

Secondary School Counselors as Educational Leaders:

Shifting Perceptions of Leadership

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Abstract

School counselors are currently being charged to become active participants in systemic change for student achievement. This will require leadership. Our study was significant in that it complemented and perpetuated the vision and direction of the school counseling field. This empirical study investigates school counselors' perceptions of leadership, specifically their roles as educational leaders in their present school settings. Our study was a qualitative inquiry into a select number of Texas high school counselors with years of experience ranging from three years to thirty-two years. This collaborative study provided insight into counselors' views of leadership. Our study results indicated that respondents have the tools to be educational leaders. However, some of the tools are misunderstood, underutilized, unrecognized and/or used incorrectly.

Secondary School Counselors as Educational Leaders: Shifting Perceptions of Leadership

School counselors are consistently not categorized as leaders in the school setting (DeVoss & Minnie, 2006). Whether or not counselors impact student outcomes is a continuous issue in the field of school counseling. Consequently, school counselors have been traditionally trained as mental health providers and student advocates rather than receiving training on becoming school leaders. This specific change requires vision and leadership (Heilbruhn, 1994). As a result, school counselors, who lack at least some primary leadership skills and development, are at a disadvantage to promote wide-ranging change in the educational setting (DeVoss & Minnie, 2006; Loesch & Ritchie, 2004). This trend is slowly changing. The necessity of a school counselor who provides and displays educational leadership is becoming apparent in the legislation at the national and state levels (DeVoss & Minnie).

Recently, changes were made at the university level in counselor training programs (Education Trust, 1999). Over the past two to three decades, counselor education programs primarily were based on a mental health model. With the recent research from the Education Trust, university school counseling curricula has moved to prepare counselors to be activists and advocates for systemic change (House & Martin, 1998). The Education Trust, with support from DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund, supported a working group of counselor educators and school counseling professionals to reform training and practice in school counseling. One purpose of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund is to promote essential advancements in the quality of educational and career development opportunities for all school-age youth. Additionally,

the funding is to increase access to improved services for young people in low-income communities (DeVoss & Minnie, 2006). Areas of interest include improving services to children and youth in elementary and secondary schools, in community-based organizations, and through school-community collaboration. The current role for this initiative defines school counseling as "...a profession that focuses on...reducing the effect of environmental and institutional barriers that impede student academic success. The profession fosters conditions that ensure educational equity, access, and academic success for all students k-12" (Education Trust, <http://www.edtrust.org>).

Is this New Focus Counselor training enough to reach and change perceptions of leadership for current school administrators and school counselors? A general lack of understanding by critical stakeholders, such as school principals, may exist as a roadblock to the new vision of school counselors as educational leaders (Galassi & Akos, 2004). Collaboration among school personnel is an essential tool for improving services to students (Broughton, 2005; DeVoss & Minnie, 2006; Martin, Wright, & Danzig, 2003). In most instances, ultimately the principal determines the role of the guidance counselor. There must be a clear understanding of the standards to which counselors are held accountable as school leaders for any type of collaboration to be effective (Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, & Marshall, 2001).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of our study was to examine how secondary school counselors perceive their leadership role within their present school setting. We wanted to understand what effects do school counselors expected leadership skills to have on the staff and principals. This study is based on the proposition that one of the most

important components of synthesizing effective leadership and effective counseling is the relationship between the leaders and those they are leading. Likewise, it is proposed that if these relationships are characterized by authenticity, respect, empathy and effective communication, it is likely to lead to self-actualization and personal growth in school counselors (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005). In addition, the counselor would have the opportunity to take on additional leadership opportunities to promote student achievement. The outcomes of our study are expected to add to the theoretical understandings of the nature of leadership and how it specifically operates in the field of education. Moreover, counselors may have a positive impact on defining the role of the school counselor (Dahir, 2004).

Review of Literature

A review of the literature provides an introduction and critical exploration of what has been published that is relevant to our study. In recent years, there has been an outcry for school counselors to become leaders within the educational landscape at the local and national levels. Literature, specific to changing counseling issues from the national and state levels, balanced against trends from select university school counseling programs, was examined. Finally, this review of literature explored the role of secondary school counselors as educational leaders at school settings with an emphasis on the perceptions of working school counselors' understanding of the concept of leadership. A thorough review of the literature provided an increased understanding of these complex ideas and an area of opportunity in the research that lead to our qualitative study.

National and State Interventions for Counselor Transformations

Despite the improved focus and renewed interest in comprehensive guidance models that highlight a balance between prevention and intervention and the continued call for increased accountability in educational standards, there is continued deliberation over troubles with role ambiguity among school counselors (Education Trust, 1999; Gray & Carroll-McCollum, 2003; Kaffenberger, Murphy, & Bemak, 2006). In addition, there exists concern from a variety of sources that educational programs for school counselors have not evolved with the times and that school counselors are not prepared to work successfully with all students in the 21st century (Colbert, Vernon-Jones, & Pransky, 2006; Broughton, 2005).

In response to the changing view of the school counselor's role, the Education Trust (1999), funded by a grant from the Dewitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, reviewed the state of the school counseling profession. After extensive analyses, the Trust issued a mandate for the transformation of school counselor education and training for the enlightenment of school systems, regarding how to maximize their counseling services and to ensure that the profession kept pace with societal changes and demands (Studer, Oberman, & Womack, 2006; Baker, 2000). The Trust utilized counselor educators, school counselors, teachers, principals, and related counseling professionals to evaluate the current state of counselor education across America. After considerable inquiry and collaborative research, the Trust determined that school counseling programs needed to be revamped to better meet the needs of counselors working in the 21st century. More specifically, they developed a list of problem areas and proposed solutions. Foremost among their observations was that current training

programs did not adequately provide counselors with the knowledge and skills they needed to be effective. They also emphasized that counselors in the 21st century should serve as advocates, leaders, team members, and consultants to students, parents, teachers, principals, and community agencies to ensure success for all students (Education Trust, 1999).

In addition, the Trust solicited proposals for developing new school counselor training models, from revamping selection criteria of candidates for counselor education programs, to revising curriculum content, instruction, field experience, and professional development. It is imperative that state education departments ensure that program training continues to keep pace with societal changes and demands (ASCA, 2003; Education Trust 1999). These changes became known as the New Vision Counselor (DeVoss & Minnie, 2006; Education Trust). However, the New Vision Counselor concept was noticeably missing from the literature of secondary counselors currently working in the school setting for five years or more. It appears that very few currently employed school counselors are aware of the new national standards for counselors.

The American School Counseling Association and recent research conducted by the Education Trust (1999) advocate the implementation of consistent, comprehensive training standards and the value of teamwork among state departments of education, professional organizations, and university training programs, school counselors, teachers, administrators, parents, and community leaders (Dahir, 2004; Galassi & Akos, 2004). For example, some researchers discovered the necessity of utilizing counselors as advisors and consultants in the leadership process (Colbert et al., 2006; Amatea & Clark, 2005; Martin et al., 2003). The top priorities of universities must be to promote

professional accountability and to provide school counselors with the necessary skills to support each other, while at the same time, continuing to promote academic success among the range of students they serve (DeVoss & Minnie, 2006; Martin et al.).

Baker (2000) summed up these priorities that complete the Education Trust Initiative's goals at the post baccalaureate level. According to Baker, in order to provide more viable training, university programs must begin by going back to the basics by emphasizing: (1) developing and promoting collaborative training models for school counselors that better prepare them to function as part of a multidisciplinary team; (2) educating school personnel, the community, and the general public about the value of what school counselors do; (3) assessing each school or district's specific needs; (4) developing and implementing programs to address these specifics; and (5) conducting periodic evaluations by eliciting feedback from parents, students, school personnel, and community partners in order to continually fine tune the services they offer (Baker, 2000, p. 65). These goals are lofty, yet necessary. As has been shown through the literature, counselors should be leaders in the school setting. Standards have been set at the national and state levels. Universities and even some boards of education have put the New Vision school agenda as priority one (Education Trust, 1999). However, counselor educators must not lose sight of the fact that schools' greatest resources in this effort are also presently employed school counselors (Loesch & Ritchie, 2004).

Climates of the Current Counseling Profession

It is an interesting fact that the first school guidance program was implemented by a Detroit principal at the beginning of the twentieth century (Beesley & Frey, 2006). The school counseling profession has been aligned with school administrators. It is not

surprising that the school counseling profession has been a natural partner and collaborator with administrators for decades. As the demands and expectations for school counseling programs increased, it is evident that counselors could not bear the brunt of providing comprehensive counseling and guidance services without the assistance and cooperation from school administrators (Broughton, 2005). The literature suggests that the goal of school counseling is to enhance students' personal, social, vocational, and academic achievements (ASCA, 2003). Although this may be true, there is an ambiguity as to how to utilize the counselors' role as a leader in the indispensable element of the counseling and guidance process (Beesley & Frey, 2006; DeVoss & Minnie, 2006; Loesch & Ritchie, 2004; Saginak & Dollarhide, 2006; Walker, 2006). McCleod (2005) stated, "School principals obviously hold the ultimate responsibility of building leadership" (p. 4). Subsequently, these top school administrators hold the key to the link of counselor leadership roles being implemented and recognized effectively in today's school setting (Beesley & Frey, 2006). There have been numerous studies attempting to gain a pulse on the necessary clarifications of counselor job descriptions and effective collaborations with school principals (Broughton, 2005; Colbert et al., 2006; Education Trust, 1999). School Counselors' historical link from vocational guidance to their current connection with student achievement and functioning provides them with the advantage (ASCA, 2003; Broughton, 2005; DeVoss & Minnie, 2006; Kaffenberger, Murphy, & Bemak, 2006; Loesch & Ritchie, 2004). This type of connection to student achievement is in stark contrast to the typical school administrators' reactive mode. As DeVoss and Minnie pointed out, it is imperative for school administrators to recognize and move counselors into a more active leadership role.

One qualitative study that explored changing schools and changing counselors, examined the delicate balance of school principals' perceptions and counselors' perceptions of their role as educational leaders (Beesley & Frey, 2006). At this point in time, university educational leadership curriculum does not characteristically impart awareness of the potential skills that counselors could provide to schools. Furthermore, most future principals learn about the counselor role exclusively through on-the-job experiences (Amatea & Clark, 2005). Put another way by Kirchner and Setchfield (2005), the identification of emerging pioneering roles of the innovative school counselor as a collaborative element among administrators may broaden the thinking of many school administrators as to the unique skills that counselors can bring to their schools. Kirchner and Setchfield also emphasized a change to the "principals' lack of understanding of counselor roles that lead(s) to poor allocation of counselors' time, and the real demands of the work settings that fringe on their roles" (p. 14). Developing and defining appropriate roles for school counselors in today's changing school climate is a perpetual source of apprehension for school counselors (Education Trust, 1999).

Theoretical Framework

Many leadership theories and models have had their beginnings in the fields of psychology and social psychology. The concepts from a number of leadership theories can be integrated easily into an educational leadership model that is an optimal fit for school counselors (DeVoss & Minnie, 2006). Each leadership theory has various ranges and approaches. However, most include an assessment, plan, implementation, and evaluation (Martin, Wright, & Danzig, 2003). Warren G. Bennis, (1994) stated that leaders are made. This growth and creative process should continue throughout one's

career (Bennis, 1994; Heilbruhn, 1994). In other words, becoming a leader is a transformational process. Furthermore, Bennis indicated, “Leaders conquer the context...while managers surrender to it” (p.37).

This leadership theory is extremely applicable to our research. Bennis (1994) emphasized that leadership courses merely teach skills. Leadership is about behavior first, skills second. Good leaders are followed chiefly because people trust and respect them, rather than because of the skills leaders possess. Leadership is different than management. Management relies on planning, organization, and communication skills. Leadership relies on management skills too, but more so on qualities such as integrity, honesty, humility, courage, commitment, sincerity, passion, confidence, wisdom, determination, compassion and sensitivity (Bennis, 1994; DeVoss & Minnie, 2006). On the whole, leaders must learn character and vision outside of the school setting. Heilbruhn (1994) commented on the following leadership attributes in the transformational process: (a) capability of creating an inspiring vision; (b) an excellent communicator; (c) awareness of what challenges have to be met; (d) comfort with change, confusion and constructive conflict; (e) ability to balance the short and long-term; and (f) a model of integrity (Heilbruhn, pg. 2)

Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of our study was to investigate secondary school counselors’ perceptions of their role as educational leaders. Because, phenomenological studies allow researchers to describe a meaning of the lived experiences of several individuals about a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998), it served as the method of choice

for this investigation. Our research study followed the recommended protocols for research on human subjects. Thus, participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study, and their participation was completely voluntary (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research typically uses observation, interviewing, and document review to collect data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 1998; Glasser & Strauss, 1967). We interviewed secondary school counselors by telephone about detailed and verbal descriptions of leadership characteristics in their school settings.

Our study derived data from open-ended telephone interviews. The participants in the study were chosen individuals who had experienced the phenomenon being studied. Via an email survey, a demographic questionnaire was completed by participating secondary school counselors. The survey included various questions about current job descriptions, leadership qualities, and leadership perceptions. At the conclusion of the email survey, participants had the option to be contacted for further questions via a telephone call by the researcher. Questions were posed during the phone interviews that could compare the perceptions of the counselors' leadership roles and how their principals perceive their roles as educational leaders. Additionally, counselors' views of national standards for counselor leadership were explored in the interview. These verbal interactions focused on the meanings and interpretations of the participants' perceptions of leadership. In contrast to a quantitative study, this research method measures information based on opinions and values as opposed to statistical data.

Interview Questions

The following interview questions were designed in order to obtain insight into secondary counselors' perceptions of their leadership roles within education:

Background Data

1. How many years have you been in the field of education?
2. How long have you served as a counselor?
3. How long have you served as a counselor at this school?

Perceptions of School Counselor Leadership

1. Is there a written job description of the duties and responsibilities of the school counselor? If yes, where can it be found in the school? Could you please email/fax/mail me a copy of the counselors' job description?
2. Do you consider yourself an educational leader? Why or why not?
3. Does your principal consider you an educational leader?
4. If yes, what specific behaviors tell you that your principal considers you as a leader?
5. If yes, what are the specific behaviors you exhibit that require leadership skills?
6. If you feel your principal does not consider you an educational leader, what specific behaviors indicate this?
7. If your counseling position were to develop in the way that you would like, what would a school counselor as an educational leader look like?
8. What do you think is the first step that you could take to change principals' perceptions of school counselors as leaders?

9. Are you aware of the Education Trust Initiative and the New Vision Counselor Focus?

Participants

A stratified representation of secondary school counselors was interviewed for the purpose of gaining insights into their perceptions of leadership. Stratification is the process of grouping members of the population into relatively homogeneous subgroups before sampling (Cohen & Morrison, 2000). The counselors' names were retrieved by collaboration with another researcher who had conducted an online survey on the topic of perceptions of counselor leadership. The online survey had a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The questions ranged from demographic queries, to years of experience, to specific perceptions of educational leadership. The final portion of the survey asked for the permission to be contacted by telephone in the future to continue with questions on the topic. One of the researchers conducted phone interviews with five secondary counselors. Four females and one male counselor were interviewed. The years of experience in the field of education ranged from three years to thirty-two years. Ethnic make up of respondents included three Caucasian and one Hispanic. All participants were certified school counselors with a master's level degree. After an evaluation of telephones area codes, we chose one phone number from the highest bathes of area codes from each area code submitted by rrespondents who chose to be contacted for further questioning. Overall, the questions pertained directly to the views and knowledge of the counselors' educational leadership.

Data Analysis

Analytic induction refers to a systematic examination of similarities between various social phenomena in order to develop concepts or ideas (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Social scientists doing social research use analytic induction to search for those similarities in broad categories and then develop subcategories. For example, we examined an initial category of secondary-school counselor leaders. Next, subcategories were developed for secondary-school counselor leaders that were implementing the new national standards. This type of data analysis is termed open coding (Creswell, 1998). Open coding is a method in which initial data about the phenomenon being studied are segmented into categories. Next, within each category, we found several properties or subcategories. A category represents a unit of information composed of events, happenings, and instances. In the meantime, a search for data to show a pattern of similarities or themes in the category being studied was explored (Creswell, 1998). If no relevant similarities can be identified, then either the data need to be reevaluated and the definition of similarities changed, or the category is too wide and heterogeneous, and should be narrowed.

Finally, a cluster of meanings was sought. In data analysis, this is an expression of common themes that emerge in the data collected by the various descriptions of the research participants. This process is a meticulous transformation of various verbal responses into a common theme (Creswell, 1998). In this case, these transformations are connected to make general descriptions of the range of experiences of leadership for secondary counselors in the school setting. We analyzed (a) the textural description of what was experienced and (b) the structural description of how it was experienced.

The textural description referred to the qualitative responses; in contrast, the structural descriptions referred to the design of the questions. Some qualitative researchers vary this approach of incorporating personal meanings (Creswell, 1998). This was the case, as both researchers have been employed as secondary school counselors.

Results

It is important for researchers to critically evaluate the specific procedures used for obtaining responses including the types of questions that were asked (Creswell, 1998). As a result, the examination of the data can provide rich reflections of the phenomenon being studied. In order for research data to be meaningful, the interview questions and the procedures to inquire and collect the data must be valid. Validity refers to how accurately something measures what it is supposed to measure. If the interview questions are too complex or ambiguous so that different respondents might interpret them differently, validity will be compromised. The data should be in the respondents' words. Therefore upon the conclusion of each of our interviews, we reviewed the responses that the interviewer had written out for each interviewee to confirm that it was indeed what that had been verbally expressed by the respondent. This is also known as descriptive validity (Creswell). Cohen referred to qualitative data validity in this way, "...it may be addressed through the honesty, depth, and richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached." (Cohen & Morrison, 2000, p. 105) After recording the responses of the participants, we classified the counselors' perceptions of leadership into three categories. The three categories were, (a) counselors' job descriptions and the role of educational leadership; (b) counselors'

perception of their role as educational leader; and (c) counselors' knowledge of the transforming role of the school counselor.

Counselors' Job Descriptions and the Role of Educational Leadership

Leadership is difficult to measure. It represents an abstract and subjective trait like beauty (Bennis, 1994). The interviewer considered this as she interviewed five secondary counselors about their present job descriptions and the role of educational leadership. Upon recording their subjective experiences in their present jobs as counselors, we were able to gain insights from their descriptive responses. One counselor was the testing coordinator for her school. Two served as the career and technology counselors. One was a lead counselor of a large high school and the ninth grade campus. Another was at a school that only had two counselors due to the total student enrollment. Thus, this counselor's job description included master schedule, special programs, and post-high school planning. Finally, the counselor with the fewest years of experience was responsible for the schedules and post-high school planning for students assigned to him according to their last names. Each school counselor respondent was assigned a certain number of students based on a combination of grade level and last names.

Counselors' Perception of Their Role as Educational Leader

All of the counselors perceived themselves as educational leaders except for one. The one exception was the counselor who had only been working as a counselor for three years. This counselor, with the least years of experience out of the five interviewed, rarely found an opportunity to display leadership skills. He felt that the role of educational leader was in the hands of the lead counselor only. One key example of

perceptions of leadership given by another counselor that had been at her present school for thirteen years was that she was the campus testing coordinator. Using counselors as test coordinators contradicts the new focus of transforming counselors presented by the Education Trust Initiative. It stated that, a New Vision Counselor uses data to effect change (House & Martin, 1998; Education Trust, 1999). Assigning students and faculty members to a testing room does not effect change. However, interpreting testing data to impact future decisions would effect change in a school. Other perceptions of leadership included, “providing professional development,” “attend to issues and concerns of the entire counseling department,” “attend department meetings,” and “speak at faculty meetings.” However, these contacts with administrators and staff mostly dealt with student scheduling and testing issues. This limited dimension put most counselors interviewed into an ancillary support position. In other words, the perceptions of leadership were similar to the present focus of counselors as listed in the literature rather than the New Vision.

Counselors' Knowledge of the Transforming Role of the School Counselor

Recent research has indicated that many counselors may need insight regarding ways in which to become educational leaders to consistently improve and impact student achievement (DeVoss & Minnie, 2006; Amatea & Clark, 2005). The school counselors in our study typically ascribed more importance to concepts that fit within traditional counseling models. In other words, the status quo of the present focus of counseling was evident in each descriptive response. Specifically, this is in direct contradiction to the new focus of school counseling, which attributes whole school and system concerns and issues. For example, each respondent was asked where their

written job description could be found in the school building. Several respondents did not have a written job description. One lead counselor responded, "My principal and superintendent have a copy." If the staff is not aware of the specific ways that counselors serve the school, the perpetuation of ambiguity will inevitably continue. Thus, there may be a gap in counselor educators' knowledge and expertise between the traditional school counselor role and the transformed role that is called for in the current standards of the Education Trust Initiative for the transformation of school counseling. As current and former school counselors ourselves, we can interject a reflective voice at this point. The respondents made us confident that these five secondary counselors are familiar with the concepts of skills that promote, develop, and enhance effective teamwork within their departments and administration of the school. In addition, they have assuredly experienced the barriers that may impede the progress to the complex process of authenticity at various levels. However, when the interviewer asked had they even heard of the following: Education Trust Initiative, Transforming Role of the Counselor, and/or the New Vision Counselor, each counselor answered, "No." One counselor said, "Maybe, does it have something to do with the TEA (Texas Education Agency)?" This lack of knowledge resulted as a concern for us. The secondary counselors in our study perceived themselves as leaders. Thus, our study results indicated that respondents in this study could have the tools to be educational leaders. However, some of the tools are misunderstood, underutilized, unrecognized and/or used incorrectly.

Limitations

One major limitation to our study is the novelty of the Education Trust Transforming School counseling Initiative. The Initiative began by conducting focus groups with counselor educators, counselor supervisors, and working counselors in 1997. Funding was provided by the Reader's Digest and DeWitt Wallace Fund to begin to infuse this new concept of counselor leadership at the university level. Six universities initially applied and received the grant to begin this transformation (Education Trust, 1999). Ten years later the profession still needs time to distribute this information to school counselors presently working in the field. Consequently this is a limitation to our study.

Another limitation is the setting of our study. It would have been to our advantage to observe the secondary counselors in their work settings. This would have allowed for direct observations of potential leadership opportunities. Additionally, direct observation would have added to the depth of the respondents' perceptions and reflections. As a researcher, the presence at the school setting is a critical component which creates further implications about our understanding of our respondents' perceptions. For example, if the interviews were conducted in a counselor's office, they may have been more expressive and rich.

Recommendations

To be an effective leader, a counselor not only has to get the group of followers on the right path, but must be able to convince them that whatever obstacles stand in the way ahead can be overcome (Bennis, 1994). For today's school counselors, the leadership path should include the entire school staff. The theoretical framework of our

study is to emphasize the transformational process of leadership. This is imperative for what is required for school counselors to embrace the New Vision Counselor (Education Trust, 1999). Education Trust and counseling scholars (DeVoss & Minnie, 2006; Colbert et al., 2006; Amatea & Clark, 2005; Broughton, 2005; Galassi & Akos, 2004;) have challenged the counseling profession to develop new ways for school counselors to serve as leaders in today's educational setting. The new role for school counselors includes a focus on addressing school system factors that influence student development. The transforming and New Vision Counselor, a newly developed method for school counselors to facilitate change as educational leaders, is presented as a possible way for counselors to collaborate and plan as an integral part of impacting student achievement. Thus far, this method has begun at select university counselor education programs and at professional conferences and journals (Education Trust). As a result, it is recommended that secondary counselors continue to take advantage of professional development opportunities. This could be done by joining a professional association, subscribing to professional journals, and taking a course at a university that is involved with the Education Trust Initiative.

Further research should be done in two key types of studies. One is a case study of a counselor that has been trained as a New Vision Counselor. It would be beneficial and insightful to have a qualitative journey of a counselor entering and attempting to work as an educational leader after being trained in this new focus. Next, it is significant to mention school principals here. Many of our interview questions concerned principal perceptions of counselor leadership. This is because in most instances a school principal has direct control of a counselors' job description. As a result, we would

recommend a focus group study of New Vision Counselors at a select school.

Simultaneously, a focus group study should be conducted of the administrative team of principals at the same school. What did they learn from this process of transformation?

Discussion

The first step toward change is to refuse to be classified by others and to choose to classify yourself (Bennis, 1994). The results of this study demonstrated that school counselors overwhelmingly were unfamiliar with the recent trend over the last decade to transform the role of counselors through the Education Trust Initiative (Education Trust, 1999). Consequently, we concluded that secondary counselors in this study perceived themselves as educational leaders. However, their perceptions of leadership were not congruent with those of the Education Trust. The leadership attributes that counselors reported matched principals' duties and other types of administrative responsibilities. These results do not reflect the New Focus Counseling objectives. For example, one counselor stated that by speaking at faculty meetings she was considered a leader. However, at the meeting she was reviewing standardized testing schedules rather than disseminating student data that could assist teachers in impacting student achievement and could assist school administrators with faculty decisions about student achievement. The latter activities would be in line with the New Vision Focus.

The rationale for national standards was to clarify the continued confusion as to the purpose, scope, and practice of school counseling. However, the secondary counselors in our study were unfamiliar with the newest trends in school counseling leadership. Each respondent stated that they were unfamiliar with the New Vision Focus of the counseling profession. People who have a particular interest in the subject matter

or the research itself are more likely to return questionnaires than those who are less interested. Therefore, it is possible that after being asked about their knowledge of the New Vision Counselor, maybe the counselors in this study will seek out more information about this phenomenon.

The researcher, rather than the research tool, is the key instrument of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Through informal questioning, we could change the wording, explain or add to the questions. During the interviews most respondents needed clarification on one particular interview question. The question that asked about what a school counselor leader would look like needed to be repeated, and some wait time was required before the response. We believed this was because most of the respondents felt that they were functioning as a leader already. Some of the respondents did mention more time to work with students and less duties once they understood the question. These insightful descriptions assisted us in seeing and reporting the reflections of working secondary counselors through the eyes of the participants. We were concerned about the processes rather than simply for the outcomes. One of the most important findings of our study is that a starting point for secondary counselors to become educational leaders is to increase dialogue with school administrators. The main topic of this communication should be a counseling job description that is in writing and accessible to all staff members. In addition, the job description should have clear leadership opportunities. As a result, school staff members have a clear understanding of the potential role of secondary school counselors' positive impact on student achievement through leadership.

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