

# The Challenge to Change from Guidance Counseling to Professional School Counseling: A Historical Proposition

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Professional school counselors (PSCs) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) have been working diligently to reconfigure the professional identity of PSCs from its historical guidance epistemology to a comprehensive developmental model. Nevertheless, the historical influence defining a school counselor's identity has been difficult to alter. The purpose of this article is threefold: (a) to review the historical origins of school counseling, (b) to outline the current PSC identity model promoted by ASCA, and (c) to introduce steps to support the transition to a consistent professional identity for the school counselor.

School counselor preparation programs and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) advocate professional roles and standards of practice for school counseling professionals. However, incongruence is apparent between what is advocated and the actual duties most professional school counselors (PSCs) are performing. This divergence has cultivated role ambiguity and conflict, increasing occupational stress in PSCs (Lambie, 2002). Furthermore, school administrators, teachers, parents, and other groups tend to view the role of a school counselor in different ways (Burnham & Jackson, 2000).

Role ambiguity is present in school counseling to the extent that even PSCs have different perceptions of their roles in the school environment. Role ambiguity exists when (a) an individual lacks information about his or her work role, (b) there is a lack of clarity about work objectives associated with the role, or (c) there is a lack of clarity about peer expectations of the scope and responsibility of the job (Lambie, 2002; Sears & Navin, 1983). Following their study comparing PSCs' actual role with roles prescribed in two accepted counseling models, Burnham and Jackson (2000) concluded that PSCs are too often involved in non-counseling-related activities including multiple clerical tasks, which require an inordinate amount of time and pull them away from "more appropriate counseling activities" (p. 47). Additionally, Hutchinson, Barrick, and Grove (1986) found that PSCs are required to perform increasing nonprofessional duties in a limited amount of time (e.g., attendance, record keeping, testing coordination, hall and bus duty). Furthermore, other noncounseling duties commonly reported include scheduling;

transcripts; office sitting; clubs and organizations; parking lot, restroom, and lunch duties; averaging grades; and homeroom duty (Burnham & Jackson, 2000).

## HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

Countries, events, and people often are defined by their histories. Memorial services communicate a historical narrative of an event or person, providing attendees with a defining portrait. Therefore, the realities of an event, institution, or person are socially constructed (Freedman & Combs, 1996). The same holds true for school counseling, which is defined by its historical story. Within this conceptualization, "Beliefs held by individuals construct realities and realities are maintained through social interaction which, in turn, confirms the beliefs that are then socially originated" (Fruggeri, 1992, p. 43). Therefore, school counseling's historical narrative constructs the lens through which individuals interpret the profession. To understand and possibly alleviate the current incongruence between the actual and the ideal professional identity of PSCs, the historical narrative configuring the profession needs to be understood, appreciated, and then possibly reconstructed.

From its inception in the early 1900s, school counseling was very different from the current functions advocated by the ASCA (2004) professional role statement. The term employed during the early 1900s for the profession was vocational guidance, which involves roles that were similar to modern career counseling with a focus on the transition from school to work, emphasizing an appropriate client-occupational placement match. This vocational guidance movement was founded to enhance the post-school vocational adjustments of young people (Super, 1955). A founder of this movement was Frank Parsons, who is often referenced as the "Father of Guidance" with his focus on supporting young men's transition into suitable vocational placement based on a mutual beneficial match between the young person's aptitudes and abilities and an occupation's requirements and environment (Schmidt, 2003). Additionally at the time, the popularity of psychometrics increased with Alfred Binet and a colleague publishing their intelligence scale intended to assist educational systems classifying students in Paris. The scale was used during World War I by the U.S. military for recruit placement.

An alliance among education, social work, and psychometrics in vocational guidance led to the organization of the National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA) in 1913. The membership of the NVGA was made up of professionals from the fields of education, psychology, community service, business, and government (Super, 1955). The NVGA would in time merge with the American College Personnel Association, the National Association of Guidance Supervisors and Counselor Trainers, and the Student Personnel Association for Teacher Education, becoming the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA), which is today the American Counseling Association (ACA). Therefore, the evolution of the NVGA was significant to the development and recognition of school counseling as a profession. Clearly, many of the duties that today's PSCs struggle with, such as assessment (testing) and academic and vocational planning (scheduling), are connected to this early history.

During the 1920s, John Dewey introduced the cognitive developmental movement, proposing that people move through hierarchical stages of development. These stages are qualitatively distinct, with each stage being unique and separate. Dewey (1963) proposed that the challenge in

child development is to provide children with the appropriate types of stimulating experiences during decisive periods of development when specific predispositions are ready to surface and progress. Therefore, Dewey emphasized the school's role in promoting students' cognitive, personal, social, and moral development. A result of Dewey's work was an incorporation of guidance strategies into the curriculum designed to support student development.

In the 1930s, E. G. Williamson expanded Parsons' vocation guidance tenets and created the first guidance and counseling theory--the trait and factor theory. Later, Williamson and his colleagues were associated with their directive or counselor centered approach to school counseling, which was presented in the book *How to Counsel Students* (Williamson, 1939). Within this approach, school counselors were to provide students with information while gathering facts to influence and motivate (Schmidt, 2003). This directive administrative approach to working with students appears to be a current expectation of PSCs in some settings, where administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians expect PSCs to generate desired student behavior with minimal student input or contextual influence.

In the 1940s, the "Father of Counseling," Carl Rogers, published his book *Counseling and Psychotherapy: New Concepts in Practice* (Rogers, 1942). Rogers likely had the greatest effect of any individual on the development of the counseling profession and modern counseling approaches (Schmidt, 2003). To that point in time, Williamson's directive approach and Freud's psychoanalytic therapy were the two foundational theoretical models. Rogers' psychological humanism movement began as a response against the mechanized reductionistic view of people extended by psychoanalytic and behavioral theories (DeCarvalho, 1990). Theorists such as Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1951) rejected the idea that clients should be reduced to a collection of drives or discrete behaviors. Rather, they argued that a counselor should empathize with a client's experience of the world and provide a safe environment that facilitates the client's movement toward self-actualization; the counselor should assist clients in their growth process, improving their ability to cope with current problems and future challenges (DeCarvalho 1990; Hansen, 1999; Williams & Lair, 1991). Rogers (1986, as cited in Kelly, 1997) wrote that the counselor "becomes a companion to the client in the journey toward the core of the self" (p. 138). Rogers influenced vocational counselors, psychologists, and school counselors by conceptualizing clients as "people rather than problems" (Super, 1955, p. 4). Following the inception of Rogers' work, the term guidance began to be replaced in the literature by counseling, within which guidance is encapsulated (Cobia & Henderson, 2003).

Until the 1950s, the number of school counselors was small, having limited avenues to receive professional preparation. The identity of school counseling was strengthened in 1952 with the formation of ASCA, which became a member of the APGA in 1953. Additionally, in 1953 the *School Counselor* was established as the professional journal of ASCA. ASCA provided the profession of school counseling with professional development strategies, research, resources, and advocacy promoting the profession's identity. During the same period, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) worked with ASCA in the development and training of the school counseling profession. ACES emphasized the need for quality education and supervision of counselors in all work settings. During the 1950s, the training of school counselors centered on the development of one-to-one counseling relationships skills. Other important components identified as necessary within the training included record keeping,

information dissemination, placement, follow-up, and evaluation (Baker, 2000). These additional duties seem incongruent with the current ASCA (2004) professional role statement; however, they are evident in the historical developmental process of the profession.

In 1957, the launched Sputnik by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics inadvertently advanced the development of professional school counseling. The United States was stunned and in response Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958. The legislation was intended to identify, guide, and support those students with high aptitudes in the areas of math and science so that they might become future technological innovators. To this end, funds were allocated to provide school counseling services to every high school student with counselors that had been trained to identify gifted students and guide them toward college. Additionally, the NDEA allotted funds to colleges and universities for the development of school counseling preparation programs.

In 1962, Gilbert Wrenn, who chaired a committee to study the role and function of school counselors, submitted his conclusion to APGA in a report entitled *The Counselor in a Changing World*. The report identified professional school counseling goals emphasizing students' holistic development (Cobia & Henderson, 2003). These goals included what Wrenn identified as the current remedial services being provided. Furthermore, the publication recommended that counselors incorporate multiple approaches to address the comprehensive developmental needs of the students. Supporting the civil rights movement and Wrenn's report, legislation was developed backing school counseling. Amendments to the NDEA in 1964 extended the search for gifted students to the elementary level, providing funds and momentum for elementary school counseling. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act designated funds for guidance and counseling. The Vocational Education Act Amendments of 1968 granted funds to support career guidance programs responding to the needs of disadvantaged students and people with disabilities, extending guidance and counseling career service to elementary schools (Herr, 2003).

The 1970s commenced a decade of decreasing school enrollment, affecting school counselors. Mercer (1981) described the consequences of the declining enrollment on the profession. Before the reduction, the school counselors' role was to counsel students behind closed doors, but due to difficulties of assessing their outcomes and the issue of confidentiality, administrators began to eliminate counseling positions because of budgetary reductions. Consequently, some school counselors began to take on additional roles in the school to assist administrators and give their role more visibility. These added duties often were administrative in nature and are related to many of the noncounseling roles school counselors are currently performing.

The Educational Act for All Handicapped Children of 1975 (PL 94-142) expanded the services school counselors provided. The bill mandated schools to provide free public education for all children with an emphasis on equity for exceptional children (Baker, 2000; Schmidt, 2003). This legislation expanded the school counselors' roles into special education, including appropriate placement services, collaboration in the Individual Education Plan process, record-keeping management, and providing consultation and counseling service to children with disabilities, their parents and/or guardians, and their teachers (Humes, 1978).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, additional legislation and publications further influenced the role of the school counselor. In 1983, the National Commission of Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk*, which reported the declining achievement of students and promoted the implementation of reform initiatives (Schmidt, 2003). The reaction to the publication advanced the accountability and testing movement, both strongly influencing school counselors. A second example was the School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994, which reinforced the importance of career guidance and counseling services to support students transitioning from school to employment (Herr, 2003). Additionally, in 1990, ASCA (2003) advocated the transition to identifying the profession as "school counseling," moving away from the previous title of "guidance counseling." Following this transition, some school counseling professionals began to identify themselves with the term "professional school counselors."

Many themes emerge throughout this historical narrative of the school counseling profession. A central theme was that the school counselors' roles expanded with every decade. During the early 20th century, the focus was vocational guidance, assessment, and academic placement; during the midpart of the century, providing personal and social counseling services while promoting students' holistic development was incorporated; and toward the end of the century, special education services, consultation, coordination, and accountability duties were integrated. Important to note is that although school counselors' roles were being expanded, no services seemed to be removed from the counselors' responsibilities. Therefore, based on this historical narrative, school counseling roles have been vast and ever-changing, making it understandable that many school counselors struggle with role ambiguity and incongruence while feeling overwhelmed.

### PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELOR IDENTITY MOVEMENT

The role of the PSC is complex and multifaceted. PSCs engage in preventive, developmental, and systemic approaches to counseling. They work within the educational system to support teachers, students, and families within the context of community (Rowley, 2000). Until the recently published ASCA National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), there was a lack of clearly defined roles for PSCs that ASCA advocated.

Comprehensive professional school counseling programs are progressive in that they adhere to the most recent standards proposed by ASCA (Erford, 2003; Rowley, 2000; Sink, 2005). The evolving formation of PSCs has been defined in the professional literature as the following:

Professional school counselors are certified/licensed professionals with a master's degree or higher in school counseling or the substantial equivalent and are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students. Professional school counselors deliver a comprehensive school counseling program encouraging all students' academic, career and personal/social development and help all students in maximizing student achievement. (ASCA, 2004, p. 2)

Many have written about the developmental, comprehensive guidance and counseling model as an effective delivery system (Borders & Drury, 1992; Good, Fischer, Johnston, & Heppner, 1994; Gysbers, 2002; Gysbers & Henderson, 1994; Henderson & Gysbers, 1998; Myrick, 1997; Paisley & Borders, 1995; Stanciak, 1995; VanZandt & Hayslip, 1994; Wittmer, 2000). As

Rowley (2000) stated, "What began as an experiment is now a movement" (p. 225). Furthermore, Sink & MacDonald (1998) found that 43 states were implementing the comprehensive school counseling model in some form. Guidelines for comprehensive school counseling programs include a triadic focus (i.e., the three "Cs"), providing counseling, coordination, and consultation services to students, families, and staff.

Many factors influence the demands for PSCs. One major determinant is student enrollment. Enrollment in the public school system of the United States has steadily increased for the past 15 years and projections continue to rise (Hussar, 1995). Our schools are being affected by recent immigration trends; the increasing diversity of the population poses many opportunities as well as challenges. This population includes the needs of bilingual, biracial, bicultural children and their families (Towner-Larsen, Granaello, & Sears, 2000). Additionally, it includes children with serious mental health issues. In conjunction with a burgeoning, diverse school population to serve, America's schools find themselves facing the approaching retirement of a large number of PSCs. The generation of counselors who benefited from the NDEA training funds is quickly approaching retirement age. With the wave of retirements, the demand for PSCs is exceeding the supply of fully trained and licensed PSCs (Towner-Larsen et al., 2000).

### STEPS TO PROMOTE THE MODERN PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELOR IDENTITY

Although many schools say they support the preventative, proactive thrust of comprehensive, developmental counseling programs, these functions are not supported with time or resources (Moles, 1991; Parsons & Napierkowski, 1992). Professional identity development is a continual process involving the integration of external influences (e.g., graduate training, administrative and others' perspectives) and internal contributors (e.g., attitudinal, self-conceptualization), shaping PSCs' professional roles (Brott & Myers, 1999). The primary barrier to implementing the recommended roles and responsibilities of PSCs is often simply the inertia of the school system itself and its external influences upon the counselor. Institutional systems are notorious for resisting change (maintaining homeostasis), and schools are no exception. Napierkowski and Parsons (1995) concluded, "This resistance needs to be confronted if counselors are to break out of their limiting roles and employ the skills and knowledge they have been trained to use" (p. 365).

Professional organizations such as the ACA, ACES, and ASCA are calling for uniformity in counselor education and training and licensure standards. The central foundation for this movement is connected to the Standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2001). CACREP promotes high standards for counselor education and training. It is hoped that by achieving a level of national conformity, consistency will be increased and state reciprocity policies will be established. As a result, school counseling will be empowered as a profession or, as described by Anderson and Reiter (1996), the counselor will become "indispensable."

Although the history of professional school counseling has been rich and ever-changing, it is essential that all counselors can articulate their current role. To promote consistency and reduce role incongruence, PSCs need to advocate and take action within their schools and communities.

In the following discussion, the authors propose four steps PSCs can take to reinforce and advance their professional identity.

### [Step 1: Educate Principals](#)

Research indicates that the support of the school principal in the implementation and maintenance of a school counseling program is essential (Beale, 1995; Coil & Freeman, 1997; Ribak-Rosenthal, 1994). The relationship between principal and PSC is especially crucial in determining the program's effectiveness (Brock & Ponec, 1998). Principals who are educated concerning professional school counseling and who support the ASCA (2003) national model generally recommend that PSCs do the following:

1. Develop trust and maintain frequent communication (keep principal informed; meet individually with teachers; post newsletters regularly; post counselor's schedule; document needs assessments, services, and evaluations with written reports and make them available).
2. Establish a clear definition and understanding of the counselor's role (obtain training and credentials; distribute ASCA's role statements with appropriate and inappropriate duties; develop a school counseling handbook; develop an advisory board; obtain clinical supervision; attend professional development opportunities).
3. View the school staff as a team or partnership (support school-wide policies that promote safety, respect, and successful learning; make presentations at faculty/parent meetings; serve on multidisciplinary teams; participate in peer supervision models).
4. Get out of the office and stay visible! (Cormany & Brantley, 1996; Davis & Garrett, 1998; Ponec & Brock, 2000; Ribak-Rosenthal, 1994; Studer & Allton, 1996)

### [Step 2: Abolish Teaching Requirement for Counseling Licensure](#)

The critical attributes of effective performance of a PSC are not related to specific background experience in teaching. Rather, the counselor's personal qualities, maturity level, clinical supervision, and quality of professional preparation are related to professional competence. According to the research, teaching experience is not related to PSC effectiveness; therefore, the requirement of previous teaching experience should be eliminated (Baker, 1994; Williamson, 1998). PSCs should work to gain administrative support in an effort to change licensure requirements in those states continuing to mandate teaching experience.

Counselor education programs need to evaluate alternative methods of preparing counselors without teaching experience to become knowledgeable in the areas that are unique to working in a school environment. Administrators must provide induction and orientation support to new counselors to assist them in "learning the ropes" (e.g., the school's policies, procedures, and unspoken rules/norms) (Baker, 1994; Williamson, 1998).

### [Step 3: Provide Supervision in the Schools](#)

A lack of standard expectations for counselor supervision may be an obstacle to effective school counseling programs. PSCs are frequently supervised and evaluated by principals who have little

or no training in counseling theory and practice. Most principals do not have counseling backgrounds and have received little training in counselor education and supervision. As a result, principals frequently attempt to provide counselor supervision using existing models of teacher supervision. This, coupled with a general lack of training for principals in the proper role and use of the PSC, results in counselors not receiving much substantive feedback about their clinical skills.

PSCs are frequently the only mental health care providers that an individual will ever see. Furthermore, they encounter complicated cases in which students have acute counseling needs on a regular basis. These counselors often are initially the sole mental health professionals able to assist such students, yet they find themselves without the support of regular clinical supervision (Crutchfield et al., 1997; Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002).

PSCs need ongoing clinical supervision to help them refine counseling skills, learn how to deal with difficult student issues, practice ethically, and perform their many and varied functions. Although there is little agreement in the literature on a definition and description of supervision, the idea that supervision should be regular and constant seems to be accepted by most counselors and counselor educators. Supervision is an important part of any counselor's professional development. PSCs seem to be lagging behind other groups within the counseling profession in integrating this activity as part of their professional culture. PSCs need to take the initiative and actively pursue clinical supervision to ensure self-care and the provision of quality services (Herlihy et al., 2002; Sutton & Page, 1994).

The ASCA National Standards for School Counselors recommend that counselors receive in-service and pre-service instruction and supervision to develop and implement a comprehensive school counseling program. Comprehensive school counseling programs require a collaborative effort among well-trained, highly competent professionals. Supervision is one aspect of collaboration that can ensure that PSCs are effective agents in schools (Williamson, 1999). Clinical supervision is one of the most important continuing education and professional development tools available to PSCs.

#### [Step 4: Reassign Inappropriate Duties](#)

Ribak-Rosenthal (1994) encouraged counselors to communicate to their principals that administrative and/or clerical assignments are not cost-effective duties for a PSC. Such duties inherently detract from the counselor's ability to devote time and energy to appropriate counseling-related duties (i.e., direct service to students, parents/guardians, faculty, and staff). Partin (1993) commented, "In many schools the counselor's role has evolved into that of an assistant principal. If not on paper, at least by default, the counselor's job description has grown to encompass a vast array of noncounseling duties, from supervising restrooms to conducting school fundraising drives ... and substituting for absent teachers" (p. 280).

Several studies have shown that PSCs are managing large caseloads of students who have issues related to drugs and alcohol, depression, stress, suicidal ideation, identity conflict, and family concerns (e.g., Kendrick, Chandler, & Hatcher, 1994). Therefore, if PSCs practice their professional duties such as counseling students, consulting with parents and teachers, facilitating



prevention programs, and providing comprehensive developmental guidance, it follows that indirect counseling services such as lunchroom and hall duties, scheduling, test coordination, and substitute teaching need to be reduced or eliminated (Coil & Freeman, 1997). Consequently, if PSCs are to offer the advocated professional services they were trained to provide, they will need to reverse the "add-on" trend of taking on additional responsibilities without giving up any of their current duties.

## CONCLUSION

School counseling is a relatively new profession with an evolving identity. To reduce the current issue of role ambiguity and incongruence, PSCs need to gain an understanding and appreciation of their history as well as become proactive advocates of their specialized training and aptitudes to school administrators, parents/guardians, students, and colleagues. Change is difficult and all systems prefer to maintain homeostasis (Lambie & Rokutani, 2002). Therefore, a paradigm shift away from school counselors being perceived as "assistant administrators" (guidance counselors) to being school counseling professionals with clearly defined roles and responsibilities is necessary and requires a conscious effort by the entire profession. In addition to the four steps presented (educating principals, abolishing teaching requirement for counseling licensure, providing supervision in the schools, and reassigning inappropriate duties), another proposed movement for supporting this change is for PSCs to be consistent in their language. Language creates our world and constructs the way in which we understand and view our reality (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Therefore, PSCs need to be consistent in the language they use to define the profession. One of two possible approaches is for counselors to identify themselves as "professional school counselors" and not simply as "guidance counselors." Additionally, identifying their department as the "professional school counseling department" instead of the "guidance department" can reconfigure the language associated with the profession and thus its identity.

Furthermore, PSCs need to be advocates of their profession and not submissive bystanders. This includes being active members in school counseling professional associations, attending and presenting at professional conferences, reading the professional literature, staying up-to-date by attending workshops and taking courses, and seeking supervision. Additionally, PSCs need to be able to verbalize their professional role and educate others about what a PSC is and is not. As a profession, we can choose to be defined by our history (as guidance counselors) or we can choose to accept and appreciate our history while constructing our new and ever-evolving professional identity (as professional school counselors).

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