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Data and Research that Matter: Mentoring School Counselors to Publish Action Research (Practitioner-Focused Research)

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DATA AND RESEARCH THAT MATTER: MENTORING SCHOOL COUNSELORS TO PUBLISH ACTION RESEARCH

Data and research serve as powerful advocacy tools in highlighting the effectiveness of school counselors and school counseling programs. School counselor educators can be key mentors who support practitioners in sharing the findings of local school action research. This article focuses on four unique projects by school counselors that demonstrate specific outcomes in student achievement and the mentoring efforts in guiding the dissemination of their results. The authors discuss recommendations for school counselors and counselor educators based on the mentoring process and publishable action research projects.

"How are students different because of what school counselors do?" This question derived from the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012) calls all school counselors to examine and articulate the effectiveness of their school counseling programs. Attending to accountability has become increasingly necessary in school counseling programs and in school counselor preparation and training. Much of this emphasis came with the implementation of the ASCA National Model and has grown in acceptance across states (ASCA, 2012; Dahir & Stone, 2009). However, for practitioners, making attempts to quantify and qualify their work, let alone publish it, may seem challenging and daunting.

Although school counselors acknowledge that data-driven decision making is no longer optional, many report not recognizing the value of action research and not having appropriate training or time to actually conduct research in their school settings (Kaffenberger, 2012). School counselor educators and supervisors are in an ideal position to mentor and support school counselors' efforts to conduct action research. In fact, collaborating with others will lessen the workload, offer support, and strengthen professional relationships (Young & Kaf-

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fenberger, 2013). The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how practitioner-researchers can test the impact of their interventions. This article also discusses the challenges practitioners face in writing about their interventions and the role of mentoring for publication.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

Action research holds promise for strengthening school counseling's ties to the progressive education reform agenda and is a valuable resource for strengthening the link between theory and practice (Rowell, 2005, 2006). Further, action research, by nature, is collaborative, pragmatic, and empowering, and can help build a sense of community among practitioners with an emphasis on high standards of professionalism.

Action research principles and design present a logical framework through which to understand the outcomes of school counseling interventions and their impact on student achievement (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Mason & McMahon, 2009; Rowell, 2005, 2006). Using a framework of action research respects the fact that school counselors are often simultaneously in the roles of both intervener and researcher. Schools are natural settings for action research because they invite investigations of a locally relevant nature. Action research does not presume generalizability to other settings but rather supports a cycle of continuous improvement in a single setting.

Sharing Findings and Informing Practice

In the first decade of *Professional School Counseling,* only 13.8% of first and second authors identified themselves as practitioners and 25.2% percent of 91 articles (*n* = 23) written by practitioners reported research

about practice (Falco, Bauman, Sumnicht, & Engelstad, 2011). Access to practitioner-driven research findings in scholarly publications can empower school counselors to implement data-driven interventions in existing comprehensive school counseling programs, directly impacting student achievement (Chapman & Schwartz, 2012). Therefore, practitioner-researchers should strive to make their findings readily available to relevant populations.

MENTORING AND PRACTITIONER SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY

Writing manuscripts for peer-reviewed publications is not an easy process, even for university faculty for whom it is an expectation. Every journal has its own set of guidelines and acceptance rates vary considerably across journals. Further, the writing and publication processes are related, yet separate. School counselors likely have experience with academic writing from their graduate programs but unless they also pursue advanced degrees, they may not have experience with writing for publication, or, more specifically, for publication in scholarly journals (Wynne, Guo, & Wange, 2014). Academic writing is not a requirement of the practitioner's job as it is for the scholar. Thus, writing with one or more counselor educators can help guide school counselor researchers through the process (Lambie, Ascher, Sivo, & Hayes, 2014).

This article presents four unique action research projects by school counselors representing one middle school and three elementary schools, and their collaboration with a school

counselor educator. The focus of the projects varies from academic to behavior to attendance interventions. Each project is presented separately to preserve uniqueness and to honor each author's work. The article concludes with a personal glimpse into the mentoring process between the practitioner-researchers and the school counselor educator mentor. The article also provides practical recommendations for school counselors and school counselor educators.

Practitioner Research Project #1:
CLOSING THE GRADE GAP AT EIGHTH GRADE WITH ACADEMIC ACTION PLANS

When reviewed by the school counselors, school-wide data revealed higher percentages of Hispanic (32%) and Black (18%) students identified as "at-risk" when compared to the overall school population (16% Hispanic and 6% Black), and smaller percentages of Asian (14%) and White (36%) students identified as at-risk compared to the overall school population (21% Asian and 52% White). Students were identified as academically at-risk if they earned two or more Ds or one or more Fs as final grades in core subjects at the conclusion of the school year. This data clearly indicated that Hispanic and Black students were more likely to be identified as academically at-risk than their Asian and White peers, revealing a sizable gap in achievement by race/ethnicity.

The purpose of the intervention was to improve the grades of identified academically at-risk eighth-grade students and to reduce the achievement gap. School counselors assumed that students who received additional support under a customized plan involving multiple stakeholders would show an increase in grades and that the resulting impact would be a decrease in the school's overall achievement gap.

Review of Literature

School counselors must heed the call to use data to address the achievement gap (House & Hayes, 2002) and act as leaders to create change for students (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Mason & McMahon, 2009; Shillingford & Lambie, 2010). To reduce achievement gaps, counselors must implement culturally sensitive services and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions

these conferences provided input and suggestions as to the interventions, programs, and supports they believed the student needed to boost his or her achievement. Following the meetings, the counselors compiled the feedback into an individualized academic action plan (AAP) for each student, assigning each conference participant an active responsibility in the plan.

After the development of the AAP, interventions were implemented and counselors followed up with each stakeholder to ensure that everyone understood their unique responsibility. Examples of interventions in the AAP included individual and group counseling; support classes for reading, writing, math, and organization; after-school extra-curricular help; peer tutoring; behavioral reinforcements; and extra supervision for homework and classwork.

THIS ACTION RESEARCH PROVIDED ONE EXAMPLE OF AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO UTILIZE COLLABORATION THROUGH THE USE OF TEAM CONFERENCES.

(Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011). Comprehensive school counseling programs use a number of strategies to address student needs, such as core counseling lesson delivery, group and individual counseling, and individual student planning including supporting course selection and goal setting (Sink, 2005).

Method and Procedure

For the intervention, school counselors identified 22 eighth graders, out of a class of 693, who were considered academically at-risk. The racial/ethnic makeup of the group was Caucasian (8 students, 36%), Hispanic (7 students, 32%), African American (14 students, 18%), and Asian (3 students, 14%). Counselors organized and led separate team conferences for each student; these included the student, family, teachers, administrators, support staff, and other appropriate stakeholders. All participants in

The school counselors collected three types of data to measure the effectiveness of this intervention: (a) process data in the form of the number of students impacted by the project; (b) perception data in the form of a survey that asked students to rate the support classes in which they participated, and (c) outcome data in the form of final grades at the conclusion of school year after the students had the opportunity to experience a full year of intervention.

Results

At the end of the school year, the identified students completed surveys in which they rated their support class on its helpfulness for core subject skills, test-taking skills, and work completion skills using a scale of 0 (*do not agree*) to 2 (*100% agree*). Average student ratings ranged from 1.06 to 1.60. Regarding all of the support classes, including reading, writing, math, and

organizational help classes, students consistently said that they would "recommend the class to another student." Students also consistently said of all support classes that they only marginally helped them become better test takers. Students found the organizational help class to be the most helpful.

After a full year of the AAP intervention, the number of identified students who had Ds and Fs decreased overall by 63.6%, with a 66.7% decrease for Asian students, 40% decrease for Black students, 57.1% decrease for Hispanic students, and 62.5% decrease for White students. Eight of the original 22 students were still considered academically at-risk entering their freshman year of high school. School counselors examined the makeup of the remaining pool to see if the AAP intervention reduced the achievement gap. The percentage of Hispanic students who were identified as at-risk dropped from 32% to 12.5% after the AAP intervention, which was slightly lower than their overall representation in the school population (16%). The number of Black students in the at-risk pool decreased from five to a final count of three. Despite the decline, Black students still made up a disproportionately higher percentage (37.5%) of the final at-risk pool, as compared to their overall representation in the school population (6%).

Discussion and Implications

The data that the school counseling department collected suggested that the AAP intervention contributed to reducing the number of Ds and Fs. Each racial group experienced a decrease from the baseline data, which supports the belief that an individualized intervention plan supported by a team of stakeholders may be a useful tool for reducing the achievement gap. Although the achievement gap was closed for Hispanic students, a gap persisted for Black students despite within-group gains. Moving forward, school counselors will use this data to support the use of team conferences,

but will also collect further data to understand why the intervention appears to be less effective for Black students.

Collaboration has persisted as a key theme in modern school counseling (Miller, 2006). This action research provided one example of an effective way to utilize collaboration through the use of team conferences. By collaborating with a variety of stakeholders, school counselors can develop action plans for at-risk students and help minimize or close achievement gaps.

Practitioner Research Project #2:
IMPROVING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT ATTENDANCE WITH SMALL GROUP COUNSELING

A review of school-wide data by school counselors demonstrated that every year, some students' poor attendance required intervention. In fact, improving poor attendance was such a priority within the district that all school counselors were required to develop a yearly action plan specifically to address the needs of students who struggled with attendance.

The purpose of the intervention was to address through weekly check-in groups the needs of 20 elementary students in kindergarten through fifth grade identified as having excessive absences or tardies.

Review of Literature
Steen and Kaffenberger (2007) showed that "integrating academic interventions and group counseling improved students' behavior related to school achievement" (p. 516) in various elementary small groups. The authors cited specific group procedures that led to an increase in positive learning behaviors shown in

school, such as meeting weekly with students during non-instructional time for approximately eight to ten sessions. In the group meetings, conversations and activities were specifically focused on the counseling topic being addressed and goals were tailored depending on the particular needs of each student (p. 517).

> **ACTION RESEARCH CAN HELP BUILD A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG PRACTITIONERS WITH AN EMPHASIS ON HIGH STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONALISM.**

Sklare (2005) also demonstrated the benefits of using tenets of solution-focused counseling in schools, including focusing on the present and future, choosing specific behaviors to improve, and emphasizing and amplifying what students are already doing that works well for them. Clemans (2011) highlighted components of check-in groups that contribute to their success, including peer validation and support as a part of the group process, helping students develop skills, and including everyone in the process. Having a well-defined process for each group session and a positive leader who believed in the purpose of the group were critical to the success of both approaches.

Method and Procedure
The primary goal of this program was to decrease group members' tardies or unexcused absences by 5% during the second quarter of the school year. A secondary goal was for students to be able to identify strategies for improving their attendance. A quarter-long (9 weeks) check-in group was designed and implemented by the school counselor with the purpose of improving the attendance of 20 students.

Students were invited to participate in the check-in groups during the second quarter of the school year because they had accrued either excessive absences or tardies during the first quarter. Twelve students with excessive tardies were placed together in one group, and the eight students

with excessive absences were placed in another group; both groups received the same intervention. The groups met 12 times during the second quarter of the year; this allowed each student to attend nine sessions due to the unique year-round, staggered school calendar,

The check-in groups met one morning each week of the second quarter, and meetings lasted 20-25 minutes during the school's designated arrival time before the morning bell. The goal of improving either absences or tardies was made clear and students were assigned individual calendars to help them and the school counselor keep track of their attendance during the second quarter. The counselor kept these calendars and, before each meeting, checked member attendance. For each day a student was either present (for the absence group) or on time (for the tardy group), the counselor would mark the calendar. During the group meeting, each student would add a small sticker where the calendar had been marked, and as students earned stickers, they worked toward prizes provided by the counselor.

A positive, solution-focused approach was foundational to the group. Both groups were called the "Attendance All-Stars" and emphasized the anticipated good attendance the students would have during the second quarter, rather than dwelling on their poor attendance during the first quarter. During each session, the students would share how they were able to either be present at school (for the absence group) or arrive on time (for the tardy group). Students would support each other and even encourage each other with new strategies. Each week students set a goal for how many stickers they would try to earn, and prizes were awarded when students met their goals.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the groups, school counselors compared students' first quarter absences or tardies (depending on which had been deemed excessive for that student) to those from the second quarter. The data was analyzed to see whether overall absences and tardies of the group had decreased by 5%, the goal set by the school counselor. Counselors also surveyed students at two points during the group to see if students could identify strategies for improving their individual attendance.

Results

All students attended sessions each week of the second quarter, for a total of nine sessions. By the midpoint of the program, 18 of the 20 students (90%) were able to verbally identify two strategies they had used to improve their attendance. By the final session, 19 of the 20 students (95%) were able to identify one thing they could do to continue to improve their attendance.

Both groups surpassed the goal of decreasing absences or tardies by 5%. Eight students in the absence group decreased from 44 combined absences during the first quarter to 13 combined absences during the second quarter, a 71% reduction in the total number of absences. Also, three students in this group earned perfect attendance and every student in the group accrued fewer absences during the second quarter. The 12 students in the tardy group decreased from 85 combined tardies during the first quarter to 44 combined tardies during the second quarter, a 48% reduction in the total number of tardies. Nine of the 12 students (75%) had fewer tardies during the second quarter.

Discussion and Implications

From first to second quarter, nearly all students' attendance improved, some dramatically. These improvements showed that a check-in group could be beneficial when addressing attendance. Students responded well to the consistent, positive, solution-focused approach of the groups. Because of the success of these groups, plans were made to replicate them in the future.

Students who had a 3-week vacation in the middle of the intervention, due to the year-round school schedule, did not make as much progress as their peers who did not have this interruption. In the future, students may have more success if programs are scheduled so that students receive consecutive weeks of intervention.

Interventions related to attendance lend themselves well to data collection because attendance is often a school-wide goal and many districts have electronic systems that provide access to data. The consistent group meeting dates and times, as well as the continuity provided by following the same structure at each meeting, allowed for organized sessions and a clear focus. Students understood why they were in the groups and what to expect each week, such that even early elementary students made improvements and learned new strategies.

Practitioner Research Project #3:
INDIVIDUALIZED BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS AT THE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

The primary purpose of this intervention was to quantify the effect of behavioral interventions instituted by school counselors with two students at the intermediate school level (fourth to sixth grades). Through the use of informal behavior observations, data was gathered on the behavior of the identified students. The school counselor and a school counseling intern designed targeted, individualized behavior programs in conjunction with existing school-wide behavior supports. The intervention used a behavior chart system called "H.U.G." and provided an opportunity to show the academic and social outcomes for each student.

Review of Literature

Using school-wide positive behavior support programs can curb many undesirable behaviors and identify students who need support at a more intensive level (McIntosh & Bennett, 2011; McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008; Medley, Little, & Akin-Little, 2008). However, given that more than half of all elementary school disciplinary referrals are for repeat offenders, punitive disciplinary actions have been largely unsuccessful in changing undesirable behaviors (Smith, Bicard, Bicard, & Casey, 2012). For students who need more intensive support, behavioral interventions can be an asset to a school when they include numerous evidence-based practices and data collection in the student's natural setting (Couvillon, Bullock, & Gable, 2009; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2009; Smith et al., 2012).

Behavior education programs that provide daily feedback and rewards for desired behaviors and teach self-monitoring and self-management strategies have proven effective with students (Hawken, O'Neill, & MacLeod, 2011; Killu, 2008). Also, a helpful approach is tailoring the behavior plans to the student's various environments in which they need support, such as the classroom, lunchroom and gym (Benazzi, Horner, & Good, 2006; Killu, 2008; Smith et al., 2012).

Method and Procedure

The two students who were identified for this intervention—a female student in fourth grade and a male student in fifth grade with a gifted individual-

ized education plan—exhibited similar behavior concerns: task-related avoidance and difficulty with social cues when interacting with peers and adults. The school counselor observed the identified students' time-on-task behavior and peer interactions to pinpoint specific behavior concerns that had been reported by teachers. Upon conclusion of these observations, student records reviews, and consultation between the school counselor, teachers, and administrators, it was determined that the identified students might respond to a rewards system outside of the classroom. A daily check-in, check-out behavior program, "Hello, Update, Goodbye" (H.U.G.), through the school counseling program was implemented for both students. H.U.G. charts used a points system to capture teachers' feedback on these students' classroom performance as it related to their individual goals. The points system gave students the opportunity to earn small, daily rewards or larger, weekly rewards, such as lunch with a friend and an adult.

The school counselor monitored the students' disciplinary referrals, grades, and attendance during the intervention, while also noting the behavior chart data and time-on-task observations. Before the use of H.U.G. charts, the school counselor discussed the goals and consequences of the charts with the identified students and their teachers to ensure fidelity of implementation. The students also received instruction on coping strategies to use when they struggled with teacher redirection and their teachers received instruction on new redirection strategies to cue the two students.

Results

For the female student in fourth grade, the goals and target goal achievement rate at the beginning of the intervention were (a) to use kind words and actions with peers and adults at least 80% of the day, and (b) to be prepared for class and to complete work on time at least 80% of the day. Results showed initial improvements in both of her goals, enough to revise the daily expecta-

tions for goal attainment to 85% at the 4-month mark. However, at the revised, higher percentage, the student's behaviors worsened. The student continued to struggle with making connections with peers, but due to her academic needs, the school counselor did not pull her out of class for additional counseling. During a postintervention interview, the student indicated that she struggles with managing her anger and while she tries to use coping skills, she feels unable to do this on a regular basis. She felt that the H.U.G. chart was helpful with her second goal "because it helps me to know if I have a good class or a bad class."

> ## WRITING WITH ONE OR MORE COUNSELOR EDUCATORS CAN HELP GUIDE SCHOOL COUNSELOR RESEARCHERS THROUGH THE PROCESS.

For the male student in fifth grade, the goals and target goal achievement rate at the beginning of the intervention were (a) to use kind words and actions with peers and adults at least 80% of the time, and (b) to complete classwork and homework on time and stay focused in class at least 80% of the day. Based on H.U.G. chart data, he had demonstrated progress at the 2-month mark, at which point his target goal achievement rate was revised to 87.5%. The student showed consistent gains over a period of time that resulted in the termination of the intervention. The student ultimately exceeded expectations by achieving both goals nearly 100% of the time. During a postintervention interview, the student indicated that he knew he possessed the ability to do well with his goals, but before the H.U.G. chart was introduced, he did not feel motivated to complete his work or to make connections with his peers.

Data showed increases in both students' grades and work completion rates and decreases in off-task behavior. Postintervention interviews also indicated greater self-awareness in

both students regarding responsibility and decision making, and an increase in their ability to maintain progress.

Discussion and Implications

The data collected for each student supported the need for school counselors to work closely with all students to identify individual strengths and needs, and to be able to structure interventions and data collection methods for implemented interventions. Although the use of behavior charts demonstrated an immediate effect, the impact may not translate into long-term changes that extended into subsequent school years.

Data from these interventions was crucial in making subsequent decisions about how to further help each student. Thus, regular data analysis and collection, including interviewing students, is useful for school counselors in fostering a deeper understanding of students with extensive needs and of the effectiveness of individualized interventions.

Practitioner Research Project #4:
COMBINING INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS FOR STUDENTS ACROSS ELEMENTARY GRADES

The elementary school in this intervention was a high needs school with critical disciplinary problems. While disaggregating the disciplinary referral

data, the counselors found 34 students in kindergarten through fifth grade who had received a combined 230 discipline referrals (five or more each) of the 242 total school referrals during the previous school year. To address the discipline issues, the school's two counselors developed a comprehensive plan to intervene that included both individual and group interventions.

STUDENTS RESPONDED WELL TO THE CONSISTENT, POSITIVE, SOLUTION-FOCUSED APPROACH OF THE GROUPS. PLANS WERE MADE TO REPLICATE THEM IN THE FUTURE.

Review of Literature
Elementary school students are beginning to develop decision-making, communication, and life skills, as well as character values (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Early identification and intervention of children's academic and personal/social needs are essential in removing barriers to learning and in promoting academic achievement (American School Counselor Association, 2008). School counselors at the elementary level are uniquely situated to implement data-driven, comprehensive school counseling programs that focus on prevention, skill building, and problem reduction (Galassi, Griffin, & Akos 2008).

Method and Procedure
The purpose of this intervention was to reduce discipline referrals for identified students at an elementary school. Each student received three or more of the following individual or group-based strategies: individual counseling, weekly check-in/check-out procedure, behavior reward system, behavior monitoring, small group counseling, adult mentoring, peer mentoring, and referrals to outside agencies. The 34 students who participated in this intervention ranged from 5-12 years old, were of various ethnicities and abilities, and were all of low socioeconomic status. Several of the students who participated were part of the school's Emotional Behavioral Disabilities program.

Individual Intervention
The school counselors met with each student to set individual behavior goals, which the counselors monitored and shared with each student's teacher. They also partnered with the teachers to provide an incentive for positive behavior within the classroom; a frequent incentive was time with the school counselor to do a preferred activity. At the beginning and end of each week, the school counselors blocked out time to check in and out with the targeted students to assess progress on behavior goals. This intervention provided individual encouragement and helped students maintain positive behaviors for the week. Finally, the school counselors worked with the students' families to make referrals for additional mental health services; community-based mental health counselors were available to meet weekly with students.

Group Intervention
Every student in the targeted group received an adult mentor through the U.S. Navy or Big Brothers Big Sisters programs. Mentors served as positive role models and met with students to focus on behavior goals. Through the Safe School Club, an antibullying club started by the school counselors, older peer mentors from the fourth and fifth grades met with younger students in the targeted group. These peer mentors taught friendship skills, social skills, and bullying prevention. Some students also received a 10-week small group counseling intervention from the school counselors using the S.S. Grin social skills curriculum.

Results
All of the aforementioned interventions were in place for 7 months. Dis-cipline referral data at the end of the school year indicated that combined referrals for the 34 identified students saw a 52% reduction over the year. Furthermore, student survey data for the students who participated in the small group counseling intervention demonstrated increased knowledge in social skills and anger management strategies. Surveys indicated that 93% of participating students in K-second grades and 96% of participating students in third-fifth grades were able to identify feelings, demonstrate respect, build positive relationships, and identify appropriate ways to handle conflict.

Discussion and Implications
The counseling interventions provided to the targeted group of students contributed to an overall decrease in discipline referrals. Results also supported research surrounding adult mentoring and small group intervention as having an immense impact on student behavior and achievement (Erford, 2010; Sink, Edwards, & Eppler, 2012). The school counselors have continued to implement all of the elements involved in this intervention as part of the elementary school's comprehensive school counseling program.

The elements of this intervention can be replicated easily at any school level. However, school counselors developed for each student a unique plan of combined activities to maximize individual effectiveness.

MENTORING PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHERS FOR WRITING

Although not necessarily intended, mentoring began when the first author facilitated a panel presentation of action research projects at an annual conference. From these presentations, she invited the practitioners to submit materials for their

presentation and to consider contributing to a professional manuscript that would disseminate their work. The motivation behind the invitation was both personal and professional. The first author had been a practitioner for many years and had been able to publish her action research, and she was keenly aware of the historical and current lack of practitioner-focused research in the field. Many of the presentations she witnessed at the conference answered the question, "How are students different as a result of what school counselors do?" and as such, were models of the type of data-driven, evidence-based interventions that could and should be disseminated to a larger professional audience.

Reflections from the Contributing Practitioners

The first author asked the practitioner contributors to share their thoughts as to what interested them in writing for a publication, their knowledge of scholarly writing or action research, their experiences of the writing process, and how the first author may have mentored them along the way. One author shared the following thoughts on the process:

Although I've already had experience contributing to modern social-psychological theory and practice, especially in education, this particular article was a new experience for me. This writing is different because it is not simply following the scientific method to observe results and inform practice, but also revealing the actual impact of interventions within a single school. When multiple school counselors contribute to this kind of writing, you get to see the diverse manner in which counselors around the country need to approach their students. In this way, the practices are more specific and tailored to the unique population of our particular schools. Rather than painting with a broad stroke, my contribu-

tion highlights the effectiveness of knowing the community, understanding specific needs, and applying appropriate interventions to empower students. Dr. Mason was helpful when working with me to provide standards and suggestions to make sure my writing flowed with other counselors who I hadn't met before. Her leadership on this project empowered me to illuminate the data from my school so as to contribute to a growing body of action research. My hope is that other counselors will be able to read more of these miniature studies, both to inspire the spread of effective interventions and to encourage even more counselors to add to the literature. (I. Brodie, personal communication, April 5, 2016)

Another author shared similarly affirmative thoughts on their experience:

Overall, I've had a positive experience writing for and contributing to this article. I was without such an experience before, so I am far better prepared for my next journal article, particularly with budgeting my time to meet editorial deadlines. I feel so fortunate that I had the opportunity to translate my experience in a school counseling practicum/internship into a piece for a peer-reviewed publication. I hope that in the publication of this article, other school counselors and students pursuing school counseling degrees see a place in this journal for their contributions. Furthermore, I respect Dr. Mason for not only the work she does as a counselor educator but also in making this article a reality. She's volunteered her time and energy

for the last few years into this article—without her, I wouldn't have had the ability to contribute to this journal. I have tremendous respect for the time and energy she invested in me and others contributing to this article. (C. Pennington, personal communication, April 9, 2016)

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELOR EDUCATORS AND SUPERVISORS

Scholarly activity, including conducting research and publishing in peer-reviewed journals, is fundamental to the professional role of school counselor educators and supervisors (Lambie et al., 2014). Therefore, school counselor educators and supervisors can serve as mentors, role models, and a resource to encourage practitioners to demonstrate their leadership and advocacy skills through participation in scholarly contributions. Further, these collaborative working relationships will enhance the professional identity development of school counselors and add viable research to the existing literature in the field.

The significance of school counselor educators mentoring school counselors to disseminate and publish their work is directly tied to the need for more school counselors to enter counselor education doctoral programs. Given the unique training requirements of school counselors (Brott, 2006; Kozlowski & Huss, 2013), recruiting more school counselors into doctoral programs is critical so that they might train future generations of practitioners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELOR PRACTITIONERS

School counselors' use of data is essential to inform effective, comprehensive school counseling interventions and to ground decisions that impact students' academic, social/emotional, and career well-being (ASCA, 2012; Young et al., 2009). Action research projects shared with stakeholders are critical to the continued evolution of the field of school counseling (ASCA 2012; Young et al., 2009). One of the contributing authors spoke directly about the implications for school counselor practitioners:

> Dr. Mason mentioned emphasizing school counselors working together; that idea played an important role in my wanting to share about this project. I first started to consider several components that I would incorporate in my attendance groups years ago while meeting with and sharing ideas with fellow district school counselors during our regional professional learning team meetings. I hoped that in writing specifically about what I did in leading my attendance groups, including the very basic information about how I prepared before the meetings, other school counselors would see an intervention they could either replicate or adjust to fit their circumstances. (K. Collins, personal communication, April 20, 2016)

CONCLUSION

This article presented the findings of four unique action research projects by school counselors representing one middle school and three elementary schools. The authors discussed the mentoring process involved in bringing this manuscript to fruition, with a focus on the critical importance of practitioners sharing and disseminating findings of their action research. Counselor educators and supervisors, through collaborative efforts, are ideally situated to mentor and support school counselors in the field to conduct action research and publish their findings through participation in scholarly activity. ∎

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