This is the seventh edition of the journal and we plan to offer many more editions, with the goal of adding to the counseling profession literature.

The purpose of the *Tennessee Counseling Association Journal* remains constant: to promote professional growth and creativity of TCA members, Tennessee counselors, counselors nation-wide, and other helping professionals. We hope the empirical research and expository ideas shared in this journal hearten readers to provide best practices to clients, expand notions of counseling, and share innovative counseling strategies with peers.

The target audience for this journal is counselors in all specialty areas, and we invite manuscripts of interest for professionals in all areas of counseling. We welcome manuscripts that: (a) integrate theory and practice, (b) delve into current issues, (c) provide research of interest to counselors in all areas, and (d) describe examples of creative techniques, innovations, and exemplary practices.

As this edition is completed, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the TACES and TCA leadership for their continued support of the journal. It continues to be an honor to serve as the editor of TCAJ.

Sincerely,
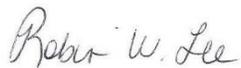
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Addressing the Mental Health of Non-Custodial Mothers From a Chronic Loss Perspective

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There are a growing number of women who are the non-custodial mothers of biological or non-biological children. Despite this fact, there is a dearth of information surrounding the mental health and well-being of these mothers. Living with the loss of custody can lead to symptoms of grief that are more complex than the "normal" grief that even accompanies the death of a child. A construct that may fit the emotional inner world of a mother living without her children is *chronic sorrow*, a term usually reserved for parents of chronically ill children, but one which is fitting for the non-custodial mother. A new framework is suggested which would allow a mental health counselor to counsel a non-custodial mother within the confines of many theoretical approaches and which incorporates an understanding of the application of chronic sorrow to this population.

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In *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us*, Clinton (1996) quotes author Elizabeth Stone: "Making the decision to have a child---it's wondrous. It is to decide *forever* to have *your heart* go *walking around outside your body*" (p. 7-8). This quote embodies both the poignancy and powerlessness that co-occur with motherhood. Not only does the state of motherhood hold an almost universally acknowledged sacredness, it also imparts on the bearer certain conditions that must be met in order for a mother to earn self-acceptance as well as public acceptance (Gustafson, 2001). For mothers that are no longer living in the same household as their children, the challenge in accepting their new status can be overwhelming. Many mental health counselors will treat both non-resident mothers--mothers not living in the same household as their children--and non-custodial mothers. It is important that counselors develop a systematic approach to aiding these clients in recognizing the effects

of separation and loss, treating those symptoms, and developing a life plan which provides ongoing consolation and support. Simultaneously, it is usually more functional for the relationship between mother and child to remain intact; the counselor can encourage this through effective communication that balances the needs of both child and mother. In looking at the various aspects of non-residential and non-custodial motherhood -- voluntary/involuntary status, level of coping, concurrent conditions, and evaluation/treatment--mental health counselors are encouraged to work in collaboration with their clients to assist them through the challenges of this role. While the definitions of non-residential and non-custodial are not interchangeable, for the purposes of this article, the term non-custodial motherhood will be used.

A Review of Literature

General Findings

If the literature on non-custodial motherhood is sparse, information on counseling these mothers is almost non-existent. A search of the term "non-custodial mother" on EBSCOhost reveals 24 journal articles, three of which primarily pertain to the topic of non-custodial mothers. Similarly, a search of the term "non-residential mother" generates fourteen articles, six of which are pertinent. There is an obvious dearth of information available on the topic (Bemiller, 2010; Kielty, 2006). There are, however, some significant findings in the literature review that are helpful. Many authors refer to the stigma involved in non-custodial motherhood, the emotional pain experienced by mothers who are not full-time parents, and the challenges faced by women who are living without their children.

Why Study Non-Custodial Mothers?

Non-custodial mothers are a group about which little is known and even less is studied. Bemiller (2008) wrote:

The non-custodial mother is an anomaly - she does not live with her children on a full-time basis, putting her outside of the dominant expectations associated with motherhood. Although there has been an increase in the number of non-custodial mothers in recent years, information on the experience of being a non-custodial mother is minimal. The majority of our knowledge of non-custodial mothers stems from research conducted during the mid-1980s through the 1990s. This research was primarily descriptive in nature, lacking theoretical density (p. 910).

Census data suggests that the number of non-custodial mothers was over two and a half million in 2011 (Grall, 2013); however, little data has been collected about this population, and even less is known about the various circumstances under which mothers do not retain custody of their children. The lack of community mental health services for this group is discouraging for a prospective consumer, and the online community and literature available targeting this population is minimal. Available

information suggests that there are no multi-disciplinary resources available at client and community levels to address the needs of non-custodial mothers (Bemiller, 2010; Kielty, 2006). This suggests there is a need for both individual and systemic treatment for the millions of mothers suffering from the various effects of their custodial and residential status.

On a public level, the stigma attached to non-custodial mothers is as virulent as ever. Read (2009) wrote an online article entitled "*Mothering From Afar: Mothers who Don't Live With Their Kids*" to which she received numerous online comments including this one: "Any woman that does not get custody of her children either has something very wrong with her or she did something very wrong…as far as I am concerned every non-custodial mother out there deserves to endure a lifetime of stigma and shame" (Anonymous, 2011, comment section). The responder is not singular in his reaction. Whether this type of response is verbalized or not, a non-custodial mother has to choose between not revealing her status as a mother or being subject to the belief that

> …the noncustodial mother must have deserted her children or had them taken away. Did she hit them? Leave them home alone while she went bar-hopping? Leave them in order to "go find herself"? If those thoughts actually don't go through your mind when you meet a noncustodial mother, you can bet that the fear of what you're thinking probably is going through *her* mind. Rather than face odd looks, intrusive questions, or rude remarks, some noncustodial moms say they keep their kids' photos off their desks at work, avoid mentioning their children, and wonder when to break the news to new acquaintances that they are, in fact, *real* mothers. They often suffer guilt, confusion, sadness, and depression (Read, 2009, n.p.).

Social Status and Stigma

Non-custodial mothers are at a significant social disadvantage due to the stigmatized status of non-custodial motherhood (Kielty, 2008). One study that was conducted with ten non-custodial mothers in the United Kingdom revealed that the myth that non-custodial mothers are somehow "lacking in good mothering skills was invalidated" (Clumps, 1996, p. 237). However, this confirmation regarding the "fitness" of the mother does not negate the notion, which is almost universally embedded in each culture, that mothers who are not raising their children must somehow be unfit, as noted by King (2008):

> Mothers without physical custody of their minor children defy popular notions of what constitutes good motherhood and risk being subjected to societal stigma (Babcock, 1997). They may be seen as morally tainted, unfit, incompetent, selfish, cold-hearted, uncaring, self-centered, emotionally unstable, irresponsible, licentious, promiscuous, abusive,

mentally ill, or drug addicts (Aquilino, 1994; Dolan & Hoffman, 1998; Greif, 1997; Pagano, 2000; Thompson & Laible, 1999) (p. 56).

King also indicated that mothers without custody are at a much higher risk of losing total contact with their children than are fathers without custody. This could be due to the isolation and shame caused by the social stigma of their status. Others have found that non-custodial mothers are the most disapproved of group in regards to familial status (Fischer, 1983 and Dolan & Hoffman, 1998). The clear lack of support, permeating all levels of the non-custodial mother's ecosystem, may have dramatic implications for the emotional resilience of the mother (Gustafson, 2001). Gustafson shared her own story of "unbecoming" a mother after she decided to allow her children to live with their father. She noted the stigma of voluntary non-custodial motherhood: "My pain was obscene. Non-custodial mothers were not to be embraced. They were to be rejected with contempt…The loss of that daily connection to my children was not recognized as legitimate. With little support, my grief intensified. I cried alone and ashamed" (2001, p. 208).

Motherhood and the Concept of Fitness

Adjusting poorly to her status as non-custodial mother, Gustafson (2001) wrote of the sharp decline of her physical and emotional health following the change in custody:

To my family, colleagues, and the uninformed stranger, the reasons why my children lived with their father became increasingly obvious. I had become the image of the "bad" mother: self-absorbed, inadequate, out of control. When I looked in the mirror, I could no longer see the "good" mother I believed myself to be (p. 209).

Regardless of a mother's fitness prior to loss of custody, the emotional distress and social stigma of non-custodial motherhood can become a sort of self-fulfilling prophesy. Coleman and Karraker (1998) demonstrated the strong correlation between perceived parental self-efficacy and positive parenting practices. Self-efficacy in parenting also mediates maternal depression and lack of support; as support diminishes, and unabated grief is experienced, perceived self-efficacy may decline as well. Concurrently, Clumpus (1996) reported that Western societal constructs of maternal fitness are a means by which to reduce attention to power inequities. In addition, online anecdotal accounts of non-custodial mothers demonstrate that time and again, a non-custodial mother's beliefs about her own "goodness" or "badness" as a mother can be drastically affected by her resilience in the face of non-custodianship. It appears that personal views, personal views through the lens of society, and societal views of one's motherhood all play a part in shaping the actual fitness of the non-custodial mother.

Discussion

Chronic Sorrow

Chronic sorrow, a construct developed to explain the manner in which people deal with "living losses" such as having a child who is suffering a chronic illness (e.g., diabetes mellitus or neural tube defect) may be the most appropriate lens through which to view the complex grief of a non-custodial mother. Research has shown that almost exclusively, a non-custodial mother is a grieving mother (King, 2008). However, unlike a mother who passes through the stages of grief while grieving the loss of a child to, say, cancer, the non-custodial mother of living children is often the subject of unremitting emotional pain. Just as society sees the non-custodial status as unnatural, the cells of the non-custodial mother's body metaphorically reject the idea of non-custodial status. One non-custodial mother put it this way:

> It's actually physical…something that somebody takes out of you that you just…you feel so empty…I imagine it must be like women who have these terrible operations where people take out all the wrong organs and things, that's what is feels like. It feels like you've been robbed inside and you're not the person you were and you never can be that person again (Kielty, 2008, p. 36).

This mother had been living without her child for six years, and the depth of her pain was evident in the description of her loss. Gordon (2009) used the 1998 framework of Eakes, Burke and Hainsworth's middle range theory of chronic sorrow to assist in identifying patients with chronic sorrow and maintained that there are two antecedents to chronic sorrow: 1) "…a single event of a living loss is experienced," which can be conceptualized as the initial decision for a client to be non-custodial, whether voluntary or involuntary; and 2) "…an unresolved disparity resulting from the loss" (p.116). This disparity is best exemplified in Kielty's (2005) summation of her case narratives:

> In spite of geographical dispersal, six of the seven mothers have remained in regular contact with their children and say that they have a warm and loving relationship. Nevertheless, all were profoundly dissatisfied with the level of involvement and the position that they held in their children's lives. They each described motherhood as their core identity and throughout their accounts there was a profound sense that living apart from their children was experienced as a physical loss of the very essence of their selfhood (p. 9).

While the construct of chronic sorrow is currently used exclusively in the medical field to describe the grief felt by parents with disabled children - or disabled person themselves - the definition aptly describes to the inner pain felt by many non-

custodial mothers, and is a more useful lens than a case formulation centering around depression through which to view the inner landscape of non-custodial mothers.

Counseling Approaches

The available literature has few suggestions on counseling the non-custodial mother. Schen (2005) took Fromm-Reichmann's lead in cautioning against being glib or falsely reassuring, and emphasized empathy for the client's situation and pain, refraining from judgment, and attempting to lead the client out of isolation. Schen also suggested helping the client to vocalize the pain and accompanying anger as well as focusing on disavowed feelings, and cautioned that for women in positions of powerlessness "suicide and self-destructive acts can be important means of protest" (p. 240). Altmaier (2011) emphasized the narrative format and suggested that it is not the techniques that are effective as much as the relationship that is built between client and counselor. Indeed, gentle conversation, providing safe emotional space, and developing trust are the keys to intervention. Gustafson described the mistake one counselor made highlighting the need for techniques to properly treat the non-custodial mother: "The counselor poked and prodded, in search of personal demons rather than interrupting my process of unbecoming" (2001, p. 209). Snowdon and Kotze (2012) also suggested a counselor be cautious to avoid assuming or imposing the dominant view on motherhood, which may close off lines of inquiry into a person-centered view on motherhood.

Using the information contained in this article as a foundation, the author has developed a model that counselors can use when counseling non-custodial mothers. The model is identified with the acronym "C.A.R.E.S." specifically. Counselors are encouraged to consider the *Causes* and *Conditions* surrounding mothers' non-custodial status ("C"). This means discovering the cause of her status and whether the choice was voluntary or involuntary. Economics can play a factor as can race, sexual orientation, mental health status, incarceration, military service, addiction and a belief that her decision will provide the best outcome for her children. As the *causes* of mothers' status are investigated, counselors may learn of the *conditions* surrounding the situations. Co-occurring illnesses (mental or physical) may be present and may impact treatment. Counselors can help mothers identify resources and support services in their community. Mothers' housing, jobs, and transportation situations can reveal relevant information as well. Generally, counselors will conduct a needs assessment to make sure that clients' basic needs are being met.

It is important that counselors keep in mind the custodial status of mothers as they conduct intakes. For instance, in constructing genograms, it would be helpful to find out the familial and cultural beliefs surrounding motherhood. Regarding substance use and addiction, it is possible the non-custodial status of mothers is due to or affected by addiction or substance

misuse. Likewise, it is possible that clients have initiated or increased substance use in order to manage feelings of grief and anxiety regarding their custodial status. A meta-analysis of treatment studies found that counselors feared that incorporating motherhood issues into treatment would distract mothers and introduce feelings of guilt and shame regarding motherhood, thus increasing the complexity of treatment. However, programs incorporating motherhood issues have longer lengths of residential stay that often lead to improved treatment outcomes (Milligan et al, 2011).

The "A" in the C.A.R.E.S. approach stands for *Assessment* and *Attachment.* This is a time-sensitive, crucial aspect of the model. As discussed previously, barring a co-occurring mental illness, counselors and clients may benefit from the use of an available assessment for chronic sorrow. An empirical tool validated to measure the concept of chronic sorrow is the Burke/NCRCS Chronic Sorrow Questionnaire, modified in 2003 as the Burke/Eakes Chronic Sorrow Assessment Tool (Peterson & Bredow, 2004). Once counselors are aware that there is a difference between depression and chronic sorrow, distinguishing between the two conditions should become more obvious. Counselors may decide to remain current on research and publications that discuss chronic sorrow and grief so as to recognize and properly treat this particular emotional state. Additionally, Eakes, Burke, and Hainsworth (1998) found that developing both internal and external coping strategies for managing grief is useful.

The *attachment* aspect of this part of the model is the time-sensitive feature. Women that are in crisis following the first antecedent of chronic sorrow (i.e., the initial loss of the children) may have a difficulty with the emotions that arise when they think about their children, and may actively attempt to avoid situations or conversations which trigger those thoughts. While this seems contradictory, the loss can be felt so strongly that even consideration of the children and acknowledgment of their existence can lead to a paralyzing state. Visitation can be a painful experience for non-custodial mothers as they are reminded of the pain of separation (Schwab, Clark, & Drake, 1991; Nicholson, Geller, & Fisher, 1996). They may need support in order to call the children on whatever basis they are scheduled. If there are unlimited phone calls or visits, they may need help setting up a manageable routine which maximizes the benefits of talking and visiting and minimizes the emotional turmoil for both mother and child. Inconsistent visitation has been shown to do more harm than good (Kelly, 2005) and if clients are experiencing extreme mental illness the benefits and risks of visitation would be a beneficial focus of treatment.

As counselors are charged with "doing no harm," it is important that they consider how their work with mothers may impact mothers' children. Shapiro (2008) noted ethical considerations when working with families are important "…because neither scientists nor practitioners can predict the future within which families will live with the consequences of shared decisions"

(p.42). Counselors can provide mothers with numerous methods of remaining connected to their children including phone calls, letter writing, video-sharing via computer, social networking with older children, and the creation of story books (Nicholson, Sweeney, & Geller, 1998). In addition, there are children's books and cards available that allow mothers to record their voices while reading books or cards to their children. This gift allows children to hear their mothers' voices even in their absence. Stuffed animals can be constructed at retail shops like Build-a-Bear™ into which a little recorder can be placed onto which mothers can record phrases so that every time the button is pushed the phrases are spoken. Any tools that mothers typically utilize in attachment would be suitable. It is the reaching out and establishment of regular communication that is imperative. At this stage even a short time without contact can be traumatizing for a child (Schen, 2005).

The "R" facet of the model stands for *Rebuilding Respect* and *Redefinition*. As has been discussed, many mothers that do not live with their children face considerable shame and guilt. Counselors can aid clients in *rebuilding respect* for themselves by 1) modeling that respect for them; 2) providing them unconditional positive regard; 3) challenging them to engage in activities that build self-respect; and 4) encouraging self-care. While the rest are self-explanatory, the concept of "self-care" may be a difficult one to grasp for non-custodial mothers, who may not feel worthy of this practice. Specifically, counselors can encourage clients to be kind to themselves and develop self-compassion - a construct shown to build mental wellness and resilience (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). Neff (2003) notes that self-compassion is constructed of

> (a) self-kindness—being kind and understanding toward oneself in instances of pain or failure rather than being harshly self-critical, (b) common humanity—perceiving one's experiences as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as separating and isolating, and (c) mindfulness—holding painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them. (p. 85).

Incorporating these essential aspects of well-being is vital for some non-custodial mothers whose shame can quickly lead to negative ways of coping such as alcohol or drug abuse.

To the extent possible, counselors can encourage non-custodial mothers to work on treating themselves compassionately. *Redefinition* goes hand in hand with this point. Clients' dreams of motherhood may have been shattered. They have potentially lost the hope of seeing their children's first steps or of being the ones their children call "Momma." These clients may have lost the vision of attending their child's graduation or wedding. Their losses can be extensive and ongoing. This may be a valuable time for clients to recreate a new idea of what "motherhood" looks like (Bemiller, 2010; Snowden & Kotze, 2012). Counselors can help non-custodial mothers set realistic roles and goals for themselves. How this is conceptualized will vary from

case to case, but it is a vital aspect of reimaging themselves through a realistic lens. Snowden and Kotze (2012) recommend asking "meaning-making" questions:

> We believe that highlighting the specific actions a woman takes, rummaging for details, asking for descriptions of the intention behind the action and the meaning this step had for the mother, is to lay out a newly created position for this woman's active contribution to mothering (p. 151).

Thoughtful counselors can be very supportive of this undertaking.

The "E" in the C.A.R.E.S. model stands for *Education* and *Evaluation*. Now that the vital steps are in place to manage the crisis counselors can *educate* clients on 1) the nature of chronic sorrow, if present, and what their expectations can hold for the future; and 2) obstacles or barriers which can be anticipated so as to mitigate emotional pain. Chronic sorrow can be a manageable condition if one knows what to expect and has the proper tools to deal with days that seem overwhelming (Gordon, 2009). For instance, holidays, special days such as birthdays, and developmental milestones can be emotionally troublesome; as such, counselors can encourage clients to anticipate the difficulty and have a plan in place. Eakes et al. (1998) described these events -- especially the events that magnify the disparity between reality and what a mother had hoped to experience with her child -- as trigger events which renew the initial grief felt with the loss of full time parenting. Clients may benefit from commemorating their children's birthdays in personally meaningful ways. In some cases, a mother may need to spend the day acknowledging and honoring her sorrow. This will vary from client to client, but anticipated pain is manageable pain. Shapiro (2008) highlights the positive benefits of "anticipatory grief" on personal growth.

Other difficult days for non-custodial mothers may include Mother's Day. On this day, clients may consider whether or not they wish to acknowledge the person who has taken over their day-to-day duties of mothering. While this may be difficult to do, the substitute caregivers are taking care of their children and recognizing the effort involved may be helpful. Counselors can educate their clients about ways to remain informed of their children's activities so that they do not miss important days like confirmations, grade-school graduations, and other significant life events. It may be more painful to hear about these events after the fact and to realize they have been overlooked than to confront them directly. While clients may not be invited to attend these events they can be encouraged to follow up about the day with their children.

Evaluation is necessary regarding both counselors' effectiveness and mothers' self-reported efforts. Counselors and clients can look for areas of improvement, assess what has worked well for clients and determine which areas still need

attention. Evaluation need not be formal, but a regular look at what progress has been made can be both informative and encouraging.

The "S" aspect of the model stands for *Share*, *Support* and *Spirituality*. The first two activities go hand in hand. It has been documented that the isolation that comes from the stigma of non-custodial motherhood is a particularly harmful aspect of the role (Gustafson, 2001). Counselors can work with other therapists to find clients in similar situations who are willing to meet with one another. If necessary, counselors can form support groups for non-custodial mothers. The frequency with which women assume this role is greater than most people expect. If no groups are available locally counselors could support clients in researching and locating online resources. Eakes et al (1998) suggested individuals suffering from chronic sorrow improved when "talking with others involved in the same or a similar loss situation, talking with someone close, or talking with a trusted professional" (p. 182). Online nationwide support groups for non-custodial mothers can be a source of power and support for women coping with their non-custodial status as well (Bemiller, 2010). Mothers living without their children may be afraid to experience happiness. They may be fearful of participating in joyful activities, thinking "how does a woman without her children smile, or laugh?" Sharing their feelings with women in similar situations can relieve the guilt and sadness that are commonly felt by this group.

Successful counselors will consider engaging clients in their spiritual practice of choice, if any. These clients may need encouragement to reach a place of self-forgiveness; religious or spiritual practices may heal them in ways that go beyond the capability of the human counselor. While the addition of spiritual components into mainstream counseling is relatively recent, both the American Counseling Association and the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling competencies highlight the appropriateness of addressing religious and spiritual themes when relevant to treatment (Cashwell & Young, 2005 and ASERVIC, 2009). As a giver of life themselves there is a good chance that mothers believe in something greater than their own power.

Conclusion

Both the lack of information about non-custodial mothers, and the self-reported pain of non-custodial mothers make it clear that a new approach is needed for the treatment of this oft-overlooked group. Operating from a chronic sorrow frame of reference within the context of the C.A.R.E.S. model are ways in which counselors can help this group of clients cope with a very difficult life experience. Any conversation this framework generates will further open lines of communication regarding the dilemma

of women in this category and aid others in grasping the plight of the unseen mourning of this group and the chronic nature of their

pain.

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Psychometric Properties of the School Counselor National Model Activity Scale (SCNMAS)

R. Eric Heidel
John Breckner
Jeannine R. Studer
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Research has shown the effectiveness of comprehensive developmental school counseling (CDSC) programs; however, implementation has been gradual and school counselors report completing tasks that are not commensurate with their training. We created the School Counseling National Model Activity Scale (SCNMAS) to examine the alignment of professional activities with the ASCA National Model. We sought to establish the validity of the SCNMAS. Results revealed evidence that the SCNMAS was a reliable instrument with three factors and had convergent and concurrent validity.

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In the past decade, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has supported professional school counselors in transforming their profession into one that takes a comprehensive and developmental focus through the use of the ASCA National Model. School professionals designed this model to use as a prototype in making a philosophical transformation from a traditional, reactive school counseling approach, to one that is a proactive comprehensive developmental school counseling (CDSC) program. Tracking and measuring professional school counselor activities, according to the ASCA guidelines, is challenging given the lack of formal instruments designed for this task. In this article, we describe an instrument designed to measure school counselor tasks and report the research findings from our investigation of the psychometric properties and strength of the designed instrument.

Since the inception of the school counseling profession, professional school counselors have unwittingly engaged in school tasks unrelated to professional school counseling that have contributed to a misunderstanding of the professional school counselor's role (Foster, Young, & Hermann, 2005; Kolodinsky, Draves, Schroder, Lindsey, & Zlatev, 2009; Martin, 2002). Although Scarborough and Culbreth (2008) attempted to more clearly define this professional role, efforts have been negligible until recently. With the inception of the *Summary of Goals 2000 Educate America Act* (2005), an opportunity exists for ASCA to delineate essential professional school counselor roles and responsibilities contributing to the improvement of academic and skill standards for their students. In response to educational reform initiatives, ASCA developed the ASCA National Standards that focused on what "all students, from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, should know, understand, and be able to do" (Campbell & Dahir, 1997, p. 5) as a result of participating in the school counseling program. Furthermore, Education Trust, a separate project sponsored by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, established the Transforming School Counselor Initiative (TSCI). This initiative focused primarily on academic achievement and use of data (Pérusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004) with professional school counselors serving as leaders, advocates, consultants, and data consumers to close the achievement gap (Education Trust, 2009). In 2001, the ASCA National Model was developed and incorporated the Educational Trust elements to enhance the ASCA Standards (2005). This model serves as a template for professional school counselors in developing a comprehensive developmental school counseling (CDSC) program that integrates four interrelated components and provides a clearer understanding of the professional school counselor's role and responsibilities.

CDSC Four Model Components

The four model components include Foundation, Management, Delivery, and Accountability, as well as incorporated elements that are interwoven throughout the model. The first component, Foundation, focuses on the beliefs and philosophy of the program, a mission statement that states the purpose of the program, and the academic, career, and personal/social domains that define the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students should be able to demonstrate upon graduation from high school (ASCA, 2005).

The Delivery component includes the guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and systems support. Within this component, professional school counselors engage in activities such as teaching a guidance curriculum, counseling students in individual and small-group settings, individual planning to assist students set goals, and system support to maintain the program (ASCA, 2005).

Management includes agreements to address how the program is to be organized, an advisory council to make recommendations, data to monitor students' progress, action plans to outline how and when competencies are to be addressed, and the time that is to be spent on identified activities (ASCA, 2005). Professional school counselors take on the roles of the consultant, counselor, collaborator, and advocate while serving as a leader in a CDSC program based on the ASCA National Model.

The Accountability component seeks to answer the question, "How are students different as a result of the school counseling program?" (ASCA, 2005, p. 59). These results are achieved through data collection, analysis of the program, and school counselor performances for assessment and improvement. By gathering and analyzing data that objectively support desired changes in student behavior and learning, the school counselor is better able to defend his/her professional activities and serve as an advocate for both students and the profession (ASCA, 2005).

Finally, the ASCA National Model has four elements that are interconnected with the preceding four components. These elements include Leadership, Advocacy, Collaboration and Teaming, and Systemic Change (ASCA, 2005). These four elements undergird the implementation of the four components and are an influential factor in the daily activities of school counselors whose behaviors typically lead to systemic school change (ASCA, 2005).

Efficacy of CDSC Programs

The efficacy of CDSC programs is well documented in the literature. Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun (2007) found that high school students attending fully functioning CDSC programs had more positive perceptions of school. Gysbers, Lapan, Blair, Starr, and Wilmes (1999) reported that professional school counselors performed more activities that were consistent with their training and education when working in a CDSC program. Furthermore, when students are involved in a CDSC program, there is an increase in student academic achievement (Fitch & Marshall, 2004), and improvements in school attendance, behavior, and self-esteem (Whiston, 2007). The ASCA and accreditation institutions such as the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) support the theoretical framework of a CDSC program, and school counseling training programs use this model to train professional school counselors. Although the model has been in existence for over a decade, the transition to a CDSC program has been rather deliberate and taxing and professional school counselors report that they continue to perform clerical and administrative tasks that are incongruent with their education and training (Oberman & Studer, 2008).

Established Instruments

Despite ardent efforts by the ASCA members to promote a transformed school counseling program using the Model, there continues to be inconsistent program implementation among professional school counselors. Given this dilemma, a query guiding this study is, "What tasks are professional school counselors performing that are congruent with a CDSC program?" The ASCA School Counselor Competencies instrument (ASCA School Counselor Competencies, 2012) is an assessment developed to attempt to answer this type of question. In addition, Hatch and Chen-Hayes (2008) designed the *School Counseling Program Component Scale* (SCPCS) to assess professional school counselors' perceptions of the importance of addressing activities within a CDSC program. Finally, Scarborough (2006) created the *School Counselor Activity Rating Scale* (SCARS) to reflect activities in the categories of counseling, consultation, coordination, curriculum, and other duties.

Statement of the Problem

A brief and efficient version of the ASCA School Counselor Competencies instrument is needed to determine the professional tasks school counselors, at all grade levels, perform that accurately reflect activities integral to the ASCA National Model. The School Counselor Competencies, SCARS, and SCPCS instruments provide useful and informative data, however, we propose that a valid and reliable instrument that helps assess the degree to which school counselors accomplish important professional activities within CDSC programs and is also brief and easy to administer does not yet exist and would be of great benefit to the profession.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to establish a valid, reliable, brief, and efficient instrument, *The School Counseling National Model Activity Scale (SCNMAS),* to assess activities professional school counselors perform specific to those identified by the ASCA National Model. A psychometrically validated instrument is an important addition to determining the extent to which professional school counselors perform essential professional activities within CDSC programs. To determine the validity of scores on the SCNMAS in relation to other activity assessment scales, we used the School Counseling Program Component Scale (SCPCS) to establish convergent validity evidence due to its conceptual and theoretical similarities in assessing school counselor activities. In this regard, the focus of the current study is to generate evidence of score validity and reliability for the SCNMAS linking it with the School Counseling Program Component Scale (SCPCS).

Research Question & Hypothesis

A general question guiding this study was, "To what extent are professional school counselors performing activities identified by the ASCA National Model?" A more specific research question was, "Can a valid, reliable, brief and efficient instrument to measure the extent to which professional school counselors perform activities identified by the ASCA National Model be developed?" We hypothesize that such an instrument can be developed.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Members of the American School Counselor Association acted as participants for the study. Upon receiving IRB approval, we accessed a listserv of ASCA members that contained a total of 31,000 email addresses. We sent an email explaining the nature of the study and an electronic link to an online version of both the SCNMAS and the SCPCS to every email address in the listserv. In the email, we informed recipients that upon completion of the survey, they would be eligible to win a $200 gift card via a random drawing. Instructions then prompted recipients to "click" on the electronic link to participate in the study. We presented participants with an informed consent document and completion of the survey indicated consent. We included only those who responded to all the items of the SCNMAS, the SCPCS, and four demographic questions in this study.

Instrumentation

School Counseling Program Component Scale. The School Counseling Program Component Scale (SCPCS) is an instrument based on the ASCA National Model in which school counselor participants were asked to evaluate components of the model they considered as essential (Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008). The creators derived content of the instrument from an extensive review of the literature regarding the roles and subsequent functions of professional school counselors in CDSC programs and information gathered from focus groups and discussions with professional leadership at state and national levels. The scale contains 18 items where respondents rate their subjective beliefs about the importance of various ASCA National Model components on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale has a strong internal consistency estimate of reliability, Cronbach's alpha (α) = .92, and four subscales related to a) Use of Data for Program Planning (α = .82), b) Use of Data for Accountability (α = .80), c) Administrator Support (α = .78), and d) Mission, Goals, and Competencies (α = .86). In regard to the validity of the instrument, Hatch and Chen-Hayes (2008) write, "Factor analysis provided evidence of construct validity for the instrument, meaning that inferences can legitimately be made from the items in this study to the theoretical constructs on which these items were based" (p. 39).

School Counselor National Model Activity Scale. The School Counselor National Model Activity Scale (SCNMAS) is a 17-item instrument focused on the tasks that professional school counselors perform that are in alignment with the standards of practice in CDSC programs, and the strategies that promote professional school counselor role transformation (Studer, Diambra, Breckner, & Heidel, 2011). We used definitions from each component and theme in the ASCA National Model Workbook (ASCA, 2005) to extract language, definitions, and concepts directly from each school counselor performance standard and developed questions based solely on those concepts and definitions. Next, we piloted the SCNMAS by administering it to 10 randomly selected professional school counselors at varying levels who provided feedback on content and structure. Respondents for the present study were asked to rate the planning, implementation, and evaluation of ASCA National Model components along a 5-point Likert scale with options of 1 = Not at all, 2 = to some extent, 3 = neutral, 4 = to a large extent, and 5 = completely. In regard to the content of the instrument, two questions asked respondents to rate how well they believe the CDSC program has been implemented in their respective schools. One question focused on the Foundation component of the ASCA National Model, including beliefs and philosophy, mission statements, and program competencies. Four questions assessed the Delivery System in regard to guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and systems support. Two questions accounted for the Management component, specifically management agreements and the advisory council. Four questions pertained to Accountability to measure for the use of data, school counselor performance, services rendered to clients, and the sharing of evaluation results with administration. Finally, four questions measured the Elements of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change. We did not initially analyze reliability and validity in our aforementioned study (Studer et al., 2011) due to the high face validity of the instrument. The purpose of the current study is to further establish the reliability and underlying factor structure of the instrument as well as the convergent and concurrent validity of the SCNMAS.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Psychometric and Statistical Methods

First, we ran frequencies on each item in both the SCPCS and SCNMAS to check for coding or data entry errors as well as for demographic variables. We then employed the expectation maximization method to replace any missing values and calculated composite scores for the SCPCS and the SCNMAS along with subscale scores of the SCPCS. We then calculated Cronbach's alpha to determine an internal consistency measure of reliability for the SCNMAS. Next, we used an exploratory factor analysis to identify the underlying factor structure of the SCNMAS. After that we ran a promax rotation to interpret the

factor loadings. We then computed subscale scores for each factor of the SCNMAS. We also determined Cronbach's alpha for each of the factors of the SCNMAS.

Next, we conducted a series of bivariate Pearson correlations to establish convergent validity evidence for the SCNMAS by comparing both subscale and composite scores of the SCNMAS to the subscale and composite scores of the SCPCS. To establish concurrent validity (ability for the instrument to differentiate between groups) evidence for the SCNMAS, we created groups based on level of professional experience and then analyzed these groups using one-way ANOVAs. Then we analyzed the skewness and kurtosis of each variable's distribution to meet the assumption of normality, and used Levene's test to meet the assumption of homogeneity of variance. We computed ANOVAs to test for differences between the experience groups for each composite score and subscale of the SCNMAS and a Bonferroni correction, in a post-hoc fashion, to explain any significant main effects and to account for family-wise error rates when testing multiple effects. We utilized SPSS Version 18 to conduct all analyses and statistical significance was assumed at a $p < .05$ level.

Psychometric and Statistical Results

We downloaded a total of 5,878 survey observations from the online survey platform. Out of these 5,878 surveys, 2,554 surveys "timed out" meaning they were not completed or closed out from the online survey. We excluded these from the study leaving a total of 3,324 completed surveys for purposes of the analysis, yielding a survey response rate of 56.5%. With several thousand observations and over a 50% response rate, adequate statistical power and representation of the population could be assumed (Colton & Covert, 2007).

Of the 3,324 participants used in the study, 13.9% ($n = 465$) were male and 86.1% (n = 2859) were female. The majority of respondents were Caucasian (79.5%; $n = 2644$), followed by African-American (7.7%; $n = 255$), Hispanic (5.9%; $n = 196$), Asian (1.6%; $n = 52$), Native American (.9%; n = 30), people responding to "Other" (1.6%; $n = 53$) and "Prefer not to answer" (2.8%; $n = 94$). In regard to professional experience, 30.3% ($n = 1008$) had one year or less of experience, 35.6% ($n = 1184$) had between two and seven years of experience, and 34.1% ($n = 1132$) had eight or more years of experience.

We ran frequency of responses on each item of the SCNMAS and SCPCS to establish the normality of each item's distribution and to check for coding errors. We employed expectation maximization to replace missing data points. The means and standard deviations of each item of the SCNMAS appear in Table 1.

The SCNMAS had an overall Cronbach's alpha of .92 with 17 items. The exploratory factor analysis yielded a total of three factors accounting for 60.34% of the variance. The first factor, Management, had a Cronbach's alpha of .89 and accounted

for 44.75% of the variance contained in the items related to eight variables: 1) the standards of a CDSC program, 2) meeting the standards of a CDSC program, 3) the presence of a mission statement, beliefs and philosophy, and program competencies, 4) job descriptions and arrangement of program responsibilities, 5) advisory council members that review program results and make recommendations, 6) data collection and analysis related to counseling effectiveness, 7) job performance evaluations based on job descriptions, 8) enumerative data related to students, parents, and teachers, and 9) data sharing with decision makers and administrators.

The second factor, Delivery, had an alpha coefficient of .84 and accounted for 9.45% of the variance with items pertaining to 1) engaging in system-wide change for student success, 2) advocating for students to achieve success, 3) collaborating with stakeholders to develop programs that support students, and 4) assessing the school for systemic barriers to academic success.

The third factor, Elements, had an alpha of .80 and accounted for 6.14% of the variance and contained items reflecting the guidance curriculum consisting of lessons designed to achieve identified competencies, individual student planning having activities designed to assist students establish personal goals and future plans, responsive services having activities that meet students' needs in regards to counseling, consultation and referrals, and systems support consisting of professional development, collaboration, and maintaining programs. The factor loadings of the SCNMAS appear in Table 2.

In regards to establishing the convergent validity evidence for the SCNMAS, the composite scores of the SCNMAS and the SCPCS were significantly correlated, r = .25, p < .001. Each composite score and subscale score of both the SCNMAS and the SCPCS yielded significant correlations at a p < .001 level. These findings suggest some evidence of the convergent validity of the SCNMAS. Please refer to Table 3 for the subsequent correlation coefficients.

In terms of establishing concurrent validity evidence, we found non-significant main effects between experience levels (less than one year to one full year of experience, two to seven years of experience, and seven or more years of experience) in regards to the ratings on the Elements subscale of the SCNMAS, p = .916, the Delivery subscale of the SCNMAS, p = .068, and the Administrator Support subscale of the SCPCS, p = .192.

Significant main effects were found for the SCNMAS composite score (p < .001), the SCPCS composite score (p = .003), the Management subscale of the SCNMAS (p < .001), the Use of Data for Program Planning subscale of the SCPCS (p = .001), the Use of Data for Accountability subscale of the SCPCS (p = .001), and the Mission, Goals, and Competencies subscale of the SCPCS (p < .001).

Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction found significant differences between the least experienced (0-1 years of experience) group and the second most experienced (2-7 years of experience) group in regards to the SCNMAS composite score ($p < .001$), the SCPCS composite score ($p = .003$), the Management subscale ($p < .001$), the Use of Data for Program Planning Subscale ($p = .004$), the Use of Data for Accountability ($p = .009$), and the Mission, Goals, and Competencies subscale ($p < .001$).

Post hoc comparisons also found significant differences between the least experienced group and the most experienced (7+ years of experience) group related to the SCNMAS composite score ($p = .002$), the SCPCS composite score ($p = .029$), the Management subscale ($p < .001$), the Mission, Goals, and Competencies subscale ($p = .013$), the Use of Data for Accountability ($p = .002$), and the Use of Data for Program Planning ($p = .004$).

Lastly, post hoc comparisons found no significant differences between the second most experienced group and the most experienced group on any composite or subscale score. We present subsequent means and standard deviations for all comparisons in Table 4.

Limitations

Since completion of this study, the ASCA National Model has been revised thereby requiring an updated version of the SCNMAS. A particular limitation of this study was that we only designed one question concerning the Foundation component of the ASCA National Model. In an attempt to reduce the length of the survey, we used a "triple-barreled" question concerning beliefs and philosophies, mission statements, and program competencies. In retrospect, this subject matter deserves separate questions to more accurately discern for all the elements within the Foundation section.

Although the researchers secured a substantial number of participants (i.e., 3,324) across the United States for this study, the response rate was approximately 11%. It is possible that findings may include response and/or volunteer bias and it is possible that non-ASCA members may have responded differently. It is important to note that a number of survey recipients indicated via email contact that they were no longer school counselors. They indicated that they were either retired, in a director role, or a counselor educator. Those who contacted and informed us of their current status did not complete the survey. This insight helps account for a large number of the incomplete surveys.

Finally, respondents may have interpreted the response choice designations differently, which may have influenced study results.

Discussion and Implications

This study yields empirical evidence suggesting that the SCNMAS is a reliable and valid instrument. The internal consistency analyses indicate that overall scale and subsequent subscales of the SCNMAS have alpha coefficients well above the generally accepted benchmarks (Whiston, 2007). The factor analysis also yields empirical evidence highlighting the aspects of the ASCA National Model that are most influential to school counselors: Standards of a CDSC program, presence of a mission statement, beliefs, philosophy, program competencies, job descriptions and arrangement of program responsibilities, advisory council members that review program results and make recommendations, data collection and analysis related to counseling effectiveness, job performance evaluations based on job descriptions, enumerative data related to students, parents, and teachers, and data sharing with decision makers and administrators. Validity evidence suggests that the constructs the SCNMAS measures are potentially linked to the already validated SCPCS yet the SCNMAS has the ability to differentiate between experience levels. All of the findings provide compelling evidence that the SCNMAS accurately assesses the types of school counselor professional tasks that are influential to those within a CDSC program. Given updates in the ASCA National Model, however, we propose further research focused on adapting the SCNMAS to better match the ASCA Model, Third Edition.

The ASCA National Model is designed to account for the integral, interdependent nature of each of the components. In this study, the management component accounts for approximately 44% of the variance with several elements associated with the foundation and accountability components loaded onto the management system component. The Foundation elements of mission and beliefs, which loaded onto the Management System component, serve as catalysts to identify student content areas. Items within the Accountability component also closely relate with the Management System components. The specific items within Data Collection and Analysis relate to counseling effectiveness, job performance evaluations based on job descriptions, enumerative data related to stakeholders, and data sharing with decision makers and administrators are essential aspects of accountability. These relate to "…data to effect change within the school system…to ensure [*sic*] that every student receives the benefits of the school counseling program" (ASCA, 2005, p. 23). Results suggest the close relationship and interconnectedness of the two components to the Management System. Furthermore, we speculate that the factor loading could be a result of the Foundation component only being represented by one question in the SCNMAS.

While other school counseling programmatic related instruments help make a positive impact in the lives of students, measure the perception of importance of school counseling tasks, and reflect the activities school counselors conduct in key professional areas, the SCNMAS provides a unique contribution as a direct measure of school counselors professional tasks and

activities related to the ASCA National Model and a CDSC program. Results of this study have implications for practicing professional school counselors, counselor educators and researchers, and school counselor trainees.

Practicing Professional School Counselors

With school accountability as an essential component of educational reform, an evaluative tool for measuring professional school counselor productivity in providing services within a CDSC program is necessary. This information can also be useful in adapting or adjusting program foci to identify and address missed components or adjust efforts when school counselors identify components that may be receiving an excess amount of attention and energy. Additionally, school counselors can share collected data from the instrument with their school administrators. Collaboratively, school counselors and administrators can use collected program data to make program adjustments and improvements, and compare actual time with recommended time for each area (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

Counselor Educators and Researchers

Counselor educators and researchers will find this tool useful in tracking the extent to which their school counselor graduates are working or implementing activities in a transformed school counselor program. Through feedback from program graduates, counselor educators would be able to revise curricular offerings in order to highlight areas within the ASCA National Model that students are not addressing. The revised curriculum can also provide insight on how school counselors can act as agents of change implementing CDSC programs. Furthermore, we strongly recommend research be continued on a revised SCNMAS that includes multiple questions pertaining to the Foundation component to ascertain the direction and strength of relationship it shares with the Management and Accountability components.

School Counselor Trainees

School counseling students have the same opportunity to conduct further research to improve and enhance the instrument so it more equally and accurately measures the components of a CDSC program. Additionally, students have an opportunity to understand their role in a transformed school counselor program by using this tool to track their activities and in determining the components and elements that these activities reflect. Furthermore, students who are being supervised within a traditional program will have an opportunity to introduce the SCNMAS tool to help inform their supervisors about a CDSC program, and how the activities that they already conduct fit within the philosophy of this type of programming. School counseling students can help lay the foundation for bridging the gap in their respective schools transitioning from traditional school counseling programs to CDSC programs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the SCNMAS sought to further research pertaining to the ASCA National Model by designing a scale that incorporated the ASCA competencies into survey questions. We then validated the SCNMAS scale with the SCPCS. The SCNMAS showed convincing evidence of reliability and validity; the three underlying variables of Management, Delivery, and Elements accounted for 60% of the variance in implementing the ASCA National Model. The SCNMAS allows for further research evaluating the roles of professional school counselors and whether they are actively participating in legitimate activities pertaining to academic achievement, personal/social development, and career planning.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for the SCNMAS

	Mean	SD
1. When you first arrived at your present school, rank how well you believe your school counseling program met the standards of a CDSC program.	2.67	1.20
2. How well would you rank your school counseling program now in regards to meeting the standards of a CDSC program.	3.48	1.00
3. The Foundation Component includes beliefs and philosophy, a mission statement, and program competencies. Indicate whether or not your program includes these elements.	3.49	1.30
4. The Guidance Curriculum consists of structured lessons designed to achieve identified competencies.	3.54	1.24
5. The Individual Student Planning consists of activities designed to assist the student establish personal goals and develop future plans.	3.82	1.04
6. The Responsive Services consists of activities to meet students' immediate needs such as counseling, consultation, and referral or peer mediation.	4.22	.85
7. The Systems Support consists of obtaining professional development, collaboration, and engaging in activities to maintain the program.	3.82	1.05
8. Management Agreements include job descriptions and how the program responsibilities are arranged.	3.22	1.22
9. Advisory council members are individuals who are appointed to review the guidance program results and make recommendations.	2.53	1.37
10. Data is collected and analyzed to reveal counseling activity effectiveness.	3.05	1.22
11. School counselor performance is evaluated based on a school counselor job description.	3.28	1.28
12. Data that specifies the number of students, parents, teachers, etc. that received services each day is collected.	2.82	1.33
13. Data is shared with decision makers such as the administration, superintendent, and school board.	3.11	1.29
14. As a leader, I am engaged in system wide change to ensure student success.	3.91	1.01
15. As an advocate, I work to ensure the academic success of every student.	4.39	.74
16. I collaborate with all stakeholders inside and outside the school to develop educational programs that support the goals for every student.	3.86	.98
17. I participate in systemic change to assess the school for systemic barriers to academic success.	3.82	1.00

Table 2

Factor Loadings for the SCNMAS

	Component		
	Management	Delivery	Elements
When you first arrived at your present school, rank how well you believe your school counseling program met the standards of a CDSC program.	.667		
How well would you rank your school counseling program now in regards to meeting the standards of a CDSC program.	.470		
The Foundation Component includes beliefs and philosophy, a mission statement, and program competencies. Indicate whether or not your program includes these elements.	.493		
The Guidance Curriculum consists of structured lessons designed to achieve identified competencies.			.589
The Individual Student Planning consists of activities designed to assist the student establish personal goals and develop future plans.			.706
The Responsive Services consists of activities to meet students' immediate needs such as counseling, consultation, and referral or peer mediation.			.945
The Systems Support consists of obtaining professional development, collaboration, and engaging in activities to maintain the program.			.723
Management Agreements include job descriptions and how the program responsibilities are arranged.	.596		
Advisory council members are individuals who are appointed to review the guidance program results and make recommendations.	.817		
Data is collected and analyzed to reveal counseling activity effectiveness.	.759		
School counselor performance is evaluated based on a school counselor job description.	.608		
Data that specifies the number of students, parents, teachers, etc. that received services each day is collected.	.813		
Data is shared with decision makers such as the administration, superintendent, and school board.	.819		
As a leader, I am engaged in system wide change to ensure student success.		.738	
As an advocate, I work to ensure the academic success of every student.		.780	
I collaborate with all stakeholders inside and outside the school to develop educational programs that support the goals for every student.		.851	
I participate in systemic change to assess the school for systemic barriers to academic success.		.853	

Table 3

Convergent Validity Coefficients

	SCNMAS Composite	SCPCS Composite	Mgmt	Delivery	Themes	Missions, Goals, and Competencies	Administrator Support	Use of Data for Accountability	Use of Data for Program Planning
SCNMAS Composite	-								
SCPCS Composite	248**	-							
Management	.941**	.218**	-						
Delivery	.877**	.200**	.734**	-					
Themes	.729**	.241**	.531**	.559**	-				
Missions, Goals, and Competencies	.250**	.789**	.219**	.210**	.232**	-			
Administrator Support	.162**	.758**	.144**	.137**	.147**	.453**	-		
Use of Data for Accountability	.209**	.894**	.192**	.160**	.195**	.606**	.585**	-	
Use of Data for Program Planning	.199**	.831**	.165**	.157**	.222**	.584**	.455**	.680**	-

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of Experience Groups

		Mean	SD
SCNMAS Composite	Least Experienced (0-1 years)	60.52	14.16
	Second Most Experienced (2-7 years)	58.13	12.78
	Most Experienced (7+ years)	58.56	12.80
SCPCS Composite	Least Experienced (0-1 years)	83.22	6.88
	Second Most Experienced (2-7 years)	82.17	7.23
	Most Experienced (7+ years)	82.38	8.40
Management	Least Experienced (0-1 years)	25.74	8.15
	Second Most Experienced (2-7 years)	23.38	7.38
	Most Experienced (7+ years)	23.42	7.38
Delivery	Least Experienced (0-1 years)	18.82	4.39
	Second Most Experienced (2-7 years)	18.75	4.02
	Most Experienced (7+ years)	19.13	4.06
Elements	Least Experienced (0-1 years)	15.95	3.23
	Second Most Experienced (2-7 years)	15.99	3.23
	Most Experienced (7+ years)	16.01	3.30
Use of Data for Program Planning	Least Experienced (0-1 years)	23.64	2.02
	Second Most Experienced (2-7 years)	23.32	2.21
	Most Experienced (7+ years)	23.32	2.50
Use of Data for Accountability	Least Experienced (0-1 years)	23.08	2.41
	Second Most Experienced (2-7 years)	22.74	2.66
	Most Experienced (7+ years)	22.69	2.99
Administrator Support	Least Experienced (0-1 years)	17.78	2.11
	Second Most Experienced (2-7 years)	17.72	2.15
	Most Experienced (7+ years)	17.89	2.36
Mission, Goals, and Competencies	Least Experienced (0-1 years)	18.72	1.86
	Second Most Experienced (2-7 years)	18.39	1.95
	Most Experienced (7+ years)	18.47	2.17

Experiential Satisfaction Predictors of the International Student Experience

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Researchers explored the predictive properties of international and study abroad students' perceptions of host universities' student support services, social support, and the students' comfort in communicating within the host culture and how these variables impact their overall satisfaction with their international education experience. The analysis of multivariate multiple linear regression uncovered a coefficient of determination $(R^2 = .23)$ which indicated that 23% of the variance of a student's overall experiential satisfaction was explained by the combination of the predictors (independent variables). The findings support the assertion that social integration services should be in place at host universities to assist students in the integration process.

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Goel (2010) reported that historically the United States accepted many more international students than it sent abroad. The most recent data collected by the Institute of International Education (2014) confirmed this - international students in the U.S. (886,052) outnumber the students sent abroad by the U.S. (289,408). Even though there was about a 3% increase in the number of students who study abroad, only about 9% of U.S. college students study abroad during their undergraduate studies (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2014).

Norris and Gillespie (2008) reported that more than 60% of 500 American high school students surveyed said they would be interested in studying abroad, but in reality, just over 1% of U.S. college students actually fulfilled that goal. Further research to investigate what happened to the 59% of students who never realized their goals and reasons for not achieving those goals would be important information for institutions to consider when assessing their efforts toward campus globalization. International and study abroad students exhibit certain perceptions of social support and student support services; they are cognizant of whether a university offers them the ability and opportunity to feel comfortable communicating in the host culture's language. If these perceptions and needs are addressed within higher education, it is possible that institutions in the United States and abroad can increase campus internationalization.

Those same services developed to support international students on U.S. college campuses are applicable to international institutions as well because once American study abroad students arrive at the host institution they are now part of the host university's international student population. By identifying and addressing the deficiencies present in the current models used, institutions can more successfully prepare students, ease concerns, and better support students studying internationally so that all students may extract as much as possible from their experiences abroad. This shift in student support means that trained counselors need to be involved in the provision of dedicated services to study abroad and international students, thus bolstering the global internationalization initiatives on college campuses.

<div align="center">Impact of International Education</div>

Reynolds and Constantine (2007) recruited 261 international students from various African, Asian, and Latin American countries through the International Students Office to participate anonymously in a study examining their perceptions of their acculturation adjustment to living in the United States. The students completed a demographic questionnaire, a Cultural Adjustment Difficulties Checklist, the Outcome Expectations Scale, and the Career Aspiration Scale. The results of the Reynolds and Constantine research revealed that acculturative distress was significantly predictive in all the international students' career outcome expectations; greater acculturation stress predicted lower career aspirations. The more difficulty students had adjusting to their new cultural situation, the less their future life and career expectations became, according to Reynolds and Constantine (2007).

In their research of U.S. students' experiences, Norris and Gillespie's (2008) primary goal was to "explore the long term impact of studying abroad" (p. 384). The primary questions asked were, "What is the impact of study abroad on U.S. college students' career paths?" and "What factors of education abroad differentiate alumni who later worked or volunteered for

international organizations?" (p. 382). The results of Norris and Gillespie's (2008) study showed a clear correlation between study abroad and alumni choosing global careers. Forty-nine percent of the respondents stated that their study abroad experience shaped their career choice, and 77% stated that they acquired skills while abroad that influenced their career paths. In all, 48% of the respondents reported working or volunteering in an international capacity at some point since college. Norris and Gillespie (2008) also found that study abroad had significant impacts on career choices, academic choices, foreign language acquisition, and increased self-confidence if the students were able to overcome the impact of continual cultural adjustments (Norris & Gillespie, 2008; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Yang, Wong, Hwang, & Heppner, 2002).

Impact of Cultural Adjustment on International Students

There is an abundant amount of research pertaining to the cultural adjustments students will face upon arrival at their destination and upon their return to their home country, including the effects of culture shock (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Lin, 2006), transition shock (Berry, 1997; McLachlan & Justice, 2009) and physical and mental health implications (Crockett & Hayes, 2011; Ryan & Twibell, 2000). The negative effects of compounded stress connected to the numerous transitional and cultural adjustments that are rooted in the acculturation experience are described in the literature as being acculturative (Berry, 1997; Rice, Choi, Zhang, Moreno, & Anderson, 2012; Sümer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Yakunina, Weigold, & Weigold, 2013).

McLachlan and Justice (2009) discussed the importance of addressing the impact of transition shock experienced by international students during their first 6-12 months stateside; nontraditional approaches to mental health were included, and there was an expressed need for colleges to have support services for international students. Clafferty (2011) reported that student socialization was extremely important for all demographics, and especially so during the "critical early weeks of transition and settling down" (p. 245). McLachlan and Justice (2009) also warned that in some cultures, mental health services are not seen as socially acceptable and that for international students to feel comfortable expressing themselves, universities should exercise creativity in the methods they incorporate to reach these students. Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1971), Owens and Loomes (2010) found that without significant support, international students were only meeting the bottom two levels of needs: physiological and safety.

When the students are in need of services to assist them with acculturative stress, they ideally would turn to campus counseling services, but this occurs on an infrequent and inconsistent basis. In much of the previous literature, authors analyzed effects of cultural adjustment (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Lin, 2006; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Ryan & Twibell, 2000) and the reactive use of counseling services (Crockett & Hayes, 2011; Lin, 2006; Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003). One approach that the

authors plan to advance with the current study is the concept of having proactive services in place to mitigate the effects of transition shock before they become problematic for the students so they can extract as much from their international experience as possible (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Irizarry & Marlowe, 2010; Lin, 2006; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Owens & Loomes, 2010).

Various authors found some contradictions to the previous research; they reported that "the experiences shared [by the students]…defy the conceptualization that culture shock is harmful and maladaptive…these participants depict such experiences as an integral part of their transition and development" (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011, p. 302). Research also supports that students who embark on international education experiences are typically more flexible and open to the continual transition experiences inherent in the experience of living abroad (McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Nunes & Arthur, 2013). By maintaining a flexible transition embracing mentality and receiving support throughout the transition process, students studying internationally learn and develop internal strengths that are valuable resources which enable them to persevere through life situations (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Nunes & Arthur, 2013).

Significance of the Study

Universities typically have a broad number of academic, adjustment, and mental health support services available for all students who feel comfortable using those services (Crockett & Hayes, 2011; Lin 2006; Yi et al., 2003). Yakushko, Davidson, and Sanford-Martens (2008) reported that 60% of the sampled international students (N = 132) visited a campus counseling center five or fewer times, with 36% only going for one session. The question that has been largely unaddressed is where students go for support when services offered on campuses are not able to adequately address issues related to transition shock, culture shock, acculturation stress, communication problems, and the loss of social support systems from home countries (Irizarry & Marlow 2010; Yi et al. 2003). Currently, there is a scant amount of research concerning international and study abroad students' experiential satisfaction in relation to the preparation and student support services administered by the home and host institutions. The significance of this study is in providing further insight to a shifting of the paradigm that many universities use in their associations with their study abroad and international students.

With the continual push to internationalize college and university campuses in the U.S., coupled with the growing need to internationalize U.S. students so they can compete in a global economy, the concept of internationalization is at an all-time high. In order to provide the best possible learning and growth experiences for students who study overseas and for the international students visiting U.S. campuses, services need to be in place that prepare students for their travels and arrivals as

well as continual support throughout the process (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Irizarry & Marlowe, 2010; Lin, 2006; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Owens & Loomes, 2010; Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Yi et al., 2003). Some Australian universities have already begun to immerse their domestic and international students in the local community as a way to combat the transition difficulties experienced by students in college; this method is still being underutilized in U.S. institutions (Irizarry & Marlow, 2010; Owens & Loomes, 2010).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the predictive properties of students' perceptions of host culture social support, host culture student support services, and comfort level communicating in the host culture language. These data can then be used to research the students' overall experiential satisfaction with their international student studies. The aim of the researchers is to highlight the need for proactive services for international and study abroad students that assist them in mitigating the stress caused by initial and continual cultural, academic, and social adjustments.

The researchers assessed the perceptions of international and study abroad students to identify areas for improvement that can be addressed pre-departure, during their experience in the host culture, and upon return, in an attempt to increase levels of overall experiential satisfaction with their respective trips; for the purpose of identifying areas for growth that can be addressed at the institutional level. The term *experiential satisfaction* will be used to describe the students' perceptions of their overall satisfaction with their international education experience including, but not limited to social integration, social support, student support services, communication abilities, and skills development.

Research Question

The following research question was addressed to explore the relationship between students' preparation to be international or study abroad students and their experiential satisfaction with student support services at their destination: Which variables (social support, student support services, and comfort in communication) predict experiential satisfaction?

Method

Selection of Participants

The sample was comprised of 144 international and 226 study abroad students from eight higher education institutions who were in study abroad programs over a five-year span from 2002-2007. The researcher's original intention was to collect a purposeful sample, but due to the reluctance of some universities to participate, the sampling method was amended to an opportunity sample. The institutions that participated in the research were University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,

Appalachian State University, University of Maryland, Minnesota State University-Moorhead, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Georgia State University, Duke University, and Old Dominion University.

Instrumentation

In order to assess students' perceptions of social support in the host culture, student support services at their host institution, and their comfort level communicating with the host population, the Cross-Cultural Participant Questionnaire was used (Author, 2007). For the purposes of this research, three Likert-scaled questions, with possible answer choices ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, were selected that specifically dealt with the subject matter. The item selected to assess students' perceptions of social support in the host culture was question 23, which assessed "I found a support network in the host community." The item designated to evaluate students' perceptions of student support services at their destination was question 33, which assessed "How would you rate your access to student support services?" The item chosen to assess students' perceptions of their abilities to communicate in the host culture language was question 30, "I am comfortable communicating with the host nationals." To assess students' overall experiential satisfaction, question 37 was selected: "I am satisfied with my overall experience in the host country."

Data Collection

The data were collected by Author (2007) from international and study abroad students from eight universities throughout the United States for the purposes of her dissertation. The rationale for the study was to better understand the expectations international and study abroad student have of their host countries and how those expectations impacted their international education experiences, whether met or unmet (Author, 2007).

Data Analysis

The sample (n = 383) was comprised of international students and study abroad students from eight higher education institutions who were on study abroad programs over a five-year span from 2002-2007. Of the total sample of 383 respondents, 59% (226 students) studied abroad, 37% (144 students) were international students on U.S. campuses, and 3% (13 students) are unknown and were removed from the sample reducing it to n =370 because of incomplete identifying information.

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program (SPSS; IBM, 2013). In the first data analysis, a multivariate multiple linear regression was used to investigate the predictive properties of these independent variables: social support (Q23); communication comfort ability (Q30); and student support services (Q33) on students' overall

experiential satisfaction (Q37). The data were further analyzed using chi square to explore the direct relationship between students' perceptions of social support and their overall experiential satisfaction.

In the first data analysis a multivariate multiple linear regression was used to investigate how each of the independent variables, social support (SS), communication comfort ability (CCA), student support services (SSS) impacted the overall experiential satisfaction of American students who study abroad and international students who study on campuses in the United States. Assumptions for multivariate multiple linear regression were checked for multivariate outliers, linearity, normality, and homoscedasticity. There were no missing data for the variables noted (SS, CCA, SSS, and overall experiential satisfaction). A Mahalanobis distance was calculated to determine if any multivariate outliers existed. A χ^2 was obtained to determine variables that exceeded the critical value of >135.8 with 379 degrees of freedom at 01. Degrees of freedom were calculated at n-p-1 = 370 – 3 – 1 = 366. No value exceeded the value of 135.8; thus, it was determined that there were no multivariate outliers when considering the variables noted. A scatterplot for the variables (SS, CCA, SSS) indicated that the scores were not elliptical in shape and confirmed that the assumption of linearity had not been met. Conversion to z scores, by dividing the skewness and kurtosis coefficients by the standard error, indicated that some z scores were not within the limits of +3.00 and -3.00, indicating the distribution of data was not normally distributed. Although residuals were not scattered and were clustered in certain areas, questions were formed in Likert scale with five answer choices, thus indicative of meeting the assumption of homoscedasticity.

Despite some deviations for linearity and normality of data, multivariate multiple linear regression was considered quite robust to moderate violations of normality (Field, 2009; Mertler & Vannata, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Other researchers (Lumley, Diehr, Emerson, & Chen, 2002) have indicated that most statistical analyses are quite robust, especially when large samples sizes are used. Thus, based on this information, the multivariate multiple linear regression statistical analyses were selected as the most appropriate analysis. Interpreting whether there was evidence of multicollinearity was conducted by initially examining the Collinearity Statistics, Tolerance column. All of the coefficients were >.10, indicating that no predictors were explaining the same construct. Thus, the results of the multivariate multiple linear regression could be analyzed. Means and standard deviations are provided (Table 1) along with the frequencies and percentages for each question and answer choice (Table 2). A correlation matrix is provided (Table 3) and the four variables are statistically significantly correlated with the each other.

Results

The results of the data analysis are reported across four areas: social support (SS), communication comfort ability

(CCA), student support services (SSS), and overall experiential satisfaction. Multiple regression was conducted to test which variables (SS, CCA, and SSS) predicted student's overall experiential satisfaction. After consulting the model summary, the coefficient of determination $(R^2 = .23)$ was noted, which indicated that 23% of the variance of a student's overall experiential satisfaction was explained by the combination of the predictors (independent variables). The predictors (SS, CCA, SSS) for which there was an R^2 change were entered and those were the predictors that were statistically significant ($p < .001$). Regression results indicated that the model significantly predicts the final score, $R^2 = .23$, $F (3,366) = 36.82$, $p < .001$.

In interpreting the b (regression coefficient) and β (Beta) weights, we found that as the SS, CCA, and SSS ratings increased, the overall experiential satisfaction rating increased as well. This finding indicates that as overall experiential satisfaction increased, a person's attribution of satisfaction was due to his/her access to SS, SSS and comfort with and ability to communicate in hosting language. The b weights were interpreted using Y^1 = constant + b weights. For every unit change in SS, overall experiential satisfaction increased by .309 units. For every unit change in CCA, overall experiential satisfaction increased by .079 units. For every unit change in SSS, overall experiential satisfaction increased by .031 units. Thus, the resulting formula was the following: Y^1 = 2.89 + (0.309X) + (0.079X) + (.031X).

The β weights were interpreted, and it was found that for every standard deviation (SD) score increase on SS, there was an SD change of 0.435 on the overall experiential satisfaction rating. For every SD score on CCA, there was an SD change of 0.093 on the rating for overall experiential satisfaction. For every SD score on the SSS, there was an SD score change of 0.038 on the overall experiential satisfaction rating. Among the three predictors, SS showed a significant difference ($p < .01$) (Table 4). Thus, 23% of the overall experiential satisfaction was explained by three predictors, SS, CCA, and SSS. The higher the overall experiential satisfaction rating, the higher the ratings were reported on SS, CCA, and SSS. Further, the β weight that statistically significantly predicted overall experiential satisfaction was the SS.

Social Support Significance

For further analysis, a chi square was used to investigate the direct relationship between SS that students received and their overall experiential satisfaction. Examination of the counts and percentages indicated there were equal amount of students who selected *strongly disagree* on SS (20.7%), *disagree* (6.9%), *neutral* (20.7%), *agree* (31%), and *strongly agree* (20.7%) on overall experiential satisfaction. Students *agreed* (13.9%) and *strongly agreed* (86.1%) on SS on overall experiential satisfaction (Figure 1). A significant relationship was found ($\chi^2 (16) = 141.12$, $p < .01$) between the ratings of SS and the ratings of overall experiential satisfaction for the data set. The effect size determined by calculating the Cramer's V was .31. This

indicates that there is a medium effect size association between students' ratings on SS and their ratings on overall experiential satisfaction for the data set. There was a statistical significance and a practical significance for an association between rating on SS and rating on overall experiential satisfaction for the data set.

Discussion

Through the course of data analysis, the results revealed that social support, student support services, and comfort communicating in the host culture language accounted for nearly 25% of the overall experiential satisfaction of students in an international education experience. These results support much of the previous researchers' claims that having services in place are vital to the overall satisfaction that these students experience (Irizarry & Marlowe, 2010; Lin, 2006; Nunes & Arthur, 2013; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Owens & Loomes, 2010; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014; Shen & Herr, 2004; Yi et al., 2003). These services effectively support students in an international education experience during the critical processes of language acquisition, social integration, and campus integration. Multiple authors also support the belief that proactive services should be in place to moderate the consequences of transition shock to assist the students in reaping as many benefits from their international experience as possible (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Irizarry & Marlowe, 2010; Lin, 2006; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Owens & Loomes, 2010; Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Yi et al., 2003).

The current study results also demonstrate that social support and assistance with integration for international students "has been identified as a critical factor supporting successful, engaging, and satisfying learning experiences" (Owens & Loomes, 2010, p. 276). Increasing opportunities to become socially interactive within the campus and community through university and community orientations, sporting events, social events, community activities, work-related activities, as well as welfare activities were shown to have positive effects on international student moral (Irizarry & Marlowe, 2010; Owens & Loomes, 2010). As shown through the results of the current study, when international students are able to connect with the host community, feel supported by the host institution, and become comfortable communicating in the host language, they experience a greater level of satisfaction than they otherwise would.

The current study also provides credence to the necessity for creating and administering preemptive services for international and study abroad students to prepare them for the inevitable and continual cultural, academic, and social adjustment and the accompanying stress that impacts their experiences, health, and mental well-being (Crockett & Hayes, 2011; Irizarry & Marlowe, 2010; Lin, 2006; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Owens & Loomes, 2010). An increase in proactive student support services will also afford a global multicultural training ground for students who are learning about and planning to work in

helping professions such as education, social work, law enforcement, psychology, and counseling. This will give students on U.S. and international campuses opportunities to interact with globally diverse students, which will add support for the internationalization of current and future generations.

The international education experience has historically had positive impacts on shaping college students' future career development by raising their career expectations and desire for skill-building; there is an increased likelihood that they may work in an international capacity at some point after college (Norris & Gillespie, 2008; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Yang et al., 2002). Researchers have uncovered the impact that cultural adjustment (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Lin, 2006; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Ryan & Twibell, 2000) has on traveling students and a lack of counseling service that international students receive (Gone, 2010; Lin, 2006; Yi et al., 2003). With increased international diversification taking place on college campuses throughout the U.S., combined with the necessity to internationalize U.S. students in order to contend in a worldwide economy, the notion of internationalization is at an unprecedented height. To deliver quality learning opportunities and growth experiences for all students who choose to study at universities in foreign countries, services are needed that prepare these students for their travels and arrivals, while providing continual long-distance support throughout their stay abroad. There is a tremendous opportunity to immerse college students in the global community that is going unnoticed in U.S. colleges and universities; the U.S. students' international experiences can be revolutionized by programs that increase social integration and support (Irizarry & Marlow, 2010; Owens & Loomes, 2010).

Limitations

There were some limitations to the current study. The data collection instrument used was self-report; the data were not collected with an operational definition of support network; and there was only one item that addressed social support networks. Self-reporting issues are a well-documented limitation of survey research study and were of only minor concern to the researchers; however, the fact that an operational definition was not provided for social support network could confound participants' answers because their independent definitions of social support may vary greatly. Also the fact that only one question addressed social support networks, combined with a lack of an operational definition, meant that participants did not have multiple ways to respond that might address their individual differences when defining their social support network. Regardless, the researchers concluded that the findings contribute to the body of research on the topic of the need for proactive social support services for international and study abroad student services on campuses in the United States and abroad.

Implications

Various research has proposed that there is a need for counselors to consider numerous approaches to support clients who are struggling with the effects of acculturative stress, social adjustment, and the associated feelings of depression (Crockett & Hayes, 2011; Irizarry & Marlow, 2010; Lin, 2006; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Owens & Loomes, 2010). Several ethnic groups are not comfortable seeking traditional westernized counseling services to assuage difficulties associated with the inception, conservation, or exacerbation of depressive symptoms (Gone, 2010; Lin 2006; Yi et al., 2003), and although most universities offer traditional westernized counseling services, at times students' usage of these services might promote increased feelings of loneliness and separation that contribute to the appearance of depressive symptomology because their cultural experiences do not include reliance on such services (McLachlan & Justice, 2009).

The current literature and the current study results support the need for proactive services to mitigate the effects of transition shock, culture shock, cultural adjustment, acculturation stress, and the difficulties of socially integrating so that students may retain their optimism and have increased opportunities to experience positive growth during their international journey (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Irizarry & Marlowe, 2010; Lin, 2006; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Owens & Loomes, 2010; Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Yi et al., 2003). Institutions of higher education can implement programs that develop, sustain, and increase their international students' optimism and thus reduce acculturative stress by the employment of preemptive reoccurring orientation services for that focus heavily on social integration, especially in the first year (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Clafferty, 2011; Irizarry & Marlowe, 2010; Lin, 2006; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Owens & Loomes, 2010; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014; Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Shen & Herr, 2004; Yi et al., 2003). Also, by incorporating multiple nontraditional mental health services into ongoing orientations, international students may have a setting where they will feel content to discuss the stressors affecting their experience (Crockett & Hayes, 2011; Hwang et al., 2014; Owens & Loomes, 2010; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Rice et al., 2012; Sangganjanavanich et al., 2011).

When students perceive they have received social support from host institutions during the course of their international education experience, they tend to have more positive feelings about their overall experience, which was supported throughout the current study (Irizarry & Marlow, 2010; Owens & Loomes, 2010). The implication of this finding on students' preparedness is that there is a need to bring into the awareness of hosting institutions the significant relevance of the social support climate to students' experiential satisfaction. This specifies a need for strengthening and broadening social support services through the use of proactive campus resources that address visiting students' needs throughout the duration of their stay (Crockett & Hayes,

2011; Irizarry & Marlow, 2010; Mitchell, Greenwood, & Guglielmi, 2007; Owens & Loomes, 2010). By sustaining and maintaining international students' optimistic state of mind (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010; Lin, 206; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014; Shen & Herr, 2004) campus personnel increase the likelihood of assisting international students in preserving their physical health as well (Crockett & Hayes, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2007; Ryan & Twibell, 2000). A shift from reactive to proactive social integration and support services will contribute to creating a global multicultural training ground for students learning about, and planning to work in professions such as education, social work, law enforcement, and mental health by giving them opportunities to interact with people in a global environment.

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Table 1

The Mean, Median, And Range of Three Items Measuring Perceptions of Social Support (Q23), Student Support Service (Q30), Communication Comfort (Q33), and One Item About Experiential Satisfaction (Q37).

Measure	M	SD	Mdn	Min	Max
Q23	3.51	1.23	4	1	5
Q30	3.92	1.03	4	1	5
Q33	3.62	1.07	4	1	5
Q37	4.43	0.87	5	1	5

Note: (*n* = 370).
* *p < .001*

Table 2

The Frequencies and Percentages of Likert Scaled Answers Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5) for the Four Items (Q23, Q30, Q33, and Q37).

	Likert Scaled Answers				
Variables	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Q23					
Frequency	29	67	86	109	79
Percentage	7.8	18.1	23.2	29.5	21.4
Q30					
Frequency	5	40	61	139	125
Percentage	1.4	10.8	16.5	37.6	33.8
Q33					
Frequency	15	47	110	124	74
Percentage	4.1	12.7	29.7	33.5	20
Q37					
Frequency	7	10	26	131	196
Percentage	1.9	2.7	7	35.4	53

Note: (n = 370).

Table 3

Summary of Intercorrelations for Social Support (Q23), Communication Comfort (Q30), Social Support (Q33), and Overall Experiential Satisfaction (Q37).

Measure	Q23	Q30	Q33	Q37
Q23	--			
Q30	.252*	--		
Q33	.351*	.171*	--	
Q37	.471*	.209*	.206*	--

Note: (n = 370)
*p < .001

Table 4

Predictors (Social Support, Communication Conformability, and Student Support Services) on Overall Experiential Satisfaction (n = 370)

	B	*SE B*	*β*	
Constant	2.90	0.19		
Social Support	0.31	0.04	0.44	*
Communication Comfort ability	0.03	0.04	0.03	
Student Support Services	0.08	0.04	0.09	

Note: R^2 = 23%
*$p < .01$

School Counselors and Academic Achievement: Enhancing Collective Learning

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School counselors are an integral part of student success (Fitch & Marshall, 2004). As multidimensional practitioners, school counselors are trained to address education from a comprehensive and holistic perspective (Dahir & Stone, 2003). The overall push for higher test scores is placed primarily on the teacher's shoulders; however, this responsibility should extend to all educational stakeholders (Dahir & Stone, 2003). Understanding the responsibility to not merely contribute, but to have a meaningful impact on a student's academic achievement, school counselors must work to implement interventions that strengthen cooperative and collaborative interaction, resulting in personal growth and increased academic achievement. This conceptual article discusses how school counselors are able to affect students' academic achievement as a byproduct of honing interpersonal skills through heterogeneous (mixed-ability) grouping, and supporting this grouping strategy with cooperative/collaborative learning groups, differentiated pedagogy, and effective communication.

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In order for students to reap the full benefit of instructional practices, they must be fully engaged. Full engagement in cooperative/collaborative learning in heterogeneous groups requires that a student simultaneously values diversity, and communicates openly with his or her peers. Many students, especially those in "lower" academic standing, hold deficiencies both academically and socially (Daly, Duhon, & Witt, 2002). These social deficiencies, primarily concerning interpersonal communication, deplete the student's ability to gain full benefit from classroom/content area groups (Elliott, 1991). School

counselors have the training and ability to provide small group interventions that pinpoint these social deficiencies, allowing the counselor to scaffold the student and model appropriate and critical interpersonal communication. These communication skills allow students to reflect on shared success as well as positive changes in behavior that lead to increased academic achievement. By creating and facilitating heterogeneous (mixed ability) cooperative learning groups, school counselors are able to promote academic achievement by teaching and modeling proper communication and collaboration. The student is thus able to carry these skills into the classroom and engage more effectively in groups that enhance his/her mastery of content (Slavin, 1991).

School counselors must do more than just implement small group sessions; they must implement interventions that are research based and linked to increased academic achievement. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) developed the *ASCA National Model* as a framework for school counselors' competencies (2012). Within these competencies, group counseling is identified as an important direct service intervention that can be used to address personal/social, academic, and career development.

Enhancing Collective Learning Through Communication

When addressing the task of improving collective learning through communication, it is important to acknowledge the social and emotional abilities that must be present to derive maximum benefit from this process. It is equally important to understand the context in which communication is defined. Tubbs and Moss (2006) provide several definitions outlining the various types of communication: "**Verbal** - any type of spoken communication that uses one or more words" (p. 12); "**Intentional verbal** - conscious attempts individuals make to communicate with others through speech" (p. 12); "**Unintentional verbal** - the things we utter unintentionally" (p. 12); "**Nonverbal** - all of the messages we transmit without words or over and above the words we use" (p. 13); "**Intentional nonverbal messages** - the nonverbal messages we want to transmit" (p. 13); and "**Unintentional nonverbal messages** - all those nonverbal aspects of our behavior transmitted without our control" (p. 14).

To adequately improve collective learning within the educational setting, the ideology of organizational learning must serve as the basis for understanding the need for reform. Collective learning is enhanced through effective communication. Misunderstandings are almost always a result of poor or miscommunication, and this can lead to misperceptions (Tubbs & Moss, 2006). Pearson and Nelson (2000) define *communication* as a process of understanding and sharing meaning. This definition of communication supports the idea that communication is essential to the success of educational institutions looking to enhance the educational experience of all learners through collective learning. In today's educational atmosphere all aspects of

communication focus on comprehensively improving the collective. Communication is the foundation for any act that is conducted in a "social context" (Tubbs & Moss, 2006). This ideology speaks to the overarching goal of changing a system rather than changing a single person. *System learning*, also known as organizational learning, emphasizes improving learning for all educational stakeholders through the use of effective communications (Collinson & Cook, 2007).

Students must take an active role in improving their cognitive ability (Newman, 2000), and communication is a necessary interpersonal skill in this endeavor. A teacher's effectiveness in the classroom is predominantly dependent on how effective he/she communicates with the students and vice versa (Jonassen & Land, 2012). Group dynamics are made up of interpersonal interactions that translate into various forms of communication. While teachers are aware of the importance of communicating information effectively, very little time and emphasis is placed on equipping the student to effectively communicate with various educational stakeholders (peers, teachers, administrators) in an effort to enhance learning. All educators should possess the ability to present information in the educational setting; however, engaging participants in a meaningful learning experience is at the essence of collective learning through communication. School counselors are trained to address the needs of students in the area of interpersonal communication by way of social and emotional standards (ASCA, 2012). By implementing activities and exercises through collective learning that require students to problem solve concepts relevant to their success, school counselors are able to enhance interpersonal communication (Fitch & Marshall, 2004). School counselors can teach the nuances of communication in a multi-faceted way, approaching communication from the perspective of how something is said, the tone in which it is said, and the nonverbal cues used to accompany the message. Students acquire information in a variety of ways (auditory, visual, or kinesthetic), while others prefer tasks to be demonstrated and then given an opportunity to practice (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

Through heterogeneous group instruction, school counselors are able to use varying perspectives to convey the benefits of collective learning. By empowering students to initiate relationship building, school counselors can encourage collective learning through communication (Fitch & Marshall, 2004). School counselors are trained to improve communication, and improved communication reduces a student's apprehension toward the learning process (McCroskey, 1997). With this unique skill set, school counselors are able to assist students in actively engaging in the learning process by enhancing the way students communicate with one another, as well as how they communicate with the teacher.

The ultimate goal of this intervention process is for students to carry the acquired communication skills back into the classroom where they will be prepared to more actively engage the learning process. Particularly, students will be prepared to

derive maximum benefit from collective learning and group activities. As practitioners influence and enhance a student's communicative skills, they are influencing and enhancing the student's learning. In the classroom, this newly honed communication will provide more opportunities to fully master content. As students become better communicators, they become better learners (Jonassen & Land, 2012). When a student is able to problem solve his/her own learning (i.e., recognizing confusion, formulating and communicating the appropriate clarifying question), this aids both him/her and the practitioner exponentially. The practitioner is aided because it effectively provides a roadmap on where the student needs assistance. The student is aided by the fact that once an individual recognizes where he/she is confused, he/she is then able to seek out specific clarifying information. In this paper, the authors have strived to logically link student communication to academic achievement through improved student outcomes in a small group setting based on improved communication (i.e. Improved communication leads to more effective group sessions, which leads to higher academic achievement). Studies show how communication can improve group effectiveness, and how group effectiveness directly impacts student achievement (Slavin, Lake, & Groff, 2009; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007; Tubbs & Moss, 2006; Pearson & Nelson, 2000; Slavin, 1996a, 1996b); however, there are few studies directly linking improved student communication to improved academic achievement. More research is needed to directly and scientifically connect communication and academic achievement.

School Counselors and Academic Achievement: Enhancing Collective Learning

School counselors are essential to the educational process because they provide valuable assistance in students' personal/social, career, and academic development (Dahir & Stone, 2003; Fitch & Marshall, 2004). School counselors are licensed/certified counseling practitioners with unique qualifications and skills to address all students through the facilitation of interpersonal communication (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012). They can facilitate small group learning that enables students to maximize their learning potential through cooperative/collaborative interaction that is supported by heterogeneous grouping and differentiated instruction. Research has shown that there is more personal growth in heterogeneous grouping when applied to all students in a given population (Slavin, 1991, 1993). "Personal growth" is a difficult concept to both quantify and measure; however, for the purposes of this conceptual article, personal *growth* will be defined as the development of interpersonal communication skills that allow for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills that are relevant to one's self and social community (Marshall, 2001). This definition is derived from the idea that encountering new/different ideas, cultures, and perspectives improves one's concept of self as well as one's overall willingness and ability to engage in the social environment.

The skills acquired as the foundation of this personal growth serve as the prerequisite underpinnings for a teacher's pedagogical approach.

For teachers, the quandary of what can and should be learned is often coupled with the issue of how best to implement effective pedagogical practices so that learning objectives are reached (Bransford et al., 2000; Manchur, 1996). The 21st century classroom is a small, yet direct, correlate to the American society at large; it is an assortment of races, ethnicities, cultures, learning styles, and learning abilities. This style of classroom grouping has driven a demand for instruction that is differentiated to meet the specific needs of each student. Along with this differentiated style of instruction, teachers have embraced an ideology of more collective learning. With inclusive grouping practices, teachers have addressed the diverse learning styles with even more diverse pedagogical practices (Ferguson, 1995; Tomlinson, 2015, Tomlinson et al., 2003). At the heart of the debate on how to meet the needs of all learners is the issue of how to provide the best opportunity for lower ability students to be academically successful.

Differentiated instruction and collective learning are both strategies within the heterogeneous grouping structure that are touted to be the panacea for the current educational problem of how to educate diverse learners in an inclusive educational environment (Bevevino & Snodgrass, 1998; Brimfield, Masci, & DeFiore, 2002; Kean, 1993; Millis, 2002; Rubado, 2003) and are worthy of consideration for use in educating diverse learners. With this understanding, school counselors are able to create an environment that allows students to actively engage with various perspectives through a heterogeneous cooperative learning structure, resulting in increased opportunities for improved interpersonal communication and successfully resolving real world and classroom-based problems. This increased probability stems from the student gaining an understanding that various perspectives exist and developing a willingness to constructively engage these perspectives. As a multidimensional practitioner, the goal of the school counselor is not to just directly impact academic achievement, but to affect academic achievement as a byproduct of personal growth through personal/social development and communication (ASCA, 2012; Zins et al., 2007). School counselors hold a unique position that allows them to engage students in meaningful, small group interventions that hone interpersonal communication skills (Fitch & Marshall, 2004). School counselors working within their scope of practice are able to utilize differentiated interventions that support the learner, both academically and socially.

In today's educational climate of high-stakes testing that relies on test scores to make educational decisions about students and schools, a school counselor must work in ways that facilitate the delivery of effective and equitable interventions, incorporate interpersonal communication, and allows students to derive maximum benefit from the learning process (Clark &

Breman, 2009). With the focus on inclusion by national initiatives such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (2004) and No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), educational stakeholders have been given the task of exploring intervention practices that address diverse populations of exceptional learners (Millis, 2002). Understanding the push for inclusive educational environments, educators of all types are exploring the use of heterogeneous grouping structures supported by differentiated instruction to address the wide spectrum of learners who participate in intervention groups (Gamoran & Weinstein, 1998). Heterogeneous grouping structures and pedagogical practices that utilize differentiated instruction are intended to assist in meeting the needs of diverse populations (Tomlinson, 2015); however, group effectiveness is automatically diminished because many students that comprise these diverse populations lack the necessary prerequisite communication and collaborative skills to effectively participate in these groups (Elliot, 1991). The ability to maximize group effectiveness by properly preparing students for heterogeneous learning groups is important to educational stakeholders who are faced with the difficult task of educating students of various ability levels in the same grade level and classroom (Gamoran & Weinstein, 1998). Because people have an innate tendency to gather in groups to achieve desired outcomes and relate to others in innovative and productive ways, interventions built on the premise of grouping strategies and group dynamics are both possible and necessary (McClure, 1990).

Heterogeneous Versus Homogeneous Groups

A fundamental question at the foundation of the American educational system is: What is the best way to educate students whose backgrounds and abilities differ dramatically? One of the answers to this predicament involves tracking or grouping students homogeneously based on ability level (Gamoran, 2009). However, studies have consistently demonstrated that tracking has a minimal, if not negligible, effect on a student's achievement (Gamoran, 2009; Slavin, 1990, 1993, 1996b). Tracking breeds an atmosphere of competition as opposed to community and learning (Meijnen & Guldemond, 2002). Ferguson (1995) and Kean (1993) have suggested that homogeneous ability grouping limits the instructional experience of lower track students. Because mobility between tracks is rare, when students are placed in low track classes that primarily use rote drill on basic skills as instruction early in their academic career, their chances for promotion to tracks involving upper/higher order thinking is diminished (Burnett, 1995). In fact, in a study conducted by Yonezawa and Jones (2006), students indicated that the practice of tracking was unmerited and unfair. Tracking has also been shown to have negative effects on minority students and those students who are of lower socioeconomic status (Vang, 2005). Concerns about tracking raise questions regarding how students should be grouped in order to derive maximum benefit from the learning experience. The idea of grouping is very important to the success of equitable education (Baer, 2003; Millis, 2002). While homogeneous ability grouping has shown great

promise for students who are gifted, it presents numerous inadequacies for meeting the needs of students who have average or lower ability. The use of tracking has created disproportionate representation across the educational spectrum, which has resulted in inequitable education for all (Kean, 1993). Changes in the way students are grouped can radically change the way they are taught in schools across the nation (Ellison & Hallinan, 2004).

Heterogeneous grouping is also known as mixed-ability grouping, collaborative grouping, or achievement grouping because this style of teaching and learning takes students from all levels of the learning spectrum and places them within the same class or group within a class, where they all work together on a curriculum that is both challenging and rewarding (Slavin, 1993, 1996b). By not singling out students who are *gifted* and students with *lower* ability from the students with *average* ability, pupils have an equal range of possible acceptance and knowledge attainment (Zieber, 2009).

When planning lessons, teachers search for the most effective ways to maximize the impact of every minute in a class for every student. Cooperative, heterogeneous learning groups can be a very effective tool for improving academic achievement through effective communication. The use of heterogeneous grouping, in small group sessions, can be an effective way to reach a subset of students who are often overlooked in a traditional classroom setting (Slavin, 1991). Research has demonstrated that collective learning structures impact all core contents areas, all grade levels, all developed human settlements, and high, average, and low achievers in a positive way (Slavin, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 2006, 2009). Administrators, teachers, school counselors, school psychologists, and others involved in education can use this information to build practical pedagogical strategies that are geared toward positive equitable educational reform that is beneficial for learners of all types. School counselors, coupled with cooperative small group learning intervention, provide yet another resource geared toward improving the overall quality of a student's educational experience. As educational environments become increasingly diverse, it is important that educational leaders work to create an atmosphere that fosters equitable academic opportunities for learners of all types.

Heterogeneous grouping presents group participants with a wide variety of choices. These choices might include considering which roles to focus on within the group or at what level of difficulty participants will challenge themselves (Zieber, 2009). It is thought that by setting up classrooms with one or more of these groups, students would be able to analyze and critique what they have done in their groups (Watson & Marshall, 2006).

Every student has an opportunity to learn from the other students in a heterogeneous group, which enhances collaboration within the group. This enhanced collaboration within heterogeneous groups is beneficial to the school counselor's

goal of facilitating and modeling appropriate interpersonal communication for effective small group learning. More collaboration necessarily means more communication, and, for the school counselor, the increase in communication provides more opportunities for intervention in a student's communicative deficiencies. Additionally, in educational settings where heterogeneous grouping is used, it is expected that students be given ample opportunities to participate in the learning process, as well as respect the ideas of others within the same environment (Zieber, 2009). When executed properly, heterogeneous grouping has positive effects on students' academic achievement, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships, all of which increase students' overall academic outcome (Slavin, 1996b, 2006; Villa & Thousand, 2003).

Approaches to Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning, or group learning, is a teaching approach that emerged from the early ideas of cognitive theorists who promoted cognitive pedagogy (Aimeur, Frasson, & Dufort, 2000). Cooperative learning, evolved from early constructivist epistemology (Abbott & Ryan, 1999). Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, and Canadian-born Albert Bandura are at the forefront of the idea that knowledge acquisition is a result of reading, exploring, and experiencing within a social context (Bransford et al., 2000; Burman, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). Cooperative learning students improve their problem solving skills through different interpretations of a perceived problem (Bruner, 1985). Cooperative/collaborative learning allows the educational focus to center on the student and learning, rather than on the curriculum and teaching (Slavin, 1996a, 1996b, 2006; Walker, 2009).

With educational initiatives pushing for more inclusion-based classrooms, educators are searching for ways to effectively implement instructional strategies to provide equitable education to heterogeneously grouped learners (Gamoran & Weinstein, 1998; Lees, 2007). In order to enhance the effectiveness of these strategies in the classroom, school counselors must mimic these cooperative/collaborative strategies in small group settings; yet, instead of addressing a student's content needs, the counselor must address the social communication needs of each student (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010).

Cooperative learning theories and differentiated instruction drive the mission of appropriate pedagogy through group learning (Thomas, 1997; Thomas, Walker, & Webb, 1997). Proper implementation of grouped learning can only be achieved through understanding how students learn best and adapting methods to create individual opportunities for educational success. As a school counselor, it is necessary to establish small learning group interventions that incorporate proven techniques to increase students' academic achievement (Battistich, Solomon, & Delucchi, 1993).

Differentiated Instruction and Small Group Learning

The phrase "differential education" was coined by Virgil Ward as a way of "providing appropriate education for gifted and talented students" (Bravmann, 2004, p. 1). *Differentiated instruction* is an instructional theory that takes diverse student factors into account when planning and delivering intervention. This instructional theory is built on the premise that students learn best when connections between interest and experiences and the curriculum are made (Subban, 2006). This concept is similar to Gardner's (1993) ideology that learning is achieved through multiple avenues and that educational institutions should concentrate on teaching children based on what they know and how they learn best. Ward's concept of student-centered teaching was simple because it demanded that teachers teach based on what their students knew, and how they learned it best, but profound because it highlighted what student-centered teachers already practiced (Bravmann, 2004). Although the concept originally concentrated on teaching only academically talented or gifted children, differentiated instruction has branched out over the past 50 years into mixed-ability classes (Tomlinson et al., 2003).

Cooperative learning incorporates the ideology of heterogeneous grouping and differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2015; Vermette & Foote, 2001). Brimfield et al. (2002) stated that, "Heterogeneous grouping not only provides an encouraging and challenging environment for all students, but also provides for more flexibility in the schedule, thereby giving students access to more learning opportunities" (p. 2). A break from tradition, the practices of heterogeneous grouping and differentiated instruction seem to be paying off for all students who are fortunate to be a part of this type of environment. Differentiating instructional strategies within small learning groups has proven to be very effective and to positively impact academic achievement through interpersonal communication (Slavin et al., 2009).

Although growing popularity has pushed differentiated instruction to the forefront of the education world, Bravmann (2004) contended that there is still confusion about the implementation. Although many educators have considered differentiated instruction and explored differentiated curriculum, few have focused on the "necessary combination of the two in order to create differential education" (Bravmann, 2004, p. 3). In order for differentiation to be as successful as possible, learning objectives must be geared toward the needs of the child. To achieve differentiated education, teachers must be willing to study and understand the process of connecting students to the learning process through their interests, learning styles, and interpersonal communication styles (Subban, 2006).

While educational initiatives tend to push teachers and administrators toward a one-size-fits-all curriculum, proponents of differentiated education advocate concentrating on each individual child (Brimfield et al., 2002). One major aspect of

differentiated education is differentiated instruction. In other words, educators must present materials in a variety of ways so that students have a number of opportunities to be successful (Brimfield et al., 2002). Cooperative learning groups provide a vehicle for differentiated instruction to thrive. These groups can be used during regular instruction or during review activities. The groups may work on research projects or make class presentations. Again, school counselors working within their scope of practice are then able to utilize differentiated interventions that support the learner, both academically and socially.

Differentiated instruction and collective learning both offer possible approaches for addressing current educational problems (Bevevino & Snodgrass, 1998; Kean, 1993; Millis, 2002; Rubado, 2003). Although these strategies are discussed in the literature (Bevevino & Snodgrass, 1998; Kean, 1993; Millis, 2002; Rubado, 2003), grouping strategies specifically aimed at assisting lower ability students have received minimal attention in educational research. Professional school counselors play a vital role in providing a continuum of interventions that meet all students' needs personally, socially, and academically (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). Understanding the aforementioned, one of the most effective ways for school counselors to impact academic achievement is through small group interventions that are supported by the collaborative/cooperative ideology.

Grouping strategies that involve cooperative learning can aid lower ability students in discovering academic success through various styles of learning. In the ongoing pursuit to provide equitable education to all learners, traditional pedagogical practices are being revised in favor of more revolutionary approaches (Barrington, 2004). Recognition of the varying intelligences within each small group allows the counselor/facilitator to strategically intervene and guide communication within the group so as to create a more inclusive experience for each learner.

Conclusion

Educational entities must work to transform students into *intellectuals* who seek not to know the majority of answers, but rather, *intellectuals* who seek to ask critically constructive questions. The failure of educational institutions to evolve in these pedagogical practices is a disservice not only to the learner, but also to society as a whole. With their keen ability to address the student holistically, school counselors have an opportunity to positively impact the student, the school, and the community by nurturing the tenets that breed good citizenship. School counselors must work to provide a more profound experience within the educational environment that is motivated by personal growth and interpersonal communication. One of the most impactful ways to implement this objective is through small group learning. School counselors must work to educate relevant stakeholders on the advantages of small group interventions, while creating and maintaining environments that encourage diverse teaching practices for learners of all types.

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