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Abstract
School counseling as a specialty area within the profession of counseling is, in the eyes of many, experiencing a crisis of identity. The crisis, however, truly lies with school counselors struggling to fit the mold impressed upon them by external forces which often contradicts their educational preparation as counselors. We make two main points. First, academic achievement is not the most important domain for the school counselor to place their focus. Rather, personal/social and career development are the areas that school counselors should seek to impact. In addition, school counselors are principally counselors and not educators.

Are We Going in the Right Direction? Concerns about School Counseling

School counseling is at a crossroads. External pressures, such as education reform, the development of a single counselor identity, and serving the needs of all stakeholders, are exerted on school counseling. In 2009, the *Journal of Counseling and Development* published a special edition specifically asking, "Where lies the future?" for school counselors (Dahir, 2009). School counseling, as a specialization of the counseling profession, appears to be experiencing a crisis of identity. Historically, school counselors viewed their role as mediating the physical, personal, social, and behavior obstacles impeding students' academic success (Erford, 2011; Schellenberg, 2008). Currently, there is an attempt to shift school counselors to become education reform leaders focused on academic achievement of youth (Erford, 2011; Schellenberg, 2008). The departure from the traditional role of the school counselor seems to be redesigning the school counselor as an academic interventionist (Baker, 2001). Essentially, the crisis appears to be centered on whether school counselors are

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educators (with knowledge of counseling theories and techniques), or counselors (working within an educational environment), and whether academic achievement or holistic student development is the primary focus of school counselors. The future of school counseling may depend on which road is selected during this crisis of identity. While it has been acknowledged that there is more than one possible pathway in the future development of school counseling (Dahir, 2009), we believe that the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has selected an avenue of identifying school counselors as educators primarily focused on academic achievement that could be potentially devastating to school counseling.

Background

School counselors clearly have responsibilities to the counseling profession and to the students of the schools in which they work. This past decade, school counselors were pressured by ASCA leadership to change their role within schools. This intentional role change seems to be influenced by education reform efforts, and how ASCA leadership has interpreted the call for change.

Role and Identity

Historically, over the past century, role ambiguity has been a central issue for school counselors, yet the ASCA leadership has suggested, "professional identity is not a central concern to ASCA" (Kraus, Kleist, & Cashwell, 2009). Perhaps it is in the opinion of ASCA leaders that they have sufficiently met their goal to "create one vision, one voice for school counseling programs " (ASCA, 2005; ASCA, 2012). The question remains, whose vision and voice? The vision and voice does not seem to be aligned with the other counseling organizations, including the American Counseling Association (ACA), which is the largest organization that represents counselors, and a parent organization of ASCA. ACA has been working to establish a professional identity that can be shared by all counselors, no matter their specialty (ACA, 2010; Kraus et al., 2009, p.60), including school counselors. The 20/20 representatives, which included such groups as CACREP, NBCC, Chi Sigma Iota, and the divisions of ACA (including the ASCA leadership), identified seven principles "critical to the mission of continuing to move the counseling profession forward" (ACA, 2010). The Principles were endorsed by 29 of the organizations that represent the specialty areas, in addition to the certifying and accrediting bodies, within the counseling profession. ASCA, however, declined to support the seven principles, but indicated that if the statements were to be operationalized, and ASCA believed that the statements represented the views of ASCA, that they would sign on at that time (R. S. Wong, personal communication, July 30, 2009). After the seven principles were adopted by the other counseling organizations, the 20/20 representatives used the Delphi Method to create a visioning statement, "Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals" (ACA, 2010, para. 5). The visioning statement seems to be inclusive of ASCA's Developmental Domains (Academic, Career, and Personal/ Social), yet, at this time, ASCA has not supported this definition of counseling, perhaps

because the ASCA leadership has currently decided that they do not identify as counselors. Rather than focusing on school counselor identity, the executive director and leadership of ASCA place more importance on convincing school counselors that they should focus on academic achievement, and see themselves as in this business of *educating* youth, instead of assisting youth. The vision of positioning school counselors to focus on academic achievement, and to view themselves as educators, seems to be influenced by ASCA leaderships' interpretation of a series of reform efforts.

Education Reform

Education has been undergoing tremendous change over the past three decades, which appears to have been initiated with *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983), a report in which the federal government called for education reform because the US appeared to be academically falling behind other industrialized nations. In the past, the US Government saw school counselors as "sociopolitical instruments to achieve national goals" (Erford, 2011, p. 25). For example, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA, 1958) led to the preparation of hundreds of secondary school counselors to help identify students talented in mathematics and the sciences. In fact, the NDEA provided tax-exempt funding for the preparation of school counselors (Baker, 2001) with the belief that school counselors would deliver on the goal to propel the nation to the moon. Several decades later, *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983) never specifically recognized school counselors as part of the solution of the national goals (Schwallie-Giddis, ter Maat, & Pak, 2003). Feeling left out of *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983), ASCA commissioned the development of National Standards for school counselors (Schwallie-Giddis et al., 2003).

Subsequent legislation to address *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983) included several re-authorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The re-authorizations called for measuring student success (Erford, 2011) and eventually led to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which called for accountability in schools. Once again, school counselors were not specifically included in NCLB or the re-authorization of NCLB. The government's lack of focus on school counseling left counselors to wonder if either a) school counselors were not viewed as part of the educational solution, or b) school counseling was valued for the unique mental health focus that they provide to students within the educational environment, and therefore were not targeted for change. It is this intersection at which school counselors find themselves. On the one hand, are school counselors *educators* whose ultimate goal is to assist in the academic achievement of school youth (Baker, 2001)? Or, are school counselors *mental health practitioners* who function in an educational system, but whose objective is the development of the whole student: to help students develop personally and socially, develop their individual careers, and to recognize the relevance of academic success as an expression of personal growth and self-knowledge?

The American School Counselor Association's Reform

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), a division of the American Counseling Association (ACA), chose to respond by interpreting *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983) and NCLB legislation as a concern that school counselors were not seen as part of the solution (Schwallie-Giddis et al., 2003). School counselors, who have a long history of struggling with an identity that others recognize and respect, were encouraged by ASCA to consider themselves "educators" rather than "counselors" (ASCA, 2008). In fact, ASCA defines school counseling as "a certified licensed *educator* trained in school counseling with unique qualifications and skills to address all students' academic, personal social and career development needs" (ASCA, 2008; Kraus et al., 2009, p. 60). Many of the branch divisions of ASCA have developed their own models, which are directly related to the National Model. It is not clear that the members of ASCA (or their branch divisions) or non-members share this view or have any input into these identifying decisions. In fact, one study found that school counselors were well aware of their state model (based on ASCA's model), but few had selected to implement it (Poynton, Schumacher, & Wilczenski, 2008). Contributing to ASCA's selection of this interpretive path are the Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI; Education Trust, 1997) and the ASCA National Standards (1997). The former argued that school counselors were serving to maintain the achievement gap and further stated that counselor educators were not preparing school counselors for the real job (Erford, 2011).

ASCA National Standards

In 1997, the National Standards were developed for ASCA (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). The Standards were based on a national survey of 1127 ASCA members, representing a response rate of 56.4% (Dahir, 2004). The study revealed that 82% of respondents believed that national standards should be developed, and 83% believed that national standards were necessary. Respondents believed that if standards were developed then they should provide opportunities for all students (95.4%), should address counseling, consultation, and coordination (91.8%), should reflect the belief that all children can learn (91%), and should be connected to the mission of the school (89.6%). When respondents were asked if the standards should be based more on theory or practice, the majority (66.7%) responded that the standards should be based on practice. The resulting nine standards focused on student development in three domains: academic, personal/ social, and career.

Transforming School Counseling Initiative

In the late 90's, the TSCI developed and distributed the new vision for school counseling (Education Trust, 1997). The TSCI called for school counselors to move from serving students on an individual basis to focusing on systemic change (Erford, 2011); furthermore, the TSCI directed school counselors to move away from a mental health focus to an academic achievement focus. The Education Trust's proposed reform for school counseling was a three-phase process. The first phase focused on developing a new vision of school counsel-

ing (1995-1996) by establishing an advisory board. They described school counseling as having "...focuses on educational equity, access, and academic success, with a concentration on interventions that will close the achievement gap between poor and minority children and their more advantaged peers" (Perusse & Goodnough, 2001, p.102). The second phase involved funding 10 universities (with counselor education programs) to develop implementation plans for preparing school counselors under the New Vision. Phase III provided $450,000 to six programs over a three-year period through the DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). There were also 24 other counselor education programs that were selected to transform their counselor preparation programs, although they did not receive funding (Perusse & Goodnough, 2001). ASCA's leadership decided to incorporate the advice of the Education Trust and moved school counselors toward an academic achievement focus.

The ASCA National Model

The TSCI, the National Standards for School Counselors, along with existing school counseling models (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000, 2002, 2006; Johnson & Johnson, 2001; Myrick, 1997, 2002), were used to develop the *ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs*® (2005). The Model was intended to be developmental, comprehensive, and results-based (Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2009) while also incorporating the TSCI themes: advocacy, collaboration, leadership, and systemic change (ASCA, 2005; ASCA, 2012). Interestingly, the National Standards, a foundation of the Model, gave equal weight to the Personal/ Social, Career, and Academic domains (Campbell & Dahir, 1997); yet, the school counselors surveyed clearly identified personal/ social development as more important to the role of the school counselor (Dahir, 2004). Furthermore, ASCA members thought that National Standards should address counseling, consultation, and coordination (Dahir, 2004). Moreover, the comprehensive and developmental models that were used as a foundation for the model, supported direct services, including counseling. In fact, Myrick's model suggested that school counselors should spend between 15-40% of their time engaged in counseling (Myrick, 1997). Yet, the consistent message that ASCA has conveyed is a clear focus on academic achievement. ASCA under-emphasizes what is clearly important to ASCA members, and other school counseling experts, by placing an emphasis on academic achievement rather than personal/ social or career development issues.

School Counseling at the Crossroads
School Counselors as key members of a system

The school counselor plays a significant role in assisting in the affective development of students, which in turn, allows teachers to educate students. That is, school counselors are an important part of the delivery of, and experience with, affective education to help young people develop the affective side, an important part of the learning process (Baker & Gerler, 2004). In fact, it has been argued, "twenty-first century school counselors are in a powerful and pivotal position to effectively demonstrate how the complement of academic rigor

and affective development is the formula to student success" (Dahir, 2009, p. 3). Although, over promotion of school counselors focusing on academic rigor is flawed; Brown and Trusty (2005) suggested that school counseling programs promise more than they can deliver on academic achievement. Thus the role of the school counselor in the school, and in the greater social system, is one that is significantly shaped by the personal, social, and affective needs of the students in any given school. In fact, it has been argued that if school counselors are to remain relevant, they must recognize the centrality of the counseling portion of their work and the increasing mental health needs of the young citizenry of this country (Mainzer, 2010). Whiston (2002) argued persuasively that school counselors should not abandon students in the areas in which they require assistance. She contended that school counselors are well suited to providing mental health services to students in school settings, and that if they do not perform this task, someone else will. If ASCA continues to follow their current trajectory, school counselors will have moved from a position of responding to student needs to a position of responding to the needs of the educational establishment, which currently only seems to value academic excellence.

Desirable School Counseling Role Responsibilities

Wrenn (1962, as cited in Gysbers, 2001), Roeber (1963, as cited in Gysbers, 2001), and Stripling and Lane (1966, as cited in Gysbers, 2001) emphasized the centrality of the role of individual and group counseling in the work of the school counselor. In a recent study of 1,244 school counselors in the state of Alabama, school counselors saw their role as that of performing counseling (Dahir et al., 2009). The highest overall k-12 means were: counseling students individually about personal/social issues (a mean of 4.69 out of 5); decision making skills; counseling students who have behavioral problems in classes; personal problems that affect grades; managing emotions; consulting with parents, teachers, and administrators. The activities that were rated the lowest were program management and academic development. Clearly, school counselors saw themselves as performing counseling tasks that are different from the educational functions of the teacher and the administrator in a school setting. The findings were consistent with the findings of Scarborough and Culbreth (2008), who found that school counselors wanted to be engaged in activities that led to positive student outcomes, and to spend less time engaged in nonguidance related activities. Indeed, Scarborough and Culbreth found that high school counselors had a strong desire to engage in counseling, consultation, coordination, and curriculum activities. In a study of ASCA members, Perusse and Goodnough (2005) found that both elementary and high school counselors, ranked individual counseling, group counseling, and consultation with parents and teachers as the three most important content areas of counselor preparation; presumably these content areas reflect the most central work that school counselors engage in at the elementary and high school levels. Aside from how school counselors view their role, even teachers believed that school counselors should engage in one-student-at-a-time therapeutic counseling, and felt that school counselors should be doing more of this type of work (Reiner, Colbert, & Perusse, 2009).

The crystal ball: What does the future look like?

According to Whiston (2002), school counseling is in a critical position and has the capacity to flourish or wane through current academic reform. Some (ASCA, 2005; ASCA 2012; Green & Keys, 2001) have suggested that school counselors need to align their program with school improvement goals or be replaced by reading teachers or social workers (Green & Keys, 2001). Sink (2001), on the other hand, questioned the causal relationship that some have drawn between the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs and improved academic performance. In fact, he argued that we should not hold school counselors accountable for increases in traditional markers of academic achievement. Rather, school counselors should focus their attention on the areas of student development that are consistent with their training: personal and social developmental changes, career planning, responsive services, program implementation, and school climate. Currently, school counselors are placed in an unrealistic position of trying to fulfill the variety of expectations placed by stakeholders (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Some (Green & Keys, 2001) argue that providing more indirect services to students allows counselors to impact more students (i.e., manage large caseloads), while others suggest that an over emphasis on indirect services may lead to counselors not being recognized for the services they provide (Whiston, 2002). School counselors were faced with a similar lack of recognition in the 1930's when the role of the school counselor was at risk for being "absorbed into curriculum revision" and essentially eliminated as a specific role (Gysbers, 2001).

In considering the future of school counseling, Whiston (2002) suggested school counselors make tough decisions about the role responsibilities that they need to relinquish in an effort to more effectively serve students. We propose that school counselors should refocus their energy on mental health services in schools. Failure to support students in the areas in which we receive the most training may lead to the "belief that school counselors are not 'real' counselors" (Whiston, 2002, p.5). If school counselors fail to deliver the mental health services, which they were trained to provide, schools may hire other individuals to provide counseling services (Whiston, 2002). Given that social workers are hired by school districts to provide mental health services, it is clear that schools do value both mental health and instructional services in school settings. Perhaps, school counselors have not clearly articulated the extent of their mental health training to the satisfaction of the educational establishment, which leads schools to look to other professions to provide counseling services. While we are not saying that social workers not be staffed in schools, we are arguing that they should not be replacing school counselors; both school counselors and social workers support the mental health of students by providing unique, complimentary, and necessary services.

Despite the known mental health and career development needs of youth in schools, the Education Trust TSCI hoped to move school counselors away from a mental health focus to an academic achievement focus (Erford, 2011); the Education Trust has seemingly convinced ASCA to follow this pathway. The TSCI message is not entirely problematic; while the Education Trust identified that academic achievement for all students was the ultimate goal, perhaps the

intent was to move school counselors beyond just the principles of social justice to actively advocating for change within the complicated and political educational structure of schools and districts.

School counselors, by the virtue of their training, are indeed prepared to identify problems and collaborate with others to find solutions. School counselors sit on a gold mine of quantitative and qualitative data and are privy to micro (individual) and macro-level (district/ community) strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, school counselors are trained to interact with individuals and groups to support change. Closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged and advantaged students creates access and opportunities for all students to work toward achieving their life goals, and school counselors are in a position to advocate for change that can impact their students for a lifetime.

While the Education Trust's TSCI message, about closing the achievement gap, proposes some real benefits for the future of our youth, limiting social justice and advocacy to only an academic focus seems to contribute to underserving disadvantaged youth in a holistic manner. Furthermore, school counselors may simply side-step advocating for educational equity, access, and academic success to a practice of simply ushering ALL youth in to higher education. Convincing all young adults that academic success and attending college is the *valued* pathway may contradict the underlying value of counseling which involves asking students to reflect on their personal strengths, abilities, interests, values, and goals and to make decisions that they believe will lead to a fulfilling life.

Providing youth with the ability to both attend and succeed in higher education should remain the goal rather than simply placing all young adults into college. Using data to determine the systematic barriers that impede student success, providing career education and counseling, and remaining connected to students as individuals will ensure that school counselors are in a position to help all youth address any of the barriers in their lives. Interpreting the TSCI message as a call to send all youth to college could lead school counselors down a familiar path; in the past many students were told that they were not "college material", and they perceived that message to mean that their school counselor did not have faith in their abilities. Will the new perceived message be, "my school counselor did not care to help me figure out what I wanted to do with my life, they just sent me to college and hoped I would figure it out there, while I incurred tens of thousands of dollars of debt"?

A Dark Future

ASCA has an opportunity to reinterpret education reform efforts (*A Nation at Risk*, NCLB, TSCI, etc.) and change their agenda; but if they do not, we foresee a future of fragmentation beyond the relationship with other counselors, to a fragmentation within the school counseling specialty, and ultimately a systematic elimination of school counseling positions in schools. According to Gysbers (2001), school counseling may become fragmented with school counselors focusing on providing services based in their preferred area of interest, whether that be academic, personal/social, or career. Such fragmentation would certainly contribute to continued confusion amongst school counselors and other stakeholders if, within the school counseling specialty, counselors individually selected their preferred services. We fear that schools will begin to follow a de-

centralized model more commonly seen in colleges, where personal social counseling is provided separately from academic advisement and career services. While fragmentation and specialization makes the role more simplistic and clear, it also diminishes the opportunity to view and serve students holistically. Dividing school counselors into sub-specialties may be additionally detrimental to students, as often students will see their school counselor about a benign issue (i.e., schedule change, college information) as a cover to discuss significant issues in confidence without others' (peers, teachers, and parents) awareness. Having to see the "mental health counselor" may dissuade students from seeking the assistance they need from fear of being stigmatized.

Reflecting on the decentralized college/university model, mental health centers are staffed with individuals who have the clinical training to serve students' mental health needs, and are often comprehensive, in that they combine the services of counselors, social workers, and psychologists, but sometimes counselors are left out of this model. Individuals with business backgrounds often staff career centers; those individuals likely have little training in career development concepts or in the counseling process. Finally, academic advisors simply provide information to students about how to graduate within their major with little connection to other aspects of students' lives (McArthur, 2005). In fact, the change may have already begun. Many high schools have already moved to staffing career centers with business teachers. Some high schools have also moved toward hiring academic deans, who provide school counseling services while adding discipline to the repertoire without a school counseling or administrative degree (Gutierrez & Sokolowski, 2010). Even those who have sung the praises of such a direction for school counseling have found that students have expressed discomfort with the dual roles of disciplinarian and counselor, and have suggested that these professionals need to attend more to the mental health and emotional development of students (Gutierrez & Sokolowski, 2010). Recognizing a gap in affective education, in the state of New York, for example, nine State Commissions, including the Education Department and the Office of Mental Health, recommended that teachers be trained to infuse social and emotional development into the classroom (New York State, 2008, p.6). Perhaps the reason is that teachers have to address more social and emotional issues because school counselors are focusing on academic interventions. And, finally, counseling services are being contracted out with greater regularity to external mental health agencies. Given the current trajectory, we fear that the entire specialty of counseling, currently known as school counseling, stands to be lost.

Conclusion

School counselors are on the brink of a decision: What do we believe is in the best interest of children and young adults? We choose the work of counselors: addressing the social/emotional and career development of the children in our schools, as well as advocating for equity and access in education; focusing on these areas may lead to academic achievement, but academic achievement is not the sole goal. If we do not focus on the holistic development of youth, school counseling may experience a divorce into academic advisors and men-

tal health contracted workers. Education reform, fueled by NCLB, is a hot topic in school counseling and across the educative enterprise. The politics of education have profoundly impacted the manner in which educational and mental health services are provided to students in school settings across the country. ASCA proposed that using their model, with its emphasis on accountability and student academic success, will allow school counselors to demonstrate their worth and, thus, ensure the maintenance of jobs of school counselors. The government, however, has decreed that mental health services in schools are essential to the development of young people throughout their educative experience. ASCA seemingly never considered this path. Instead, ASCA has chosen to focus on an educators' role with a targeted focus on academic achievement. Consider this: Schools can provide a holistic education where teachers focus on academic achievement and learning and school counselors support the social, emotional, and career development of students. The emphasis is on the word "can." Each of these domains impacts the other, and it is this collaborative effort that we call "school" and "education."

School counselors need to expect their roles to change as society changes (Herr, 2001; Paisley & McMahon, 2002); it has been our history, and will be our future. In sum, school counselors have a choice. It is true that the context of school counseling has certainly changed throughout the past fifty years. The question, however, remains as to whether school counselors will choose to support a suggestion to identify primarily as educators, remaining fixated primarily on the academic needs of students. Or, on the other hand, will school counselors choose to more predominantly focus on the whole student's needs, personal/social, and career development, and facilitate the growth of an educational establishment that understands the context of the student in the academic development of the individual student? Perhaps prior to another entity making such a decision for school counselors, it is the school counselors themselves who should decide. While education is in a period of flux, school counseling should take the opportunity to boldly state the role of school counselors. Our main emphasis is on the personal/ social and career development of youth, while serving as a resource broker of academic services, not an academic interventionist. Our role with academics is to help youth see the relevance of education in their lives, to connect them to resources, and to support them in their decision-making processes about short and long-term goals. Our main process is through facilitation, whether it be through individual or group counseling, classroom presentations, or large group presentations. Ultimately, we use our counseling skills to help youth develop holistically with the ability to pursue fulfilling lives.

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