Providing Accountability in School Counseling: A Literature Review

to Support Data Use in Assessing

Group Counseling

by

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ABSTRACT

An ongoing task for professional school counselors has been that of providing evidence to show how students are different as a result of a comprehensive school counseling program. This literature review examined how school counselors can collect and analyze data to demonstrate accountability for their work with group counseling. Types of data and assessment strategies are discussed, along with the IDEAS model for data-based decision making. It further focuses on the need to disseminate the results of the data to key stakeholders such as school superintendents, administrators, staff, students, parents and community members. The review concludes with recommendations for practitioners and researchers to consider regarding the use of data to demonstrate accountability for group counseling. One example of a recommendation for school counseling educator programs is to incorporate additional coursework on the practice of using data to assess progress and influence targeted intervention strategies.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The new task for schools in the 21st Century is focused directly on the implementation of strategies for successful teaching and learning. The call from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act to increase standards-based education reform, based on a foundation of accountability, and increased academic achievement for all students comes at a time of rapid technological advances and increasingly diverse demographics of U.S. schools (The Education Trust, 2002). The combination of these dynamics, along with a critical look at the history of the profession of school counseling, provides a perfect opportunity for re-defining and transforming the role of school counseling in schools across America (Martin, 2002).

Based on this call for action, The Education Trust, a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C., developed a multifaceted, five-year national initiative for transforming the profession of school counseling. This plan was formed with the help of the De Witt Wallace–Reader's Digest fund, and the outcome resulted in the drive for beginning the fundamental changes needed to merge the profession of school counseling with the mission of American schools for the 21st Century (The Education Trust, 2002). Author Patricia Martin (2002) suggested that it became clear that modifications in the role of school counselors were necessary in order to maintain the profession amongst the swift changes occurring in the K-12 school environment.

While the more traditional focus of mental health training that was provided to school counselors in past decades may have prepared the practitioners to assist students adequately with their personal and social challenges, there was a lack of training in the area of providing students with the necessary skills for academic success (Martin, 2002).

This deficit was highlighted by the recent demand for school counselors to show accountability by providing data to key stakeholders to demonstrate the impact their role has on student achievement in all three domains, including academic, personal/social, and career development. Accountability strategies provide evidence of the great influence school counselors have over students' academic placements, and demonstrate how they are critical keys to students' future careers (Martin, 2002).

Bolman and Deal (2003) emphasized, "a vision without a strategy is an illusion" (p. 278). This quote illustrates the current status of the profession of school counseling, being that until recently, many school counselors employed counseling strategies without the use of data collection, making it impossible to track their efforts to maximize student success (Kaffenberger, Murphy, & Bemak, 2006). Now, professional school counselors are being challenged to provide guidance and counseling services to all students in a manner that is both efficient and effective. In addition, recent school reform efforts have continued to encourage the role of the professional school counselor to include a more deliberate focus on the importance of academic achievement for all students. The No Child Left Behind Act now requires that all states implement standards-based instruction, as well as provide annual measurements of student academic achievement (The Education Trust, 2002). This additional pressure on schools and students to meet academic standards of NCLB has had a resulting effect on school counseling programs (Kaffenberger, Murphy, & Bemak, 2006).

Another need for data collection resulted when many school counselor positions were called into question by community members, parents and school administrators. When school counselors were unable to produce hard data to show accountability, the

profession lost many positions in the field. The outcome of this situation resulted in a shift in the vision of the school counseling profession, where demonstrating the impact school counselors have on student achievement is essential as a new area of accountability exists, and as school counselors continue to strengthen and define their roles (Steen & Kaffenberber, 2007).

In response to this shift, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) developed a national model for school counseling programs in 2003, which served as a comprehensive school counseling program model designed to connect school counseling with current educational reform movements that emphasize academic achievement and to improve areas of accountability in the profession. The national model defined the main goal for school counselors as that of using leadership, advocacy and collaboration in an effort to maximize success for all students (ASCA, 2003). School counselors are being asked to think and work differently – to accept the responsibilities for leadership and advocacy while continuing the more traditional direct services to children and adolescents (Schwallie-Giddis, ter Maat, & Pak, 2003).

One way school counselors can work to show accountability is through data collection and analysis of group counseling work with students (Paisley & Milsom, 2007). Group counseling is included as part of the delivery system of the ASCA national model, and has been shown to be an effective responsive service offered by professional school counselors to address the academic, personal/social, and career needs of all students (Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007). ASCA (2005) recommended that school counselors spend ideally 15 – 45% of their time in direct services with students, and

because time is so limited due to the ratio of students-to-counselors, the use of group

counseling strategies can be very effective (Paisley & Milsom, 2007).

In recent research on cognitive development, group counseling has been found to

be beneficial to children and adolescents, especially due to the nature of the composition

of the groups, where students can benefit from hearing multiple perspectives. This is

especially true in the case of heterogeneous groups, which provide students with the

opportunity to grow cognitively through discussions that focus on varying approaches to

a single problem (Paisley & Milsom, 2007). Research continues to show that groups are

an essential aspect of a comprehensive school counseling program, and should be

incorporated into all educational institutions, due to the positive effect on personal

development and academic achievement (ASCA, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

The recent shift in the profession of school counseling has resulted in a demand

for school counselors to demonstrate accountability for the work they are engaging in to

address the academic, personal/social, and career development needs of all students. It is

believed that group counseling is beneficial to student success, but currently there is

minimal data existing to document the effectiveness of group interventions designed to

improve student academic outcomes. Therefore, the problem becomes, what

opportunities are there to collect data to show school counselors are making a difference

and contributing to student's opportunities for success though group counseling?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore literature pertaining to types of groups that

school counselors facilitate with students, and then to determine effective methods for

data collection and analysis procedures that can be used to monitor students' progress in the groups. Furthermore, this study will examine how school counselors can use data collection and analysis to examine the influence of group counseling on the outcome of academic achievement for students. Finally, this study will address strategies for school counselors to demonstrate accountability to key stakeholders such as school administrators, teachers, and parents through the dissemination of the resulting data on the effects on student academic achievement through the use of group counseling.

Research Questions

The following questions will be considered when exploring literature pertaining to this paper.

1. How can school counselors use data collection and analysis of their group counseling to show accountability for maximizing efforts toward student success?

2. How can school counselors use dissemination of data on group counseling to show accountability to school administrative personnel?

Assumptions of the Study

The following information is a discussion of the assets and limitations that should be considered regarding this topic. The literature reviewed in this work represents a small sample of that which is available on the subject of accountability for school counselors by using data to show accountability through group work. Due to the recent need for data collection by school counselors, and because little research has been published in this area, readers should be aware that conclusions drawn from this literature may be limited. Further research needs to be done to provide a more concrete picture of how school counselors can use data to show accountability through group work. The literature was

reviewed during the spring of 2009.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined because they appear frequently in the literature

and research on the field of professional school counseling and group counseling, and

may help clarify use in this paper.

Accountability. The use of data collection and dissemination to provide

statistical evidence of student achievement and progress that can be directly correlated to

the interventions facilitated by the professional school counselor (ASCA, 2005).

Achievement-related data. Data related to individual student achievement data,

such as attendance rate, discipline referrals, or homework completion rate (ASCA, 2005).

Action research. A link between practice and research (Mason & Uwah, 2007).

ASCA National Model. A comprehensive school counseling program model that

was created by the American School Counseling Association as a template for school

counselors to use in their schools (ASCA, 2003).

Data-based decision making. The process of collecting, analyzing, reporting and

using data for school improvement (Poynton & Carey, 2006).

Group counseling. Professional practice involving the application of knowledge

and skill in group facilitation to assist an interdependent collection of people to reach

their mutual goals, which may be interpersonal, intrapersonal, or work-related. The goals

of the group may include the accomplishment of tasks related to work, education,

personal development, personal and interpersonal problem-solving, or remediation of

mental and emotional disorders (ASGW, 2002).

Perception data. Survey data on student, teacher, parent or self-reported attitudes and beliefs (ASCA, 2005).

Process data. Data relating to the process of a specific school counseling intervention strategy, such as which students received the intervention, for what length of time and under which conditions (ASCA, 2005).

Results data. Consists of student achievement data, achievement-related data, and standards and competency data (ASCA, 2005).

Standards and competency data. Data that is related to current professional school counseling standards and competencies, such as the percentage of students within a school who have completed an Individualized Learning Plan to predict the course of their four year education with grades 9-12 (ASCA, 2005).

Student achievement data. Data related to individual student achievement, such as standardized test scores or grade point average (ASCA, 2005).

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, the reader will find five sections. This literature review will begin with a discussion on the emerging need for accountability in the profession of school counseling, followed by more a more specific review of the literature relating to accountability for group counseling. Next, readers will find information on how school counselors can use action research to assist with their goals to demonstrate accountability, along with a review of data-based decision making through the use of the IDEAS model. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of implementing the IDEAS model, describing the procedures for collecting and analyzing data to show accountability for the profession of school counseling through group work.

The Emerging Need for Accountability in School Counseling

The ability to demonstrate the effect school counselors have on student achievement and success is an essential aspect of the profession, in light of the recent shift in the vision for school counseling. As school counselors continue to re-frame, re-define and strengthen their roles in American schools, accountability is an essential facet of new school counseling models (Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007).

The American School Counselor Association (2003) noted the importance of accountability for the professional school counselor, and emphasized that school counselors and administrators have the responsibility to show the results of their work pertaining to their school counseling program in terms that are measureable for others to see. Authors Gerrity and DeLucia-Waack (2007) emphasized that in order to evaluate their effectiveness with group counseling, school counselors must collect and analyze

data that shows a correlation between group counseling and student achievement. They also noted the importance for the focus of group counseling to be centered on increasing student success with learning and academic achievement, while also including strategies to foster personal/social development, and career awareness. The ASCA national model (ASCA, 2005) can be used as a framework for the development and facilitation of the groups, along with a basis for monitoring progress and the success of students. This progress can be measured through the collection of data before, during and after the implementation of group counseling, can be used to document the impact of group counseling on students' academic achievement, personal/social learning behaviors, and career awareness (Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007).

Accountability for Group Counseling

As stated earlier in this paper, the profession of school counseling is currently experiencing a shift toward individual and program accountability to assure an increase in academic success and development for all students. The common focus in this process is finding ways to reach more students, and using data to demonstrate results. Comprehensive school counseling models that include accountability strategies for counselors searching for new and revised strategies for help fulfill their goals discuss group counseling as a method of furthering academic achievement, personal/social development, and career awareness for all students (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005) included group counseling as an essential component in comprehensive school counseling programs, and stated it is an effective responsive service to meet the needs of all students in the areas of academic, personal/social development, and career awareness (Steen & Kaffenberger,

2007). Importantly, in light of the calls for accountability, lobbying for effective strategies for student development, such as group counseling, is most effective when paired with evidence to support its impact on student success.

This evidence can be provided when school counselors gather data from the group members, as well as key stakeholders who have observed the students in the group, and is then compared to a control group of similar students who did not participate. Authors Steen, Bauman and Smith (2007) discussed how this process can be used to demonstrate how students have been impacted as a result of participation in the group counseling process.

Group counseling has a multitude of applications in schools, with the ability to provide responsive services to elementary, middle school and high school settings on a range of topics. Further, there has been consistent evidence found in research to support the continuation of group counseling in the schools, based on the documented level of effectiveness (Steen, Bauman & Smith, 2007). Yet, it is important to point out that most group counseling done in the schools is offered primarily based upon the personal/social domain. Riva and Haub (2004) suggested that this may be the case due to the academic and career domains being addressed more often in proactive and preventative strategies such as large group classroom lessons. These authors also noted that the personal/social domain is most often addressed through individual and group counseling strategies, which focus on assisting students whose personal and social impairments may inhibit their success in academics. Therefore, the majority of small group counseling has its focus on this domain, and is known to be an efficient and effective strategy for assisting students with personal/social development (Steen et al., 2007).

There are a wide range of topics that may be chosen as themes for groups used within the K-12 setting. These topics for small or large counseling groups can be developed through collaboration with key stakeholders such a teachers, administrators, parents, and students. In many cases, school counselors consult with these stakeholders or other school personnel when in the process of developing plans and strategies for working toward impacting student development (ASCA, 2003). The main objective is for school counselors to collect preliminary data on the needs of the students, then initiate the group counseling interventions, and finally follow up with data collection strategies to address whether or not the group counseling has been effective in impacting student academic and/or personal/social concerns (Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007).

Accountability can be shown through presentations designed for faculty, administration, and parents on the topic of group counseling. When the therapeutic factors in groups are explained, it may increase understanding of how groups work. Additionally, providing an opportunity for addressing concerns of stakeholders may encourage the recognition that group counseling strategies are a valuable component of the school's counseling program (Steen, Bauman & Smith, 2007).

Group counseling can be used in a variety of ways in the K-12 setting, including prevention groups, support groups that are problem-focused, and informational or psychoeducational groups that are designed to teach a certain subject (Steen et al., 2007). These groups allow school counselors to assist students who may not be achieving to the level of success in their academics or with their personal or social skills, as they are capable of under more favorable conditions. An example of a prevention group would include dealing with peer pressure surrounding issues such as alcohol and other drug use,

whereas a support group counseling session could be focused on helping students to cope with a particular issues such as the divorce of their parents, and in this way can assist students who are dealing with challenging life situations. Finally, a psychoeducational group may be focues on providing students with information strategies and techniques for developing their study skills, in order to assist student who are struggling with failing grades (Steen et al., 2007).

Authors Corey and Corey (2006) reported that a large amount of the research with group counseling for children and adolescents has taken place in school settings. These authors also noted the research supports the idea that group counseling provides students with an opportunity to further develop insights about themselves and others, while offering a safe place in which to work on developmental issues in the areas of academic and personal/social growth. Further, research supports the observation that group counseling has been found to be an effective strategy for impacting children and adolescents' perspectives, attitudes, behaviors, and values (Steen, Bauman, & Smith, 2007). It has been determined that many factors work together to contribute to the effectiveness of group counseling, such as the opportunities for peer interactions and observations of peer role models (Corey & Corey, 2006). In this way, students further their development through this opportunity, not only to receive support from others, but also to grow from their ability to help others, which may have a positive impact on increasing self-esteem (Yalom, 1995).

Much of the literature on professional school counselors and accountability highlights the need for school counselors' ability to show the impact they have on their students through demonstration of the results in measureable and concrete ways. The

question that is raised surrounding accountability which professional school counselors must answer is, "How are students different as a result of the school counseling program?" (ASCA. 2005, p. 59). School administrators, teachers, and families may have differing views and knowledge about the role of a professional school counselor (Curry & Lambie, 2007). Due to this confusion, school counselors need accountability strategies in order to effectively advocate for themselves, their profession, and the school counseling services they offer. School counselors must be able to demonstrate to key stakeholders how their students are different as a result of participating in group counseling sessions. While literature reviewed addresses the importance of school counselors being able to engage students in school counseling programs, little has been said about the importance of school counselors gaining the support of key stakeholders such as school administrators, teachers, community members, and other school personnel (Curry & Lambie, 2007).

Action Research

Due to the lack of time cited by many school counselors as a barrier to their ability to collect and analyze research, methods of school counseling program evaluation must be efficient (Mason & Uwah, 2007). One such effective method is that of action research, which Mason and Uwah (2007) describe as a link between practice and research. These authors cited examples of research questions school counselors may ask when focusing their data collection and analysis efforts on providing accountability for group counseling, such as, *"Does this small group experience help decrease absenteeism?" or "Are there less incidents of bullying when students complete coping skills training?"* (Mason & Uwah, 2007, p. 5). Other resources school counselors could

use to guide their focus when deciding on a research question may include perception data (such as needs assessments or other student or parent self-reported surveys) or student achievement data (standardized test scores or grade point average) (ASCA, 2005).

Mason and Uwah (2007) predicted that action research can have significant implications for the future of the profession of school counseling, when it is focused on counseling outcomes. These authors further stated that while many school counselors have expressed interest in conducting action research, they may lack the assessment methods needed to assist with documenting the effectiveness of the responsive services they are providing to students. Therefore, a practical method for applying action research when assessing school counseling services (such as group counseling) is presented. The IDEAS model is a five stage approach for conducting action research in schools.

Evaluation of IDEAS Data-Based Decision Making Model

ASCA (2005) noted it is through the use of data analysis that school personnel such as counselors, administrators, staff and community members are able to document and describe "a current picture of students and the school environment" (p. 49). School counselors and other school personnel can use this assessment to begin to discuss and plan for the best way to meet students' needs, as well as plan for the role school counselors should have in addressing the identified student needs (ASCA, 2005). Authors Poynton and Carey (2006) noted one effective strategy professional school counselors can use to show accountability for group counseling is through the use of data-based decision making.

Poynton and Carey (2006) researched and developed an integrative data-based decision making (DBDM) model based on five models commonly used within the profession of school counseling. Their IDEAS model is aligned with the ASCA national model concepts, terminology and resources, and provides a sequence designed for school counselors to follow when in engaging in data-based decision making.

These researchers noted that while the importance of using data to plan and evaluate school counseling activities has been acknowledged for many years, formal models of DBDM have only been developed recently, and are mostly due to the recent standards-based school reform initiatives (Poynton & Carey, 2006). These new DBDM models focus more on student advocacy, as well as providing measurable results for aiding professional school counselors in the design and implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). The IDEAS model can be used in evaluation of a variety of comprehensive school counseling program activities, as well as specific responsive support services, such as group counseling (Poynton & Carey, 2006).

There are several conditions necessary to have in place within a school setting in order to enable effective data-based decision making, and Poynton and Carey (2006) pointed out that DBDM can only occur within a school context that supports and aids in the process. These enabling conditions are that of collaborative culture, collaborative structures, widespread data-literacy, and access to useful data. The authors argued that a collaborative school culture is essential in order to have productive data-based goals among school staff that are also designed to promote learning and development.

The next enabling condition necessary for effective DBDM was that of collaborative structures. This condition would incorporate teaming and regularly scheduled meetings between the school counselor and an advisory council, made up of key stakeholders, such as a school administrator, parent, teacher, student, community member, or other school personnel. This collaborative team would focus on participating in the DBDM process by providing their input and reviewing the results of the data that was collected and analyzed. Poynton and Carey (2006) noted that the composition of the advisory council would depend on the intended goal of the group process necessary to achieve that goal.

The third condition necessary for effective DBDM recommended by Poynton and Carey (2006) was that of wide-spread data literacy. This refers to the level of understanding that participants have in the area of statistics. While the ASCA national model states that school counselors do not have to be highly skilled at statistics in order to collect, interpret and present data, the authors argued that participants in DBDM need to possess some skill in evaluation of data so they are able to determine whether their interventions are resulting in the desired effectiveness. They noted that effective evaluation would involve collecting and comparing targeted data prior to, and following the intervention.

Finally, Poynton and Carey (2006) stated that DBDM requires that the participants have the ability to view meaningful and useful data pertaining to their project. The authors pointed out that schools vary greatly on the level of access to student data, as well as the amount of data they collect, and data such as school climate and needs assessments are not usually incorporated in student information systems within the

school. Only when this important data is accessible, along with the preceding conditions, can effective DBDM occur within a school context.

Implementing IDEAS for Group Counseling

School counselors must first be able to collaborate with others in their school in order to establish the necessary conditions for facilitating DBDM. Once these enabling conditions are in place, professional school counselors can then follow the IDEAS model to incorporate data-based decision making into their formation and evaluation of the group counseling services they offer (Poynton & Carey, 2006).

There are five basic steps to the IDEAS model, which will be described in this paper, that school counselors can use to show accountability for group counseling. The steps that will be described are: identify a question (using the goals of the school program to guide research), develop a plan (address the issue hindering progress toward the goal), execute the plan (put evidence-based intervention into action), answer the question (assess the extent to which the intervention achieved the desired result) and finally, share the results (ensure all key stakeholders are aware of the benefits that result from the school counseling program) (Poynton & Carey, 2006).

In the first step of identifying a question, there are several tasks school counselors must facilitate. The first task is that of forming the DBDM team. The school counselor must begin by identifying whether the reform initiative involves a whole-school reform, or only a single component. In the case of group counseling, the reform initiative would most likely only involve a component of the school counseling program's management and accountability system (ASCA, 2005). Therefore, the school counselor would most likely be designated as the leader of the team, and the team would consist of advisory

members and others such as administrators, teachers, students and parents. Poynton and Carey (2006) noted that school counselors should consider data-literacy requirements when selecting their advisory council members, as well as each individual member's ability for effective collaboration.

The second task in step one is to identify the goals of the school counseling program. Many times these goals are aligned with district and school missions, and can be used by the DBDM team to guide their focus. For manageability, the team should select a single goal that is measureable by student results data. For example, if the team is focusing on a study skills group to improve academic achievement, they would focus on student achievement data such as grade point averages or standardized test scores. The authors also noted that the goals should be specific to the school, and written out for clarity.

Finally, the DBDM team must collect and analyze data to document the current status of the situation they are seeking to modify, in order to establish a baseline of data. Once this stage is completed, Poynton and Carey (2006) stated that the DBDM team would have a clear picture of a specific question that can be defined by measureable student learning achievement.

The DBDM team would then be ready to move to the second step of IDEAS, developing a plan. In order to complete this stage, they must first identify potential barriers to goal attainment (Poynton & Carey, 2006). Once barriers have been identified, school counselors can collect further perceptions data through surveys of school personnel, parents and community members to assess how their involvement could benefit the process.

Next, the task of the DBDM team is to determine an evidence-based intervention to try to effect change. They could use results and perception data to determine an intervention, which has been proven through research to be effective. The authors pointed out that if an evidence-based intervention cannot be identified that pertains to the specific problem, the team can collaborate with other counselors who may have had a similar problem to learn what they implemented to remedy the problem.

The final tasks when developing a plan are to create an action plan and an evaluation plan. The action plan serves as a timeline for the implementation of the intervention, assign jobs to different individual team members, research resources that will be needed to facilitate the intervention, and finally assess which data is needed to evaluate the intervention. The evaluation plan is an explicit plan for evaluating the intervention to determine its effectiveness, and ensure that all necessary data has been identified and collected throughout the process (Poynton & Carey, 2006).

Once this has been done, the DBDM team will move to the third step of IDEAS, the execution of the plan. The first task in this process is to implement the already formed action plan. Once it has begun, the team should then monitor the implementation to ensure its treatment validity. Additionally, the team should conduct a formative assessment of the intervention. This can be done through formal assessments such as quizzes to monitor student knowledge, or informal assessments to determine the perception data of the accountability team. This formative data should be collected during the intervention, so it can then be sued to address any changes that need to be made to the intervention (Poynton & Carey, 2006).

The fourth step of IDEAS is to answer the question. This is done by analyzing the data that has been collected and interpreting the resulting information to determine the success of the implemented intervention. Based upon the results of this data, the team will then decide whether or not to move to the final stage of the process.

If the resulting data reveals that the intervention was successful, the team will be ready to implement the last stage of the IDEAS model, and share the results with the public (Poynton & Carey, 2006). The authors recommended disseminating the data broadly, but also caution that school counselors should consider the demographics of their audience. The data can then be presented to communicate with stakeholders of the school setting, including the school board, administrators, students, parents, and the community at large. While it may seem like a lengthy process, the results demonstrating student growth and achievement are well worth it in the end.

Chapter III: Discussion

The information provided in this section will serve as a summary of literature reviewed on accountability for school counselors regarding supporting data for group counseling. The summary and discussion of the literature will be discussed as they relate to data collection, analysis, and presentation to key stakeholders. Finally, the chapter will conclude with further recommendations for future research.

Summary

This review of literature indicated a need for accountability for school counselors who use group counseling as one strategy to work with students. The ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of school counseling services is needed, as school counselors need to show accountability in assisting students with measurable data. The literature also indicated that school counselors need to provide opportunities for student achievement and remove barriers or obstacles to student success. ASCA (2005) noted the importance of accountability for the professional school counselor, emphasizing the responsibility school counselors and administrators have to show the results of their work.

The use of data to demonstrate accountability with the responsive service of group counseling as a component to their comprehensive school counseling model is one example for school counselors to demonstrate accountability. There are a variety of examples of topics and themes which could be chosen for the focus of the school counseling groups. The literature also indicated there are multiple uses for group counseling within the schools, which could provide the necessary data to support the need for school counseling across all levels of K-12 education.

School counselors can use data collection and analysis of group work to show results for maximizing student success. The American School Counselor Association (2005) emphasized the responsibility school counselors have to collect and analyze data that shows a correlation between group counseling and student achievement. ASCA (2005) also noted the importance of using the national model as a framework for the development and facilitation of groups, along with a basis for monitoring progress and the success of students, though data collection before, during and after the implementation of group counseling.

This data can then be analyzed to assess and document the impact of the group counseling on students' academic achievement, personal/social development, and career awareness. ASCA (2005) further stated the need for school counselors to analyze student achievement data in comparison to the counseling-program-related data to assess the effectiveness of the program, and identify areas for further research. This data can then be shared with stakeholders to ensure all students receive equal opportunities for an optimal education.

Accountability strategies and procedures were also included for counselors who searching for new and revised strategies to help fulfill their program goals. Findings also indicated a need to discuss group counseling as a method of furthering academic achievement, personal/social development and awareness for all students. Further, Steen, Bauman and Smith (2007) reported that group counseling is an effective responsive service to meet the needs of all students in the academic, personal/social, and career domains.

The research also found that evidence can be provided when school counselors gather data both from group members themselves, as well as staff or other school personnel who have observed the students in the group, and then compared the results with other students who have not participated in the group counseling process. Finally, it was also noted that group counseling has a multitude of applications in schools, with the ability to provide services across all levels of K-12 education

The use of action research is an efficient and effective way to collect and analyze data for school counselors to demonstrate the results of their group counseling interventions. Research by Poynton and Carey (2006) further elaborated on the use of action research for school counselors, suggesting the IDEAS model of data-based decision making, which provides a step-by-step model for guiding school counselors to formulate teams to collect, analyze and disseminate the results of their data.

School counselors can disseminate data on group counseling to show accountability to school administrative personnel, students and parents. There was much discussion about the importance of school counselors being able to disseminate their research in order to advance the profession.

Steen and Kaffenberger (2007) noted the importance of demonstrating accountability through presentations to interested individuals, which can assist in the understanding of how groups work by explaining the therapeutic factors involved. These authors also pointed out the additional opportunity school counselors can gain through dissemination of results, when they can address the concerns of the stakeholders, and encourage the recognition that group counseling strategies are a valuable component of a comprehensive school counseling program.

Authors Poynton and Carey (2006) also offered suggestions to further increase the opportunities for school counselors to disseminate the results of their data, utilizing data-based decision making through the IDEAS model, by involving stakeholders directly in the research process. The authors noted this can be done by forming teams, such as advisory councils, and inviting others such as school administrators, parents, students and teachers to become part of the team. With the help of these stakeholders, teams will be able to further disseminate the results of the data to a larger audience.

Recommendations

It is evident from the literature cited that group counseling is an effective responsive service when incorporated into a comprehensive school counseling program. When used as such, group counseling is an efficient way of reaching many students while contributing to the opportunities for academic success, personal/social growth, and career exploration. Yet, while much literature recommends the use of group counseling to be incorporated into comprehensive school counseling programs in K-12 schools across America, there is currently little research that has documented the extent to which the impact of group counseling can have on student academic achievement, personal/social development, and career awareness.

One recommendation, stated by Paisley and Milsom (2007), would be to continue more specified research in this regard, across all levels of K-12 education, with specific emphasis on the data collection, analysis, and dissemination strategies for school counselors engaging in group counseling as a responsive service included in the comprehensive school counseling programs.

Another recommendation, made by Steen, Bauman and Smith (2007), also mentioned by Martin (2002), was the idea that graduate programs in the area of school counselor education programs, may want to consider assigning data collection activities pertaining to student success so counselor candidates can begin collecting data upon employment. The authors noted that although more school counselor educator programs incorporate a graduate course in research methods and/or statistics, these introductory courses are mostly aimed at preparing school counseling candidates to be critical readers of research, and Martin (2002) noted that it is rare for graduates to continue to do research once they become practicing school counselor.

Kaffenberger, Murphy and Bemak (2006), stated responsibility for further research falls not only on practicing school counselors, but also upon school administrators and district members to require ongoing research within the role and job description of a professional school counselor.

Given the limited body of evidence within this literature review pertaining to specific strategies for collecting data, it would seem relatively new for school counselors to be collecting a great deal of data to demonstrate, or gain support for, the effects of group counseling interventions on providing opportunities for advanced achievement for students. Yet, it is important for school counselors to continue their efforts in this regard, and strive to increase communication with others regarding dissemination of data to support the use of group counseling as an effective responsive service in their comprehensive school counseling programs. This communication is especially important in light of current reform efforts, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, which have raised awareness that accountability is expected to be demonstrated not only by

professional school counselors, but by educators across all fields. Further research is needed showing ways to use data to support the effectiveness and contributions that school counselors make each day in the changing lives of children in schools today.

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