

Self-Efficacy and Multicultural Competence of School Counselors

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between school counselor self efficacy and perceived multicultural competence self efficacy in a sample of 157 school counselors. Results reveal School Counselor Self-Efficacy (SCSE) *cultural acceptance* subscale was a statistically significant predictor of all three multicultural competencies (MCC: Terminology, Knowledge, and Awareness) scales. Results also indicate that school counselors' years of experience was a significant predictor in all three MCC scales (Terminology, Knowledge, and Awareness). Implications of the findings are discussed.

Self-Efficacy and Multicultural Competence of School Counselors

As schools become increasingly diverse, school counselors will need to demonstrate cultural understanding and skills to effectively address the unique needs of a multicultural student population. Research shows that there is an increase in diversity among students entering schools (e.g., Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Chinn, 2002). Similarly, recent United States Census (2000) data projections suggest that by 2023, students of color under the age of 18 will become the majority population in schools across United States and by 2030, half of the children attending elementary schools in the United States will be students of color.

School counselors' ability and readiness to address the needs of culturally diverse students is one of the major challenges facing the field of school counseling (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). Another serious concern in the field of counseling is that most counseling interventions frequently used in school settings have not been empirically tested to determine their effectiveness with diverse student populations (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1995). Counselors must understand the changing demographics of students and school communities. School counselors need adequate preparation to deliver a counseling program to diverse groups (Green & Keys, 2001).

Multicultural Competence and School Counselors

Observing the trends in educating diverse students, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), a division of the American Counseling Association (ACA), published a position statement that urges school counselors to take an active stance in ensuring that they address the needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds (ASCA, 2004). The ASCA position statement exhorts school counselors to "foster

increased awareness and understanding of cultural diversity in the school and community,” the position statement does not elucidate how school counselors acquire the attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills to provide a culturally relevant counseling program that meets the needs of diverse students.

In their influential discussion on becoming a culturally competent counselor, Arredondo et al. (1996, p. 1) noted that “culturally skilled” counselors demonstrate specific competencies (or skills) that support their work with diverse clients. Known collectively as the Multicultural Competencies, Arredondo et al. identify three areas that shape counselors’ abilities to counsel multiculturally. First, counselors maintain awareness of personal assumptions, values and biases by understanding how their cultural backgrounds influence perceptions of counseling and others. The second competency states that multiculturally competent counselors empathetically understand the worldview of clients from diverse backgrounds and maintain a general understanding of multicultural issues (Sue & Sue, 2008). The third multicultural competency asserts that multiculturally competent counselors develop and use appropriate interventions, strategies and techniques that are consistent with the lived experiences and cultural values of their clients (Sue & Sue, 2008). Of note, the American Counseling Association officially adopted the multicultural competencies in 1996 and continues to explore ways to “operationalize” implementation of the competencies through counselor training and practice.

During their training, school counselors are required to take at least one course in social and cultural diversity that explores national and international cultural trends; encourages each trainee’s self-exploration as a cultural being and understanding of

other cultures; expounds multicultural counseling theories, advocacy, social justice, and the Multicultural Competencies; develops skills that promote client wellness; and supports understanding of “counselors’ roles in eliminating biases, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination” (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009, p. 10). A recent study of school counselors’ perceived multicultural competence found that taking a class in multicultural counseling facilitates school counselors’ awareness of multicultural terminology but coursework in multicultural counseling had no significant effects on participants’ perceived multicultural awareness (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005).

Self Efficacy, Multicultural Competence and School Counselors

Self-efficacy can be defined as the levels of confidence individuals have in their ability to carry out certain courses of action, or achieve a desired outcome (Bandura, 1982; 1997). The influence of personal self efficacy on the behavior and functioning of individuals is well documented in the literature (e.g., Bandura, 2001; Schwarzer & Renner, 2000). Research has shown that self-efficacy is an important aspect of effective teaching, counseling, and coping with change (Bandura, 1995; Larson & Daniels, 1998) and these three aspects with change characterize key school counselor conceptualizations and activities.

Multicultural self-efficacy refers to counselors’ perceptions that their multicultural competence will lead to positive counseling outcomes. However, little research has explored multicultural self efficacy as a function of school counselors’ multicultural competence. School counselors’ ability to advocate on behalf of students (Lee, 2001) and their multicultural training (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001a) have been linked to

multicultural competence. Holcomb-McCoy, Harris, Hines, and Johnston (2008) note that while multicultural competence has been addressed widely in the counseling literature, little attention has been given to assessing school counselors' multicultural self efficacy, despite its emergence as a key factor in guiding counselor's counseling activities with clients.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was twofold. Using a random sample, we explored the relationships between self efficacy and multicultural counselor self efficacy and investigated differences among respondents' reported levels of multicultural self efficacy based on gender, number of years as a school counselor, age, and work setting. The authors identified the following research hypotheses for this study:

1. Dimensions of self efficacy will significantly and positively predict dimensions of multicultural self efficacy in school counselors.
2. There will be no significant differences in levels of multicultural self efficacy based on the demographic variables of school counselors by gender, number of years as a school counselor, age and work setting.

Methodology

Participants

Researchers used a national membership roster of the American School Counselor Association to randomly select potential participants. Within each state, we searched the email addresses of members who registered themselves as elementary school counselors, middle school counselors, and high school counselors. Within each of those service level categories, we randomly selected five members. Some states only

had five or fewer members in a category, in which case all were selected and additional members were randomly selected from the category of elementary/middle or middle/secondary if needed. The email addresses were transferred to a file from which we made the contacts to request participation. Emails that were returned undeliverable were replaced by another email selected from the same school level in the same state.

Using this procedure, 750 ASCA members were contacted. This procedure resulted in a sample that was over-represented by middle school and rural state counselors, as these categories usually results in fewer members to choose from than elementary or high schools or more populated states. Thus, taking equal numbers from each category resulted in a higher percentage of the population than strict random sampling, but we believe there is also merit in obtaining a sample that represents all of the possible settings in which school counselors' work.

Procedures

An e-mail was sent to each participant requesting that they participate in the on-line survey. The incentive for participating was a promise from the researchers to donate \$1 per participant to Prevent Child Abuse America. The email described the survey and indicated that a consent form was included in the survey site. Two reminder emails were also sent, one a week after the invitation and one two weeks after the first reminder.

Instruments

The survey consisted of a multicultural competency scale (MCCTS-R; Holcomb-McCoy & Day Vines, 2004), a School Counselor Self-Efficacy scale (SCSE; Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005), and some demographic questions. The survey was entered onto a

university-sponsored survey site and the link to the site was provided in the email to participants.

The MCCTS-R is a 32-item self-report Likert-type scale using a 4-point response option (1 = not confident, 2 = somewhat confident, 3 = confident, 4 = extremely confident). The scale was originally developed to evaluate the multicultural competence level for all counselors, but the revised version was developed specifically for school counselors by changing some of the language to reflect school counseling (e.g., using “student” instead of “client”). The MCCTS-R has three subscale which include four items assessing Multicultural Terminology (e.g., “I can define prejudice”); 19 items assessing Multicultural Knowledge (e.g., “I can discuss how the counseling process may conflict with the cultural values of at least two ethnic groups”); and nine Multicultural Awareness items (e.g. “I am aware of how my cultural background and experience have influenced my attitudes about psychological processes”) (Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004).

The SCSE was also developed specifically for school counselors, and assesses school counselor self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a person’s belief about his or her ability to perform certain behaviors and is a mediating factor in motivation, perseverance and resiliency (Bandura, 1995). Thus, school counselor self-efficacy is a person’s belief in his or her ability to perform the functions expected of a school counselor. The SCSE is a 43-item self-report Likert-type scale using a 5-point response option (1=not confident, 2 = slightly confident, 3 = moderately confident, 4 = generally confident, 5 = highly confident). Five sub-scales comprise the instrument: Personal and Social Development consisted of 12 items (e.g., “Guide students in techniques to cope with peer pressure”); Leadership and Assessment was made up of 9 items (e.g., “Select and implement

applicable strategies to assess school-wide issues”); Career and Academic Development was comprised of 7 items (e.g., “Implement a program which enables all students to make informed career decisions”); Collaboration consisted of 11 items (e.g., “Conduct interventions with parents, guardians and families in order to resolve problems that impact students’ effectiveness and success”); and Cultural Acceptance consisted of 4 items (e.g., “Understand the viewpoints and experiences of students and parents who are from a different cultural background than myself”) (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005). The final questionnaire requested participants to identify information regarding their gender, number of years as a school counselor, age and work setting.

Participant Demographics

This online survey used participants’ emails listed in the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) membership roster to contact potential participants. Seven hundred and fifty emails were distributed to ASCA members. A systematic sampling of school counselors yielded 157 responses. The sample (80.8% female and 19.2% male) included 83.3% Caucasians, 5.8% African American, 3.8% Latino, .6% Asian, 2.6% Bi-Racial, and 1.9% Native American. The mean caseload reported by school counselors was 278 students. The mean years of experience for this group of participants were 7.6. The majority of school counselors reported working in public school settings (91.5%) while 8.4% reported working in a private setting. Thirty four percent of school counselors reported working in a k-6 elementary school setting, 27% indicated they worked in a middle school setting, 29% worked in a high school setting and 8% reported working in an alternative school setting. Because of missing data

(participants' not answering questions) some demographic information may not total 100%.

Results

A multivariate regression analysis was implemented for the simultaneous prediction of the three multicultural competence scales, i.e., Terminology, Knowledge, and Awareness, by five SCSE scales which are 1) personal and social consisting of 12 items, 2) leadership and assessment which consists of 9 items, 3) career and academic which consists of 7 items, collaboration which consists of 11 items and cultural acceptance which consist of 4 items and years of experience.

As follow-up tests, each predictor was tested across the three regression equations simultaneously. Table 1 provides a summary of the multivariate analysis. In follow-up tests, "SCSE Cultural Acceptance" was a statistically significant predictor of all three MCC (Terminology, Knowledge, and Awareness.) outcomes simultaneously ($F(3, 118) = 10.64, p < .01$). The SCSE cultural acceptance scale has items including counseling practices that are aimed at increasing cultural awareness and processes.

Also, school counselors "Years of Experience" was a negative and statistically significant predictor of the two outcomes on the MCC scale "Knowledge" and "Awareness". Interestingly enough, "Years of Experience" was a statistically significant predictor of all three MCC outcomes simultaneously ($F(3, 118) = 5.30, p < .01$) even though it was not a significant predictor for "MCC Terminology" in the first OLS (ordinary least squares) regression equation. All three OLS regression ANOVA indicated significant models; the explained variances by the predictors for outcomes MCC

Terminology, MCC Knowledge, and MCC Awareness were 28%, 45%, and 36%, respectively.

Table 1

Multivariate Regression Findings

Predictors	Outcomes			Testing Across Equations $H_0: \beta_{ij} = 0$ ($i = 1, \dots, 6$) ($j = 1, \dots, 3$) $F(3, 118)$
	MCC Terminology	MCC Knowledge	MCC Awareness	
	(B/SE)	(B/SE)	(B/SE)	
1. SCSEPersSoc	.058 (.057)	-.190 (.258)	.126 (.103)	1.64
2. SCSELeadAssess	-.073 (.054)	.141 (.240)	-.107 (.096)	1.66
3. SCSECarAcad	.099 (.065)	.451 (.289)	.031 (.116)	1.26
4. SCSECollab	-.020 (.054)	.159 (.239)	.057 (.096)	.41
5. SCSECultur	.442** (.116)	2.439** (.517)	.951** (.207)	10.64**
6. Years of Experience	-.016 (.024)	-.399** (.106)	-.089* (.042)	5.30**
7. CONSTANT	3.699 (1.886)	-6.398 (3.356)	7.314* (3.356)	
R^2	.28	.45	.36	
F	7.53**	15.79**	11.06**	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Discussion

We investigated the relationship between school counselor self efficacy through examining by five SCSE scales which include 1) personal and social, 2) leadership and assessment, 3) career and academic, 4) collaboration, and 5) cultural acceptance, years of experience, and multicultural self efficacy (three multicultural competence scales, i.e., Terminology, Knowledge, and Awareness) in a sample of professional school counselors.

However, multivariate regression results found statistical effects for SCSE subscale “cultural acceptance” was a significant predictor of all three of the MCC subscales (Terminology, Knowledge, and Awareness). This finding suggests that school counselors’ level of cultural acceptance was related to their reported levels of competence on all three of the multicultural subscales. This is consistent with the findings of Constantine’s (2002) study, which found that racist attitudes among counselors were significant variables in counselors’ reported levels of multicultural competence. More specifically, counselors who had higher levels of racist attitudes had lower levels of multicultural competence. This study implies that individuals who are more accepting of other cultures would be less likely to report low levels of cultural competence.

There were no significant findings in levels of cultural competence of school counselors by gender, age, and work setting. However, this study’s results indicate that school counselors’ years of experience was a statistically significant predictor of all three MCC subscales (Terminology, Knowledge, and Awareness). This finding is consist with Sodowsky, Taffe, and Gutkin (1991), who found that counselors who had a

large amount of contact with multicultural clients also reported higher levels of cultural competence. Perhaps school counselors' multicultural self efficacy, to some degree, is developed through their years of experience.

Limitations

Several important limitations need to be considered when reviewing the results of our findings. First, the study is limited by self report data; participants may have responded in a way that was socially desirable or in a way that made them appear culturally competent. Another limitation of our study was that the vast majority of participants were female. Different results might have been obtained if the study's participants represented a more gender balanced sample. Researchers also failed to inquire about the diverse populations within the school buildings themselves. This data would have provided a richer picture. In addition, an unfortunate oversight was the absence of the geographic location of the school counselors we surveyed. Perhaps a viewing the school counselors by geographic location might have yielded different results.

Implications

This study's findings have implications for K-12 school counseling supervisors and counselor educators. One of the primary ways that school counseling trainees acquire multicultural competence (terminology) is by taking a course in multicultural counseling. These results suggest that as school counselors are inducted into the profession, it may be wise to pair them with a more senior school counselor given that years of experience was statistically significant predictor of multicultural competence in this study. For school counseling supervisors who supervise professional school

counselors, designing and implementing professional development activities that promote knowledge and awareness of diverse cultures is paramount. Multimodal delivery of training, such as face to face, asynchronous, and virtual sessions, can serve to build partnerships between counselor educators and K-12 school counseling supervisors that improve the multicultural competence of trainees and practicing professionals. With these partnerships, counselor educators and school counseling supervisors can share professional expertise that support formal induction into the school counseling profession that is multiculturally focused and supportive of school counselors' acquisition of multicultural competence.

Recommendations for Future Research

Understanding school counselors' multicultural competence and its operationalization continues to be investigated in the counseling literature. This study found that school counselors' level of acceptance was related to levels of multicultural competence across terminology, knowledge, and awareness areas. Future research could employ longitudinal methods to explore multicultural competence and self-efficacy across counselors' career spans. Current research relies upon 'snapshots', if you will, of school counselors at various career and life stages. Longitudinal research might elucidate how multicultural competencies and self-efficacy unfold for a particular cohort over time and would provide researchers the opportunity to control for possible mediating factors such as type and quality of professional development; life experiences; experiential learning, and professional experience. Longitudinal research that is framed upon career development theory and lifespan development theory might

provide different but useful information about multicultural competence and self-efficacy in school counselors.

Another possible avenue for future research could investigate a possible relationship between gender and multicultural competence. While this study did not find a relationship between gender and multicultural competence, future studies might benefit from examining gender salience as a construct and its relationship to school counselors' multicultural competence and self-efficacy. Gender salience refers to the importance that a person places on his or her gender identity and the centrality of gender in overall personal identity. Gender salience is a type of "identity salience that refers to the influence of a particular identity on behavior as a result of its properties as a cognitive schema" (Sanders Thompson & Akbar, 2003). While previous studies have attempted to determine the relationship between gender and multicultural competence, future studies may examine if low gender salience or high gender salience influence multicultural competence and self-efficacy of school counselors.

Finally, future studies can explore the relationship between multicultural competence, self-efficacy school, and school counselors' work settings. For example school counselors in working in private schools may have different perceptions of multicultural competence than those working in publicly funded charter schools. Further, consideration of geographical location of schools and concomitant funding formulas based on population, taxes, and local allotments; regional ethnic, religious, and racial diversity; and even the educational attainment of the local populace may also shape school counselors' multicultural competence. In short, future research can offer much in

terms of understanding the systemic and intrapersonal factors that shape school counselors' multicultural competence and self-efficacy.

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