

Career Counseling in Middle Schools: A Study of School Counselor Self-Efficacy

Carrie Sanders, Laura E. Welfare, Steve Culver



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Students in K–12 schools benefit from career counseling as a means to improve their readiness for academic and career success. This quantitative study explored the career counseling self-efficacy of 143 practicing middle school counselors using the Career Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale-Modified and a subscale of the School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale. Although school counselors were confident overall, evidence of specific areas of concern and limited time for career counseling was found. Results related to the importance of prior teaching experience in relation to career counseling self-efficacy also were highlighted. Implications for school counselors and policymakers include examining the amount of time school counselors spend on providing career counseling in comparison to time spent on non-counseling–related duties.

Keywords: career counseling, middle schools, school counselors, self-efficacy, time

All students in K–12 do not have the same exposure to career opportunities. Providing avenues for students to learn about and identify ways to access a variety of careers is the responsibility of counselors in the school setting. School counselors contribute to students' development in the domains of academic, career, and social and emotional development through comprehensive school counseling programs (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2014). ASCA published *ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success: K–12 College and Career Readiness Standards for Every Student* (2014), which offers a framework of desired mindsets and behaviors for college and career readiness. This resource and others highlight the importance of a school counselor's work in the career domain. However, school counselors' knowledge and self-efficacy in the career counseling field may impact their ability to be effective in this aspect of their work (O'Brien, Heppner, Flores, & Bikos, 1997; Perrone, Perrone, Chan, & Thomas, 2000). This quantitative study explored the career counseling self-efficacy of practicing middle school counselors. As students move through elementary and secondary school, they continuously learn valuable knowledge and skills to explore postsecondary options and prepare to enter into the world of work. Middle school is an important time in this continuum for students as they consider their future academic and career plans and identify pathways to achieve their goals. The results of this study, as well as results related to the amount of time middle school counselors spend providing career counseling, yielded valuable implications for school counselors, K–12 stakeholders, and counselor educators.

The Importance of Career Counseling

Students begin to develop career awareness in elementary school, explore careers during middle school, and move into career preparation and planning in high school. Career counseling connects the experiences students have in school to their future, which enhances academic motivation and provides meaning to and purpose for the work they are doing in school (Curry, Belser, & Binns, 2013; Scheel & Gonzalez, 2007). As children and adolescents learn about themselves and the world of work, they are more likely to make informed career decisions, value school, succeed academically, and engage in school offerings (Kenny, Blustein, Haase, Jackson, & Perry, 2006; Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, Akos, & Rose, 2013; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010).

Carrie Sanders is a visiting assistant professor at Virginia Tech. Laura E. Welfare, NCC, is an associate professor at Virginia Tech. Steve Culver is Director of Assessment and Analytics at North Carolina A&T State University. Correspondence may be addressed to Carrie Sanders, 1750 Kraft Drive, Suite 2005, Blacksburg, VA 24061, cbrill@vt.edu.

Career counseling is needed in middle school in order to inspire young adolescents to make preliminary career decisions, to prepare them to take desired high school classes, and to equip them for future career pathways (Akos, 2004; Osborn & Reardon, 2006). Curriculum that integrates postsecondary college and career options in middle school has the potential to provide support and motivation for students (Curry et al., 2013). This type of curriculum connects directly to the comprehensive school counseling program. In schools with fully implemented comprehensive counseling programs that include career counseling, students self-reported higher grades, perceived they are better prepared for the future, recognized the relevance of school, and experienced a sense of belonging and safety, more so than in schools with less comprehensive school counseling programs (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001; Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997). In summary, establishing connections between a student's academic preparation and possible career options benefits students in various ways, and school counselors are essential guides in the career exploration process.

Career Counseling in Schools

Despite this empirical evidence of its importance (Anctil, Smith, Schenck, & Dahir, 2012; Barker & Satcher, 2000; Osborn & Baggerly, 2004), school counselors can face barriers to implementing career counseling, including limited time because of competing demands, negative perceptions about career counseling, and low school counselor self-efficacy. For example, school counselors are often called upon to perform non-counseling tasks that take time away from providing a comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors desire to be engaged in promoting positive student outcomes and would prefer to spend less time on non-counseling-related activities (Orthner et al., 2013; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). There is some evidence that the desire to spend more time on counseling applies directly to career counseling, as found in a study of school counselors at all levels (Osborn & Baggerly, 2004). But, other studies have found that some school counselors are uncertain about the importance of career counseling (Perrone et al., 2000). These findings may indicate that although there is a desire to spend more time providing career counseling, there is uncertainty about its value.

Another potential barrier that is a focus of this study is individual school counselor self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, a core construct in this study, centers on the belief one has in his or her ability to perform a task (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Self-efficacy of school counselors would be defined as beliefs about their abilities to provide effective counseling services (Larson & Daniels, 1998). High self-efficacy among school counselors would promote adaptive delivery of school counseling services to meet the needs of diverse student populations (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005; Larson & Daniels, 1998). Social cognitive career theory (Lent & Brown, 2006; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000) offers a framework for understanding self-efficacy in action—that is, how it impacts the interactions between individuals, their behaviors, and their environments. O'Brien and Heppner (1996) explored social cognitive career theory as it applies to interest, engagement, and performance of career counseling.

The interaction between people, their behavior, and their environment provides a highly dynamic relationship. Performance in educational activities is the result of ability, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and established goals. School counselors have varied training experiences and personal self-efficacy beliefs that impact the delivery of a career counseling program. A school counselor's self-efficacy in career counseling can increase through four primary sources: personal performance, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997). School counselor self-efficacy may be influenced by many things such as graduate training, service learning, internships, professional development, and years of experience (Barbee, Scherer, & Combs, 2003; Lent, Hill, & Hoffman, 2003; O'Brien et al., 1997). Teaching is a related experience that may impact

career counseling self-efficacy. Some authors have highlighted prior teaching experience as helpful in the preparation of school counselors; others have not found such evidence (Baker, 1994; Peterson & Deuschle, 2006; Smith, Crutchfield, & Culbreth, 2001). Skills school counselors use to provide classroom guidance, which is one delivery method for career counseling services, are similar skills to those used by effective teachers (Akos, Cockman, & Strickland, 2007; Bringman & Lee, 2008; Peterson & Deuschle, 2006), so it is reasonable to expect that school counselors without teaching experience may be less comfortable managing a classroom of students than those with teaching experience (Geltner & Clark, 2005; Peterson & Deuschle, 2006).

There are two studies that have explored self-efficacy of school counselors with and without prior teaching experience. Scoles (2011) compared self-efficacy of 129 school counselors serving across all grade levels and did not find a statistically significant difference between those with and without teaching experience. In contrast, Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2005) found that respondents with teaching experience ($n = 183$) reported significantly stronger self-efficacy than those without teaching experience ($n = 42$). These conflicting findings about the importance of prior teaching experience suggest that further study is warranted.

Purpose for the Study

Given the importance of beginning career exploration early and the essential role school counselors play in that process, this study focused on career counseling in the middle school setting. Understanding practicing school counselors' self-efficacy and their time spent providing career counseling will help administrators and policymakers better understand ways to increase career counseling in middle schools. As such, the following research questions were posed: (1) What are middle school counselors' levels of self-efficacy in career counseling? (2) How does middle school counselor self-efficacy in career counseling vary with previous K–12 teaching experience? and (3) What is the relationship between middle school counselor self-efficacy in career counseling and the amount of time spent providing career counseling?

Method

A quantitative research design was used for this study. The researcher examined school counselor self-efficacy in the career counseling domain. A school counselor was invited to participate if he or she was a current middle school (sixth, seventh, or eighth grade) counselor in Virginia at the time of the study and his or her email information was provided on a district or school website. The electronic survey included three instruments: an information questionnaire that was used to collect data about personal experiences and training, the Career Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale-Modified (CCSES-Modified; O'Brien et al., 1997), and a subscale of the School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSE-Subscale; Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005).

Descriptive statistics were compiled by computing means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores for total career counseling self-efficacy, as identified by both the CCSES-Modified and the SCSE-Subscale independently. Means and standard deviations of the 25 items of the CCSES-Modified and the seven items of the SCSE-Subscale also were calculated.

Two analyses of variance (ANOVA) and a *t*-test were used to determine if there were statistically significant differences among means. Participants were given the opportunity to report their years of counseling experience both full- and part-time, and the researcher combined these to get a total number. This number was obtained by taking the total reported number of years as a full-time school counselor and adding that to .5 multiplied by the reported number of years as a part-time school counselor. Then, the researcher created discrete levels to represent groups of experience once the data had been collected in order to conduct the analysis. Identifying the range of experience of the sample and using a scale

appropriate for the sample determined the discrete levels. These three levels represented those who had the least experience, those in the middle, and those with the most experience as a school counselor. The researcher conducted an ANOVA with these groups and the SCSE-Subscale mean and a separate ANOVA with the identified groups and the CCSES-Modified mean.

The researcher obtained an answer of “yes” or “no” to indicate previous teaching experience. A separate value was given to answers of “yes” and “no” and the values were used to run a *t*-test with the mean for the SCSE-Subscale and the CCSES-Modified mean.

Participants indicated the total number of hours of conference presentations, workshops, or trainings that focused primarily on career counseling within the last 3 years. First, the researcher identified the range of the number of hours of training participants reported receiving in career counseling within the last 3 years. Then, the researcher created discrete levels to represent groups of recent training once the data was collected in order to conduct the analysis.

The third research question required a correlation to analyze the relationship between school counselor self-efficacy in career counseling and the amount of time (measured in percent) spent providing career counseling.

Participants

The participants for this study were practicing middle school counselors, defined as counselors working in a school housing students in grades 6 through 8 at the time the survey was completed. The data cleaning procedures described below resulted in 143 participants out of 567 invitations, which is a 25% response rate. Of the 143 participants, 23 (16.1%) were male and 117 (81.8%) were female (three participants omitted this item). Regarding race, 110 participants (76.9%) identified as White/Caucasian, 20 (14.0%) as African American, four (2.8%) as Hispanic/Latino, and one (0.7%) as Multiracial, while five (3.5%) preferred not to answer and three participants omitted this item. Participants' ages ranged from 25 to over 65 years with an average age of 45 years ($SD = 11$; respondents who reported being 65 and over were coded as 65).

Regarding training, the participants reported their highest level of education: 125 participants (87.4%) reported having a master's degree as their highest level of education, 11 (7.7%) had an education specialist degree, six (4.2%) reported having a doctoral degree, and one participant omitted this item. Participants reported a mean of 13.3 years ($SD = 7.4$) of experience providing school counseling. Regarding full-time teaching experience in a K–12 school, 47 (32.9%) participants had experience, while 94 (65.7%) did not have this experience, and two people omitted this item.

Instruments

The 49-item online survey included 17 items to gather demographic and professional information, the 25-item CCSES-Modified (O'Brien et al., 1997), and seven items from the Career and Academic Development subscale of the SCSE (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005).

Career Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale-Modified. The CCSES-Modified (O'Brien et al., 1997) was used to assess overall career counseling self-efficacy. Participants were asked to indicate their level of confidence in their ability to provide career counseling. For this study, the terms “client” and “career client” were replaced with the term “student” to be more congruent with school counselor terminology. Permission was granted from the first author of the scale to the researcher to make these changes (K. O'Brien, personal communication, January 7, 2013). The CCSES-Modified contains 25 items that are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (0 = *Not Confident*, 4 = *Highly Confident*). Within

the CCSES-Modified, there are four subscales: Therapeutic Process and Alliance Skills, Vocational Assessment and Interpretation Skills, Multicultural Competency Skills, and Current Trends in the World of Work, Ethics, and Career Research. The full scale has a reported internal consistency reliability coefficient of .96 (O'Brien et al., 1997).

School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale-Subscale. One subscale from the SCSE (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005) was included in this study. The SCSE Career and Academic Development subscale was designed for school counselors to examine self-efficacy in the career domain. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Not Confident*, 5 = *Highly Confident*), participants indicated their level of confidence on each of the seven items. Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2005) reported a subscale internal consistency reliability coefficient of .85.

Indices of Reliability in the Present Study

The internal consistency reliability in this sample for the CCSES-Modified was $\alpha = 0.941$ and the SCSE-Subscale was $\alpha = 0.871$. The CCSES-Modified had four subscales: Therapeutic Process and Alliance Skills (10 items, $\alpha = 0.820$), Vocational Assessment and Interpretation skills (6 items, $\alpha = 0.855$), Multicultural Competency Skills (6 items, $\alpha = 0.913$), and Current Trends in the World of Work, Ethics, and Career Research (3 items, $\alpha = 0.747$). All of these exceed the common threshold for reliability for similar measures. The CCSES-Modified total score and the SCSE-Subscale score had a strong positive 2-tailed Pearson correlation (0.792), which was statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This strong positive relationship suggests these two measures captured related information from the participants.

Procedure

The original sampling frame consisted of 576 middle school counselors with publicly available email addresses, which were collected from public school websites in all counties in Virginia. After Institutional Review Board approval was secured, participants were sent an email invitation with the informed consent and link to the web survey. One week later, participants were sent a reminder email. Upon completion of the survey, participants were given the opportunity to vote for one of five organizations to receive a \$100 donation as a token of appreciation for their time completing the survey. After the recruitment email was sent, there were nine people who indicated they were not eligible to participate. These included three individuals who sent a return email indicating that they were out of the office during the survey administration, three who were not currently middle school counselors, two who reported needing school division approval, and one person who had difficulty accessing the survey. This reduced the actual sampling frame to 567.

Data Cleaning

One hundred and sixty-one respondents answered the survey items. There were 18 respondents who omitted 15% or more of the items from the CCSES-Modified or the SCSE-Subscale and were therefore removed from the study. This changed the total number of remaining respondents to 143. Of the 143 remaining, there were eight respondents who each omitted one item that was used to measure career counseling self-efficacy on the CCSES-Modified or the SCSE-Subscale. Each omitted item was replaced with the individual's scale mean (e.g., mean imputation; Montiel-Overall, 2006), and those respondents were included in the analyses. When the omitted item was part of an analysis for Research Question 2 or 3, the respondent was removed from the affected analysis. Omissions on the demographic questionnaire are noted above in the description of the participants.

Results

RQ1: What are school counselors' levels of self-efficacy in career counseling?

Overall, middle school counselors who participated in this study were moderately confident, confident, or highly confident in their ability to provide career counseling services. According to the CCSES-Modified, counselors felt least confident in the subscales of Multicultural Competency Skills and Current Trends in the World of Work, Ethics, and Career Research, while they reported the most confidence in their Therapeutic Process and Alliance Skills. Specific areas of school counselor self-efficacy deficits were related to special issues present for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students in the workplace and in career decision-making, as well as special issues related to gender and ethnicity in the workplace and in career decision-making. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics and reliability for each subscale and the total scale.

Table 1

Career Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale-Modified Subscale Scores (N = 143)

<i>Subscales</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>Item M</i>	<i>Item SD</i>
Therapeutic Process and Alliance Skills (10 items)	21	40	35.24	4.05	0.82	3.52	0.40
Vocational Assessment and Interpretation Skills (6 items)	5	24	18.08	4.21	0.86	3.01	0.70
Multicultural Competency Skills (6 items)	0	24	16.52	4.79	0.91	2.75	0.80
Current Trends in the World of Work, Ethics, and Career Research (3 items)	3	12	8.09	2.44	0.75	2.69	0.81
<i>Total Scale</i> Total Instrument Score (25 items)	32	99	77.94	13.60	0.94	3.12	0.54

Note. 1 = Not Confident and 4 = Highly Confident.

The means and standard deviations for the SCSE-Subscale are listed in Table 2. On average, participants were confident or highly confident in their abilities to attend to student career and academic development.

Table 2*School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale-Subscale Individual Item Responses (N = 143)*

	% Response					<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Implement a program which enables all students to make informed career decisions.	1	3	20	34	43	4.16	.89
2. Deliver age-appropriate programs through which students acquire the skills needed to investigate the world of work.	--	2	18	34	46	4.24	.81
3. Foster understanding of the relationship between learning and work.	--	0	9	40	51	4.42	.65
4. Teach students to apply problem-solving skills toward their academic, personal, and career success.	--	1	8	36	55	4.45	.69
5. Teach students how to apply time and task management skills.	--	2	6	35	57	4.46	.71
6. Offer appropriate explanations to students, parents, and teachers of how learning styles affect school performance.	--	2	15	39	44	4.24	.79
7. Use technology designed to support student successes and progress through the educational system.	--	6	22	44	29	3.96	.86
Total Subscale Score						29.93	4.08

Note. 1 = Not Confident, 3 = Moderately Confident, 5 = Highly Confident.

RQ2: How does school counselor self-efficacy in career counseling vary with previous K–12 teaching experience?

Two *t*-tests were conducted to identify if there was a difference between career counseling self-efficacy among participants with and without previous experience as a teacher. Separate means and standard deviations were calculated for the two groups—those who had teaching experience ($n = 47$) scored higher on the CCSES-Modified ($M = 82.2$, $SD = 9.7$) and the SCSE-Subscale ($M = 30.9$, $SD = 3.4$) than those without teaching experience ($n = 94$), CCSES-Modified ($M = 75.8$, $SD = 14.7$) and SCSE-Subscale ($M = 29.4$, $SD = 4.3$).

Independent *t*-tests were performed to determine if the differences between the groups were statistically significant. For the CCSES-Modified, the assumption of homogeneous variances was not satisfied (Levene's test, $F = 7.13$, $p < .05$); therefore, the more conservative *t*-test was used to assess for a statistically significant difference ($t = -3.06$, $p = .003$). The mean score for the teaching experience group ($M = 82.2$, $SD = 9.7$) was statistically higher than the mean score for those without teaching experience ($M = 75.8$, $SD = 14.7$). For the SCSE-Subscale, the assumption of homogeneous variances was satisfied (Levene's test, $F = 3.71$, $p = .055$, $d = .51$). The mean score of the group with teaching experience ($M = 30.9$, $SD = 3.4$, $d = .39$) was statistically different from the mean score of the group without teaching experience ($M = 29.4$, $SD = 4.3$), $t = -2.03$, $p = .045$. Cohen's *d* is a valuable index of effect size for statistically significant mean differences (Cohen, 1988). The Cohen's *d* of .51 for the CCSES-Modified and .39 for SCSE-Subscale both represent medium effect sizes.

RQ3: What is the relationship between middle school counselor self-efficacy in career counseling and the amount of time spent providing career counseling?

The third research question required a correlation to analyze the relationship between school counselor self-efficacy in career counseling and the percent of work time spent providing career counseling. Participants reported the percentage of time they spend providing responsive services to students in the three school counseling domains, as well as testing coordination and other non-counseling–related activities, which is represented in Table 3. The averages and standard deviations of the percentage of time spent in each subscale were: *personal/social counseling* ($M = 36.25, SD = 15.39$), *academic counseling* ($M = 23.32, SD = 10.47$), *career counseling* ($M = 12.15, SD = 6.98$), *Virginia State Standards of Learning (SOL) testing coordination* ($M = 11.83, SD = 12.88$), and *other non-counseling–related activities* ($M = 16.44, SD = 12.55$). One participant omitted this item; therefore, $N = 142$ in Table 3. There was no statistically significant relationship between the CCSES-Modified and time providing career counseling ($r = .160, p = .057$) and a statistically significant weak positive relationship ($r = .286, p = .001$) between the SCSE-Subscale and time providing career counseling.

Table 3

Self-Efficacy and Time Providing Career Counseling

		% Career Counseling
<i>Career Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale-Modified</i>	Pearson Correlation	.160
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.057
	N	142
<i>School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale-Subscale</i>	Pearson Correlation	.286*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	142

Note. *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

There were several key findings from this study of middle school counselors' self-efficacy with career counseling. First, it is important to note that there was a wide range in the total self-efficacy scores for middle school counselors. As a group, these counselors were the most confident in their Therapeutic Process and Alliance Skills, and least confident in Multicultural Competency Skills and Current Trends in the World of Work, Ethics, and Career Research. Specifically, special issues related to gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation in career decision-making and in the workplace were areas of concern. School counselors who had previous K–12 teaching experience were significantly more confident providing career counseling than those without, as assessed by both measures. Finally, a Pearson correlation indicated there was a weak positive correlation between the SCSE-Subscale and the percentage of time school counselors indicated they spend providing career counseling. There was not a statistically significant relationship between the CCSES-Modified and time spent providing career counseling.

In this study, results indicate that middle school counselors spend more time doing non-counseling–related activities than providing career counseling, which is alarming. Career development is one of the three primary domains of a comprehensive school counseling program, and it is important for school counselors to create career development opportunities for students.

The majority of school counselors report the importance of career counseling; however, middle school counselors acknowledge they spend less time on career counseling than they prefer (Osborn & Baggerly, 2004). There is a need to reprioritize career counseling, which includes recognizing and acknowledging how career counseling intersects with academic and personal and social counseling in K–12 schools (Anctil et al., 2012).

Career counseling is valuable and evidence needs to be provided to indicate how non-counseling-related tasks take time away from school counselors' ability to offer adequate career counseling for students. Test coordination is time-consuming and an example of a non-counseling duty that some school counselors perform. Considering the amount of time this role requires, school counselors would find more time to provide career counseling services for students without this obligation. School counselors should gather evidence and provide accountability reports about how career counseling efforts contribute to student engagement and success.

Implications for School Counselors, K–12 Stakeholders, and Counselor Educators

In general, the practicing school counselors in this study had ample self-efficacy with regard to providing career counseling. However, there were certain items on the CCSES-Modified and the SCSE-Subscale that reveal discrepancies in middle school counselors' levels of confidence. Counselors felt least confident in the subscales of Multicultural Competency Skills and Current Trends in the World of Work, Ethics, and Career Research. Specifically, they reported lower self-efficacy addressing special issues related to gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation in relation to the world of work. In light of these findings, counselor preparation programs need to further investigate what is being taught in career counseling courses, how the content is being delivered, possible gaps in curriculum, and opportunities for outreach to current school counselors through continuing education. Given the powerful movement for advocacy related to these important social issues, it is in some ways confirming that the practicing counselors in this study felt less confident in these areas. Perhaps the national attention on issues of privilege and oppression related to gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation has shed light on individual or systemic challenges these school counselors face as they try to serve diverse young adolescents in a dynamic phase of their development.

There are opportunities to increase career counseling self-efficacy related to gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation in relation to the world of work. Bandura (1997) highlighted personal performance, vicarious learning, and social persuasion as particularly effective strategies for increasing self-efficacy. Continuing education, supervision, and professional organization engagement may be the best opportunities for continued development in these areas (Tang et al., 2004). In-service training and continuing education could be offered to provide school counselors relevant information to support their professional development and promote an increase in career counseling self-efficacy. Gaining up-to-date knowledge about the experiences of students with varied gender identities, ethnicities, and sexual orientations will best prepare school counselors to serve the entire student body. Observing advocacy approaches modeled by other leaders may inspire school counselors to use their voices in their own systems. Relatedly, this finding makes it apparent that K–12 school systems need clear and powerful policies and leadership around gender-, ethnicity-, and sexual orientation-related issues. School counselors are well positioned to partner with principals and superintendents in this important change process.

The second research question provided additional information about a somewhat contentious issue in previous research. School counselors who had teaching experience had higher career counseling self-efficacy than those who did not have teaching experience. This finding contradicts the

findings of a study conducted with school counselors in Ohio (Scoles, 2011) and supports the findings of the national study conducted by Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2005), as described above. Contradictory findings like these beg for more research. Perhaps the higher self-efficacy of those with previous teaching experience is related to the preparation in specific academic disciplines that teachers receive. It could be that because these school counselors were previously trained in a specific academic area, they are more confident in talking with students about careers in that particular career cluster (e.g., science teachers who become school counselors may be more prepared to discuss careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics with students). Conversely, this potentially narrow view of career opportunities may limit the career exploration of students if school counselors do not include a wide array of career options. An excellent area for further research would be to identify how previous teaching experience may specifically impact school counselor self-efficacy.

School counselors without teaching experience, although lower in self-efficacy than those school counselors with teaching experience, still had high career counseling self-efficacy. This suggests that school counselors without teaching experience have confidence in their ability to provide career counseling. If, as Peterson and Deuschle (2006) suspected, the advantage of those with prior teaching experience is because of the increased training and practice in classroom management and lesson preparation, one would expect that effect to diminish as years of school counseling experience are accumulated. A larger sample than the one in this study would be necessary to test that empirically. If, however, the impetus for the significant impact of teaching experience is more general, those newer school counselors without teaching experience may be adjusting to the setting and to new ways of managing their time, balancing multiple roles and responsibilities, incorporating community involvement, working with parents, fostering collaborative relationships, and becoming familiar with local resources. All of these tasks take time and effort and could impact a school counselor's self-efficacy to provide adequate services to students. It may be helpful for school counselors without teaching experience to ask for support and suggestions from seasoned school counselors in the district to learn from their experiences. In addition, professional development programming could be established for school counselors to become more familiar with the specific roles and responsibilities related to the career information, education, and counseling needs within a particular community.

Finally, the third focus of the study was on how school counselors use their time and if self-efficacy is related to that allocation. Most alarming about these findings was that school counselors are spending less time providing career counseling than they are doing non-counseling-related duties. A large percentage of middle school counselors' time was reported to be spent coordinating testing or doing other non-counseling-related tasks, which is not the most efficient use of school counselors' strengths. School counselors are uniquely trained to provide supplemental support for students in the academic, personal and social, and career domains in order to promote student success; therefore, it would be advantageous if they were able to utilize their time in a way that is consistent with the needs of students. One option to address the time constraint, particularly in this day of tighter budgets, is to utilize someone with an administrative background for the non-counseling duties in order for the school counselor to have time to incorporate adequate career counseling into their school counseling program. This is particularly important for middle school counselors providing career counseling because middle school students are preparing academic and career plans that will serve as a guide through high school and postsecondary educational endeavors (Trusty, Niles, & Carney, 2005; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005).

The world of work is continually changing, which makes it important to be aware of the current trends in this area. As these changes happen, marginalized populations face unique issues in the

area of career exploration and planning. Counselors need to be trained adequately to provide career counseling to clients. In addition to providing relevant information, promoting thoughtful reflection, and facilitating discussions for counselors-in-training, counselor educators could provide outreach and continuing education opportunities focused on career counseling.

Just as career counseling may be infused with academic and personal and social counseling for school counselors, counselor educators may consider infusing career counseling concepts throughout other courses and experiences during a training program. Counselor educators could model this authentic type of integration. Counselor educators could talk more about various career clusters and the value of career counseling throughout a training program rather than just in one specific course. Counselor educators may also facilitate discussions with counselors-in-training about their own career counseling experiences, allowing trainees time to reflect on their experience. In addition, trainees could talk about how they have worked with people in roles other than a counselor through the career exploration and planning process.

Counselors need to consider ways to utilize and increase the support of administration and teachers to identify what needs to change in order for them to reallocate their time so they are able to provide more career counseling. Providing evidence of the positive impact of their work may be an effective strategy. There are many approaches to this, such as utilizing current research studies to communicate support for the value of career counseling efforts. In addition, school counselors can gather data from current students, parents, and alumni regarding their perception of and desire for career counseling services through surveys or focus groups. Once specific programs are implemented, school counselors can evaluate the outcomes of the career counseling efforts through both formal and informal assessment procedures with students, teachers, and parents. Administrators should continue to express support for the career counseling efforts of school counselors and show support by advocating for more personnel in order for students to receive adequate career counseling and to meet the demand of the non-counseling tasks that counselors are assigned.

Limitations

The findings should be considered in light of the limitations of the study. Because of the nature of instruments that involve self-report, the results are based on the current perception of the participants and not objective assessments of the effectiveness of their work. Also, it may be more socially and professionally desirable to have confidence in personal abilities and, therefore, some participants may have answered the way they thought they should. This study was limited to those middle school counselors who had publically available e-mail addresses and were working in Virginia. Non-respondents and middle school counselors outside of Virginia are not represented in these findings; therefore, generalizing the findings should be considered with caution. Furthermore, the 406 non-respondents and the 18 respondents who did not complete the entire survey may be systematically different from the 143 respondents who were included.

Conclusion

This study has provided important new information about the self-efficacy of school counselors in the middle school setting as related to career counseling. Career counseling self-efficacy was high overall, with specific areas of deficit related to gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Those school counselors who had previous teaching experience had even higher career counseling self-efficacy than those who did not. High self-efficacy in school counselors had little or no impact on the time spent providing career counseling services. Tailoring continuing education opportunities in career counseling and providing clear administrative leadership would further strengthen practicing school counselor self-efficacy. Utilizing support personnel for non-counseling-related duties may allow

school counselors to use their career counseling skills and training to help middle school students explore and connect with careers, thereby improving academic and life outcomes.

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