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Connecting School Counselors...Supporting Students

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From Your GSCA President

Brent Henderson

Hello Georgia Professional School Counselors,
It is with great pleasure that the Association presents you with the annual GSCA Journal. GSCA proudly offers the Journal as our research based publication for our organization. In it you will find many informative articles that will allow you to advocate for success in the development, planning, implementation, and evaluation of your comprehensive school counseling programs.

A special thank you to Dr. Karen Rowland, Editor, and her editorial board for their endless hours of soliciting and editing articles for this publication. They have worked incredibly hard to provide Georgia school counselors, graduate students, and counselor educators with a wonderful opportunity for professional growth and development based on counselor identified needs.

I would also like to thank the authors who were published in the Journal. Their articles are informative, and enlightening. I know you will enjoy the GSCA Journal as you continue to advocate for success!

Sincerely,
Brent Henderson
2015-2016 GSCA President

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From Your GSCA Journal Editor

Dr. Karen D. Rowland

The Georgia School Counselor Association 2015 – 2016 president, Brent Henderson theme for this year is Leadership, Learning, Legacy, a theme that certainly encompasses important roles and responsibilities of the 21st Century school counselor! Professional school counselors are school leaders and agents of change for the students they serve; the administration and teaching staff they work with; as well as, the parents, guardians, and community agents they work along-side meeting the myriad of academic, career, and social/emotional development needs of the students. As leaders working collaboratively, professional school counselors build and sustain relationships for the development, acceptance, and achievement of goals leading to success for all students. It is the hope of this journal that school counselors, particularly in the state of Georgia will find the articles helpful in understanding the essential roles and responsibilities of leadership, learning and legacy.

The articles in this edition of the journal alludes to the importance of the school counselor in taking a leadership role in order to facilitate students learning as well as begin building a legacy through designing comprehensive school counseling programs that are developmental in nature. By aligning the counseling program's mission with that of the school's mission statement, the school counseling program actively takes on and advocates for the achievement of the school's mission. In this way, the school counselor acts as a leader, in successfully delivering an effective school counseling program with a firm philosophy and measurable goals, based on the ASCA National Model.

It is my honor and pleasure to share with you the work that your colleagues are doing and to encourage you to write and share what you are doing as you continue to blaze trails in leadership, learning and legacy!

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Applying a Grief Response Framework to Death/Loss in Schools

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Abstract

School counselors play a crucial role when schools face any type of tragedy or loss, many times learning from experience because response plans are not in place. School counselors are called upon to help shape and provide the response to students, staff, and parents. The demands of managing all of the aspects of school tragedy, in addition to the tragedy itself, can be overwhelming. This article provides a framework that will guide school counselors in providing a comprehensive response to death or loss in schools.
Keywords: grief, school counseling, response, school tragedies

Background

When responding to a school tragedy, a response plan is needed ahead of time (Haviland, 2007; McGlauflin, Massatt, Moses, & Ornstein, 2007) to guide the school community in dealing with the aftermath of a traumatic event. Hart and Garza (2013) support the need to be proactive, noting that many times crisis plans are not developed until after a crisis has occurred, which may create distrust; yet, a crisis plan helps build competency and may reduce anxiety. A structured plan or guidebook is needed to help deal with grief. Training is needed for teachers because they may feel inadequate in responding appropriately to overwhelming grief.

There are published response plan formats available, such as from Kerr's (2009) comprehensive text on crisis intervention. Most school districts have some type of crisis plan in place. Yet, many of these plans deal with a whole range of issues involving administrative duties such as calling emergency personnel and arranging for physical safety. Since school counselors are charged with providing personal and social support to students and the school family, there is a need for school counselors to have a plan specifically to guide them through handling the emotional aftermath of a tragedy, whether it be a disaster that affects an entire school, such as the recent Sandy Hook tragedy, or a student or teacher death that affects one classroom or a grade level.

Grief Response Framework

Provided here is a framework (Appendix A), congruent with recommendations from the literature regarding handling school crises. The framework guides school counselors through responding to a traumatic event. The framework is divided into three main components: Administrative Support, Grief Support, and Evaluation. How school counselors can respond in each of these key areas is addressed.

Administrative Support

The first area of the response framework is Administrative Support. One of the first administrative tasks is to make sure that areas are set up for students needing counseling support. Counselors may identify suitable areas such as the media center, an empty classroom, or whatever spaces the school has available to accommodate numbers of students. Set-up includes having basics such as bottled water for drinking and tissues available for students. Attending to the basic needs of students and providing physical supports help students cope with their emotions (Kerr, 2009).

Another essential task is to identify students most at risk. This may include students who suffered a loss, or who were close to the situation or victim. This may also include students who have experienced multiple losses or losses for which they are still grieving, or students who already have mental health issues. (Kerr, 2009; Lenhardt, 2000; O'Brien, Mills, Fraser, & Andersson, 2011; Shaughnessy, 2011). Students may also have secondary losses after tragedies, such as financial issues or a parent being less available (Shaughnessy, 2011). Counselors, who are in regular contact with students through various school activities and individual and group counseling, possess valuable information regarding students' histories; thus, counselors will help identify at-risk students and staff. School counselors also have the role of activating the emotional response team- those professionals in the school and community who have proactively been solicited to assist with overwhelming grief issues.

School counselors will also assist with the administrative task of sending home a letter to parents/guardians, if warranted by the scope of the tragedy. Schools may decide if the letter actually comes from the principal or the counselor, yet either way, the counselor's knowledge, sensitivity, and experience dealing with emotional issues will be invaluable in the crafting of the letter (Kerr, 2009).

Grief Support

The second area of the framework, Grief Support, involves the critical role of school counselors in responding to a tragic event. Counselors provide support to school personnel, their primary target population- students, and to families. The goal is to create a school climate which is sensitive to the numbers of children experiencing loss(es) and to the magnitude of the loss(es) and to bring awareness to the students' need to grieve (McGlauflin, 1998). Counselors can help provide a safe environment for discussion, conduct support groups, assist with transitions, and work with teachers to minimize grief triggers. Schools are the ideal location to provide support for grieving students because of their relationships with teachers and staff and because teachers understand child development issues (Shaughnessy, 2011). Teachers and other school staff such as coaches and secretaries, touch students on a personal level, see them day to day, and students trust them (Hart & Garza, 2013; Massat, Moses, & Ornstein, 2008). In fact, students are reluctant to share feelings with strangers such as professionals outside the school

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coming in to assist (Haviland, 2007).

School counselors can assist teachers in dealing with grief issues in several ways. One way is to assist teachers in informing students of the tragedy as sometimes teachers feel inadequately prepared to deal with such issues. Some teachers may even be silent, not wanting to speak of the loss in the classroom (Hart & Garza, 2013). In the recent Sandy Hook tragedy, teachers were concerned about how to answer students' questions (District Administration, 2013). School counselors may go into classrooms and be the ones to deliver the sad news, or school counselors may help prepare a reference sheet of talking points which teachers can follow in providing accurate and sensitive information.

Another way counselors may assist teachers and other staff is by educating them regarding grief discussions with students and how students grieve. Teachers and staff may not know how to support a student who has experienced a loss (Haggard, 2005), or may not understand how students view death differently at different age levels. For example, younger elementary students may believe death is avoidable or reversible, feel abandoned, and have difficulty expressing their feelings, not having the vocabulary to adequately describe their feelings. Adolescents understand the concept of death better and will have more philosophical type questions about the meaning of life. Some teens will engage in high-risk behaviors believing death will not happen to them (Massat, Moses, & Ornstein, 2008). Teachers need to be aware that grieving students may exhibit such behaviors as lack of concentration, not completing assignments, fatigue, withdrawal or excessive emotional reactions, and aggressiveness (McGlauflin, 1998). In addition to reduced social and emotional functioning, academics and attendance may also suffer (Raider, Steele, & Kuban, 2012). There is a substantial body of literature available regarding children's and adolescents' grieving processes, yet delving into that discussion is beyond the scope of the focus of this article, which is to provide a framework for dealing with grief issues in schools.

School counselors may also assist teachers in learning to have a genuine dialogue about loss issues including the need to discuss that death is part of life; the loss experience can be used as a learning experience (Bennett & Dyehouse, 2005). Students and adults should become knowledgeable about the grieving process. Most students appreciate the opportunity to talk about their grief experiences. Teachers can allow opportunities for students to express their grief (McGlauflin, 1998).

School counselors also need to remember that teachers may be experiencing their own grief (Black, 2005; Massat, Moses, & Ornstein, 2008). School personnel need time to grieve and cope and time for rest and renewal (Massat, Moses, & Ornstein, 2008). Sharing vital information with faculty promotes a sense of unity and provides opportunities for faculty and staff to check on each other. They want to be informed about what is going on; they want to be kept up to date from school officials, not learning information as students walk in the door (Haviland, 2007).

In addition to providing grief support and education to faculty and staff, school counselors must focus on the emotional needs of all students affected by a tragedy. After affected students have been identified, counselors can provide individual and small group counseling so that students may express their feelings. Recovery or counseling rooms can be set up so that traumatized students may receive additional support; some students may seek this support on their own while others may need to be encouraged by counselors or staff to participate. Counselors may also provide classroom guidance sessions, as appropriate, to deliver information about the tragedy to help monitor the grieving process, and to allow discussion to help students process the event(s). Students need the opportunity to share their feelings and to be comforted (O'Brien, Mills, Fraser, & Andersson, 2011). As mentioned for teachers, counselors also need to consider the manner in which children grieve. Counselors should acknowledge how severe and overwhelming a loss can be, and be prepared for resistance, especially from adolescents. Counselors may use such interventions as bibliotherapy, journaling, memory books, relaxation techniques (Lenhardt, 2000), role-playing, listening to music (O'Brien, Mills, Fraser, & Anderson, 2011), art, puppets, and games (Andrews & Marotta, 2005) in providing support to grieving students. Other guidelines are to provide honest information, speak from compassion, not pity, and to show appropriate emotion (McGlauflin, 1998). Counselors also need to recognize that students may express their grief by creating impromptu memorials of items such as cards, flowers, and stuffed animals around desks, lockers, or vehicles (Fast, 2003; Richard, 2001). Additionally, counselors in realizing that mourning takes place over time (Fast, 2003), and that grief does not end with funerals (Massat, Moses, & Ornstein), need to be prepared to provide ongoing support and even to recognize tragedies on important dates, including anniversary dates of the tragic events (Bennett & Dyehouse, 2005; McGlauflin, 1998).

Another school counselor role is to provide support for victims' families. Health of family systems in dealing with tragedies may affect students' ability to deal with grief. Lack of coping can lead to parents' being less involved in schoolwork or school activities (Andrews & Marotta, 2005). Another aspect of reaching out to families is to involve them in decisions about what should be told to students and in planning for memorials. Families may not want certain details shared (Bennett & Dyehouse, 2005; Massat, Moses, and Ornstein, 2008). Opportunities should be given for families to give input regarding what type of memorial, if any, should be constructed at the school. Memorials can help students, staff, and the victim's family gain closure and move on (Bennett & Dyehouse, 2005). Schools do need to have policies in place regarding memorials so that they are appropriate and because they establish a precedent for memorials for future losses (Kerr, 2009). Some examples of appropriate memorials are planting a tree, constructing a memory book, writing letters, having an online blog, and releasing balloons (Hart & Garza, 2013).

Evaluation

The third major area of the framework is Evaluation. It is essential to meet with faculty and staff just after responding to a tragedy to obtain feedback on how all affected are doing and to determine the effectiveness of the response effort. This allows for tweaking of continued response and possible revisions to the response plan. Debriefing allows for continued support to responders. In addition to obtaining verbal feedback, surveys can be distributed shortly after the tragedy to gain further input from responders (Kerr, 2009). In fact the need for teacher training regarding response to loss and the need for structured

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plans have been learned from follow-up surveys (Hart & Garza, 2013).

Another aspect of the Evaluation phase is to use feedback information in determining which students and staff need follow-up services outside the school system. Appropriate referrals may be made to community resources for physical and emotional needs (Lenhardt, 2000). After experiencing a tragedy, a school may see the need in retrospect to follow the recommendation of some professionals to incorporate death and change education in the school curriculum; training and educational materials may also be provided to teachers and school staff. Students and adults can be taught that grief is natural and healthy, results in unique responses in individuals, is a life-long process, and that everyone is capable of healing in a safe, supportive environment. Children's losses, regardless of severity, can be grieved so that they learn that grief is a normal reaction (McGlauflin, 1998).

Reflection

When tragedies occur in schools, school counselors are at the forefront in providing an effective response. Because there are so many elements to address in responding to grief in schools, a comprehensive plan is needed to guide the response. School counselors can help ensure that all necessary steps in a response effort are carried out- from managing the grief reactions of students, families, and staff, to assisting in informing and supporting families, to helping plan memorials. The framework provided here for responding to grief could be particularly helpful to guide those new to the profession, or those who have not yet experienced a school tragedy. The framework is also useful, not only in guiding all school counselors in making sure all essential areas are covered, but also in building confidence and lessening anxieties.

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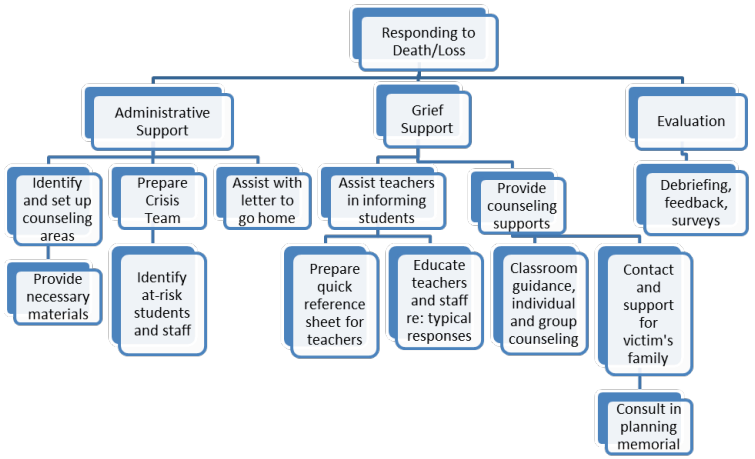
Appendix A



Framework developed with assistance from Fort Valley State University School Counselor Education students Jennifer Mathis and Dary Myrick, 2011.

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An Action Research Study on the Influence of Gangsta Rap on Academic and Behavioral Issues of 5th Grade African-American Males

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Abstract

This small action research study (ARS) began with a review of the literature examining the relationship of gangsta rap in regards to academic achievement, self-esteem, decision-making, identity issues and development of young African American males. The purpose of the ARS was to examine the correlation between gangsta rap and its influence on 5th grade students at one elementary school in suburban Atlanta. The ARS also examined the relationship between gangsta rap and inclination towards school, asking if gangsta rap is a deterrent to academic achievement. Dyson (1996) noted a strong correlation between high school dropouts, incarceration rates and gangsta rap; therefore a mentoring program was designed to address academic achievement and behavioral development for 5th grade African American males. The results led to a discussion of the appropriate use of music as an influence on students as used by the professional school counselor.

Keywords: Gangsta Rap, African American Males

An Action Research Study on the Influence of Gangsta Rap on Academic and Behavioral Issues of 5th Grade African-American Males

African-American males have faced innumerable issues since they were bought to the United States as slaves in 1555 (Chideya, 1995). Socioeconomic standing (SES), negative stereotypes, random violence, and feelings of abandonment have kept generations of African-American men out of the cultural mainstream in America (Beachum & McCray, 2004). With the emergence of Hip-Hop in some of the poorer neighborhoods of the Bronx, New York, a culture was created which started to shape the lives of countless African-American males (White & Cones, 1999). For many individuals Hip-Hop created an identity and value system that became a shared structure built on the moralistic street code of the artists who helped create it (Kitwana, 2002). Because many young African American males connect to Hip Hop and especially gangsta rap as early as elementary school age, this Action Research Study examined the influence of gangsta rap on 5th grade students at one elementary school in suburban Atlanta. Additionally, the ARS examined whether adherence to gangsta rap deters these students from achieving their fullest academically.

Literature Review

According to Rose (1994) Hip-Hop culture was categorized as the contemporary and urban-centered youth lifestyle associated with popular music. Rap music became a central cultural vehicle for open social reflection on poverty, fear of adulthood, the desire for absent fathers, frustrations about black male sexism, female sexual desires, and daily rituals of life. With the materialization of gangsta rap the Hip-Hop culture became viewed as negative, misogynistic, and violent (Kunjufu, 1993). Hip-Hop culture has the ability to affect the values of African American youth through various mediums such as radio, television, and social media.

Gangsta Rap emerged in the late 1980s with the arrival of the west coast powerhouse group N.W.A. (Niggaz Wit Attitude) and the music associated with gangsta rap became a new phenomenon. However decades of criticism and controversy have earned gangsta rap a bad reputation because of its admiration of drugs, sex, and violence. To understand its lyrical content one has to relate to or identify with the plight of the artists. This relationship created an identity crisis among many Black youth of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Beachum & McCray 2004).

Identity Issues

African American youth are often faced with identity development issues. According to Beachum and McCray (2004) they are often faced with transitions that range from school location, maturation, and identity development. The development of the gangster culture within the African American community was fast-tracked with the birth of gangsta rap. It became a contest to male ego and bravado to prove how "hard" you were. Many artists spoke about their criminal lifestyle and bolstered credibility by "keeping it real" (Kopano, 2002). Radio was the lightning rod because it played the music that was censored for individuals' listening pleasure. The most influential medium, however, came with the advent of music videos. The music video and the controversy behind its images visually linked the artist to the listener. Many African-American males develop a poor self-image from the influence of TV videos. Developing the cultural identity of today's African American man is directly associated with Hip-hop. Identity development for African American youth is more intricate in its consideration of race/ethnicity than it is for White peers, making this a time of complexity and vulnerability (Cross, 1971). Developing a culturally significant mentality for children of African descent living in the United States is indeed a daunting task. In their attempt to find themselves they often search cable channels such as BET, VH1, or MTV (Tatum, 1997). In classroom history textbooks images of faces similar to theirs are of slaves. Caucasians however see an endless stream of positive self-imagery. From the majority of leaders of the country to television, the image of dominance and ownership is blatant. For children of African descent, the development of an identity is still fairly new. It was only 44 years ago that James Brown coined the phrase "I'm Black and I'm Proud". Positive images of Whites are never in short demand, but images of highly esteemed Blacks are so rare that people marvel at their achievements (Kopano, 2002). With inequalities such as these, Hip-hop became a saving grace for millions, especially gangsta rap. The various mediums for delivery also helped shape the development of some Black youth into a negative state. This situation creates the need for direction and guidance from influential individuals and educators (Beachum & McCray, 2004).

Developmental Growth

Growth and maturity in the fifth grade signal an important transition because not only are students beginning to experience

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puberty, but identity and social attachments are vital to their personal development. At this age students are on the brink of discovering who they are and seeking approval from peers. The feeling of wanting to belong to a group and not be considered an outsider is important to children. Being part of the group gives children their first feelings of acceptance. Positive social development can help ease the stress of this confusing period. Negative social development can lead fifth grade students towards a troublesome direction (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Given the educational crisis facing our African American male youth when they fall below White students in math and reading (Education Trust, 2004), stakeholders are concerned that otherwise intelligent African American male students are rejecting formal education as a means of success. Instead many adopt identities that eschew school achievement while choosing peer groups that favor street culture over school culture (Chideya, 1995).

African American males are following negative role models; emulating the misogynistic ways of thinking and behavior that is glorified in gangsta rap. Ultimately, this mentality is a reflection of the current value system within our society. Rapidly, we are becoming a society where the exploitation of images and issues seem to attract audiences and generate capital (Kunjufu, 1993). The core audience of gangsta rap consists mostly of young and older African American males. However, this critique must always be contextualized, or we risk making it appear that the behavior associated with this thinking supports and condones rape, violence against women, and crime in general (Chideya, 1995; Kitwana, 2002; Kopano, 2002; Kunjufu, 1993). Knowing this, we have to put music in its proper place.

Gangsta rap is a form of music that often depicts the lives of artists who grew up in violent communities and their music relates their stories in an often graphic fashion (Kopano, 2002). Gangsta rap is a challenging and territorial genre wherein the artists duel with imaginary foes over instrumentals, thus the barrage of violent lyrics aimed at the listener. Decades of criticism and controversy have earned gangsta rap a bad reputation because of its apparent admiration of drugs, sex and violence (Chideya, 1995). Because of the lyrical content that has raised the concerns of civil liberties groups and caused protests and congressional hearings, it stands to reason that society must question how this can be an acceptable art form when it demoralizes society as whole.

Factors Influencing Identity and Development

There appears a need to develop culturally specific models of treatment and prevention that are geared towards the lifestyle many young African American males are choosing. These critical choices are not just present with the delinquent youth, but also are evident in our professional athletes, singers and rappers (Kitwana, 2002). It is a generation inundated with stigmas and stereotypes. Society often feels justified to degrade groups that have been characterized negatively. Consider the stereotypes presented through the world's most powerful medium, television. African Americans have had to struggle simply to join an all-Caucasian television cast. Images of the African American family were rare until the groundbreaking Cosby Show. For years African Americans have always been seen as the help, the maid, the driver, the sidekick, the common criminal, and the list goes on and this was presented as standard across the world (Dyson, 1996).. The high rate of incarceration, numerous inequalities within the educational system, and the extremely high homicide rates among African Americans (Kunjufu, 1995; Rose, 1994) are examples of this degradation. When we look at homicides, dropout rates, inferior education, and other problems associated with the lack of proper employment this negative mentality becomes apparent. Society often assesses the advancement of a group of people by their achievements. With the advent of hip-hop and the subsequent harshness of gangsta rap, society found the music and its messengers easy targets to blame for crimes in predominantly African American neighborhoods. What is misunderstood is that gangsta rap does not necessarily create a negative mentality. Poor living conditions, crime, inferior education, unemployment, hopelessness, and drugs flooding the community (Kunjufu, 1995) continue to produce a mentality similar to that of the music produced from gangsta rap.

Summary of the Literature

During the exploration for this literature review an abundance of material on gangsta rap from books, magazines, scholarly journals, and newspapers was found. There are many well-known scholars and historians (see Cornell West, Tricia Rose, Michael Eric Dyson, Kevin Powell, Kevin Lyles, and Russell Simmons) and more who have made an impact on the Hip Hop industry through their research and contributions. Dyson (1996) gives insight into the evolution, vision, influence, unfavorable origins, and inappropriate representation of African American youth of Hip Hop's controversial subgenre "gangsta rap" while addressing views of gangsta rap critics. Critics such as Rose (994), assume gangsta rappers are easily manipulated pawns in a chess game of material dominance where their consciences are sold to the highest bidder. Additionally rappers have been considered as the African American face of White desire in order to distort the beauty of African American life. White record executives were believed to discourage the production of "positive rap" and reinforce the desire for lewd expressions packaged as cultural and racial authenticity (Rose, 1994). According to Katz (1995), African American youth who spend more time watching sex and violence depicted in the "real" life of gangsta rap music videos are more likely to practice these behaviors in real life. Katz reported instances where murder defendants alleged the influence of such lyrics on their criminal behavior (e.g., Howard v Texas 1995, Branaccio v Florida 1995, Walker and Jackson v Wisconsin 1994). Interestingly, all defendants cited the inflammatory influence of the late Tupac Shakur's gangster' rap album 2pocalypse Now on their murderous impulses and actions. Expectations of such social judgments probably go beyond the singular expectation that a person who writes violent music lyrics might also be predisposed to violent behavior. Often the lifestyle of an African American character on television or in the movies helps shape the direction of African American society. Denzel Washington portrayed a real life African American gangster in the movie American Gangster. As Katz (1995) suggests gangsters portrayed on the big screen often become role models for criminal-minded individuals. Gualpo (2003) wrote that 85-95% of the young African American men incarcerated between 18-30 years old have similar role models from gangsta rap & Hip-Hop, movies, and/or sports celebrities whereas only 5-10% of African American men of similar age in

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a graduate program at a university share the same choices of role models as those incarcerated. Copying negative role models is a huge problem in the African American community though it is only 12% of the population in America; prison is almost 47% African American (Gualpo, 2003). Gangster movies and gangsta rap images often are irresistible temptations to young African American males looking for a hero. It is no wonder that in all negative statistics, such as prison populations and school dropout rates, African Americans lead the statistics. Parents and educators need to raise their expectations of what African American students can and should achieve academically. Parents need to consider that they are partners in their child's education and involve themselves in schools as volunteers and advocates (Kunjufu, 1995). Parents need to encourage their children to read more for fun and spend less time listening to gangsta rap and engaging in a dynamic activity of shared attitudes about the topics that affect rappers, singers and audiences (Rose, 1994). The emerging patterns of behavior and topics within the discourse constitute the conflicts in rap music: economics, violence, family, social alienation, polarization of societal units, and cultural and social deprivation (White & Cones, 1999).

African American boys like most other children, begin school as eager learners, indistinguishable from other students in their professed interest in school and desire to do well. Chideya (1995) noted that African American boys also begin school with levels of achievement similar to that of African American girls. Before long, though, African American males often are seen as displaying problem behaviors by teachers (Chideya, 1995) and are most likely to be labeled. If students are motivated to participate in school intervention programs, the negative influences can be shifted so it is possible to see attitudinal and academic change occur in rising 6th graders. This mentoring intervention provided participants with a personal coach to help them improve their academic performance and enhance their abilities to withstand daily challenges as preteens. The mission was to empower male children of African descent to know themselves aside from the negative stereotypes with which they so closely associate themselves with by way of television, radio, and the internet. The goal was not to blame gangsta rap, but to use its content, message, and music as a hook and make its use a teachable moment. The connection was to teach young males how to disconnect from the music and images and find themselves in the texts of history so as to improve their self-image, self-esteem, and self-worth. During the mentoring sessions students focused on their set goals and the means to achieve them. The sessions provided academic support, mentoring, peer-to-peer accountability, life skills, and career development. Ultimately, the goal was to inspire young men to strive for more than what they hear on the radio or see on the television. Those who can properly interpret gangsta rap know that its influence on the mind is null and void. However, the mental awareness of elementary school children is not at all that acute, so to help interpret the music and its meaning can greatly improve their ability to examine the content of the music they listen to, the types of programming they watch on television, and the information others present to them. In essence, the goal was to give them an analytical mind and help them objectively process matters in their personal life and the world at large.

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The purpose of this ARS was to examine the correlation found between gangsta rap and its influence on 5th grade students at one elementary school in suburban Atlanta. The ARS examined if there is a relationship between gangsta rap and school connectedness, asking if gangsta rap deters 5th grade males from academic achievement because of its imagery and connotations of real life within the gangsta rap community. Also it addressed whether gangsta rap negatively influences African-American males and if it puts African-American youth at risk, and what effect gangsta rap can have on a student's educational achievement?

Method

Action research (Ferrance, 2000) is a collaborative activity among colleagues searching for solutions to everyday, real problems experienced in schools, or looking for ways to improve instruction and increase student achievement. Ferrance (2000) also notes that practitioners are continually being held publicly accountable for student achievement results. Therefore this mentoring program was proposed to administrators, teachers, and parents by a school counselor as an alternative to help at-risk children, those who were fatherless, disaffected, or simply in need of motivation to perform better academically. The purpose of this action research study was to examine the effectiveness of the mentoring program designed with specific criteria to deter the influence of gangsta rap on 5th grade students and to improve their academic performance.

Participants

The mentoring group consisted of 10 fifth grade African American students attending a private elementary academy in suburban Atlanta ranging in age from 11-12 who were referred by their teachers and administrators. Eligible participants were selected based on their present level of low academic performance and multiple discipline referrals. Informed consent from parents was secured for participation and all of the students agreed to participate in the ARS.

Procedure

The primary researcher (PR) was a school counselor working with the academy to improve the attitudes of African American 5th grade males. The mentoring program took place over a 6 week period. The group met twice a week for 1 hour. The semi-structured curriculum addressed effective leadership, academic success, goal setting, decision-making, positive and responsible communication, and conflict resolution. Ultimately, the goal was to inspire African American adolescents to strive for more than what they hear on the radio or see on the television.

Instruments

The items on the two surveys were developed by the PR/school counselor (Boynton, & Greenhalgh, 2000) from the preceding literature review. The Pre-intervention survey included statements focusing on the possible influence of gangsta rap, thoughts about school and future aspirations and was administered during the initial mentoring session. The Post Student Survey was administered during the last session. The Pre-Intervention Survey used a Likert scale ranging from 1-5: 1 (Never), 2 (Rarely), 3 (Occasionally), 4 (Frequently) and 5 (Very Frequent) on 3 items; 7 items on the Pre-Intervention survey ranged from 1-5 as follows: 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Undecided), 4 (Agree) and 5 (Strongly Agree). Since the AR used a researcher-developed survey, no reliability

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or validity studies were performed on the measure; however, guidelines for designing questionnaires were followed (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2000). The students were given 30 minutes to complete the survey. Those who needed extra time received an additional 15 minutes.

Results

Pre-Intervention Survey

Survey results were analyzed by sorting and summing participant responses and comparing response percentages. Thirty percent of the participants (Q #1) answered that they listened to gangsta rap very frequently, 30% stated that they listened frequently, 10% indicated that they listen occasionally and 30% conveyed that they rarely listened (Table 1).

Question 2 asked if gangsta rap had a negative influence on African American Males. Twenty percent stated that they strongly agreed that gangsta rap had a negative influence on African American Males, 30% agreed that it had an influence, 20% were undecided, 0% disagreed and 30% strongly disagreed.

Question 3 asked if gangsta rap has a positive effect on African American Males and results showed 20% strongly agreed that gangsta rap has a positive effect on African American Males, 20% agreed that it has a positive effect, 10% were undecided, 40% disagreed with it having a positive effect and 10% strongly disagreed.

Question 4 asked how often the participant was reprimanded at school for his behavior. Students (30%) indicated that they were reprimanded at school very frequently for their behavior, 0% indicated that they frequently were reprimanded for their behavior, 30% mentioned that they were occasionally reprimanded for behavior, 30% expressed that they were rarely reprimanded and 10% articulated that they were never reprimanded.

Question 5 asked if the participants' grades were below average due to behavior; 10% strongly agreed, 20% were undecided, 30% of the participants disagreed and 40% of the participants strongly disagreed that their grades was below average due to their behavior. No participants (0%) agreed that their grades were below average due to their behavior.

Question 6 examined how often the participants completed class assignments. Thirty percent of the participants responded that they completed assignments very frequently, 20% indicated that they frequently completed assignments, 40% of the participants stated that they occasionally completed their assignments, and 10% of the participants rarely completed assignments. No participants responded they never completed their assignments.

Question 7 asked participants if he had received disciplinary infractions throughout the present school year. Twenty percent of the participants strongly agreed, 50% agreed, 20% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed. No participants were undecided about discipline violations.

Question 8 asked if the participants look up to gangsta rappers. Twenty percent of the participants strongly agreed that they looked up to gangsta rappers, 60% strongly agreed that they looked up to gangsta rappers, 20% disagreed with this statement. No participants were undecided or strongly agreed with the statement.

Question 9 asked the participants if they wanted to be a gangsta rapper when they grew up. Several students responded they strongly agreed (20%) and 20% agreed that they wanted to be a gangsta rapper. Other responses demonstrated they (10%) were undecided; 40% disagreed that they wanted to be a gangsta rapper and 10% strongly disagreed.

Question 10 asked the participants if they wanted to be something other than a gangsta rapper when they grew up. Twenty percent strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 40% were undecided, 10% disagreed about wanting to be something other than a gangsta rapper when they grew up. Again, no participants strongly disagreed.

Post Intervention Survey

Post Survey data suggests that the Mentoring Program was a success in many arenas (See Table 2). In response to question 1, 10% strongly agreed and 50% of the participants indicated they are maintaining positive behaviors at school; 20% disagreed and another 20% strongly disagreed. In response to question 2, 40% of the participants strongly agreed and 30% agreed the mentoring program helped them understand they are responsible for completing assignments. Twenty percent were undecided, 10% disagreed that the mentoring program helped them understand their responsibility for assignment completion and no participants strongly disagreed. On question 3, 70% (50% strongly agreed and 20% agreed) of the participants indicated they realized gangsta rap could have a negative effect on African American Males. Twenty percent did not seem to come to the realization that gangsta rap can have negative effects on African American males as they were undecided and 10% disagreed with this concept. No one responded that he strongly disagreed. In response to question 4, 50% of the participants strongly agreed they wanted to be something other than a gangsta rapper when they grew up. Ten percent agreed they wanted to be something other than a rapper, 40% disagreed; no participant indicated he was undecided and no participant decided he strongly disagreed. In response to question 5 about grades being better after the program 20% of the participants strongly agreed the mentoring program helped and 70% agreed with the statement. Ten percent disagreed that the mentoring program helped improve grades. No participants indicated they were undecided or strongly disagreed. Finally, on #6, 60% (40% strongly agreed and 20% agreed) of the participants indicated that overall the mentoring program impacted their behavior in a positive manner. Another 40% disagreed and no participant was undecided or in strong disagreement.

Discussion

The results of the ARS on the Mentoring Program with 5th grade African American males indicated an increase in the positive behavior, academic achievement as presented by their teachers and the overall improved socialization for many students (see Tables 1 and 2), yet some students did not benefit as much. Student survey results indicated that although 60% of the participants believed that the mentoring program helped them change their negative behavior, the other 40% continued to receive office referrals. Although 70% of the participants felt responsible for and motivated to complete assignments, 30% continued to complete assignments at their own discretion after participating in the program. Although 60% of the participants felt that gangsta rap had a negative effect on African American young males, 40% still felt that gangsta rap was positive. This last result appeared to be based on

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an individual's experiences as the school counselor kept field notes on behaviors and language during the mentoring group time span. Although 60% of the participants felt that they wanted to be something other than a gangsta rapper, 40% indicated a preference for being a gangsta rapper. Again during informal inquiry while in the group, the school counselor heard some students express their desire to be like rappers whose music they or their parents were listening to. During informal discussions these students (40%) mentioned that they wanted the instant gratification that is seen on television.

The overall results were impressive for a program that ran for 6 weeks only. Yet while the results indicated that the mentoring group had a substantial impact on the majority of students' accountability to complete assignments, maintain good behavior, decipher if gangsta rap was negative to African American males and to determine future aspirations (see Table 2), some students did not gain as much from the experience. After careful examination of the limitations and appropriate concessions, planning for future mentoring programs at the academy looked hopeful.

Limitations

Based on the faculty informal feedback, administrators felt encouraged about including a consistent mentoring program specific to 5th grade African American males. The informal perceptions presented by teachers of the participants assured the school counselor/PR that the students' increase in academic achievement, behavior and future aspirations was credited to the intervention. In addition, there was no outcome data collected. The success of the program was measured using pre and post self-perception data and informal feedback from teachers of the participants.

The short term of the program at only 6 weeks was noted as a possible limitation. Plans for the future will look to conduct the program over a semester.

While the school counselor led mentoring program was viewed as successful, it must be noted that other mentoring does occur at the school but on an inconsistent basis. Although the participants demonstrated gains in their responsibility toward academics and positive behaviors, other variables may have contributed to the increase. These variables include various mentoring agencies which participate on a yearly basis at varying times. Additionally there was the possibility that parents became more involved in their students' home assignments and behavioral reprimands due to the request for consent for their child's participation in the mentoring activities for academic and behavior concerns. Finally, there was an initiation of a school-wide mentoring program the same semester. For this ARS, the PR did not attempt to control for confounding variables, however, these variables are important and will be examined in future studies on the impact of the mentoring program.

Another limitation occurred from the data collection, which for a single-group assessment can indicate a possible threat to internal validity. The school counselor led mentoring was a compensatory program and thus only included participants who were at risk for low academic performance and multiple discipline infractions (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007) as determined by a simple screening process of teacher and administrator referral. Thus there was no comparison group and this lack can misrepresent the analysis of results (Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 2010).

Future Interventions and Research

Involving more African American adult males in mentoring interventions for African American young students could demonstrate additional success. Research indicates that men despite their race had a greater mentoring influence on young males (Educational Crisis, 2010).

Better scheduling with school administrators to present the mentoring program when other mentoring agencies are not in the school would allow more certainty about the success of the program due to its curriculum. Help from school staff to confirm all approvals preceding the start of the mentoring sessions would ensure students had no difficulty attending each session due to prior commitments. Scheduling a designated classroom for the mentoring program sessions would lessen the confusion students had in finding the room each week.

Because of the positive effect and the desire for the program to continue, administrators have considered these adjustments. Administrators agreed to have a designated classroom assigned for the group meetings so that participants would no longer be moved on a regular basis. Finally it was agreed that the schedule for group sessions would be distributed early enough for parents to plan accordingly.

Implications for Counseling

More men and community members, African American and Caucasian, from urban and suburban settings must take on the role of mentors that is needed to help African American youth. Educators and parents need to be more aware of the potential negative impact of gangsta rap and other popular media on our children's ability to manage their time and engage in their studies. Students must be taught to reject the negative images of gangsta rap music they hear in popular culture and demand of themselves and their schools an elevated educational commitment. Once children can accurately put entertainment into its proper box and place themselves outside that box, growth and development of more socially aware individuals will occur. This means a support system must be in play to help properly guide children to a more opportunistic future. School counselors can lead this support group and advocate for all the needs of students not only those academic needs.

Music tends to greatly influence young people so school counselors who are aware of this influence may help change the influence of gangsta rap on African American youth. Hallam (n.d.) presents suggestions on the influence of music on the personal and social development of individuals as well as the potential to increase enthusiasm for learning. School counselors, who understand this impact, may divert negativity in children who are influenced by such music as gangsta rap by advocating for the appropriate of music in their comprehensive programs. Hallam (n.d.) suggests music can help increase confidence, self-esteem, self-discipline and the means to express one's self. Other benefits of participation in appropriate music exercises can instill a sense of accomplishment, responsibility, commitment and bonding with others through friendship and similar goals.

School counselors who are working with students as they develop their own identity may find music is an appropriate source of support when an individual is distressed

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and/or distant. Music within the curriculum of the school counseling program can increase a sense of social unity (Hallam, n.d.). Understanding the cultural importance placed on music by many and incorporating appropriate expressions of such into school counseling may lead to more effective engagement in academics and empowerment for personal responsibility.

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Table 1. Gangsta Rap Pre-Intervention Survey

The following table presents descriptive statistics based on 10 participants.

Item	Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1.How often do you listen to gangsta rap?	30%	30%	10%	30%	0%
4. How often are you reprimanded for your school for your behavior?	30%	0%	30%	30%	10%
6. How often do you complete classwork?	30%	20%	40%	10%	0%
	Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Undecided**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
2. Gangsta Rap has a negative effect on African American males.	20%	30%	20%	0%	30%
3. Gangsta Rap has a positive effect on African American males.	20%	0%	20%	30%	40%
5. My grades are below average due to my behaviors.	10%	0%	20%	30%	40%
7. I have had a disciplinary infraction this school year.	20%	50%	0%	20%	10%
8. I look up to Gangsta	20%	60%	0%	20%	0%
9. When I grow up I want to be a Gangsta Rapper.	20%	20%	10%	40%	10%
10. When I grow up I want to be something other than a Gangsta Rapper	20%	30%	40%	10%	0

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Table 2. Gangsta Rap Post-Intervention Survey

The following table presents descriptive statistics based on 10 participants

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I am maintaining good behavior at school.	10%	50%	0%	20%	20%
2. I understand my responsibility for completing assignments.	40%	30%	20%	10%	0%
3. I understand the possible negative effects of gangsta rap.	50%	20%	20%	10%	0%
4. When I grow up I want to be something other than a gangsta rapper.	50%	10%	0%	40%	0%
5. My grades are better due to my good behavior.	20%	70%	0%	10%	0%
6.Being in the group has helped change my negative behavior.	40%	20%	0%	40%	0%

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Gangsta Rap Pre-Intervention Survey

Please circle the number that best suits you and your perception of Gangsta Rap.

1. How often do you listen to Gangsta Rap?

Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
5	4	3	2	1

2. Gangsta Rap has a negative effect on African American Males.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

3. Gangsta Rap has a positive effect on African American Males.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

4. How often are you reprimanded at school for your behavior?

Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
5	4	3	2	1

5. My grades are below average due to my behavior.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

6. How often do you complete classwork?

Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
5	4	3	2	1

7. I have had a disciplinary infraction this school year.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

8. I look up to Gangsta Rappers.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

9. When I grow up I want to be a Gangsta Rapper.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

10. When I grow up I want to be something other than a Gangsta Rapper.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

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Gangsta Rap Post Intervention Survey

Please circle the number that best suits you and your perception of Gangsta Rap.

1. I am maintaining good behavior at school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

2. I understand my responsibility for completing assignments?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

3. I understand the possible negative effects of gangsta rap.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

4. When I grow up I want to be something other than a Gangsta Rapper.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

5. My grades are better due to my good behavior.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

6. Being in the group has helped change my negative behavior.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

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Implementation and Effectiveness of the Response to Intervention (RTI) Program

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Please consider the following submission to the Georgia School Counselors Association Journal. This research on RTI is both relevant and informative for present Georgia educators and counselors as they implement RTI. This is an original work and is not under review consideration or previously published elsewhere.

Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to determine whether or not student test scores on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) were positively impacted by the implementation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) program. This paper will review the implementation and effectiveness of the RTI method.

Introduction

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an approach of service delivery implemented in schools nationwide. The implementation can be theorized as an outline for enhancing instruction and improving student outcomes. RTI is often discussed as a tiered prevention model in which students receive progressively intense interventions based on need. RTI is driven by individual student need as determined by continuing progress on efficient and easily administered progress monitoring measures. These measures provide an estimate of students' response to effective instruction. For students who respond less than satisfactory, increasingly intense instruction is available within the tiered model.

All students receive a fundamental level of prevention through the teaching of a research-based common core curriculum in the general education classroom. The basic level of prevention is commonly referred to as Tier I. If Tier I is effective, the majority of students will be able to sustain appropriate academic progress in areas such as reading and mathematics and meet academic benchmarks with little or no additional support.

However, it is likely that a proportion of students will require a more intense level of instruction, or a secondary intervention, often identified as Tier II. In Tier II, students who require additional support receive instruction in addition to that offered in Tier I. It is important to note that Tier II enhances Tier I; it does not replace Tier I instruction. A smaller percentage of students may require an even more intense level of intervention. This level of prevention, or Tier III, provides even more intensive support for these students. Instruction is strengthened in terms of content, group size, and duration. Students in Tier III are not able to make adequate progress in Tier I and Tier II without additional support.

Since 1976, the number of students carrying the Learning Disability (LD) label has increased by an alarming rate of almost 300% (Horowitz, 2014). This prompted the U.S. Department of Education to consider a change to the classification of LD in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This led to the RTI model. While RTI was primarily used as a prevention program, new federal education law has adopted RTI to determine eligibility of a student for special education services.

Location, History and Demographics

The research site is located in the rolling hills of Northwest Georgia in Bartow County. The community was established in 1850 and offers a great deal of history, culture, and recreation today. Primary industries include textile production, manufacturing of a variety of products, and local businesses. The community is situated near Lake Allatoona, and offers many outdoor and recreational opportunities. Culturally, the community features a vibrant downtown district and several diverse and widely recognized museums.

The research was conducted in the sole elementary school in the community's city school system. Historically, the school system has been strongly supported by the community. The target school serves approximately 1,010 students in grades 3 through 5. The population is evenly distributed between males and females. According to school system data, the ethnicity of the site school is 51.3% Caucasian, 22.7% African-American, 17.1% Hispanic, and 6.2% Multiracial, and Asian/Pacific Islander students 2.2% with a relatively small 0.5% percent identifying as other ethnicities. Approximately 62.6% of the students in the school are economically disadvantaged, as evidenced by the percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced meals.

According to 2010 census data, the median income for a household in the community was $41,162, and the median income for a family was $48,219. Males had a median income of $35,092 versus $25,761 for females. The per capita income for the city was $19,977. Approximately 8.9% of families and 11.4% of the population were below the poverty line, including 13.7% of those under age 18 and 15.4% of those ages sixty-five or over. The population of the target school closely mirrors that of the community in which it is located.

The School Improvement Plan for the target school states that 100% of students in every subgroup will meet or exceed the standards on the reading and mathematics portion of the state mandated assessment, which is the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). A review of data from the spring 2012 administration of the CRCT revealed that scores in the area of mathematics were the lowest of all subject areas at the target school. The current data from the 2013 CRCT reveals that students identified in Tier II or Tier III of the RTI program were still weak in the areas of reading and math compared to students not identified by the RTI program.

The purpose of this research study was to determine whether or not student attitudes about reading and mathematics were positively impacted by the interventions used in the RTI program. Data from

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this research study will be used for staff development and pedagogical purposes, with the hope that attitudes and standardized test scores may be improved for all students in the target school.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers at the site school expressed concern that the students were not demonstrating high mastery on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Test (CRCT) despite receiving appropriate Tier I instruction. Also concern was expressed that students were not displaying positive attitudes towards learning and school in general. Students lacked strategies and critical thinking skills that would allow them to solve problems efficiently and correctly. The purpose of this research study was to evaluate the effects of the implementation of the RTI program, in hopes that reading and mathematics skills and student perceptions of academics would improve. CRCT scores for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 are listed below showing the number of students who met, exceeded or did not meet the standards for the state test. These students received adequate Tier I instruction. As can be seen, there are a number of students who did not meet the standards for the high-stakes testing.

	Meets	Exceeds	Does Not Meet
2012 - 2013 school year	55.45%	32.65%	11.9%
2013 – 2014 school year	54.34%	40.16%	5.5%

Measurement Devices

The impact of the intervention will be measured by:

- Gathering CRCT data from previous school year and comparing to prior school years when students were not receiving RTI Tier 2 interventions.
- Conducting attitude assessment prior to implementation of intervention and at the end of the intervention, analyzing information for any improvements or declines.

Review of Literature

In December 2004, President Bush signed the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) into law. The reauthorization of the IDEA had one major difference from earlier versions in that it allowed practitioners to use Response to Intervention (RTI) as a method to identify students with learning disabilities rather than the IQ-achievement discrepancy method (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The IQ-achievement discrepancy method usually does not begin until third grade. RTI can be implemented in grades as early as kindergarten.

The current focus on standards-based instruction in public education requires students to develop increasingly complex skills and strategies in all subject areas. Common Core State Standards and high-stakes standardized testing also increase the demand that students be able to think deeply and critically in order to prove mastery and progress in all academic areas. However, students do not all learn the same way, at the same pace, nor do they perform the same on high-stakes standardized testing. Some children show signs that they may not be learning in an expected manner at a very young age. These children may exhibit troubles in areas such as phonological awareness, perceptual-motor abilities, language development, and attention. All of these problems have been considered precursors of learning disabilities in older children (Coleman, Buysse & Neitzel, 2006).

The RTI model for school-aged children, at risk for learning disabilities, emphasizes pre-referral prevention and intervention. RTI can be differentiated from conventional methods of identifying students with learning difficulties in that it allows early and intensive interventions based on learning characteristics (Coleman et al., 2006). RTI does not wait for children to fail before providing necessary services and support.

In order to set a context for this research study, which focuses specifically on the RTI interventions, the review of literature examines current data to answer the following questions: What components are involved in the successful and effective implementation of the Response to Intervention model? What determines eligibility of students to receive RTI interventions and special education services? The review of literature will also examine the approaches to and components of RTI. Each component has strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of this review of literature is to explore these questions and to determine how RTI interventions can be implemented effectively and used by all staff members to help students develop necessary skills needed to adequately show mastery of standards on high-stakes testing.

To adequately study the strategies of the RTI model and its effectiveness, the researcher first examined the research on the successful implementation of the Response to Intervention model and the approaches and components of RTI. The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities defines RTI as "an assessment and intervention process for systematically monitoring student progress and making decisions about the need for instructional modifications or increasingly intensified services using progress monitoring data" (Horowitz, 2014, p. 2). RTI is intended to reduce the occurrence of instructional failures by ensuring students are being provided high quality instruction. School districts can use RTI and provide interventions to students as soon as a need arises. This is very different from pervious methods which looked for an aptitude achievement discrepancy or the "wait to fail" approach. The key element of RTI is to provide early intervention when students first experience academic difficulties. With the goal of RTI being focused on improving achievement for all students not just those that may have a learning disability. The assumption behind this model is that when provided with quality instruction and remedial services, a student without disabilities will make satisfactory progress (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

The concept of RTI is on the focus of the teaching and learning process. RTI is based on controlled scientific research. While some of the research is minimal, there is research to show that when RTI interventions are performed in the earliest years of school the student shows

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more promise (Gersten & Dimino, 2006). Research also suggests when a student is able to connect what they are learning to a real world context, children are able to demonstrate mastery and understanding (Gertsen & Dimino, 2006). According to the Cotunga, Vickery and Carpenter-Haefele (2009), ninety five percent of children who have trouble learning to read can reach grade level if they receive specialized help early on. Kindergarten and first grade are deemed to be the "window of opportunity" to prevent long-term academic problems. Without early intervention, the gap between struggling students and their peers continues to widen over time (Cotunga et al., 2009). "The odds of becoming an average reader in the later elementary grades, if you are a poor reader in the early primary grades, is no better than fifty-fifty without intervention and, in fact, may be significantly worse" (Simmons, et al., 2008, p. 159).

Early detection and intervention without the requirements of a referral to special education are strengths of the RTI model. The RTI design is created to prevent the "wait and fail" method that exists in the IQ-achievement discrepancy model. RTI uses early intervention as a means to prevent failure and declares that if a student becomes more proficient in a subject area they will remain proficient. The irony of early detection is that the earlier we test students, the less accurate the results (Gersten & Dimino, 2006).

RTI is comprised of seven core principles representing recommended RTI practices. There has been debate about the principles of RTI and the features of RTI. While the principles of RTI never change, the features of the model may differ in each school system. National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET) identifies and clearly defines the seven principles of RTI as "(1) use all available resources to teach all students, (2) use scientific, research-based interventions/instruction, (3) monitor classroom performance, (4) conduct universal screening/benchmarking, (5) use a multi-tier model of service delivery, (6) make data-based decisions, and (7) monitor progress frequently ("Accommodations and Modifications", n.d.)

Implementation of RTI requires the development of valid and reliable assessment methods for students of all age levels (Gersten & Dimino, 2006). It is imperative that in addition to valid and reliable assessments, professional development is needed, as well as training in curriculum-based measurements for all staff members involved in the RTI process. Which staff members are involved in the RTI process? Staff members involved in RTI include regular education classroom teachers, special education teachers, Title One/Early Intervention Program (EIP) teachers, school counselors, and other remedial specialists (Huber & Kozleski, 2010). To effectively implement RTI and continue the dependability of the RTI process it is crucial to have professional development and on-site support. Training needs to include the use of evidence-based practices, effective professional development and effective implementation strategies (Huber & Kozleski, 2010).

While valid and reliable assessments for students may be developed and RTI appears to be affectively implemented, some systems are not reaping the benefits of RTI because they have failed to develop the correct thinking about Response to Intervention. Failure to develop the correct thinking about RTI has led some systems to implement right practices for the wrong reasons. Far too many schools and districts are asking the wrong questions, like:

- How do we raise tests scores?
- How do we "implement" RTI?
- How do we stay legal?
- What's wrong with this kid?

These questions are guiding and shaping the schools and districts. High-stakes testing is a definite reality in public education. It is a critically flawed initial question that can lead to incorrect thinking about RTI. Many districts that first focus on raising test scores find that this way of thinking is beneficial if the goal is only to teach the standards but the goal in all systems should be to have the students learn the standards (Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2010).

Many systems unfortunately view RTI as a mandated program that must be implemented. This view causes teachers to view RTI as single actions that need to be accomplished instead of an ongoing process devoted to improving teaching and learning. Because RTI was part of the reauthorization of the IDEA in 2004, many schools only view RTI implementation from a legal compliance perspective. This concern is understandable; however, many schools and districts are making RTI unreasonably burdensome (Buffum et al., 2010). This can cause teachers to decide against recommending students for interventions because they feel the process is not worth the paperwork. Lastly, at most schools when a student struggles in the regular classroom the school's first response is to refer the child for special education testing. RTI is built on the approach that when a student is struggling, we turn our attention to finding better ways to meet the student's specific learning needs. Until schools can move away from these flawed questions, it is unlikely they will ever see RTI as anything more than a new way to identify students for special education (Buffum et al., 2010).

A flaw in the RTI models is found in the use of a universal screening tool. In typical RTI models, all students are screened in one or more academic areas. Students identified as "at risk" for learning difficulties through the use of a universal screener are provided specific interventions to target the at risk area. It is recommended to identify the pool of potential students early and often at each grade level. The goal of early identification is to increase the likelihood of at-risk students developing adequate academic competence. However, the problem with identifying using universal screeners is that you receive false positives and false negatives (Buffum et al., 2010). "False positives occur when students are deemed at risk when, in fact, they are not. False negatives are cases in which students who are not deemed at risk go on to perform poorly on a future criterion measure (Buffum et al., 2010, p. 16). "For a prevention system to work effectively, procedures for determining risk must yield a high percentage of true positives while identifying a manageable risk pool by limiting false positives" (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 95).

While both three and four tier models of RTI have been implemented and described, it was observed that there is a widespread agreement that the first tier reflects general education and the final tier reflects special education (Coleman et al., 2006). Questions do still remain regarding

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whether one or two tiers come between these points. It has been suggested that a possible solution is to view Tiers 1 and 2 as classroom prevention steps and Tier 3 as a combination of prevention and eligibility determination.

Tier 1 is designed to help teachers be preventive and proactive. Tier 1 should provide every student with high quality instruction and determine which students may need additional instructional interventions to make adequate progress (Coleman et al., 2006). Every student should be screened to determine whether regular classroom instruction will be sufficient or if the child may need additional support and interventions.

Tier 2 group interventions are used to address the needs of students who do not make adequate progress in Tier 1 (Coleman et al., 2006). Tier 2 should include differentiated instructional methods. These differentiated instructional methods may include small group instruction and curriculum modifications. It is anticipated that approximately fifteen percent of children will make adequate progress as a result of additional instructional support in Tier 2 (Coleman et al., 2006).

Tier 3 is designed to be more intensified, individualized instruction for students failing to make progress in Tier 2. It is assumed that a small proportion of students, possibly five percent, will continue making insufficient progress even with the use of Tier 3 interventions (Coleman et al., 2006). This small percentage of students may have a specific learning disability and should be referred for a more formal evaluation by a school psychologist (Coleman et al., 2006).

Progress monitoring is a large part of the RTI process. Progress monitoring is used to assess a student's progress or performance in those areas in which they were identified by universal screening as being at-risk for failure. Progress monitoring is the method used by teachers, or other school personnel, to determine if the student is making adequate growth from the interventions and additional instructional support. This allows teachers to identify students who are not making adequate progress, and help guide the construction of effective intervention programs for students who are not benefitting from typical instruction (Hoover & Love, 2011). Effective progress monitoring is achieved with consistent testing schedules. It is recommended that each student in Tier 2 or 3 receive progress monitoring on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. The use of monitoring allows the teachers to track the students and if the interventions are not increasing their rate of progress, a specialized intervention might be appropriate (Hoover & Love, 2011).

RTI has many positive aspects to consider. RTI is proactive. It begins to assess students that might be at risk as early as kindergarten. By doing so, RTI's goal is to put an end to school failure (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008). Assessment is completed using tools to establish a baseline with students. Once the baseline is established, this data can be used to determine whether or not a student is progressing within the confines of the general education curriculum (Duffy & Scala, 2012). Progress monitoring can then be used to determine the need for interventions for the students deemed at risk. Progress monitoring can also provide documentation to support these interventions (Huber & Kozleski, 2010).

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The promise of identifying a deficit before the deficit grows is a definite strength of the RTI method. RTI also allows more collaborative decisions to be made and the data to be used to make curriculum, teaching and instructional decisions regarding each student (Keller-Margulis, 2012).

If implemented correctly, RTI will reduce the number of students referred for special education testing. RTI improves poor teaching methods through the use of evidence-based approaches, utilizes research-based interventions and effective progress monitoring to ensure every attempt is made to help make each student successful in the general education classroom (Crawford, Schatschneider, & Wager, 2008). The initial RTI interventions can occur in the general education classroom and provide students the extra support needed without being pulled into another classroom away from their peers. The RTI process has delivered increased quality and quantity of instruction supplied by every classroom teacher (Crawford et al., 2008).

In contrast to the above statements, potential problems exist with RTI. Potential problems include problematic reading instruction and poorly planned interventions (Coleman et al., 2006). A student could not make adequate growth due to the teacher lacking necessary training and skills to consistently implement the RTI model. The teacher may also be using a "one size fits all" approach instead of individualizing the intervention to the student's area of need (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008). "Unfortunately, the skill of contingent instruction never attains mastery (McEneaney, Lose & Schwartz, 2006, p. 120). Dependent instruction changes with each intervention and needs to be tweaked with each student (McEneaney et al., 2006). More professional development and teacher education is needed. Professional development and teacher education will need to continue before teachers feel confident and are appropriately and effectively executing the RTI model (Keller-Margulis, 2012).

Lastly one major hurdle of RTI is for schools to gain the support and backing from academic coaches, reading and math specialists, administration, and Director of Student Services. School budgets are stretched. Sometimes it seems nearly impossible to find money to hire the needed staff. To be accepted and successful, the RTI model must "mesh with the lives of teachers in classrooms and the realities of the core programs they are using" (Deshler, Mellard, & Prewett, 2012, p. 31). When lack of support exists, the implementation of the RTI process becomes very challenging (Deshler et al., 2012). Teachers need support to be available and convenient and also need support on-site. This support will give teachers the ability to review information concerning progress and help create, model, observe, and give feedback regarding research-based interventions (Deshler et al., 2012).

Ultimately, RTI is designed to reduce the number of students referred for special education services and, at least, lessen the number of students wrongfully placed in special education programs. The cost to implement an effective RTI program in any school district may initially appear to be out of reach for struggling districts. However, when compared to the cost of a student placed in a special education program for their entire school career,

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the cost is minimal (Deshler et al., 2012). Grants are available that may help with the initial startup costs for the implementation of RTI programs. Grant monies can be provided to help with staff training, curriculum purchases, new intervention programs, and ways to help the school make the transition simple and attainable (Deshler et al., 2012). The cost of teaching students with learning disabilities is two to three times higher than the cost of teaching regular education students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Therefore, finding new alternatives to special education services seems a crucial need for public schools.

CHAPTER THREE

In performing research to evaluate the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention Program (RTI) at the host school, the committee felt that it was important to look closely at the results for students when they were not in the RTI program and then compare to the results on the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) after students spent a full year receiving interventions and additional support. The committee also wanted to see if the students felt more confident in their academic abilities after being in the RTI program. Students completed a questionnaire prior to beginning the RTI program to provide a baseline for their confidence level. The same questionnaire was given after students completed six months in the RTI program. The findings of the survey will be used by the committee to update and make necessary adjustments to the RTI program at the host school.

Each session is designed to provide appropriate interventions to the participating students. On a monthly basis, the committee will come together to assess the program's progress and plan for future meetings.

In the end, the success of the RTI program at the host school will be measured by the results on the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test . If an increase is shown in the student's scores then the goal of the program will have been achieved.

Statement of Hypothesis

This researcher collected data to test the following hypothesis:

1. Students who are participating in the Response to Intervention Program will perform significantly better on the standardized Criterion Referenced Competency Test than previous years when they were not receiving interventions and support through an RTI program.

Research Questions

Data was collected to answer two research questions:

1. How are students' state standardized test scores affected by the Response to Intervention program?
2. How are students' perceptions of their academic abilities/skills affected by their participation in the Response to Intervention program?

Participants

Participants in the study included approximately thirty-two students currently in fifth grade. The sample was composed of a mixture of male and female students of varying academic abilities and ethnicities. The sample was divided to include similar academic and demographic composition. Participants were selected by a convenience sampling of fifth grade students at the site school. The researcher worked daily with the students used as samples for the study.

Instruments

Before conducting this research, the researcher received permission from Jacksonville State University to conduct human participation research. In addition, the researcher received approval from the host school system.

Several instruments were used to collect and evaluate the data in this study. The researcher compared the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) scores from students not in the Response to Intervention Program in third grade and then identified to be in the RTI program in fourth grade. The researcher utilized the CRCT results for participating students as a valid and reliable means of assessing academic abilities. The researcher also created a survey to assess students' perceptions of their academic abilities. The survey was used as a pre-assessment and post-assessment.

Assumptions and Limitations

In conducting this study, it was assumed that each student in the study attended school regularly and was thus present for the intervention sessions. A second assumption was that all students were identified as needing additional support and not performing on appropriate grade level before and during the course of the study. A third assumption was that all students were in good physical health and came to school prepared to learn during the course of this study. A fourth assumption was that all students were familiar with survey formats and were able to complete the survey used in this study satisfactorily.

Several possible limitations existed in this research study. One limitation of this study was the amount of time each interventionist used teaching to the deficiencies of each individual student before the CRCT was administered. A second factor limiting the study was the small sample size (approximately thirty-two students) and the fact that only fifth grade students were included in the study. A final limitation in this study was the fact that researchers were not able to measure or account for the amount of time outside of class that student's in the study spent on academic extension activities. Additional outside academic practice might have altered the results of this study.

CHAPTER 4
Data Analysis

The researcher used teacher-designed student pre- and post-surveys, and scores from the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test to gather data needed. The participants for this study were thirty-two heterogeneously grouped fifth grade students. A convenience sampling of students was utilized.

Academic averages from the Georgia CRCT were analyzed in order to answer the first research question. The data revealed that the year the students participated in the RTI program scored 20.84 points higher in mathematics, and 14.72 points higher in reading. 100% of the students met standards in reading with 37.5% exceeding the standards. 87.5% of the students met the standards in mathematics with 12.5% exceeding the standards and 12.5% of students not meeting standards in mathematics. Of the 12.5% of students not meeting the standards on the CRCT in mathematics all students improved their score by an average of 11.25 points. The

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second research question was, "how are students' perceptions of their academic abilities/skills affected by their participation in the Response to Intervention program?" A student survey was given prior to and after being in the RTI program for approximately one year. The survey was used to gauge students' attitudes towards their own academic abilities.

Results

The results of this research study confirmed core beliefs about Response to Intervention held by the researcher. Analysis of data from the two sources utilized in the study: student-generated pre- and post-surveys of students' attitudes towards their own academic abilities and reading and mathematics scores from the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test revealed that students performed better on state mandated tests after receiving explicit instruction designed by the Response to Intervention program. Likewise, students' perceptions of themselves and their academic abilities increased as a result of their improved problem solving abilities.

CHAPTER 5
Future Implications

In future studies of the Response to Intervention Program, it would be interesting to compare the effectiveness of the interventions not only on state mandated tests but also on academic performance in the classroom. While this research study focused mainly on the results from the Georgia Criterion Referenced Test the research and preparation of the review of literature exposed the researcher to an enormous variety of different evaluations of RTI for schools.

A second suggestion for future research would be to replicate this research study in several different grade levels. The present study was completed on a small scale, using only thirty-two students currently in fifth grade. A larger sampling of students, particularly including a variety of ages, would create a broader base of information about the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention program.

Based on the results of this research study, and on the collective experience of the researcher in their years in education, the researcher predicts students who are participating in the Response to Intervention Program as outlined in this review of literature, will produce positive results in both state standardized testing and student perceptions of their academic abilities.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to measure the success of the Response to Intervention program at the host school. The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative data for this study, gathering quantitative data through scores on the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test. Qualitative data was collected using a teacher-created survey of student perceptions of their academic ability. The researcher used an experimental design with convenience sampling for this study, and participants were a heterogeneously mixture of fifth grade students.

Academic success is reportedly affected by socioeconomic status, parental involvement, motivation, academic discipline and self-efficacy. While many of these factors are out of the control of school personnel the objective of this study was to see if interventions currently being used were making a positive impact on student test scores as well as a student's perception of their academic ability. The results of this study produced a slight-advantage in post-intervention surveys, standardized scores and student self-perceptions. While the advantage was not statistically significant, the researcher felt that results of this study supported the effectiveness of a Response to Intervention program. It is clear that to arrive to a more definite conclusion about the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention program at host school; a more extensive study is needed. The skills developed through specific interventions are widely useful and transfer to other academic and everyday pursuits. Because of this, the researcher recommends that the current design of the Response to Intervention program continue at all grade levels. To best achieve this goal, teachers and interventionists should be provided additional training in Response to Intervention strategies and instruction in order to effectively prepare their students for academic and future life work.

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School Counselors and Multiracial Students: Factors, Supports, and Interventions

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Abstract

Multiracial students represent a growing population in school systems today. This diverse group of students and their families may encounter many challenges and race-specific issues in the school setting. School counselors are in a unique position to assist these students and their families become successful in meeting these challenges. The following identifies some of their potential challenges and issues, identifies the role of the school counselor, and provides information on interventions and supports.

School Counselors and Multiracial Students: Factors, Supports, and Interventions

While studies may differ on various aspects of the multiracial population, one point on which all researchers agree is that the multiracial population will continue to increase in the future and that the needs of this growing population must be identified and met (Choi, Harachi, Gillmore, & Catalano, 2006; Harris, 2002; Harris, 2003; Hays & Erford, 2014; Hud-Aleem & Countryman, 2008; Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012; Pedrotti, Edwards, & Lopez, 2008). In the school setting, school counselors are the professional educators able to help in the identification and meeting of these needs. Through the careful exploration of multiracial factors, school counselors can assist multiracial individuals and their families experience success in the school setting. This process includes working not only with multiracial students and families, but with school faculty, staff, and other members of the community. This paper will address the factors associated with multiracial identity, the role of the school counselor, and interventions and supports designed to address the challenges presented.

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Factors Associated with Multiracial Students

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Education added the requirement that state demographic reports include by the 2010-2011 academic year the category two or more races (Institute of Education Sciences, 2007). For the purposes of this paper, the term multiracial is defined as representing two or more races. In its 2012-2013 report on race and ethnicity, the state of Georgia included data on the number of multiracial students statewide and reported an increase from 2003-2004 to 2012-2013 with approximately 3 percent or 48,000 Georgia students indicating multiracial as their race/ethnicity in 2012-2013 (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2013). According to a map representing the data, the counties along coastal Georgia report the highest percentages of multiracial students in the state (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2013).

A number of stereotypes exist regarding multiracial individuals (Harris, 2002). Some of them include the identification of multiracial individuals as being socially challenged and accepted only in the community of the minority parent. Stereotypes negatively impact multiracial students and include complicating the process of racial identity. Racial identity is a concept identified as a critical aspect of individual identity development (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). This process becomes an even more complicated process as children enter the adolescent years. Research has shown that the establishment of a strong racial identity may function as a protective buffer from some problem behaviors experienced by multiracial youth, such as substance use and violence (Choi et al., 2006). Several racial identity development models address the process of racial identity of multiracial individuals (Harris, 2003; Hays & Erford, 2014). School counselors should be familiar with the various models and know how they can aid the counselor in helping the student through the process of racial identity.

As with all children, multiracial children desire to be accepted by peers and others they come in contact with (Harris, 2002). Research by Holcomb-McCoy (2005) linked higher ratings of self-confidence and self-esteem with multiracial adolescents who experienced a strong feeling of belonging to their ethnic group. In adolescence, children become more aware of the attitudes and beliefs regarding race and ethnicity. This awareness may result in multiracial children becoming more sensitive of how their peers view their racial identity. A study by Maxwell and Henriksen (2012) found that 60% of the school counselors that were surveyed indicated that multiracial adolescents had indicated the desire to be accepted by their peers, parents, educators, and self.

Research regarding whether multiracial students are at greater risk of problem behaviors has had mixed results (Harris, 2002). Simply because a child has been categorized as multiracial does not mean that he or she will experience emotional or behavioral problems (Hud-Aleem & Countryman, 2008). Multiracial children will have different issues to address than monoracial children, but just as with any racial identity situation, if multiracial children receive nurturing and support in their home environment, there is no reason to expect problems related specifically to racial identity development. While some studies contend multiracial children are not at increased risk of behavioral problems, other studies have found there is increased risk concerns. Some of the behaviors multiracial children have exhibited at school include low academic achievement, poor social skills, problem staying focused and on-task, aggression towards other students, and negative attitude towards adults (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001; Nishimura, 1995). Some studies have also identified multiracial students as being more likely to experience depression, substance abuse, and suicidal tendencies (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). A study by Choi et al. (2006) found that adolescents identified as multiracial were at greater risk of exhibiting problem behaviors (identified as substance use and violent behaviors) than adolescents identified as monoracial. In addition, the study identified multiracial adolescents as being more aware of issues related to race, ethnicity, and discrimination.

Role of the School Counselor

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has developed a framework for school counseling programs that specifically addresses the area of multicultural competence (Bowers & Hatch, 2005). Included in the framework is the mandate for school counselors to work in collaboration with a wide array of stakeholders to meet the personal/social developmental, career, and academic needs of all students. Cooperative relationships must be established with teachers, administrators, parents and guardians, students, and the community to successfully serve all our students. Furthermore, specific competencies in the personal/social standards require students to "acquire the knowledge, attitudes and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others" (p. 106). The competency provides indicators for the acquisition of self-knowledge and skills that will, fundamentally, assist students develop their racial identity. For instance, one indicator is the identification of values, attitudes, and beliefs, which is a critical part of cultural identity. By utilizing the ASCA model, school counselors assist students with cultural development and life skills necessary to be multiculturally aware and sensitive individuals.

School counselors are in the best position at the school level to assist multiracial students with the challenges they may encounter. In a study by Maxwell and Henriksen (2012), researchers found that experiences of multiracial students are impacted by school counselors, including experiences centered on racial identity (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001; Hays & Erford, 2014; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Moss & Davis, 2008; Pedrotti et al., 2008). While some multiracial students see the school counselor for issues directly related to racial identity, that is not always the case (Hayes & Erford, 2014; Hud-Aleem & Countryman, 2008). School counselors should talk with the student to ascertain why the student has come so the counselor knows what to address. In order to be effective, school counselors must be multiculturally competent to work with students from any cultural background, including multiracial (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001).

School counselors must also take a serious self-inventory and assess their personal feelings, beliefs, and perceptions about multiracial individuals and their families (Harris, 2002). If the school counselor has any biases that may influence the work done with multiracial students and families, those biases must be addressed immediately. For instance, if a multiracial

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student is experiencing behavioral problems, the school counselor should not automatically assume it is due to the race of the student; preconceived notions would prevent the school counselor from providing the level of service students need and deserve.

On the other hand, school counselors should assist multiracial students if they present struggles with the process of racial identity. One way to do so is by helping the student become aware of his or her personal feelings regarding being multiracial (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). Research has indicated that early, preventative intervention with multiracial youth regarding the issues related to racial identity may have greater benefit than interventions that occur later, after problem behaviors have started to occur (Choi et al., 2006). This includes discussing the student's personal perception of race, as well as perceptions of how society views multiracial individuals. School counselors should also consider the value of including discussions with the child's parents to gain a better understanding of how the parents have presented the issues of multiple cultures and racial heritage (Winn & Priest, 1993). Research has found that when individuals identify with both races, they are happier than those who identify with only one race (Harris, 2003; Hud-Aleem, 2008). The school counselor can work with the student to foster greater understanding of what the student needs from his or her family and in the school setting to develop a healthy racial identity (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001).

Interventions and Supports

To assist multiracial students and families in the school setting, school counselors may use a variety of interventions and supports that have been found to be successful with this cultural population. Researchers report that children in a minority culture benefit when counseling allows for the discussion of issues and struggles related to race (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). Through this discussion, students have an opportunity to look at issues related to race and ethnicity closely, which could aid in racial identity development. While some children may be comfortable talking about such issues, there may be some who are hesitant to talk but still want to communicate concerns and questions. Students may communicate more openly and freely regarding racial issues through the use of writing assignments or journaling (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). When journaling is used, students are able to share feelings they may not be comfortable articulating (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012). In addition, bibliotherapy is a good approach to use to help students learn about various racial backgrounds, including that of multiracial.

Narrative therapy is another therapeutic approach that has been found to be useful when working with children experiencing struggles with racial identity (Moss & Davis, 2008). With narrative therapy, storytelling is used to help the child explore his or her concept of self and allows the school counselor to get a better understanding of the child's worldview (Ivey & Ivey, 2003). The child has an opportunity to tell his or her story in any way the child wants and include details about his or her problems. The school counselor listens closely to the story and then uses the story to help the child identify strengths and positive assets that the child can use to overcome challenges. With a multiracial child, mixed heritage may be seen as a challenge or as a negative aspect, but the school counselor can use the story to help him or her see the strengths of being multiracial. Several possible strengths found in multiracial individuals have been identified through research, including a more accepting attitude towards others (Pedrotti et al, 2008). The school counselor then helps the child construct a restory – a new story that uses the strengths and positive assets that were identified (Ivey & Ivey, 2003). The final step is to help the child change the new story into action, using the strengths and new story as a springboard for change.

Counseling interventions may occur in a variety of settings, including individual, group, classroom, and school-wide. Individual counseling with multiracial students allows the school counselor to build a trusting relationship with the student that may lead to greater communication (Moss & Davis, 2008). One of the therapeutic approaches that may prove effective when counseling multiracial individuals is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) (Nishimura, 1995). Cognitive-behavioral interventions involve helping the student change cognitions and behaviors by identifying negative thoughts or irrational beliefs and replacing them with positive thoughts and corrected beliefs (Mayer, Van Acker, Lochman, & Gresham, 2009). The individual counseling setting allows for students to practice the new behaviors and thought processes they learn through CBT. For instance, if a student has negative thoughts about his or her racial background, the school counselor can help the student identify positive aspects and strengths to combat the negative self-talk. The counselor can then have the student say out loud what he or she could say to combat the negative self-talk. CBT has been found to be effective in the treatment of anger, aggression, anxiety, depression and suicidality, as well as many other behavioral issues.

Conducting groups that focus on minority cultural identity may also prove to be a beneficial intervention (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). The group setting could provide a safe and comfortable place for students from various minority cultures (or one minority group, such as multiracial) to discuss experiences they have had and to come up with solutions to problems they have encountered. These groups could also be beneficial through the incorporation of role-play activities to practice the solutions (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012). When conducting a multicultural group with multiracial students, the school counselor should be aware of the stereotypes that may be encountered as part of the discussion (Greenberg, 2003). The school counselor should also be able to facilitate the development of the individual group member's racial identity development. Part of the group process may include helping the participants learn more about their cultural backgrounds and how this relates to their own cultural identity.

Classroom guidance lessons that have a multicultural focus are a good way to increase awareness and address issues of racism and negative attitudes of any race, including multiracial (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). School-wide awareness activities are another excellent way to teach all students about various races and to foster a greater sense of cultural diversity and understanding (Moss & Davis, 2008). School-wide activities should include community agencies and school partners so information is shared beyond the boundaries of the school walls. Approaches that educate as many students, school

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staff, and community members as possible are important because doing so helps develop an atmosphere of cultural acceptance.

Following the dictates of the ASCA National Model, school counselors work in collaboration and partnership with parents, school staff, and the community. Interventions and supports are not limited in scope to just students. Parents, teachers, and other school staff benefit from information and training as well. Parents often need help in how to assist their child with the development of a strong racial identity. According to Harris (2002), parents of multiracial children have a tendency to approach racial identity in one of three ways: very little emphasis on race, strongly encourage identity with only one race, or incorporate both races in the child's cultural picture. School counselors are in the perfect position to assist parents in understanding the complexities of racial development so identity issues can be addressed in the home as well as in the school setting if necessary. The use of parent workshops that teach parents how to communicate effectively with their child about their racial background is one way school counselors can help educate and support parents (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). Parents may also benefit from learning about the impact that environmental factors can have on racial identity development (Hud-Aleem & Countryman, 2008). Environmental factors that have been identified as being influential are encouraging discussion between parents and children regarding racial heritage, positive attitude of parents about the child's multiracial identification, and presenting integrated opportunities for the child.

Although much attention has been given to the role of the school counselor in assisting multiracial students, it must be clearly understood that teachers and school staff also have a critical role in working with this diverse population as well. Teachers should receive multicultural training that includes the increasing multiracial population (Wardle, 2000). Staff development done by school counselors to address issues related to multicultural competence can assist teachers and other school staff and faculty about issues related to racial identity (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). Information should be provided that specifically addresses multiracial youth and the challenges they may encounter. According to Wardle (1998), staff training should include self-exploration of the attitudes that staff members have regarding multiracial identity and individuals, including interracial relationships; defining the concept of race and ethnicity in a universal frame of reference; providing specific information on how to assist multiracial children and their families develop healthy identities; teaching parent relation skills specific to the parents of multiracial children; and, the historical aspects of multiracial individuals. Staff training can assist teachers and other school staff in gaining the knowledge needed to provide support to multiracial students and their families. In addition, the teacher will gain a better understanding of multiracial issues and perspectives.

Conclusion

The multiracial population has increased in the state of Georgia in the past ten years. As the numbers grow, the challenges and opportunities multiracial students may encounter must be clearly identified, understood, and addressed to ensure the success of multiracial students. While school counselors are in the forefront addressing the needs of this diverse student population, they also have a responsibility to help inform, educate, and support parents, teachers, school staff, and the community. It is only through this collaborative partnership that multiracial students will be able to reach their full potential.

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School Counselors Role in College Readiness for Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

This article discusses the importance of the professional school counselors' participation in the development of self-determination skills students with disabilities need to transition from high school to college. An intervention is proposed to guide high school counselors' involvement. Strategies to promote college readiness through the development of skills associated with self-determination (i.e., self-awareness, identifying social supports, and effective social skills) are offered. Implications for school counseling practice are discussed.

Keywords: self-determination, students with disabilities, college readiness, school counselors

School Counselors Role in College Readiness for Students with Disabilities

In the United States, graduating from high school and completing some level of post-secondary education is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for success in terms of employment, salary and career choice (Gwynne, Lesnick, Hart, & Allensworth, 2009). However, the majority of high school graduates, who might have intentions to attend college, are not academically prepared for the rigor of postsecondary education (Conley, 2007). For students who are admitted to college, many come to quickly discover a significant gap between the skills and knowledge they learned in high school versus what their college or university expects them to know. As a result, a high percentage of first year college students find themselves enrolled in non-credit bearing remedial courses with percentages as high as sixty percent in public two-year colleges (Shulock, 2010) and twenty-five percent in four-year colleges and universities (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006). Consequently, taking remedial courses and not being prepared for college can bring about undue stress, broken dreams and an increased likelihood of a student dropping out of college during the first year (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006). The lack of college readiness among college students has become a major challenge for secondary and post-secondary institutions.

These challenges surrounding college readiness are even greater for students with disabilities (SWDs). Whereas college readiness has traditionally been determined

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through academic achievement, GPA and specific scores on standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT, what constitutes college readiness for students with disabilities is usually more comprehensive. Many SWDs face unique challenges to college readiness that are outside the realm of academics (American Institutes for Research, 2013). For example, college readiness for SWDs may involve an additional focus on social and emotional learning skills, such as self-determination and self-advocacy skills (Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003). These interpersonal and intrapersonal skills have been linked to positive post-school outcomes for SWDs (Cobb & Alwell, 2007). More specifically, developing self-determination skills in SWDs is important to accessing post-high school opportunities, including both attending college and entering the workforce (Bremer, Kachagal, & Schoeller, 2003; American Institutes for Research, 2013).

Colleges require students with disabilities to initiate and facilitate academic accommodations under the Americans with Disability Act, as Amended (2008), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Cory, 2011; Heyward, 2011). SWDs are advised by secondary educators and parents to request accommodations from the college's office of student disability services. If accommodations are identified, students are then instructed by disability services personnel to interact with faculty to notify them of their eligibility of approved accommodations in order to utilize the accommodations in a class (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). This requirement assumes that SWDs enter into college equipped with the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills needed to discuss their disability, understand their educational needs, and interact effectively with their professors (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). Hamblet (2014) describes students who are aware of their learning strengths and weaknesses as "better prepared to make good decisions with regard to accommodations once they get to college" (p. 57).

However, the reality for many SWDs is that their parents have served as their primary decision makers, problem solvers, and advocates for their K-12 education (Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). Students in K-12 are often do not lead the development of their goals in their Individual Education Plan and Transition Plan. If students are involved in making their own decisions, many students make uninformed goals based on assumptions about life after high school (American Institutes for Research, 2013). Parents and teachers, intentionally or not, tacit decisions to exclude students from knowledge of their disability may also be lower the expectation for positive outcomes after high school (Izzo & Lamb, 2002). SWDs who are not encouraged to make decisions have lower self-esteem and feel less control over their lives, compared to those do make their own decisions (Bremer et al., 2003; Izzo & Lamb, 2002). Unsurprisingly, many SWDs who enter into college are unprepared to demonstrate the necessary self-determination skills necessary for college success (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003).

Self-determination is a broad concept that encompasses a wide range of life skills such as self-advocacy, self-awareness, personal responsibility, problem solving, and decision-making, (Bremer et al., 2003). Such skills are viewed as critical for SWDs in postsecondary education and employment (American Institutes for Research, 2013). Additionally, SWDs who leave high school with enhanced self-determination skills are more likely, when compared to their peers who have not learned to be self-determined, to be employed or attend a post-secondary institution one year after graduation (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Students with disabilities need the support and assistance of school personnel, along with family and the community, to develop the necessary skills and resources to help them become college ready.

Professional school counselors are in a key role to assist students, including SWDs, in preparing for the transition from high school to college. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005) suggests that, through individual planning interventions, school counselors are in the best position to assist students and parents in identifying necessary resources to help students achieve success in school and in the future. ASCA supports their assertion with its "Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success" which are student competencies with corresponding behavior learning strategies self-management skills, and social skills based on researched best practices (ASCA, 2014). With their unique training, expertise, access to resources, and commitment to serving all students, school counselors can be a substantial benefit for SWDs in their preparation and transition to college (Erford, House, & Martin, 2003).

Literature Review

The review of literature that follows defines college readiness from the perspective of school personnel, higher education disability services personnel, and students with disabilities. Additionally, the review of literature identifies factors that support college completion and the role of self-determination in college readiness and completion.

Defining College Readiness

Milsom and Dietz (2009) conducted a Delphi study in which they surveyed 29 experts (e.g., special education, post-secondary education, and school counseling) regarding students with disabilities and their college readiness. The participants identified 89 college readiness characteristics. After applying Delphi methodology, the list was eventually reduced to four areas of college readiness necessary for students with disabilities beyond the expected academic preparation expected of all students. These areas include self-awareness, social supports, social skills and self-determination, which includes the subcategories of autonomy and self-advocacy.

Self-awareness refers to the knowledge students have of their disability. It includes an understanding of their physical needs and the educational accommodations and modifications which may be necessary for their academic success (Milson & Dietz, 2009). Social supports are the important interpersonal and intrapersonal networks, which strengthen and support students with disabilities. College readiness involving social skills are the mechanisms through which relationships needed for success are created and maintained. The last area of college readiness is self-determination, which is comprised of autonomy and self-advocacy. Autonomy refers to taking personal responsibility for one's actions. Self-advocacy is the ability to represent one's own interest. The results of the Delphi study emphasized the

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significance of preparing SWDs in these psychosocial areas as requirement for successful college readiness for SWDs (Milson & Dietz, 2009).

Four Factors that Support College Completion

One component of being ready for college involves knowing what it takes to be successful in college as a student with a disability. In an investigation of factors and characteristics associated with successful college completion by SWDs, Barber (2012) interviewed 20 SWDs who had successfully completed their college education program within the past four years. Student participants received accommodations for a variety of disabilities, including physical, emotional, and cognitive disabilities, while attending their college program. The study identified several key factors that were determined to be helpful to college completion. These factors included access to a mentoring relationship while at college, perseverance and determination, a positive attitude in addition to work experience, and legally mandated accommodations (Barber, 2012). These important characteristics associated with college completion are enhanced by students who have well-developed self-determination and advocacy skills (Barber, 2012).

Role of Self-determination in College Readiness and College Completion

Self-determination seems to influence a variety of factors, including social and emotional skills that contribute to SWDs' college readiness and successful college completion. A case study conducted by Garrison-Wade (2012) examined SWDs perceptions of the services they received in college. In an effort to develop a clearer understanding of what it takes to better prepare SWDs for positive outcomes in post-secondary education, the researchers conducted focus groups with 59 student participants and interviewed six disability services coordinators. The results of this study included three themes identifying factors that inhibited or enhanced students' likelihood of postsecondary success. These three themes included: (a) capitalizing on student self-determination skills, (b) implementing formalized planning processes, and (c) improving postsecondary support (Garrison-Wade, 2012).

The theme of capitalizing on student self-determination emphasized students' belief that a key to their success was taking personal responsibility (Garrison-Wade, 2012). For students, responsibility meant setting personal high expectations, and taking the necessary actions to meet those expectations despite low expectations set by others such as family and teachers. Students indicated they needed to know about their disability and also be willing to self-advocate. Secondly, the theme of implementing a formalized planning process indicated that students and disability services coordinators believed that secondary education inadequately prepared SWDs to transition into postsecondary education. Students also stated they were ill prepared to assist in the facilitation of their accommodations. Disability Services coordinators echoed students' latter perceptions, reiterating the need for a formalized transition planning process.

Finally, the theme of improving secondary support provided focus to areas of weaknesses of institutions in welcoming and supporting SWDs. Students highlighted the lack of instructors' knowledge and ability to implement classroom accommodations, physical accessibility of buildings and transportation, and financial assistance as major barriers to college completion (Garrison-Wade, 2012).

Implications for Practice

Studies consistently show that college readiness and successful completion for SWDs involves more than just academic preparation (Milsom & Dietz, 2009; Barber, 2012; Stodden, Jones & Chang, 2002; Field, et al., 2003; Cobb & Alwell, 2007; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). With the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, it is required that all SWDs have a transition plan by the age of 16 that addresses students' postsecondary goals. These plans may not readily identify and outline goals to prepare SWDs to meet the intrapersonal and interpersonal demands of college (American Institutes for Research, 2013) nor are special education teachers the most appropriate professional to aid students in the development of these self-management and social skills. Professional school counselors seem to be untapped resource to positively influence these students' college readiness.

The literature supports the development of social and emotional learning skills associated with self-determination and self-advocacy as critical components to positive post-school outcomes for SWDs (Milson & Dietz, 2009; Barber, 2012; Izzo & Lamb, 2002.; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). School counselors are specifically trained to assist students to develop critical thinking skills, time management and organization skills, use effective written and verbal communication, and identify long and short term personal goals (ASCA, 2014) . SWDs could use these skills in college to problem solve, manage multiple courses with competing deadlines, communicate their accommodation needs to faculty, and to complete college. Four specific personal and social skills have been identified as critical to college readiness of SWDs. These include self-awareness, social supports, social skills, and self-determination (Milsom &Dietz, 2009).

School counselors in high schools are primed to equip SWDs with the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills described above through the implementation of a four-year self-determination intervention plan. It is a natural fit for school counselors to facilitate individual and group counseling strategies to help SWDs develop the skills they need to be successful in college and throughout their life. The proposed intervention presumes that school counselors have the type of schedules and administrative support necessary to implement this program. We suggest a collaborative effort between counselors, special education teachers, relevant agencies, and families to ensure the skills are appropriately developed, practiced, and reinforced. School counselors can use available resources to plan and evaluate students' level of skill development throughout high school (See Appendix A for Self-determination Online Resources).

Description of Intervention

We propose a series of interventions designed to move SWD's from self-aware ninth graders, to self-determined, high school graduates who are ready for college. Each year the intervention strives to enhance SWDs' self-awareness, social supports, social skills, and self-determination.

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Ideally, by the end of the ninth grade, SWDs will have a better understanding of their disabilities and after high school aspirations. Counselors could facilitate activities that heighten students' self-awareness and self-management. Topics or activities might include stress management, learning styles, and volunteerism, and academic opportunities (Bremer et al., 2003). As students become aware of their personal and academic skill sets, school counselors could collaborate with teachers to promote use of these strengths. Students might be encouraged to create a journal, portfolio, or multimedia project to record their personal and academic success related to greater self-awareness and identification and use of strengths.

Beginning in tenth grade, the school counselor would focus on making informed decisions. Specifically, school counselors would help SWDs extend their support system beyond their families and traditional school personnel. By collaborating with the special education teachers and families, the counselor could help students identify an academic or extra-curricular goal to include in students' IEP or transition plan (Izzo & Lamb, 2002). School counselors could facilitate individual counseling strategies to guide SWDs to other resources that could aid in current and future success. Through ongoing sessions, counselors could assist SWDs in accessing such resources through the use of effective communication, problem solving, and decision making skills. The tenth grade year could culminate with SWDs conducting a meeting to propose a goal or activity to include in their IEP or Transition plan.

In the eleventh grade, school counselors would encourage SWDs to develop social skills. School counselors could facilitate dyad and group sessions to teach and practice professional, academic, and social interactions. Topics for sessions could include assertiveness, problem solving, self-disclosure, and discussing disability accommodation needs. School counselors could facilitate dyad and group sessions to teach and practice the social skills. School counselors could collaborate with special education teachers to allow SWDs participate in the coordination and facilitation of the Annual Case Conference (Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Bremer et al., 2003). SWDs would exit the eleventh grade with sufficient social skills to embark on the student-centered objective of the twelfth grade intervention.

Self-determination "is not achieved simply because an individual has certain requisite knowledge and skills; it is also important that key people and institutions in the person's life provide a context conducive to self-determi¬nation" (Bremer, et al., 2003, p. 1). Throughout the twelfth grade year, school counselors would strive to provide SWDs with meaningful and supportive learning opportunities to demonstrate self-determination. At the start of the twelfth grade year, school counselors would advocate for SWDs serve in a leadership role for the final IEP meeting (Bremer et al., 2003; Izzo & Lamb, 2002). School counselors could design individual and group counseling sessions to prepare SWDs for the task. The individual sessions could include career exploration and planning activities to incorporate into SWDs' Transition Plan (Izzo & Lamb, 2002). Group counseling sessions could include mock IEP meetings. Additionally, school counselors would provide the IEP team with a rubric to describe SWDs effectiveness within the target areas of the intervention. The rubric could be used to share feedback on SWDs progress throughout the year. The intervention would culminate with SWDs taking responsibility for final IEP, which includes transitional goals for college.

Discussion

In this article, the authors have provided an overview of an intervention that professional school counselors can use to help students with disabilities develop skills to prepare for and complete college learning. These skills include self-awareness, self-advocacy, and social skills. Throughout the implementation of this intervention, school counselors may need to consider how each strategy implemented builds SWDs' self-confidence and motivation (Milson & Dietz, 2009; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Barber, 2012).

Per Milson and Dietz (2009), SWDs' awareness of their disability and corresponding effective academic accommodations are components of college readiness. However, Garrison-Wade (2012) and Barber's (2012) findings imply that SWDs perceive that they are held to lower academic standards and post- high school expectations than their peers. School counselors are advised to prepare for this resistance. School counselors could introduce the intervention with activities that challenge students' negative perspective and promote a positive attitude about themselves, their disability, and the use of academic accommodations (Barber, 2012). For example, during the ninth grade year, counselors could encourage students' self-awareness and self- confidence through a group community service project in conjunction with an individual intervention of creating a strength board. Components of the community service project might include SWDs exploring careers learning how to manage stress and identify their strengths during the project. SWDs could benefit from a written or verbal reflection on the transferability of their identified strengths to achieve academic goals. This activity could evolve into students exploring the breadth of differences between high school and college, including registering for classes, disability accommodations, applicable federal laws, funding, and potential career opportunities for graduates.

Other key figures, such as teachers, other school personnel, families, and community members, influence SWDs' college readiness (Milson & Dietz, 2009; Garrison-Wade, 2012). School counselors may also consider embedding ongoing self-assessments by SWDs and periodic feedback from the key figures on SWDs' ability to exhibit key self-determination skills such as self-confidence, self-awareness, self-advocacy, problem solving and goal setting. The combined ongoing feedback from students and key figures would provide meaningful information for identifying likely strengths and challenges to the students' development of self-determination. The IEP team would then modify aspects of the intervention (e.g., classroom instruction, IEPs, transition plans) to meet the individual student's needs. The responsive nature of ongoing feedback would also serve as a mechanism for school counselors to negotiate possible resistance from SWDs. The team approach would likely garner support for SWDs success and promote proactive development of individualized strategies. The approach also shares the responsibility of the intervention outcomes with key figures and strive to prepare students

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with disabilities to request and facilitate accommodations to benefit from the goods and services offered on a college campus.

The need for effective self-determination skill development in high school is critical, because college students with disabilities are expected to take responsibility for their learning through the facilitation of their academic accommodations. School counselors and key figures should prepare SWDs to talk with their college faculty regarding classroom accommodations. SWDs may have to state their needs directly and the ways accommodation can help meet those needs because faculty may struggle to understand what they can do, specifically, to make accommodations (see Garrison-Wade, 2012). SWDs may also need to advocate for themselves to ensure that they have the appropriate transportation services and campus accessibility accommodations (see Garrison-Wade, 2012).

To stay current on post-secondary accommodation practices, school counselors are advised to consult with colleges and universities student disability services personnel. This may also serve as a means through which to advocate for SWDs. Through building professional relationships with service coordinators at local colleges and universities, school counselors can provide their SWDs specific information about the process of obtaining accommodations at the respective academic institutions. School counselors may even be able to refer their SWDs to an individual service coordinator. As Garrison-Wade (2012) suggested, one area in which colleges and universities can influence SWDs in succeeding is through helping them feel more welcomed and connected to the university upon admission. If school counselors were to make a referral to the service coordinator at the student's new school, this may increase the student's senses of being belonging and security, thereby helping to diminish some of the students' apprehension regarding working with a new professional and requesting services.

School counselors unique training have prepared them to collaborate with special education teachers, school psychologists and other Individual Education Program team members in the effort to prepare students with disabilities to meet the intrapersonal and interpersonal demands of postsecondary education. By doing so, school counselors could help SWDs develop not only the skills they need to successfully transition to postsecondary education, but with skills SWDs need throughout their lives.

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Source	Description	Weblink
American School Counselor Association	Mindset & Behaviors for Student Success competencies that are searchable by grade-level.	http://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/about-asca/mindsets-behaviors
Georgetown Independent School District, Texas	Website defines self-determination. Provides recommendations on how to promote self-determination. Resources include decision matrices by grade level such as elementary, middle, and high school as well as transition	http://www.georgetownisd.org/Page/535
New Tier High School District 203, Illinois	Provides 14 downloadable resources such as articles PPT, fillable PDF, and workbooks on self-determination. An article entitled Why Is This	
Cake on Fire? Inviting Students Into the IEP Process by Van Dyke, Martin, and Lovett (2006)	http://www.newtrier.k12.il.us/page.aspx?id=22614	
Chicago Public Schools	Choose your future 2012 Summer Institute presentations included Self-determination based on the ASCA model	https://www.chooseyourfuture.org/resource/k-12-counseling-and-advising-2012-summer-institute-presentations
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction	A 24 page PDF entitled Opening Doors to Self-Determination Skills. Designed to provide students, teachers, and school counselors with information and resources for successful transition to post-secondary opportunities.	http://sped.dpi.wi.gov/files/sped/pdf/tranopndrs-self-determination.pdf
National Center of Youth with Disabilities	Free resource guide available to download	http://www.ncwd-youth.info/ilp/produce-college-and-career-ready-high-school-graduates
University of Oklahoma	Self-determination assessment tools with protocol instructions and instruments	http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/self-determination-assessment-tools.html
Heath Resource Center at George Washington University	Guidance and Career Counselor Toolkit a 194 page PDF available free to download provides information for the novice and experienced school counselor to support SWDs transition to post-secondary opportunities	https://heath.gwu.edu/files/.../toolkit.pdf
ERIC	Practical Guide for Teaching Self-Determination is available on Eric to download The 186 page document is geared toward K-12 professionals who work with SWDs.	http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED442207.pdf

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In the Field

In the Field: From a School Counselor's Perspective "Building Bridges as We Walk"

By: Rachel Henning, Professional School Counselor at Druid Hills Middle School, DeKalb County Schools.

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Building Bridges as We Walk

Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks.
- Gloria Anzaldua

In my little corner of the education world, the counseling office at a DeKalb County middle school, I would like to share some of my reflections. After closing the book on the 2014-2015 school year, as I am inclined to do at this time of the year, I look back and remember the stories of student voyagers, who allowed me to join them as they moved into some challenging territory during the school year.

The Case of Nadia

One story is of Nadia, who, in early October, refused to complete an assignment on a Language Arts reading about the Holocaust. Nadia's teacher gave her a "Personal Responsibility Report," to explain why she had not completed the work. Nadia wrote that she did not know why she should do the work, "because I am a Muslim and Jewish people are our enemy that's why, and how is that supposed to help us in life?" Her teacher, who happens to be an Orthodox Jew, did not know how to address the issue with Nadia, and brought the concern to me.

I talked with Nadia and learned that, though no one had told her specifically that she should hate Jews, she thought she should. We talked about ways that belief fits with the historical problems that led to the Holocaust, and about the fact that many Muslims feel hated in today's world.

I followed up with our Language Arts Department chair, Ms. Baxter. The department keeps a 3-year focus on the Holocaust as part of our International Baccalaureate curriculum. Ms. Baxter and I talked about how that focus might create dissonance for some of our international students – particularly refugees, whose families have suffered religious persecution. We thought about looking for ways to bring in more perspectives and be inclusive of more students' backgrounds. Later that week, Ms Baxter brought me a book from the library -- a beautiful picture book about a mosque in Paris where many Jewish people took refuge during the Nazi takeover of their city. We agreed that it would be a good idea to ask Nadia to read the book and give us her opinion about whether or not we should use it with 6th grade classes next year. It was a delight to offer the book and to see Nadia's face light up when I told her she was helping us change the Language Arts curriculum for future students. She spent about two

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weeks with the book and came back with a very positive review.

Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks.

When Nadia's painfully honest response to a Holocaust-themed assignment took her teacher and me into uncharted territory, we needed to find a way to bridge the divide she was showing us. Together, Nadia, her teacher, our ELA department chair and I built a bridge that served each of us well last Fall.

Other Cases Worth Mentioning

Other stories from this year are of loss. Cameron, Greg, and Patricia each lost a parent this year.

Cameron, her mother and half-brother, Jack, were traveling through north Georgia last Fall, on their way to leave Jack for the weekend with his father. Their car crashed, injuring both children, and killing their mother. Cameron is healing, slowly -- physically, emotionally, and in her spirit. The last days of school were especially hard. Summer used to mean having more time with her mom and Jack. Now, added to the loss of her mother is another grief, for her brother. After the accident, Jack moved full-time to his father's home in South Carolina. You see, Cameron's dad and their mother married when Jack was a couple of years old. Though Jack's primary home had always been with his mom, and Cameron had been born into that home, Cameron's father has no legal claim to Jack. Losing their mother meant Jack would move to his birth father's home… a double-loss for the Cameron and her dad. On the last day of school, I got this note from Cameron's father:

Good news,
I get to have Jack for at least four weeks this summer. Last night was spent with tears of joy (and a little of loss). My boy is coming home for a while!

Greg's father, Greg Sr., was killed in his apartment in January. The newspaper said the death may have been drug-related. Not that it matters to Greg. He just knows that now, he doesn't have his dad. Greg lives with his 70-something-year-old grandmother. Her health is not good, and now, with his father gone, she has fewer resources for supporting her growing grandson. Greg is quite reserved about his grief and worries. Those feelings often show on his face, and sometimes come out in big furious tears when he brings himself to the counseling office. He gave me two hugs before leaving school for the summer break.

Patricia's mother died of cancer in March. In the weeks before her death, she was not clear with her daughter that she was sick. Her behaviors were erratic and irrational… she was probably unable to let herself know she was dying. In the weeks just before and long after her mother's death, our time together went something like this: Particia came in and sat down… not saying much. I said, "Do you want to go walk?" She stood, and we walked … and she talked... about confusion, fear, anger, worries about her future, and about her family members in another country who are now living without the financial support her mother sent. She talked about kindnesses she experienced, and her desire to be a nurse. She talked about things her father was doing that seemed strange; and about how, for all of her life, she did her school work and other positive things to please her mother, and now she fears she will stop working and become a bad person. She and I probably walked 15 miles around the school track this year.

Losing a parent takes children into uncharted territory these students are building bridges as they walk.

School Counselor's Reflection

In addition to these larger stories, this year gave me opportunities to work with students who cut themselves and who talk about suicide… students who miss parents they have never known… who struggle with autism-related social confusion, or with hyperactivity they can't control. I mediated conflicts and taught lessons about career exploration. I worked with a group of girls who were having trouble adjusting to middle school, and another group of international students who struggle in school as they straddle the gap between the more traditional home lives their parents maintain and the school life of contemporary American pre-teens. It is rich and challenging work. ***It is our work, school counselors, building bridges as we walk.***

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Resource Review

Elementary School Level Professional Library Book Review: The Dot

Teresa Brink
Mercer University

By: Peter H. Reynolds

Detailed summary

Although this is an elementary school level book, this book is a perfect example of the social cognitive model of career theory (Sharf, R., 2013). This book illustrates that Career readiness can be addressed at the elementary school level by addressing something as simple as belief in self. The Dot is about a little girl named Vashti who is frustrated in her art class. Vashti has low self-efficacy when it comes to art which affects her outcome expectations. She is frustrated because she believes she is not capable of drawing. She is so convinced that she did not even try! As in Choice Theory (Banks, 2009), the teacher tries to use humor, with no noticeable difference, by guessing that her blank sheet of paper is a polar bear in a blizzard. Her teacher being solution focused, wants her to experience success no matter how small and simply ask for a mark on the paper in hopes that the little girl will just keep going. This does not happen. The girl defiantly slams her marker on her paper and is done. She wants the teacher to believe her truth. The teacher accepts her truth and asks her to take credit for her work by signing it as any artist would do. A small success is experienced in getting a mark on the paper and Vashti's self-efficacy rises knowing she can definitely sign her name with no problem. She made it through art class; she did as the teacher told her with no negative reactions or judgment from the teacher (Banks, 2009). Upon Vashti's return to art class, she notices her dot was nicely framed by the teacher. Suddenly, Vashti develops interest and creates a new goal for herself. Her self-created goal affects her actions through her desire to make a better dot more worthy of framing. In this case, Vashti's actions positively affect her performance outcome which affects her learning experience. In turn, this learning experience positively affects her self-efficacy and outcome expectations. From here, Vashti creates so many new and beautiful dots that she has an art show. A student approaches Vashti telling her what a good artist she is. He shares a similar attitude about his lack of talent in art with which she began. Remembering from when she came, she encourages him to try. The cycle begins again.

Recommended use of book

This book can be used for any age group in elementary school. Here is an exercise using 4-5 grade students. After reading this book, students will be asked to think about what it feels like to try something new. Some may express excitement while others express anxiety or fear. Ask a student to share a time when they were afraid to try something new and when they did, they were pleasantly surprised by their experience.

Next have the students get out pencil and paper. Have them neatly write their names as many times as they can in 30 seconds.

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Let them try four times to see if they can improve. On the last time, as they get ready, ask them to switch the pencil in the other hand. After the last time, ask them to describe how they did or did not improve (some people have longer names). Ask how switching hands affected their expectation of their end results. Relate all of this to student's taking academic risks to possibly achieve in ways they did not think was possible due to their possibly unfounded beliefs.

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Dominique Wilson, Mercer University Intern

Title: *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul on Tough Stuff: Stories of Tough Times and Lessons Learned*

Author: Jack Canfeld

Publisher: Backlist LLC, Deerfield Beach, FL, 2012

Summary:

This tool is the latest of the Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul series. The book features personal narratives about a variety of complex situations, expressed through the words of the teens themselves. Readers can find short essays and poems on a variety of topics include poor self image, thoughts of suicide, family discord, loss and grief, peer pressure and school violence.

Recommended Use:

The benefit of this text lies in the perspectives through which the narratives are written. Instead of the traditional self-help literature that is discussed through a professional adult perspective, this book features an authentic context which students can easily relate to. This authenticity is congruent with counseling skills emphasizing genuineness – the literature reinforces the message that the counselor wants to make an accurate connection with the student.

Classroom Guidance Counseling

Chicken Soup serves as the perfect reservoir of case studies to include in a presentation about a specified topic. The stories represent the common experience of middle and high school students, so they are effective in introducing difficult topics without breaching confidentiality.

Individual Counseling

Counselors can assign students to read certain stories that are congruent with their current experience. Next, the counselor can use the students reaction to facilitate a discussion on about plausible solutions. Because the book also highlights the lessons gained from troublesome experiences, the literature can serve as the primary intervention.

Group Counseling

Describing a relevant case from Chicken Soup to a small group of students is a great way to introduce complex situations and facilitate a discussion about tough issues. Copies of cases can be used as handouts or activities in both the group and guidance contexts. Students can work individually or in pairs to develop productive solutions to the issues presented in the text. The counselor can use the discussion generated from the activity to evaluate the effectiveness of activity.

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Elizabeth (Lisa) Miller, Mercer University

Professional Library Book Review- Middle School

Title: *The Survival Guide To Bullying: Written by a Teen*

Author: Aija Mayrock

Publisher: Scholastic

Summary:
Aija Mayrock is a victim of bullying in middle school and some of high school. She used writing this book as an outlet to help other students know they are not alone in the world of bullying. This book is divided into nine unique chapters that consist of everything from why me to the benefits of being bullied. It goes into detail about discovering the real you, how to get help, the fears, trying to survive, cyber bullying, and being happy again in your own skin. Throughout the book Aija includes her poems and raps that she writes about bullying. In addition there are survival tips and descriptions of exactly what bullying is and the different types. Since this book is written in kid language I believe that students can connect to the meaning and make their lives better.

Recommended Use of Book:
Personally, as a school counselor I would use this book in two ways. First, I would use this individually in a session with a student who was being bullied. Since this is a guide or a roadmap on how to stand up to bullying and gain confidence, then I would assign the student one chapter to read and then we would review it in our next session for eight continuous sessions. Since there are nine chapters total during the pre-screening session with the student I would give this book to them and ask them to read the first two chapters. For the remaining sessions I would allow the student to read one chapter as homework. I believe this book would help the student open up about his or her struggles with bullying. Since it is written by a nineteen year old who was bullied in middle and some of high school, then I think it would be very beneficial. It can be difficult to get students this age to discuss their problems, but with this book it will help initiate the conversation. For example, at the beginning of the book the author talks about the importance of finding an outlet. This is a perfect segway to discuss with the student how they deal with being bullied. Helping them understand that they need to figure out an outlet for them to participate in to help with coping. The author's outlet was writing this book in order to help millions of other students with bullying. Another way I would use this book is by integrating it into a small group session with students who were being bullied. I could use this book in a number of ways during a small group. If the students were not saying anything and not responding during a session I would pick the book up and read one of the poems or raps that Aija wrote in the book. Once I read it the students would be more likely to relate and communicate how the work made them feel. In contrast I could ask a student in the group to talk about a scenario they were struggling with in school and then in the next session I could read some survival tips from Aija on how to cope with bullying. I would be curious to see if these resonated with the students in my session or not. There are a number of ways to integrate this helpful book written by a teenager to help students survive bullying in school.

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Introduction to the Professional Literature Reviews

GSCA Journal Editor

Children and adolescents today are faced with so many challenges. One way to assist with facing these challenges is books. Books provide an alternative method of helping students learn how to cope and begin the healing process. Books are beneficial for more than just the enjoyment of reading!

The goal of using books is to find the right book specific to the behavior, emotional or social need. The right book allows children and adolescents to feel like they have met someone just like them. They can now realize that they are not alone and that there are others facing the same feelings and dilemmas as they are. Students are able to identify with the characters in the books and have a sense of "I can do it too". Books open up discussions and with discussions finding solutions become easier. Further use of activities can prove to be therapeutic thus allowing students to reflect and express themselves.

The following book reviews were done by school counselors-in-training for a class project and are truly worthy of being shared with professional school counselors to use in their comprehensive developmental school counseling program.

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