

The Professional Counselor

Summer
2017



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Counselors and Workplace Wellness Programs

A Conceptual Model

Yvette Saliba, Sejal Barden

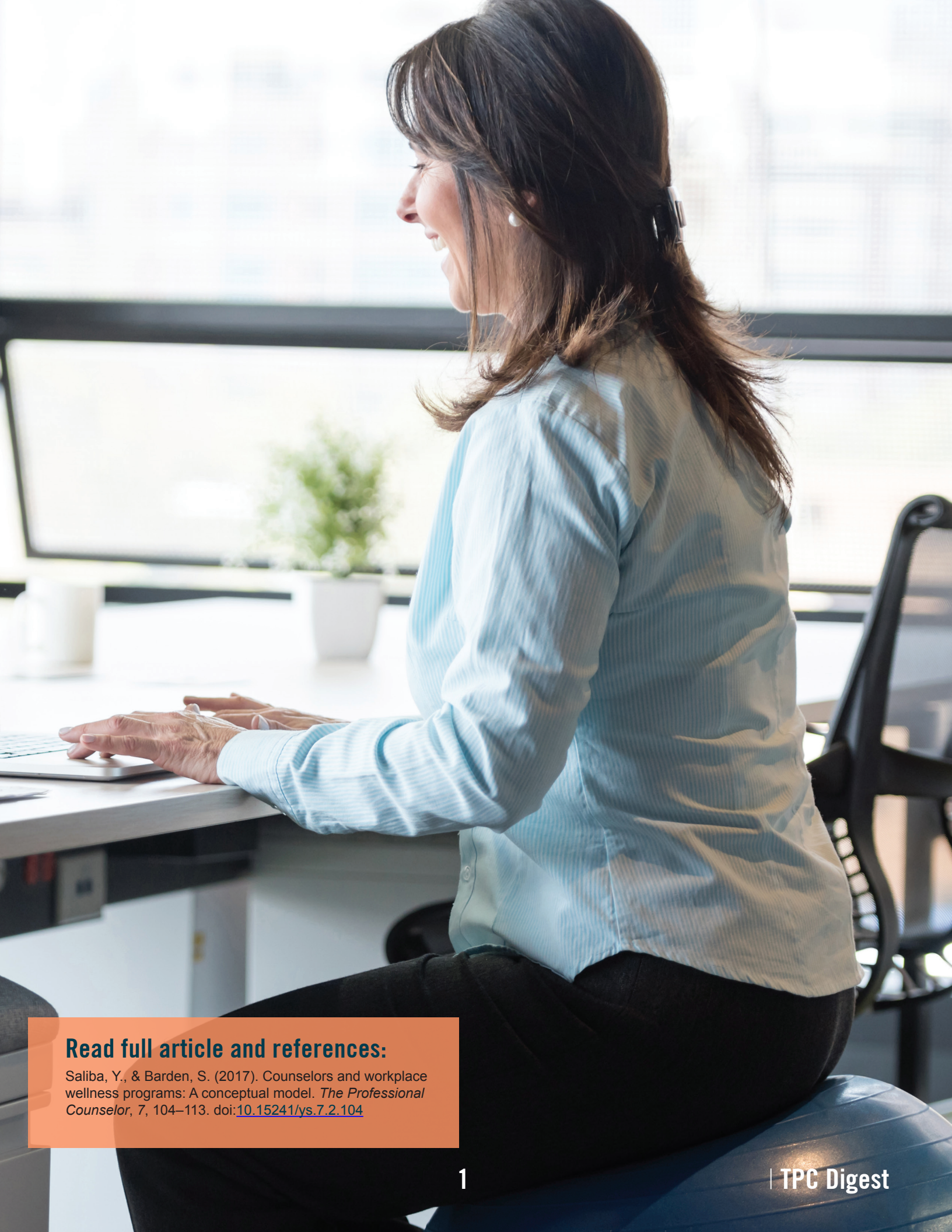
Occupational stress remains a top source of strain for over 65% of Americans due to extended hours in the workplace. This type of stress can lead to chronic illnesses, such as hypertension and diabetes, which can then drive up the cost of health insurance for many employers. To combat this, many businesses and organizations have implemented workplace wellness programs. These programs have been shown to help with: (a) employee retention, (b) lowering insurance costs, (c) supporting employee mental health and (d) enhancing employee satisfaction.

Wellness programs are divided into two areas of focus: (a) disease management and (b) lifestyle management. Disease management refers to treating chronic illnesses, such as hypertension and diabetes, and lifestyle management refers to preventing chronic illnesses through health promotion. Many workplaces have utilized health care professionals, such as doctors and nurses, to assist in the disease management portion of these wellness programs. As a result, these programs have become cost effective, often saving companies money. The same cannot be said, however, for the lifestyle management portions of these wellness programs. Lifestyle management programs, designed to promote health and wellness, utilize health care professionals or wellness coaches. The training of these professionals is not the same as the training for mental health counselors, and, as such, it is proposed that lifestyle management programs could be more cost-effective if they utilized counselors. In addition, counselors could provide employees with the tools for more effective and long-lasting health changes. Therefore, to bolster lifestyle management programs, as well as extend the professional reach of mental health counselors, it is suggested that counselors utilize their training and skills to work in lifestyle management programs.

Through the combination of motivational interviewing and the transtheoretical model of change, counselors could help employees achieve and maintain the health and wellness changes they would like to make. Motivational interviewing is an approach to help individuals motivate themselves to change, while the transtheoretical model of change can help conceptualize and facilitate those changes. Both theories have been studied individually and shown to be effective in helping clients move successfully toward their goals. Steps to Better Health (S2BH) is a proposed 8-week psychoeducational group that combines both motivational interviewing and the transtheoretical model of change. Each week of the group engages employees in discussions and exercises to promote change talk and overcome ambivalence. A case illustration of a hospital workplace wellness group is provided to help solidify the framework. The proposed S2BH curriculum is just one example of how counselors could flex their skills within workplace wellness programs.

Yvette Saliba, NCC, is a doctoral student at the University of Central Florida. Sejal Barden, NCC, is an Associate Professor at the University of Central Florida. Correspondence can be addressed to Yvette Saliba, 851 South State Road 434, Suite #1070-170, Altamonte Springs, FL 32714, ysaliba@knights.ucf.edu.





Read full article and references:

Saliba, Y., & Barden, S. (2017). Counselors and workplace wellness programs: A conceptual model. *The Professional Counselor*, 7, 104–113. doi:[10.15241/ys.7.2.104](https://doi.org/10.15241/ys.7.2.104)



An Examination of Counselors' Religiosity, Spirituality, and Lesbian-, Gay-, and Bisexual-Affirmative Counselor Competence

Laura Boyd Farmer

Lesbian-, gay- and bisexual- (LGB-) affirmative counseling includes counselors' knowledge, awareness of attitudes and skills that support sexually diverse clients. With the evolving social and political landscape surrounding LGB issues in the United States, counselors' ability to effectively serve LGB clients is increasingly important. Among studies of LGB-affirmative counseling competence, counselor religiosity has been examined as a contributing factor; however, counselor spirituality has not been explored as a potentially different aspect of identity. The author sought to examine counselors' self-identified religiosity and spirituality as they relate to LGB-affirmative counseling competence.

In this large study of practicing counselors and counseling students (N = 453), the following factors were examined to determine their relationship to LGB-affirmative counseling competence: counselors' self-identified religiosity, self-identified spirituality, education level, counseling experience with LGB clients and LGB interpersonal contact. Multiple regression analysis revealed that all five predictors explained 31% of variance in LGB-affirmative counseling competence. Of particular interest, there was a negative β value for religiosity, indicating an inverse relationship with LGB-affirmative counseling competence compared to a positive β value for spirituality and LGB-affirmative counseling competence.



Among other results, an analysis of variance revealed differences among religious affiliation groups (Protestant Christian, Catholic, Other Religious Affiliation and No Religious Affiliation). Notably, when LGB-affirmative counseling competence was compared across religious affiliation groups, those in the Other Religious Affiliation group had significantly higher scores than the Protestant Christian and Catholic groups. In addition, the Protestant Christian group had significantly lower LGB-affirmative counseling competence than those in the No Religious Affiliation group.

The results indicate that counselor religiosity and spirituality are each significant predictors of LGB-affirmative counselor competence, but in opposing directions. Spirituality is associated with higher levels of LGB-affirmative counseling competence, whereas religiosity is associated with lower levels. In this study, self-identified religiosity was assessed as the degree of involvement in one's religion and engagement in religious practices. The researcher did not examine the specific nature of participants' religious beliefs; therefore, no conclusions may be drawn about particular religious groups, as there may be wide variation in beliefs within those groups. However, results suggest that counselor spirituality does seem to support LGB-affirmative dispositions and warrants further study. Counselors are encouraged to self-reflect on spiritual and religious values, consider how they may be congruent with LGB-affirmative counseling, and develop a deeper understanding of the complex ideas and beliefs that are important to their religious and spiritual selves.

Laura Boyd Farmer is an Assistant Professor at Virginia Tech University. Correspondence can be addressed to Laura Farmer, 1750 Kraft Drive, Suite 2004, Blacksburg, VA 24061, lbfarmer@vt.edu.

Read full article and references:

Farmer, L. B. (2017). An examination of counselors' religiosity, spirituality, and lesbian-, gay-, and bisexual-affirmative counselor competence. *The Professional Counselor*, 7, 114–128. doi:[10.15241/lbf.7.2.114](https://doi.org/10.15241/lbf.7.2.114)

Self-Efficacy, Attachment Style and Service Delivery of Elementary School Counseling

Kimberly Ernst, Gerta Bardhoshi, Richard P. Lanthier

Although research supports that delivering school counseling services that align with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model makes a positive difference in student outcomes, school counselors face several barriers in their work environment that may prevent them from aligning their school counseling delivery with best practices. In this article, the authors explore the demographic and interpersonal factors related to elementary school counseling service delivery.

To examine school counseling service delivery, we measured the frequency with which school counselors perform specific activities and the preferred frequency of performing them. Activities that aligned with the “core” intervention categories were counseling, consultation, curriculum and coordination. We also examined “other” non-counseling activities that fall outside the school counselor role, including administrative, clerical and fair share activities. Using a nationwide sample of 525 elementary school counselors, we examined whether self-efficacy related to a range of school counselor activities and introduced attachment style as a potential variable related to school counseling practice. Years of experience working as a school counselor as well as training in and use of the ASCA National Model were also included as variables, as indicated by literature.

As anticipated, years of experience was related to actual performance of the core intervention activities of counseling, consultation, curriculum and coordination. School counselors who had received more training in the ASCA National Model were also more likely to perform core activities. Similarly, self-efficacy beliefs predicted the delivery of core activities aligned with the ASCA National Model.



This finding has important implications for counselor education and training, as school counselors who believed that they were capable of performing in accordance with the ASCA National Model were more likely to actually perform and want to perform core activities. Interestingly, self-efficacy beliefs also predicted higher levels of performing other activities that are considered outside of the scope of school counseling practice. It is possible that highly efficacious school counselors may simply do more, whether or not given activities align with ASCA recommendations. Providing novice school counselors with education and training that is consistent with their actual practice and is firmly grounded in the ASCA National Model will promote the development of self-efficacy from the start. In a cascade, self-efficacy will likely promote stronger alignment with best practices and, in turn, enhance student outcomes.

Anxiously attached school counselors revealed a lower preference for performing core intervention activities. Additionally, anxiously attached school counselors had a higher preference for performing other activities that are outside the scope of school counseling practice. Perhaps anxiously attached counselors find it more difficult to align with the professional identity model promoted by ASCA because administrative, clerical and fair share duties are expected and valued in their work setting. Indeed, anxiously attached workers seek close relationships with their colleagues and supervisors and have more difficulty resisting unreasonable demands in the workplace. Using attachment concepts as a guide for supervision or professional development activities could assist school counselors' ongoing efforts to understand their own behavior and motivations in the work setting. Education on attachment constructs has the potential to be a useful component of school counselor development, especially since the cultivation of healthy interpersonal relationships has a tremendous potential to facilitate effective change in schools.

Kimberly Ernst is a counselor in independent practice in Washington, DC. Gerta Bardhoshi, NCC, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Iowa. Richard P. Lanthier is an Associate Professor at George Washington University. Data for this article originated from the first author's doctoral dissertation. Correspondence can be addressed to Gerta Bardhoshi, College of Education, N352 Lindquist Center, Iowa City, IA 52242-1529, gerta-bardhoshi@uiowa.edu.



Read full article and references:

Ernst, K., Bardhoshi, G., & Lanthier, R. P. (2017). Self-efficacy, attachment style and service delivery of elementary school counseling. *The Professional Counselor*, 7, 129–143. doi:[10.15241/ke.7.2.129](https://doi.org/10.15241/ke.7.2.129)





Metaphor in Professional Counseling

Alwin Wagener

Read full article and references:

Wagener, A. E. (2017). Metaphor in professional counseling. *The Professional Counselor*, 7, 144–154. doi:[10.15241/aew.7.2.144](https://doi.org/10.15241/aew.7.2.144)

Metaphor is a common part of language and, as such, a frequent part of the communication between clients and counselors. The main goal of this article is to draw attention to the presence of metaphors and to the opportunity to better understand and work with clients through metaphors. Metaphors are important because they are part of how we learn and how we process and describe emotions. They allow for new understanding through connections to what is already understood. This understanding of metaphors means they are more than a linguistic device and research supports this understanding of metaphors.

The link between metaphor and emotional processing is a particularly important one for counselors. This connection means that counselors can learn about what their client is emotionally experiencing and processing through metaphor and may even be able to better support emotional change and processing with metaphors. Towards this end, approaches for working with clients' metaphors are described. These approaches addressed how to process metaphors with clients and the how the processing approach can be tailored to client needs. The role of counselor-generated metaphors is also discussed. Intention is a key aspect of counselor-generated metaphors, which can take the form of altered and reintroduced client-generated metaphors, short new metaphors, or metaphorical stories called disquisitions. Counselor-generated metaphors are used to help clients recognize what they are experiencing and for supporting new understanding and emotions. The way clients use metaphoric content in their descriptions provides an opportunity that is easily overlooked but potentially valuable to better understand and work with clients' inner experiences.

Through both client-generated and counselor-generated metaphors, the inner experience of clients can be more directly accessed and positive change can be facilitated. Therefore, the recognition and exploration of metaphors can be an incredibly valuable tool for counselors. It is hoped that the information provided in this manuscript will serve as a foundation for incorporating metaphor awareness and usage into counseling practice and will stimulate counselors to seek out additional training and information and develop research on the application and effectiveness of using metaphors in counseling.

Alwin E. Wagener, NCC, is an Adjunct Professor at the University of North Carolina – Charlotte. Correspondence can be addressed to Alwin Wagener, P.O. Box 1443, Black Mountain, NC 28711, alwinwagener@gmail.com.

Perceived Helpfulness of Teachers in Clinical Courses

Randall M. Moate, Jessica M. Holm, Erin M. West



Clinical courses are important in the development of students pursuing a master's degree in clinical mental health counseling (CMHC). Despite the importance of clinical courses, little is known about what CMHC students perceive as being helpful about their teachers of clinical courses. To investigate this, we sought the viewpoints of beginning counselors who were in their first four years of working as licensed counselors post-graduation. We were curious about what beginning counselors perceived as most helpful about their teachers of clinical courses during their master's degree programs and helped them to become the counselors they are today.

Thirty-two beginning counselors completed a Q sort that assessed the perceived helpfulness of their teachers of clinical courses in their CMHC master's degree program. Participants were prompted to reflect on teachers they had in clinical courses during their master's degree programs and then to reflect on what it was about those teachers that had been most helpful to them in becoming the counselors they are today. Participants were then directed to read 34 statements and rank order them on a response grid that ranged from +4 (*most helpful*) to -4 (*most unhelpful*). After rank ordering the statements, participants were asked to provide written responses to several post-Q sort questions designed to elicit qualitative data about why certain items were important to them.

Three different learner preferences about teachers of clinical courses were observed among participants in the study (i.e., application-oriented learners, intrinsically motivated learners, affective-oriented learners). When considering the different learner preferences that emerged in this study, it may be helpful to conceptualize each factor as a student-learner archetype present in CMHC clinical courses. Below, we provide a brief description of each student-learner archetype, and what they might perceive as an ideal educator in a clinical course.

Randall M. Moate is an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at Tyler. Jessica M. Holm is an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at Tyler. Erin M. West is a Lecturer at the University of Texas at Tyler. Correspondence can be addressed to Randall Moate, The Department of Psychology and Counseling, University of Texas at Tyler, 3900 University Blvd., Tyler, TX 75799, rmoate@uttyler.edu.



Read full article and references:

Moate, R. M., Holm, J. M., & West, E. M. (2017). Perceived helpfulness of teachers in clinical courses. *The Professional Counselor*, 7, 155–168. doi:[10.15241/rmm.7.2.155](https://doi.org/10.15241/rmm.7.2.155)

- Factor 1 Application-Oriented archetype: a student focused on becoming a competent professional counselor who is apprehensive about his or her lack of knowledge and experience. This student's ideal teacher explicitly articulates and demonstrates what he or she needs to do to become a competent professional counselor while providing supportive feedback as he or she tries to achieve that goal.
- Factor 2 Intrinsically Motivated archetype: a student who is a reflective thinker with a broad enjoyment of learning, motivated to become an excellent counselor. His or her ideal teacher helps to develop deeper personal understandings and wisdom through creating opportunities to hear diverse opinions and feedback.
- Factor 3 Affective-Oriented archetype: a student who wants to feel cared for and valued by a teacher as a means of developing a transformational relationship with him or her. His or her ideal teacher is a person he or she admires and who inspires the student to want to become a professional counselor.

Due to the three distinctive teaching preferences among CMHC students in clinical courses, counselor educators may need to spend more time considering how they can accommodate diverse student learning needs when teaching clinical courses. We also believe that counselor educators can use the findings of this study as a tool to conceptualize students with whom they work in clinical courses. Having such a conceptualization tool may help counselor educators modify their pedagogical approach when working with students individually in a classroom setting.

The Effect of a School-Based Transitional Support Intervention Program on Alternative School Youth's Attitudes and Behaviors

Viki P. Kelchner, Kathy Evans, Kathrene Brendell, Danielle Allen, Cassandre Miller, Karen Cooper-Haber

Alternative schools proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s. Alternative schools were initially designed to provide a positive alternative to conventional learning environments for students who were unable to succeed in traditional learning environments, but the trend today is for alternative schools to function as separate retributory schools for undesirable children. Frequently, students who are most vulnerable to dropping out of school are those who have attended an alternative school. Out-of-school suspension and expulsion are widely used practices in American school systems, which only further isolate students from education and may result in students being placed in alternative school settings. Students returning from alternative academies to their home schools may face an array of challenges. The transition back to the home school can be difficult for a number of reasons. Students returning from an alternative school setting to a traditional school setting have to readjust to the larger classroom sizes and less one-on-one assistance with their academic studies. The students are often behind in their studies because they are placed in classes at their home schools that are further along than the classes they were taking at the alternative academies. In addition, they tend to be labeled "at-risk" for school failure because of their attendance at an alternative school, no matter how much academic potential they may possess. Likewise, there is a sense of disconnectedness to the home school and disconnectedness with the faculty and staff.

The primary goal of alternative programs is to transition students back to their traditional educational environment, the home school. There is little research about this transition and how to best meet the needs of transitioning youth. Coordinated planning can minimize the anxiety and negative elements experienced by students, families and teachers that can accompany the transition from one educational setting to another. A lack of appropriate transition and support programming can negate the benefits received from the alternative school. Students have the potential to regress to prior negative behaviors and poor performance because of the loss of support, a return to the environment that already failed them, negative peer influences, and labeling and stigmatization by both peers and school personnel, which may lead to re-suspension or ultimately to dropping out of school.

The purpose of this study was to look at the effects of a school-based transitional support intervention program for students returning from an alternative school setting to a traditional educational setting. A two-phase behavioral intervention was implemented. The first phase was a psychoeducational group that focused on goal setting, self-regulation, organizational skills, study strategies, test-taking strategies and managing text anxiety. During the second phase, the group focus shifted to youth empowerment. The intervention included adult support in the form of group facilitators, mentors and a school advocate. After the conclusion of the intervention program, school attitudes, behavioral indicators and academic success indicators were evaluated. Although there was no significant effect due to treatment on attendance, there was an increase in the percentage of students remaining in school who attended the alternative school, as compared to the year prior to implementing the intervention. In addition, there was a positive effect on school attitudes among the students in the treatment group, indicating an increase in school engagement.

Viki Kelchner, NCC, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Central Florida. Kathy Evans is an Associate Professor at the University of South Carolina. Kathrene Brendell is Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of South Carolina. Danielle Allen is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in Columbia, South Carolina. Cassandre Miller is a graduate student at Syracuse University. Karen Cooper-Haber is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist at Lexington Five School District in Columbia, South Carolina. Correspondence can be addressed to Viki Kelchner, Department of Child, Family and Community Sciences, College of Education, P.O. Box 161250, Orlando, FL 32816-1250, viki.kelchner@ucf.edu.



Read full article and references:

Kelchner, V. P., Evans, K., Brendell, K., Allen, D., Miller, C., & Cooper-Haber, K. (2017). The effect of a school-based transitional support intervention program on alternative school youth's attitudes and behaviors. *The Professional Counselor*, 7, 169–184. doi:[10.15241/vpk.7.2.169](https://doi.org/10.15241/vpk.7.2.169)



Evaluating Independently Licensed Counselors’ Articulation of Professional Identity Using Structural Coding

Stephanie Burns, Daniel R. Cruikshanks

As inequities exist for independently licensed counselors, there has been much discussion about counselor professional identity along with many attempts by various counseling constituencies to address this critical issue. We investigated how independently licensed counselors expressed their role as a professional counselor to others and evaluated their consistency in expressing a counselor professional identity. Results demonstrated that independently licensed counselors rarely accurately self-evaluate their occupational role communications. As 56% of the participants rated themselves with the two highest ratings on the scale, it would seem that counselor professional identity is not a serious issue. However, when we evaluated participants’ narratives about their occupational role, we placed only 29% of counselors in the two highest formulas. As 54% of participants never used the term counselor or counseling when discussing their occupational role with others, the continued concerns about counselor professional identity are warranted.

Researchers have reported that counselors naturally distinguish the counseling profession from other mental health professions by being grounded in a developmental, preventive and wellness orientation despite practicing in different counseling subspecialties. It would appear that the profession and its members have agreement on the counseling profession’s distinct hallmarks of prevention, advocacy, wellness, empowerment and normal human development. However, results from our study indicated that only 11% of participants alluded to one or more of the counseling profession’s distinct hallmarks when articulating their occupational role to others. It does not appear that independently licensed counselors are communicating how the counseling profession’s unique values and philosophy shape their professional practice. Clearly, the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, the National Counselor Examination for Licensure and Certification, and the 2016 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and



Read full article and references:

Burns, S., & Cruikshanks, D. R. (2017). Evaluating independently licensed counselors' articulation of professional identity using structural coding. *The Professional Counselor, 7*, 185–207. doi:[10.15241/sb.7.2.185](https://doi.org/10.15241/sb.7.2.185)

Related Educational Programs Standards are all guided by these five hallmarks of the profession of counseling. However, independently licensed counselors are not connecting consciously to the philosophy and values of the counseling profession. Once they evolve into clinical practice, independently licensed counselors struggle to articulate not only a counselor professional identity, but also to clearly articulate their services. While this is a problem for the profession of counseling, this is a greater problem for the counselor who cannot clearly articulate why they should be hired, why a client should choose their services, why a legislator should listen to their point of view, or why an individual from another health profession should make a referral.

Participants' responses guided the creation of a model that can guide counselors in evaluating and improving the communication of their professional identity with clients, other professionals and the general public. This study provides a concrete description of how independently licensed counselors are expressing their professional identity when describing their role as a counselor to others. Additionally, counselors may wish to review the various formulations outlined to evaluate their own communications to see if and how their counselor professional identity can be strengthened.

Stephanie Burns, NCC, is an Assistant Professor at Western Michigan University. Daniel R. Cruikshanks is a Professor at Aquinas College. Correspondence can be addressed to Stephanie Burns, 1903 W. Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5226, stephanie.burns@wmich.edu.

The Professional Counselor

Summer
2017



The Professional Counselor DIGEST is an abbreviated version of the journal, *The Professional Counselor*, intended for the general public. The National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc. and Affiliates publishes *The Professional Counselor* and *The Professional Counselor DIGEST*.

The Professional Counselor DIGEST
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NATIONAL BOARD FOR
CERTIFIED COUNSELORS®

Digest
Volume 7, Issue 2