

## **Counseling Latino Students Using a Comprehensive Developmental Guidance and Counseling Model**

Glenda Johnson

Appalachian State University

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*Latino immigrants are the fastest growing minority group in the United States. This literature review explores challenges faced by Latino youths in the United States. Services provided to Latino youths in Mexico, the United States neighboring country, are described. Professional school counselors' and the implementation of a comprehensive school counselor program are reviewed. Implications for school counselors are presented.*

*Key words:* Latino adolescents, professional school counselor, comprehensive school counseling programs

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The faces of people in the United States (US) continue to change. As the faces in the US changes, so do the faces of children in public schools. While all students are of equal importance, this article focuses on the Latino population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, persons of Latino decent continue to be the largest growing minority in the US with a count of 47.8 million in 2006 (Census Bureau, 2010). In this exciting time of change are the academic, social emotional and career needs of Latino students being met?

### **Latino Student Concerns in the U.S.**

A review of literature indicated deficits in Latino's perceptions of services provided by school counselors in the United States. A research study conducted by Archuleta, Castillo and King (2006) examining the effectiveness of using technology to deliver counseling services found that Latina eighth grade girls attending rural schools in Texas had many questions that related to their apprehension about high school, college, and careers. Although the students had misconceptions, they were eager to learn about future opportunities available to them. This information demonstrates the need for providing more information in the area of academic, college and careers to Latino students.

Malott (2010) found that over 50% the adolescents of Mexican-Origin attending school in the U.S. responded that experiences of discrimination was one of challenges they faced most often. This discrimination was described as the prejudiced beliefs or actions by others based on stereotypes regarding Mexicans. Participants of the study indicated that most of the

*Glenda Johnson, Professional School Counseling Program, Appalachian State University, North Carolina. Formerly from Sam Houston State University. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Glenda Johnson, 314B College of Education, Boone, North Carolina 28608-2037 Email: johnsong@appstate.edu*

discrimination came from Whites. This racism occurred in a variety of settings such as school, health, and community settings. Although individuals were adult professionals as well as peers, findings from this study indicate the need for school counselors to deliver services that include diversity training for all students.

Inappropriate or inadequate advising, lack of availability, lack of individual counseling and attention, differential treatment, and low expectations or setting limits were themes found in a study conducted by Vela-Gude, Cavazos, Johnson, Fielding, Cavazos, A., Campos, and Rodriguez (2009). The study examined eight Latino college students' perceptions of their school counselors. However, one participant's experience was very different and his statements were positive regarding his experiences with his school counselors.

The assessment and placement of minority schoolchildren in special education programs is problematic. At the root cause of misidentification and labeling of students may happen because of limited-English-proficiency and minority status. Referrals to special education programs for students with linguistically and culturally diverse students occur at a higher rate than does referral to gifted and talented programs (Barona & Barona, 2006). The authors suggested that professional educators be vigilant about meeting the educational and mental health needs of these students.

In the area of substance abuse, statistics indicate that Latino adolescents' drug use is on the increase (Torres-Rivera et al., 2004). If adolescents themselves are not involved with substance use, there is a high probability that someone they know is using drugs. Therefore, prevention programs tailored to Latino adolescents are important. Consequentially, it is imperative for clinicians to make themselves familiar with the culture values of the Latino population as well as current prevention and intervention programs available (Torres-Rivera, Wilbur, Phan, Maddux, & Roberts-Wilbur, 2004).

### **Services Provided to Students in Mexico**

Thus far, some of the challenges faced by Latino adolescents in the U.S. have been explored. Statistics indicate that 64% of Latino students in the U.S. are from Mexico (Census, 2010). Next, a look at how these areas are addressed in Mexico, the U. S. neighboring country, will be covered to shed some light on services adolescents and their families may have received if they are recent immigrants. Some of the services provided to Latino adolescents are provided through The National System for Integral Family Development (DIF) a department that falls under the umbrella of The Secretaria de Education Publica (SEP). Although this department is governed by SEP, the types of programs offered by DIF vary by municipals (SEP, 2010). However, families are able to access a variety of services for their children through DIF.

The National System for Integral Family Development addresses academic testing and referral, substance abuse treatment programs, programs for teenage mothers, testing for learning disabilities, and career testing and advising among other services. Additionally, responsive services such as crisis intervention and a 24 hour help line are offered in some of the municipals. Trainings are also presented to the family and community members that cover a variety of topics aimed at prevention and education. Some of the timely topics include: drug addiction prevention, helping your children learn, human growth and development, responsible parenting.

### **Professional School Counselors**

Latino students in the U.S. are experiencing difficulties in the areas of academics, social/emotional concerns, career development (Archuleta, Castillo & King, 2006; Barona & Barona, 2006; Torres-Rivera et al., 2004; Vela-Gude, et al., 2009). One way for schools in the U.S. to address the unique needs of Latino students is through the use of professional school counselors (PSCs) utilizing a comprehensive school counseling program (CSCP). Professional school counselors are trained and certified to address student concerns such as the ones faced by Latino youths. All professional school counselors receive education and training beyond the bachelor's degree level. However, certification in the field of counseling varies from state to state. For example, in the state of Texas, the State Board of Education Certification certifies school counselors for public school, following completion of a rigorous graduate education program, at least two years teaching experience, and a minimum score of 240 on the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES) School Counselor exam. While certifications vary from state to state, nationally the purpose of the professional school counselor is to provide a CSCP that meets the needs of all students (ASCA, 2005).

Many studies demonstrate the positive impact school counselors have on student development (ASCA, 2005; Lapan, Gybers, & Petroski, 2001; Sink & Stroh, 2003). These studies have been conducted nationwide and across all grade levels; indicating regardless of the geographical location or a student's socioeconomic status, they benefit from the work of school counselors. School counselors are supportive; they care about the overall well being of the whole student and the family system in which the student lives. The school counselor has a positive impact on both students' social, emotional well being, and also on academic achievement (Sink & Stroh, 2003). Research on the effectiveness of school counselors is well documented, and further research continues to add to this body of research (ASCA, 2005).

### **Comprehensive School Counseling Program**

A comprehensive school counseling program: focuses on all students, is comprehensive in scope, preventive in design and developmental in nature (ASCA, 2005). The three domain areas of academic, career and personal/social are outlined by ASCA as the areas of focus for a CSCP. Additionally, primary activities in a CSCP are outlined by ASCA: (a) guidance curriculum, (b) individual student planning, (c) responsive services, and (d) system support.

Comprehensive school counseling programs benefit all students academically, socially, and emotionally (ASCA, 2005). Research studies indicate that many counselors across the nation have implemented a CSCP (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001; Martin, Carey, & DeCoster, 2009; Sink & Stroh, 2003). The implementation of a comprehensive school-counseling program (CSCP) allows counselors to deliver services not only to those students in crises, but to all students systematically and in a developmentally appropriate way. Additionally, research has indicated well-established CSCPs improve academic achievement, and are instrumental in student safety and success (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001; Sink & Stroh, 2003). Professional school counselors can use the CSCP national model developed by ASCA.

### **The American School Counseling Association National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Program**

The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model: A Framework for school Counseling Programs utilizes the National Standards documents and addresses current

education reform efforts. The model was written for counselors to create one vision and one voice for school counseling programs. The ASCA National Model is widely accepted in the school counseling field as an ideal guideline for school counselors to plan, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive school counseling program to meet the needs of all students (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Martin, Carey, & DeCoster, 2009; Scarborough, 2005; Sink & Stroh, 2003; Wilkerson, 2009). Elements of the model include: (a) foundation, (b) delivery system, (c) management systems, and (d) accountability. The models' themes include: (a) leadership, (b) advocacy, (c) collaboration and teaming, and (d) systemic change. A comprehensive approach to program foundation, delivery, management and accountability are presented in the model (ASCA, 2005).

The ASCA National Model suggests counselors spend the majority of their time in direct service (contact) with students and program delivery. The program delivery system consists of four components: (a) school guidance curriculum, (b) individual student planning, (c) responsive services, and (d) system support (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001; Wilkerson, 2009). School counselors can specifically address the needs of Latino adolescents through the program delivery system, using the ASCA national model or their states' model.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Counselors**

The implementation of a comprehensive developmental guidance and counseling program ensures services are provided to all students. A look at the four major components in the program delivery system reveals areas that can be used to specifically address the needs of Latino students. Suggestions for the areas of guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and systems support will be presented.

First, ways to address the potential language barrier will be addressed. Presenting services to Latino youths in English only can present a challenge to the delivery of services by school counselors that speak English only. One way to address this is with the use of Spanish-speaking translators. This can be especially helpful for students that recently arrived in the country. School counselors can also use as many manipulative and visual aids as possible to present information to students. Some school districts use a Spanish-speaking counselor to deliver individual and group interventions to assist students in expressing and dealing with their emotional needs (Thorn & Contreras, 2005).

### **Guidance Curriculum**

The presentation of classroom guidance lessons on diversity and accepting differences can be presented to all students. This allows counselors to address discrimination faced by Latino youths and other minority groups. By presenting lessons to the entire student body the counselor provides valuable information to all students regardless of their background or prior belief system. This can level the playing field and set the expectations for the school climate regarding differences.

In addition, the school counselor could serve as a consultant with teachers as they present lessons on diversity and accepting differences also. The school counselor could also take the lead in promoting school wide character development programs. There are programs available for purchase or one could be developed to meet the needs of the school.

## **Responsive Services**

School counselors can plan and deliver small group counseling sessions outside the classroom to respond to Latino adolescents' unique needs. Group work with other Latino students would allow the youths to not only connect with other persons going through some of the same struggles; but, it could also provide an alternative perspective to dealing with common concerns. Individual counseling sessions could be provided to students that do not benefit from group work or to address concerns regarding the student or the student's family that may not be appropriately discussed among others. Furthermore, community referrals to agencies can be provided to families to address crisis concerns such as suicidal ideation.

## **Individual Planning**

Latino adolescents could greatly benefit from individual planning with their school counselor to assist in analyzing their individual abilities, interests, and skills. School counselors could serve as an encouragement to students while presenting a list of possibilities and opportunities that are available to them. Additionally, advising in the areas of academics, social/emotional concerns, and career goals could be especially helpful to Latino adolescent youths whose parents may not be as knowledgeable about systems in the United States.

In regards to the component of systems support, school counselors are in an excellent position to specifically address issues such as substance-abuse among Latino youths. School counselors have access to students during the school day and this provides an opportunity to implement prevention and intervention strategies. In addition, school counselors can present teacher in-services, parent workshops, and collaborate with drug prevention agencies within the community.

## **Systems Support**

Not only can school counselors use systems supports prevention and intervention activities to address substance abuse problems, but other areas of concern can be addressed also. Yearly school wide events such as "Bullying Prevention Week", "College Week", and "Career Week" can be planned to assist Latino youths and families. The added benefit of school wide programs benefit all students, but a special focus on Latino youths can be added. Speakers of Latino origin can be brought in for "Career Day" and "College Week", Spanish translators can be provided at parent meetings and all communication can be translated in Spanish.

Additionally, school counselors can invite community agencies to the school to present workshops to families that specifically address concerns faced by Latino families in the community. Mental health agencies that have a specific focus on meeting the needs of Latino families can also be invited to the school to present workshops on topics such as depression and anxiety in Latino women, family communication, and adjustment concerns. Agencies that have Spanish-speaking counselors, evening hours, and a sliding scale fee can be an asset to a struggling family in assisting them with family concerns that will also aide in the adjustment of Latino adolescents. Such agencies can help bridge the gap between services families may have received in their country of origin and services needed in the United States.

Lastly, school counselors can distribute surveys to teachers, students, and parents to solicit information on the specific concerns of Latino adolescents. Results of these surveys can be used

to plan and implement intervention programs that are guaranteed to address the specific problems of the youths and families at a particular school and living in a specific community. Pre and post surveys can also measure the effectiveness of programs presented under the area of systems support and inform school counselors of any delivery systems adjustments needed.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this article was to look at the needs of Latino adolescents and to identify ways school counselors can address those needs. Research addressing Latino students and their relationship/experiences with school counselors in the United States demonstrate a need for expanded skill acquisition and delivery by school counselors (Archuleta, et al., 2006). Additional training and research in the area of multicultural awareness, specifically focusing on the Latino culture will allow counselors to improve their effectiveness in understanding, accepting and delivering services to Latino adolescents and their families.

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