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Campuses with successful leadership teams have a better opportunity to meet the ever-increasing and complex needs of the students they serve (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002). These successful campuses are strengthened when they include strong principals and counseling teams with shared mutual trust and understanding that permeates the school climate (DeVoss & Andrews, 2006). A review of the literature revealed a paucity of studies examining the nature of successful principal-counselor relations and the impact of this relationship on student success, effective campus leadership teams, and an effective school climate that promotes learning. Meaningful dialogue and discussion of this critical professional relationship also were found lacking in the major counseling and educational leadership professional journals.

Conceptual Framework

Trust between individuals is paramount to successful team building and leadership sustainability in schools today (Fullan, 2005). There is much support from the literature to indicate that an atmosphere of mutual trust permeating a school's climate leads to student success (Brock & Ponec, 1998; Ponec & Brock, 2000; Vaught, 1995). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) defined trust in their meta-analysis on trust as "one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is (a) benevolent, (b) reliable, (c) competent, (d) honest, and (e) open" (p.556). The working relationship

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between the campus principal and the school counselor is largely dependent upon open collegial communication, mutual respect and trust.

As the principal and counselor work together to meet the needs of their students, staff and parents, barriers to this needed trust component arise from a lack of understanding of roles, misconceptions regarding confidentiality issues, and the absence of collegial sharing (Beale, 1995; Vaught, 1995). How pervasive is this lack of mutual understanding? Are there differences in the perceptions held by elementary and secondary counselors and principals regarding these issues? Are counselors and school administrators receiving adequate training in these areas? If not, what are the critical components that should be included in preparation programs for pre-service principals and counselors to foster highly effective ways of professional collaboration and teaming?

Purpose

This national study of school counselors and campus principals was designed around the following three purposes: to describe the nature of the principal-counselor relationship in today's public schools; to describe the nature of a successful principal-counselor partnership and how to achieve this working team approach; and to identify the critical components of a graduate school preparation program in Counseling and Educational Leadership necessary to foster this important relationship. What are the significant factors in a successful professional relationship between the campus principal and the counseling team that support an atmosphere of mutual trust, a positive school climate, and student and staff success? Identifying these critical components is basic to developing appropriate learning experiences and materials for pre-service preparation programs.

Three key factors have been identified in supporting exemplary guidance and counseling programs: (a) the principal's support of the counselor is critical (Beale, 1995; Vaught, 1995); (b) an understanding of the role of the counselor is important (Cormany & Brantley, 1996; Ponec & Brock, 2000); and (c) trust and communication between the principal and counselor must be present (Brock & Ponec, 1998; Ponec & Brock, 2000; Vaught, 1995). The major purpose of the study was to examine the level of trust between counselors and principals, to describe the nature of the principal-counselor relationship in public schools, to describe successful principal-counselor partnerships, and to identify the key elements of effective principal and counselor preparation programs with regards to this relationship.

Rationale

Seifert and Vornberg (2002) concluded that school principals, who understood the role of the counselor and devoted time to develop open communication and collaboration with their counseling team, were more likely to iron out differences in perceptions in areas of mutual concern. These areas include confidentiality, student advocacy, situational cause and effect, and school climate. Counselors can make a real difference in student learning and achievement by working with the whole school and being focused on the whole student (Baker, 1996; Schmidt, 1996; Kaplan & Evans, 1999).

Because of their different professional preparation, principals and school counselors have varied approaches to address student issues and concerns (Kaplan, 1995; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Even though the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 1990) has clearly defined the role of the school counselor, research has shown that the principals and school counselors view the role of the counselor differently (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Cole, 1991; Fitch, Newby, & Ballestero, 2001; Stalling, 1991).

Frequently, the principal determines the role of the counselor in the local school and often needs to be educated about that role (Neukrug, Barr, Hoffman, & Kaplan, 1993; Ribak-Rosenthal, 1994). Ponec and Block (2000) contend, "Principals' definitions of the role of the counselor may range from that of administrative assistant to helper/ advocate of children" (p. 208). School counselors are many times utilized to perform routine clerical tasks, handle discipline problems, and react to situations rather than establish a balanced program that supports developmental and prevention efforts (Baker, 1996; Burhans, 1999; Hogan, 1998; Seifert & Vornberg, 2002). Nichter and Nelson (2006) conclude, "the principal's perception of the school counselor's role is the most likely the single strongest influence on how school counselors really spend their time" (p.16).

As noted, there is a scarcity of research examining the collegial relationship between school principals and counselors. Professional development programs in counseling and educational leadership do not address in depth this vital part of the preparation process (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). This national study attempted to identify the practitioner perspective on the key elements of a successful preparation program that addresses this relationship.

Limitations of Study

Studies that use self-report questionnaires to gather data are limited by the response rate and the honesty of the respondents. Even though the number of participants in this national study was adequate, the response rate in this study is a limitation. Many of the principals surveyed in western states reported that their counseling programs had been cut or completely eliminated due to budget constraints.

Method

Two survey instruments were developed to assess elementary and secondary school counselors' and school principals' perceptions of factors related to the principal-counselor relationship. The items included in the survey instruments were based on patterns and themes that emerged from the review of the literature. Input on items was gathered from practicing elementary and secondary campus principals as well counseling and educational leadership educators. The content validity of both questionnaires was established through formal feedback from counselor educators and professors of educational administration.

Each survey included demographic items, multiple statements with a Likert summative rating scale with response choices (1-5), and open-ended questions. The principals' survey included 44 Likert items and the counselors' survey included 45 Likert items. The survey questions focused on the role of the school counselor, the existing level of communication, trust and cooperation between the counselor and principal, and the adequacy of their professional preparation programs with regards to understanding counselors' roles, responsibilities, confidentiality, and productive professional collaboration. With the exception of the open-ended questions, the survey questionnaires were similar with parallel questions designed for comparison.

A pilot study (n=39) was conducted in a southwestern state with urban, suburban and rural participants. Based on feedback from principal and counselor participants in the pilot study and the university-based educators who reviewed the instruments, some items were revised and deleted.

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Population and Sample

The target population for the study was the national population of elementary and secondary school counselors and campus principals. To survey a cross-section of counselors and principals in the United States, the mailing lists of three national professional organizations - American School Counselor Association (ASCA), National Association of Elementary Principals (NAESP), and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) were used. The study was divided into five phases: the pilot study and four subsets with a target of 500 participants at each mailing for a total of 2,000 potential participants. Random samples of the population of elementary school counselors (n = 500), elementary school principals (n = 500), secondary school counselors (n = 500), and secondary school principals (n = 500) were drawn from the professional organizations' mailing lists.

After the pilot study was completed, survey packets were mailed to elementary and secondary school counselors and elementary and secondary campus principals nationwide. After the initial mailings, a follow-up mailing was completed in an effort to increase the response rate (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

Data Analysis and Results

School Principal Survey

As noted, 1000 surveys were mailed to elementary and secondary school principals. As a result of wrong addresses and other issues, the total number of surveys actually received by the sample was 964. Of the 285 surveys returned (30%), 253 were usable. Many elementary school principals returned surveys but indicated that they did not have a counselor in their building; a fact that lowered the usable response rate somewhat among this group. The demographics of the principal respondents were as follows: gender- 54% male and 46% female; level- 43% elementary school principals and 57% secondary school principals; setting- 47% rural, 39% suburban and 14% urban; median number of years serving as principal- 7; median number of years serving on current campus- 5; median number of years with current counselor- 3; median number of students on campus- 560; and formal training as counselor prior to serving as principal- 25% had training and 75% had no training.

An exploratory factor analysis (n = 253) revealed a six-factor solution based on visual inspection of a scree plot. The scree plot tends to be more accurate than the standard eigen value greater than one method, which often overestimates the number of salient factors (Zwick & Velicer, 1986). The six resulting factors were named as follows with coefficient alphas in parentheses: relationship quality (.966), shared leadership (.856), training (.909), role definition (.800), role communication (.675), and confidentiality (.624), which are above the typical average (Henson & Roberts, 2006). The reliability of the obtained scores was stronger in the first four factors. These six factors explained 67% of the variance in the scores.

Relationship quality. One part of the relationship explored was trust. An overwhelming majority of principals (93%) indicated that they trusted their counselors. Over 87% of principals indicated that their counselors had similar views on how to handle crises. Over 90% of principals agreed that they could predict how counselors would respond to delicate situations. Given the number of statistical significance tests that were conducted in this study, a conservative alpha of .01 was used to reduce experiment-wise error. Model assumptions were examined and met. A one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences in relationship quality between

elementary and secondary school principals, F (1, 251) = .03, p = .855. In other words, both elementary and secondary principals expressed similar views regarding the quality of their relationships with their school counselors. Trust was not an issue.

Shared Leadership. Over 90% of principals indicated that they considered their counselors to be an integral part of the campus planning team. Similarly, over 88% of principals agreed that their counselors were involved in the campus site-based decision-making process. A smaller percentage of principals (66%) sought their counselors' opinions regarding curriculum and instruction. A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in shared leadership between elementary and secondary school principals, F (1, 251) = .509, p = .476. From the principals' point of view at both the elementary and secondary settings, counselors are important members of the campus leadership team and whose contributions are sought.

Training. Three one-way ANOVA's were conducted to examine principal's training. Model assumptions were examined and met. There was not a statistically significant difference in training between elementary and secondary school principals, F (1, 252) = 1.861, p = .174. However, there was a statistically significant difference in training between principals who had formal training as counselors and those who did not, F (1, 252) = 19.76, p = .0001, with a medium effect size of η^2 = .07. The principals with counseling backgrounds or training, expressed different levels of understanding of the role of the school counselor and how to support and involve counselors than their colleagues with no counseling backgrounds.

More than 31% of the principal respondents did not agree that their training prepared them to work collaboratively with counselors. Similarly, 36% of principals did not agree that their training prepared them to know how to support counselors. In addition, 33% of principals indicated that they did not agree that their training prepared them to understand the role of counselors. A larger number of principals (40%) indicated that their training did not prepare them to understand how much to expect counselors to disclose regarding student confidences.

Over 40% of principals *without* coursework in counseling said they were not prepared to know how to support counselors, whereas 23% of principals *with* this coursework stated that their training did not prepare them in this area. Over 39% of principals *without* coursework in counseling said their training did not prepare them to understand the role of the counselor, compared to 14% of those *with* coursework in counseling. The largest discrepancy between those with and without coursework in counseling was found in the area of confidentiality. Over 46% of principals *without* counseling coursework said their training did not prepare them to understand how much to expect counselors to disclose regarding student confidences, compared to 13% of principals *with* counseling coursework.

Role Definition and Role Communication. Over 44% of principals indicated that their school districts had not clarified the types of activities in which counselors should be involved. About one-third (31%) stated that their school districts had not clearly defined the role of the counselor and the majority of principals (56%) indicated that their school districts had not explained to them what a comprehensive school counseling program was. Over 96% of principals indicated that their counselors had a voice in defining their roles. Over 91% of principals said that they discussed the counselor role   with their counselors and over 90% of principals stated that they meet regularly with their counselors. Regarding vital and important parent and student communiqués, 96% of principals indicated that they shared this information with counselors.

Confidentiality. Principals' views on confidentiality contrasted sharply with counselors' views. Principals were divided when it came to understanding why a counselor would keep something confidential if the school could be adversely affected. Almost half (40%) of the principals indicated that they understood why counselors would keep these issues confidential, whereas slightly more principals (43%) could not understand why counselors would keep such issues confidential.

School Counselor Survey

As a result of wrong addresses and other issues, the total number of surveys actually received by the school counselors was 960 of 1000. Of the 370 surveys returned (39%), 362 were usable. The demographics of the counselor respondents were as follows: gender- 12% male and 88% female; level- 54% elementary and 46% secondary; setting - 19% urban, 48% suburban, and 33% rural; median number of years serving as counselor- 9; median number of years with current principal- 3; and median number of students for whom they are responsible- 400.

An exploratory factor analysis (n = 362) revealed a six-factor solution based on visual inspection of a scree plot. These six factors explained 60% of the variance in the scores. The six factors identified were labeled as follows (coefficient alphas in parentheses): relationship quality (.954), shared leadership (.917), training (.848), role definition (.694), role advocacy (.662), and confidentiality (.602).

Relationship quality. The vast majority of school counselors (77%) indicated that they trusted their principals. An even higher percentage of counselors (86%) indicated that their principals support them. When asked if they met regularly with their principal, 66% indicated that they met regularly, but a larger percentage of elementary counselors (74%) than secondary counselors (58%) said that they met regularly with their principals. Thus, counselors indicated that they trusted their principals, but elementary and secondary school counselors differed in their perceptions of how much regular access they had to their principal.

Shared leadership. Whereas 80% of the counselors indicated that their principal wanted them to be a part of campus planning, only 48% (elementary 43%, secondary 53%) indicated that their principal sought their input in issues related to curriculum and instruction. Over 71% of the counselors (elementary 74%, secondary 67%) stated that their principal involved them in campus decision-making. When asked if their principal shared new ideas with them, 73% of elementary school counselors and 61% of secondary school counselors agreed.

Training. An ANOVA examining the difference in training between elementary and secondary school counselors was statistically significant F (1, 360) = 8.572, p = .004, η^2 = .023. In other words, elementary counselors differed from their secondary counterparts with regards to their perceptions of the adequacy of their pre-service training programs in the area of campus leadership. A majority of counselors (51%) said their training did not prepare them to work collaboratively with principals. Similarly, over 56% of respondents stated that their training did not prepare them to understand how to support principals. Over 43% of counselors indicated their training did not prepare them to be proactive with principals if asked to assume duties outside of the counselor role. Finally, 32% of counselors said their training did not help them understand how much to disclose to principals regarding student confidences.

Role definition. When counselors were asked if their school districts clearly defined their role, 39% of the counselors stated that their districts had not clearly defined their role. When asked if they had implemented a comprehensive school counseling program on

their campus, most counselors (73%) indicated that they had. Elementary school counselors (84%) were much more likely to implement a comprehensive program than secondary school counselors (61%). There was a statistically significant difference between elementary and secondary school counselors in the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, F (1, 361) = 36.31, p < .001, η^2 = .09. School counselors were not in agreement regarding the level of implementation of comprehensive counseling programs on elementary and secondary campuses.

     Role Advocacy. Given that principals determine the role of counselors on local campuses, counselors are in a position of needing to be proactive about their roles if they are going to be able to establish a role that approximates ASCA (American School Counselor Association, 1990) standards. Over 95% of respondents indicated that they understand their role as a school counselor. Over 88% of elementary school counselors said that they have discussed their role with their principals, but only 73% of secondary counselors reported doing so. There was a statistically significant difference between elementary and secondary school counselors in discussing their roles with their principals, F (1,361) = 22.18, p < .001, η^2 = .06. Both secondary and elementary school counselors appeared to struggle when it came to asserting themselves about having to assume duties outside of their role. When asked if they initiated discussions with their principals when principals want them to assume duties outside of their role, only 55% of the counselors indicated that they have had these discussions.

     Confidentiality Concerns. Issues related to confidentiality have been problematic in counselor-principal relationships. Over 37% of counselors said that they experienced tension between maintaining confidentiality with their student clients and keeping principals informed. Counselors also were concerned about how this sharing would impact their effectiveness with students. Over 57% of the counselors expressed concern about losing students' trust if they shared information with principals.

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

     One of the clearest and most consistent findings of this study was in the area of professional training. Both counselor and principal participants indicated that additional pre-service training would better prepare them for more effective communication and team building interactions. More understanding of confidentiality would be helpful to principals and might help alleviate the tension experienced by counselors regarding keeping principals informed. Both counselors and principals indicated that their training did not prepare them to understand and work effectively with each other. It appears that preparation programs should give more emphasis on the principal-counselor relationship. As this study indicates, those principals who had taken counseling courses better understood the role of the counselor. This suggests that information in pre-service course work regarding counselor role and other important issues could better prepare principals to understand counselors' roles, ethical dilemmas, and needs.

     One issue that emerged among counselors was communication. Two of the notable differences between the relationship of elementary and secondary school counselors and their principals involved communication. Secondary school counselors in particular indicated that they did not have the type of exchange with their principals that their elementary school counterparts did. Secondary school counselors were not as likely to meet regularly with their principals and they were not as likely to discuss their role with their principals. Obviously, this lack of communication is understandable given the larger size and complexity of the secondary school environment, but

considering the concern that counselors already have about their role, increased communication among secondary counselors and principals seems to be an issue that needs more attention.

Ethical issues such as confidentiality become very critical at the secondary level due to the age and nature of secondary student populations (Seifert & Vornberg, 2002). The potential for administrative misuse of the counselor's time and expertise increases in secondary school settings. Elementary and secondary counselors reported that much of their time was spent in tasks not directly related to their guidance and counseling responsibilities. Elementary principals shared their frustrations, as they waned students to benefit from direct counseling activities. In the open-ended questions, secondary principals were conflicted as to the roles they wanted their counselors to play, thus adding to confusion and miscommunication regarding performance expectations for counselors and counseling teams. Counselors expressed frustration regarding role responsibilities when asked to participate in campus leadership activities or contribute to overall campus instructional programs. Many counselors expressed frustration regarding their inappropriate role as campus test coordinators as well as being assigned the responsibility for special education or at-risk programming.

Recommendations

Recommendations for professional preparation programs included the following: *proactive collaboration* between graduate school departments, *leadership and assertiveness training* for counselors, and the development and sponsorship of field based *professional development programs* for practicing campus principals and their campus counseling team that center on "best practices".

Recommendation 1: *Proactive collaboration* between graduate departments of educational leadership and counseling in recognizing and emphasizing the importance of the school principal-counselor relationship. This includes offering jointly a graduate course, pre-service seminars, and field-based activities for pre-service principals and counselors. Study results indicated that it is important to integrate the following into the curricula of both disciplines' pre-service programs:

(1) A foundation in counseling approaches, techniques and school based programs;

(2) The components of comprehensive school counseling programs;

(3) The role and responsibilities of the school counselor and principal;

(4) Confidentiality issues, legalities, and ethics; and

(5) Collaborative team building strategies to build and nurture shared leadership teams involving the school counselor as a key contributor.

Recommendation 2*: An increased emphasis on leadership training programs and assertiveness skills* in counselor education programs could prove helpful in fostering and developing leadership skills and characteristics in future counselors. Many counselor respondents indicated that they spend considerable time involved in non-counselor duties, but almost half of the counselors surveyed said that they do not discuss this issue with their principals. Many counselors do not see themselves as educational leaders and express frustration on how to be effective advocates for students on their campuses. School campuses would benefit from the impact of counselors who viewed themselves as contributing educational leaders who have much to offer the educational setting with regards to promoting and achieving student success.

Recommendation 3*: Proactive development of professional programs and activities for campus principals and school counselors* should be developed collaboratively between the two disciplines. Meaningful professional development opportunities can be designed with the cooperation of the university-based faculty, professional organizations, and the practicing school principal and counselor. Seminars, workshops, and presentations at professional meetings and in-service opportunities can increase the dialogue and discussion of "best practices" for increasing the leadership potential of school counselors as well as increasing the support and understanding of the counselor by the campus principal.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify the extent to which trust was present or lacking between school counselors and principals, to identify the important elements of a successful teaming relationship between these two professionals, and identify the critical components of pre-service preparation programs. Surprisingly, trust was not the major issue. Effective communication practices, clear role definitions and mutual understanding, as well as pre-service preparation practices emerged as real concerns.

The bottom line remains - how does this potentially powerful relationship between school principal and school counselor affect student growth and achievement? Current preparation programs in counseling and school administration do not consistently address this vital part of the professional preparation process (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Professional preparation programs need to address mutual understanding and trust, role and responsibilities, confidentiality and ethics, and shared leadership. Programs should provide the appropriate learning experiences for graduate students in both counseling and educational administration programs. Both preparation programs must include the development and nurturing of the campus leadership team as well as the integral role and critical contributions the school counselor can make as an educational leader.

DeVoss and Andrews (2006) conclude that leadership-training programs for school counselor trainees are a vehicle that fosters development of leadership skills and characteristics. The principal-counselor relationship is critical and complex. Principals are responsible for the school as a whole. Whereas principals are responsible *for* students, counselors are responsible *to* students. Counselors are ethically obligated to keep student disclosures confidential unless a notable risk to safety exists.

School counselors do not see themselves as educational leaders on their campuses. Developing leadership capacity on a campus to meet the ever-increasing needs of students is a high priority for campus principals. It appears that additional training is needed so that principals and counselors can be more supportive and collaborative as well as develop a better understanding of each other's responsibilities, professional obligations, and needs. These two campus professionals can form the basis of the critical campus leadership team that is necessary today to meet the complex and diverse needs of the students and school communities they serve.

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