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Implementation of a School-Family-Community Partnership Model to Promote Latina Youth Development: Reflections on the Process and Lessons Learned

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School counselors frequently partner with families and community organizations to promote youth development and achievement. However, challenges to implementing school-family-community partnerships often preclude developing and sustaining such relationships. In this article, the authors document the implementation of a school-family-community partnership model, which was applied across two years of collaborative counseling programming for two groups of Latina youth. Semi-structured interviews with participants, parents, and educators were conducted and analyzed using qualitative content analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership and program implementation. The authors describe the outcomes of the partnership work and counseling programming as revealed by the findings, and offer reflections and lessons learned regarding the process, including implications for school counselors.

Keywords*:* partnerships, school counselors, community, multiparty collaboration, Latina youth

Despite numerous legislative attempts and policy changes implemented at the local, state, and national levels to address disparities in academic achievement (e.g., No Child Left Behind), many schools continue to underperform and fail to meet annual targeted benchmarks (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2010; Cook, Pérusse, & Rojas, 2012; Steen & Noguera, 2010). Educators and policymakers have worked tirelessly to reverse negative trends within underperforming schools, as evidenced by the growing number of charter and "turnaround schools," which permit significant changes to traditional school structures and staffing. Although these efforts may be succeeding in some schools, the achievement gap persists, with low-income and minority students encountering significant barriers to educational success (Grothaus & Cole, 2010). When implementing changes to improve youth development and academic outcomes, it is important to include all key stakeholders by fostering close school, family, and community ties (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010; Cook et al., 2012; Steen & Noguera, 2010). These stakeholders must include not only teachers and administrators, but also parents, students, staff, and community members (Mellin, Belknap, Brodie, & Sholes, 2015).

While school counselors play an instrumental role in supporting student development in the areas of academic achievement, social-emotional growth, and college and career planning (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012), they have frequently been excluded from school reform efforts (Steen & Noguera, 2010). Given that most school counselors possess training and skills in collaboration and partnering with families and community members (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Mellin et al.,

2015), they have unique expertise in promoting positive youth development and academic success, while advocating for educational equity for marginalized youth. The achievement gap narrows when a variety of stakeholders build partnerships, particularly in under-resourced school communities (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Chenoweth, 2007).

School-family-community partnerships are collaborative and mutual relationships among school personnel, families, and community volunteers and organizations such as universities (Bryan & Henry, 2012). These partnerships have also been identified as multiparty collaborations, whereby multiple stakeholders representative of a school community can collectively explore solutions to pressing problems that must extend beyond individual approaches to problem solving (Mellin et al., 2015). Researchers have identified the positive effects that such partnerships can have on students' academic performance, attendance, and discipline (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lee & Shute, 2010). Meaningful parent engagement has also been associated with improved academic success, including better attendance and higher test scores and grades (González & Jackson, 2013; Zhang, Hsu, Kwok, Benz, & Bowman-Perrott, 2011). More specifically, González and Jackson (2013) found that family engagement in decision making, combined with open communication between school stakeholders and families, was correlated with positive year-end data on reading and math performance among kindergarteners. Furthermore, educator practices that promote alliance building and open dialogue among school community members have been associated with positive school climate and a reduction in conflict (Acevedo-Gil, 2016; Nagda, McCoy, & Barrett, 2006).

The vast majority of school counselors possess advocacy and leadership skills and value the importance of engaging in school-family-community partnerships (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2006, 2007). Although school counselors are actively involved in partnerships, their perception of this involvement oftentimes relates to the collaborative climate of the school and their principal's expectations, as well as to their role perceptions and self-efficacy about partnerships, time constraints, and partnership-related training (Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). This finding indicates that school counselors may need additional support and direction in carrying out tasks necessary to develop and sustain partnerships. Although the ASCA (2010) position statement on school-family-community partnerships asserts that school counselors serve multiple roles, including that of advocate, liaison, facilitator, initiator, and leader, school counselors may have competing administrative responsibilities that preclude providing comprehensive school counseling services such as building partnerships (Reiner, Colbert, & Pérusse, 2009). School counselors may also feel unprepared and therefore may benefit from further training in partnership work (Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2006). Given large school counselor-to-student ratios, coupled with a decline in resources for public, urban school districts, school counselors must partner with school staff, family, and community members to effectively address local challenges and to promote equitable outcomes (Mellin et al., 2015). Certainly, school counselors must seek and negotiate critical support from school principals in this process since principals play a key role in providing resources and training needed to build and sustain partnerships in schools (Mleczko, & Kington, 2013).

The purpose of the current study was to examine outcomes of a school-family-community partnership implemented in collaboration between a public, urban elementary school community—led by the school counselor—and a neighboring university's school counseling graduate program. Various partnership approaches and models are available to guide partnership development and implementation between school communities and higher education institutions, including community service-learning (e.g., Curwood, Munger, Mitchell, Mackeigan, & Farrar, 2011), communities of practice, which focus on engaging in group-driven action to address issues (e.g., Fuentes & Spice 2015), and systemic engagement, which employs systemic approaches to community transformation, (e.g., McNall, Barnes-Najor, Brown, Doberneck, & Fitzgerald, 2015). We chose the partnership process model (Bryan & Henry, 2012) to guide our partnership work because the framework was specifically developed for school counselors and focuses on democratic collaboration and reciprocal relationships among school, family, and community stakeholders. The partnership process model provided a lens through which to examine outcomes of community partnership building and implementation, led by a school counselor who represented the local

school, in collaboration with a counselor educator who represented the local university. Preparing to partner represents the first stage of the model and involves recognizing and understanding one's own beliefs and attitudes toward students, families, and the community one intends to serve. It also centers on the importance of developing a shared vision among school stakeholders, guided by democratic collaboration and decision making (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Stage two involves assessing needs and strengths across and within the school community as the partnership forms. Stage three, coming together, entails forming a partnership leadership team (PLT) for the purpose of assessing the school and developing, implementing, and evaluating the partnership plan and programming. Stage four, creating a shared vision and plan, emphasizes the importance of achieving buy-in from stakeholders and ensuring respect for cultural differences. Taking action comprises the fifth stage of the model and involves implementing the planned intervention(s) or event(s). The sixth stage focuses on evaluating and celebrating progress, and the seventh stage concentrates on maintaining momentum.

Applying the partnership process model, we describe in this article the process of implementing and assessing outcomes of community-engaged research between a higher education institution and a local, neighboring school community. We intended to develop a partnership that would promote authentic and collaborative community engagement, mutually benefitting children, families, graduate students, and the community. Community engagement that is reciprocal in nature facilitates the mutual development and exchange of knowledge to address critical issues, enhance research, improve teaching and learning outcomes, and contribute to the public good (New England Resource Center for Higher Education, 2016). To achieve these outcomes as partnership relationships develop, stakeholders representing the school and university are encouraged to consider overall collaboration readiness, including levels of shared commitment, vision, goals, mutual respect, resources, and responsibility for implementation (Curwood et al., 2011). Accordingly, as we proceeded with partnership building, refinement, and implementation, we acknowledged our shared roles, commitments, and goals through application of the partnership process model.

The partnership work began with a large convening of school-community stakeholders, including the school principal, counselor, two teachers, representatives of local community organizations, and university staff and researchers. The convening offered a venue in which to explore opportunities for new collaborations between the organizations; facilitate a renewal and strengthening of partnership activities; and engage in collaborative research efforts to address identified local needs. Smaller partnership teams were then formed based on shared interests and expertise.

This article documents reflections on and outcomes of the partnership team's efforts to promote positive social-emotional learning and academic outcomes among newcomer Latina students. We hypothesized that democratic and collaborative school-community partnership programming can help to support the needs of schools and promote positive youth development. In applying the partnership process model, we documented implementation activities and examined outcomes of partnership efforts. Consistent with the important role of evaluation of partnership efforts (e.g., Hart & Northmore, 2011) and aligned with the partnership process model, we explored outcomes of partnership implementation and programming through qualitative content analysis (QCA) (Schreier, 2012) of semi-structured interviews with children, parents, and the school counselor. Through this investigation, we hope the implementation outcomes presented herein can guide school counselors in building and sustaining community partnerships that promote positive youth development.

Method

Partnership/Research Team

The first stage of the partnership process model—preparing to partner—emphasizes the importance of self-awareness of values and beliefs as well as recognizing biases and attitudes toward school community members (Bryan & Henry, 2012). In the context of the current study, this meant explicitly recognizing the

positions of power among the various partner stakeholders and actively promoting the equal sharing of voices, power, and decision making within the partnership leadership team (Mischen & Sinclair, 2009). The PLT first comprised four professionals: a school counselor, a dual language teacher, and two university faculty members. The principal provided full support to the school counselor in building and strengthening partnerships between the school community and the university. Because the school counselor held an integral role serving as the partnership liaison, the principal reinforced the school counselor's leadership role in partnership planning and implementation. This permitted ample opportunities to share different viewpoints among members of the PLT and facilitated the mutual distribution of power among partners.

The university, which holds the elective community engagement classification awarded by the Carnegie Foundation and endorses a social justice and urban mission, has readily supported community-engaged research partnerships. Given the close geographical proximity of the elementary school to the university, many faculty and staff have engaged in partnership activities with the school. However, school administrators emphasized the need for "greater consistency and follow through" to ensure research collaborations are grounded in shared goals and objectives and are reflective of open and consistent communication. To this end, the researchers aimed to involve school personnel in all aspects of program implementation and evaluation. The school counselor's deep involvement in the partnership also resulted in her contributing to the authorship of the manuscript. In addition, the PLT provided the opportunity to incorporate community knowledge and interests so that curriculum implementation would be relevant to local contexts and the needs of the school.

In preparing to partner, the university faculty were expressly aware of their privileged positions as White researchers and, as such, sought actively to work together in full, equitable partnership. The team shared the understanding and mission of empowering newcomer Latino families to encourage collaborative, meaningful engagement in the school community and co-participation in the partnership process and program implementation. This meant expanding representation of diverse stakeholders on the PLT, namely parent and community member participation. As we solidified and expanded our PLT, we identified strengths and needs within the school community (stage two of the partnership model). Identified strengths included a strong sense of cultural pride and community within the school, an example of which is the school's regular practice of holding "pride assemblies," where school community members convene to observe and celebrate student displays of academic and creative works.

Despite these strengths, the school's academic performance was of significant concern. School personnel, including the dual language teacher and school counselor, shared with members of the PLT the importance of employing culturally responsive practices to best support students' social-emotional learning and academic development. Through this understanding and awareness, partners actively expanded the PLT (stage three of the partnership model) to represent the voices of school-community stakeholders. The school counselor played an integral role by providing stability for sustaining partnership work as changes in school personnel occurred across the three years of collaboration. She also spearheaded recruitment of additional members to the PLT by leveraging the existing, strong parent and community relationships. As a result of the counselor's outreach, a parent and a community-based professional (i.e., the education coordinator from the local after-school program) then joined as voluntary participants of the PLT. All members of the PLT, including newcomers, were encouraged to participate on equal grounding throughout the partnership's inception and implementation.

Stage four of the partnership model emphasizes the importance of creating a shared vision and plan to direct the goals of the PLT. The vision of school improvement shared by PLT members in this study focused on (a) improving students' academic and social-emotional learning through culturally responsive curricula (b) fostering democratic communication between school and families; and (c) increasing celebration of cultural strengths and traditions. These three goals were identified with input from all PLT members. With a shared vision in place, the PLT convened quarterly to discuss implementation plans and monitor progress, leading to stage five (taking action).

Participants

Based on their shared vision and goals for school improvement, the PLT members chose to focus their attention on supporting the needs of Latino newcomer students, a burgeoning population within the school. This vision for school improvement was carried out with two groups of Latina newcomer students over two academic school years: a group of 10 fifth-grade Latinas through integrating Latino dance and Latino literature, and a group of seven third-grade Latinas through focusing on culturally responsive literacy instruction. Ten fifth-grade Latinas, six of whom identified as Puerto Rican, three as Dominican, and one as biracial (Puerto Rican/Dominican), participated in the Latino dance/literature intervention, and seven third-grade Latinas, three of whom identified as Puerto Rican and four as Dominican, engaged in the culturally responsive literacy intervention. All participants were newcomers to the school, identified Spanish as their native language, and were eligible to receive free lunch.

Partnership School

The K-5 elementary school is located in a large urban setting in the Northeast. At the time of this study, the school served approximately 543 students, of whom 88% were low income, 61.3% Latino, 26.5% African American, and 48.1% English language learners. The school was classified as a turnaround in 2011 and subsequently came under state receivership due to declining test scores (Vaznis, 2014). The school offered a Spanish-English dual language program with the goal of promoting academic success for children from low-income communities. All students engaged in dual language instruction, regardless of home/first language. Students were taught in all content areas in both languages on a weekly rotating schedule, receiving one week of instruction in English and one week of instruction in Spanish.

Measures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the university researchers as part of stage six (evaluating and celebrating progress) at the completion of each school year of the program/partnership implementation across school-community stakeholders, including children, parents, and the school counselor. Interviews with students explored academic and social-emotional development outcomes, while interviews with parents and the school counselor explored outcomes at the school-community level, particularly with respect to goals of supporting youth development and school-family communication. The focus of interview questions aligned with the goals of the PLT: (a) to improve students' academic and social-emotional learning through culturally responsive curricula and (b) foster democratic communication between the school and families. Student interview questions were based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2014) framework. Sample interview questions included: (a) What did you learn about yourself through participating in Girls Group? (b) How has Girls Group helped you solve a problem? (c) What have you learned about expressing yourself and listening to others? (d) Has Girls Group made you feel more or less confident with completing schoolwork?

Interview questions with parents focused on their perceptions of school climate, based on National School Climate Standards, which focus on creating a welcoming, nurturing, and safe learning and teaching environment (Center for Social and Emotional Education, 2009). Sample interview questions included: (a) Since arriving here to this school, have you felt welcomed? (b) Please describe what has helped you to feel comfortable in participating in the school community? (c) In what ways could teachers and group leaders help you to feel more connected and comfortable as part of the community? (d) In what ways have teachers and group leaders been supportive in promoting your daughter's academic success?

Interview questions with the school counselor aimed to ascertain comfort level with partnership involvement, as a means to inform program evaluation of the group work and partnership collaboration. Sample interview questions included: (a) Please describe your overall impression of the interventions and impact on participating students; (b) Please describe the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership and intervention work; (c) Please describe any outcomes you have observed due to the partnership. Through participation in interviews, children, parents, and the school counselor could inform the future direction of partnership programming.

Procedure

Approval to conduct partnership and group work was granted by the university and study site's institutional review board. Participants (third- and fifth-grade Latina newcomers) were chosen based on the PLT's prioritization of student needs as well as school scheduling and instructional requirements. Purposive and convenience sampling procedures were used to identify third- and fifth-grade Latina newcomer students who participated in their respective interventions during the school's specialty block. All identified participants received an informational flyer and consent/assent forms in Spanish and English. Group leaders informed parents and students, verbally and in writing, that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that declination or later withdrawal would not negatively impact students. Consent and assent forms were returned for all students except for one third-grade student who declined to participate.

PLT members shared a sense of pride in the school's appreciation and celebration of diverse cultures and expressed the importance of supporting positive school climate through strengthening school-family engagement. Thus, in keeping with the PLT's vision, group leaders integrated culturally responsive practices in curriculum implementation and parent outreach/engagement. For instance, group leaders adopted language and behaviors that respected the school's culture and helped to maintain consistency with learning in the classroom. All communication with parents was conducted in Spanish, and family meetings were held at venues where parents felt most comfortable—at home, community-based locations, or the school. In keeping with the dual language curriculum, content was delivered in both Spanish and English, and curriculum-related activities involving dance, readings, and discussions were co-created with participants to promote leadership skills.

In developing plans for working with students, the PLT emphasized the importance of co-creating interventions to ensure that everyone's needs were met, while respecting shared and disparate perspectives. The type of collaboration we envisioned could be described as a democratic collaboration (Bryan & Henry, 2012)—a partnership based on equity that respects the expertise of all stakeholders. For example, one of the school's bilingual teachers described the need to provide additional support in areas of reading and writing, with a focus on integrating culturally relevant activities. Thus, group leaders integrated culturally relevant literature as a way to empower participants, promote social-emotional learning, and reinforce literacy skills. In addition, participants co-selected socially and culturally relevant short stories to guide activities. Parents were also invited to participate in introductory meetings and biweekly phone outreach to strengthen relationships and reinforce participants' academic engagement.

Intervention with fifth-grade students

During year two of the PLT's work, in the second half of the school year, university partners began working with fifth-grade students through 50-minute weekly meetings held during specialty blocks over 18 weeks. Group meetings incorporated readings and discussions of culturally relevant short stories and biographies related to a targeted social-emotional skill (25 minutes), followed by engaging in Latino dance (merengue, bachata, and salsa; 20 minutes), and ended with brief discussions of the social-emotional skill of focus for the day (5 minutes), including taking responsibility, respecting others, exhibiting effort, self-direction, and leadership (see Hellison, 2011). Sample short stories/biographies, with their focus on social-emotional skills, included: *Abuela's Weave* (1993) (self-direction and pride), *My Name is Maria Isabel* (1993) (leadership and compassion), and a biography of Sonya Sotomayor (effort and teamwork). Group leaders encouraged development of social-emotional skills by employing specific shared reading techniques to scaffold learning (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Sanacore, 2012), including the use of open-ended and distancing prompts to explore the experiences of main characters as they related to participants' lives. The social-emotional skill was also reinforced during dance instruction. Parent participation consisted of initial meetings, biweekly phone outreach, and attending a closing dance recital. Each meeting was conducted by three group leaders, including a counselor educator, graduate mental health counseling student, and Latina performing arts student. Group leaders met biweekly to process and plan sessions, and quarterly meetings were conducted with the PLT to monitor progress and

discuss ongoing plans for program implementation and improvement. As a result of these PLT meetings and informal ongoing evaluation during the second year, changes to programming were made in order to better meet the requests and needs of students, parents, and teachers.

Intervention with third-grade students

In the third year of partnership implementation, during the second half of the school year, university partners began their work with third-grade students. In planning for program implementation, the PLT requested that increased time be dedicated to literacy enrichment, while supporting culturally responsive social-emotional development. Accordingly, group leaders revised the curriculum to focus on shared reading discussions and integrated literary activities in preparation for an end-of-school-year drama performance, instead of engagement in Latino dance. Group sessions with participants took place for 50 minutes twice per week, over 16 weeks, during specialty blocks. Participants read short stories of the group's selection, employing shared reading strategies (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Sanacore, 2012) that guided the work with third-grade students. The short stories available to students' choosing lent themselves to incorporating culturally responsive activities and discussions to promote social-emotional skill development, including a focus on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2014). Parent outreach occurred biweekly through phone contact with group leaders as a way to provide updates on student progress, encourage outside-of-school reading, and promote open communication. Group sessions were co-facilitated by two graduate counseling students, one of whom was previously an elementary school teacher in an urban community. Group leaders met weekly to biweekly with the university research team, which included two counselor educator faculty members, to process and plan sessions. Quarterly meetings with the PLT also continued during year three of the partnership in order to monitor progress.

Data Analysis

Evaluating and celebrating progress (stage six of the partnership process model) involves evaluating outcomes and celebrating successes resulting from partnership interventions (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Data analyses were conducted in accordance with the PLT's vision of improving students' academic and social-emotional learning through culturally responsive curricula and promoting democratic communication with families. To examine outcomes, one of the faculty investigators, at the close of the two academic school years, conducted semi-structured interviews in Spanish with children, parents, and the school counselor. In year one, fostering democratic collaboration with families was the focus of investigation, conducted through interviews with parents. Seven of the 10 parents participated in interviews. In year two, academic and social-emotional learning outcomes were examined via semi-structured student interviews, conducted in English, following students' language preference. Partnership and program outcomes were further examined via an interview with the school counselor.

Interviews were recorded and later transcribed (with Spanish interviews translated into English). Qualitative content analysis was employed to guide interviews and data analysis because of its flexibility of application (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2012). QCA allowed investigators to build a coding frame of themes based on two guiding frameworks: CASEL's academic and social-emotional learning competencies and the National School Climate Standards. To develop a coding frame, two members of the research team reduced data into main categories and, in some cases, subcategories by employing deductive analyses based on the two guiding frameworks, and then inductively reviewed transcribed material to further explore emerging themes. Two external auditors, graduate students trained in QCA, reviewed the coding structure to ensure trustworthiness and prevent researcher bias through an iterative consensus process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), whereby differences of findings were discussed until agreement was reached.

Results

Youth Development Outcomes

In analyzing the transcribed interview data, three main themes emerged with respect to third-grade students' social-emotional learning: (a) recognizing the impact of one's actions on others, (b) communication and problem-solving skills, and (c) the importance of hard work. Recognizing the impact of one's actions on others included two subcategories: (a) learning respect and (b) sensitivity to others, in interactions with adults and peers. For example, one participant talked about being respectful by "not say[ing] bad words" and being honest by "not keep[ing] secrets like held private." Another shared how the group changed the way she interacted with others, encouraging her to develop greater care for others in her interactions:

> Because when I was not in this group, I'd be saying a lot of stuff to other people, and I didn't care about it. Like I was really rude, so I changed. [Before] I wouldn't care … in Girls Group, we helped each other… So, this group changed me.

Similarly, another participant shared how she valued the contributions of her peers: "I paid attention, like, to my classmates when they were, like, talking." Overall, participants demonstrated greater self-awareness of the impact of their behaviors on others.

Participants developed communication and problem-solving skills, identified as a main theme with two subcategories: (a) stopping to think and listen, and (b) asking for help. For example, one student shared that she learned self-control so she could listen, think, and respond:

> I learned that I have to listen to other people … Because when they tell me something, a question I am not good at, I could control myself, I could think of this group. I would think and respond, so I changed because this group was helping me a lot.

Another student discussed how listening was important to understanding and problem solving: "If you don't listen to people, then you're not gonna know what you're doing." Participants also talked about problem-solving strategies, such as reaching out to the teacher, rather than "roll[ing] my eyes at them and do[ing] an attitude." Another shared her new problem-solving strategy of "ignoring" and "talk[ing] to the teacher about it."

The theme of the importance of hard work—which comprised the two subcategories of (a) academic engagement and (b) academic self-confidence—was identified as an area of growth. Participants revealed a strong sense of academic engagement. For example, one participant shared how the group helped her to persevere with reading coursework. "Well, if it was reading, it would help me…I sometimes keep trying, but, like, if it was math or something, it wouldn't really." Another talked about how the group helped her to "stay focused a lot," and a third participant shared that she "keep[s] trying." In addition to academic engagement, participants described an increase in their self-confidence. One participant compared herself to the protagonist of a story who persists despite challenges. "In the paper … like the work that I'm doing ... I think of Juice, that she never gave up in class, and I'm like Juice, so I'm not giving up." Another participant indicated that she thinks "about a happy thing and about [being] smart" when she encounters challenges to being successful. Overall, engaging in Girls Group contributed to the participants' academic and social-emotional learning, particularly in the areas of self-awareness of behaviors, communication skills, and academic persistence.

School-Community Outcomes

In reviewing transcribed data from parent interviews, we identified two main themes with respect to fostering democratic collaboration: (a) supporting student needs and (b) feeling connected to the school

community. Parents described their experiences with the school and group leaders in working to meet students' educational needs. For example, one parent shared:

> For now, I think that, from my perspective, all has been going well with my daughter's progress. And I think that for now there's been excellent attention and focus on what my daughter needs. I don't feel that I can say more because for now, what I like, I like everything. As I've said, I like the communication and everything.

Another parent appreciated the regular contact with group leaders: "They've called me and I've asked them to help her more with her schoolwork … and that's helped me feel comfortable." Similarly, another parent said, "I like the group because, like, this, there are activities for the children, which motivates them … she tells me that she likes school."

With respect to feeling connected to the school, overall parents described feeling like they were part of the school community: "Yeah, I like it … because they [i.e., the group leaders] send us updates and things. I like that because they are always telling us what she is doing in the class, and that's great." Another parent expressed appreciation for regular contact with one of the group leaders.

> I've felt comfortable … She sent her phone number home in a letter … she mailed her contact information … "if I would like to speak with you about your daughter, about how everything is going"; she sent home a letter, a very thoughtful letter, which engaged me.

One parent had recently arrived to the U.S. one month prior and expressed the need for additional supports to assist with the transition and ways to improve communication:

> I would like to learn a little more before facing these kinds of worries because one should know where they're going. Meet the teacher here with whom I'm leaving my child, or who I should speak with, they should give a telephone just in case, you know, I think it would help towards improving communication before the beginning [of the school year] and that they let us participate, too.

While most parents appreciated school outreach in support of their children's needs, future communication to families could be improved to better assist students as they transition to the new school. For example, school counselors could reach out to newly registered families prior to the start of the school year to introduce themselves as a point of contact, welcome families, and provide the opportunity to raise questions and share concerns.

Partnership Outcomes

Maintaining momentum represents the seventh and final stage of the partnership process model and can be difficult to achieve given the need to sustain and strengthen relationships as each year passes (Bryan & Henry, 2012). In the context of this study, at the end of each year of program and partnership implementation, members of the PLT met to discuss progress and plans for each upcoming year, including strengths and weaknesses of the partnership. Table 1 provides a brief description of the stages in the partnership process model and highlights implementation efforts and reflections associated with each stage.

Table 1. Partnership Process Model Implementation Overview

Stage	Description	Implementation Process and Outcomes	Reflections
1. Preparing to partner	• Awareness of values • Develop shared vision	• Explicitly recognize positions of power • Promote equal sharing and decision making	Understandings led to expansion of PLT to increase community voices
2. Assessing needs and strengths	• Examine needs and strengths in the school and community	• Strengths: cultural pride • Needs: academic support; reinforce family outreach	Identified importance of culturally responsive practices
3. Coming together	• Form PLT to oversee program/partnership implementation	• Expanded PLT to represent diverse voices of the school community	PLT expanded despite challenges in sustaining partnership work due to school staffing changes
4. Creating shared vision and plan	• Achieve buy-in through shared vision and respect for differences	• Improve social-emotional learning via culturally responsive practices • Foster democratic collaboration • Increase celebration of cultural strengths	Importance of culturally responsive practice via regular contact with families to sustain effective partnership programs
5. Taking action	• Implementation of program or event	• Program implementation with fifth graders: Latina dance and reading group • Program implementation with third graders: Latina reading group and drama performance	PLT requested greater dedication to literacy enrichment, resulting in curriculum revisions
6. Evaluating and celebrating success	• Evaluate outcomes and celebrate success • Can be formal and informal assessments	• Conducted interviews with children, parents, and school counselor • QCA to interpret findings • Dance recital and drama performance to celebrate student successes	Overall positive feedback on program implementation, thereby reinforcing partnership efforts
7. Maintaining momentum	• Maintain momentum through ongoing commitment to the PLT's shared vision	• Quarterly meetings • Share successes and outcomes to inform ongoing vision and goals	PLT aimed to increase parent input via outreach to parent councils, flexible meeting times, and offering childcare

Taking the time to reflect on progress is critical to maintaining momentum. In reflecting on outcomes, the school counselor shared her perceptions of the program and partnership implementation regarding youth development and forging stronger connections within the school community. She expressed appreciation for the academic and social-emotional support students received, which seemed to speak to a theme of student connectedness within the school community (or a positive school climate):

This has been a unique opportunity for the fifth-grade girls to be mentored within the school

> day by local college students and professors with a focus on academics and self-esteem. This is a transient population within our school due to immigration, housing, and other environmental factors, so often these girls might feel on the fringe of the school community. The Latina group has provided the girls a weekly opportunity to share common experiences, struggles, and develop a shared commitment to their academic success. So often when we do focus groups with students, they report that only the kids that are "badly behaved" get adult attention. This Latina group has broken down barriers that often prevent many students from having these enrichment opportunities.

The counselor also described partnership strengths, which seemed to represent a theme of cultural responsiveness. She expressed appreciation for the "culturally sensitive physical activity opportunity—salsa dancing with an opportunity to perform! [And] parent involvement—Latina families are able to have a voice."

The school counselor also described logistical challenges associated with partnership implementation:

> The implementation of a partnership takes a significant amount of school-based personal support to launch—scheduling, recruiting, working with teachers, permission slips, space reservation, etc., and an area of growth for us is to focus on aligning the skill-building efforts to Common Core standards.

Overall, with respect to the theme of cultural responsiveness, the counselor expressed appreciation for the partnership work, particularly the focus on meaningful parent engagement. "The feedback from the Latina families was overwhelmingly positive for the program and school. It has allowed the families to have a voice and become more involved in their daughters' academic success."

Discussion

Researchers have found that effective school-family-community partnerships can promote positive outcomes on school climate (Nagda et al., 2006) and youth development (Bryan, 2005; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009). However, there are significant obstacles to partnership development that may preclude effective, sustained implementation. School counselors face significant time constraints due to large student caseloads and may often be asked to take on unrelated administrative tasks (Reiner et al., 2009), which can lead to conflicting role perceptions and decreased self-confidence (Bryan & Griffin, 2010). Specialized training is also necessary to develop meaningful, democratic partnerships in minority-serving and/or low-income schools. To address these challenges, the partnership process model provides a framework for guiding school counselors in the development and implementation of school-family-community partnerships. The present study describes outcomes of a university and elementary school collaboration, from the beginning stages of preparing to partner, assessing needs and strengths, coming together, and creating a shared vision and plan, to the implementation stages of taking action, evaluating and celebrating progress, and maintaining momentum. Findings from the partnership model implementation can guide school counselors in establishing successful school-community collaborations.

In preparing to partner, we understood power dynamics as outside researchers collaborating with a local school community and actively sought shared decision making throughout the partnership and program implementation. This meant expanding the PLT to better represent the different voices of the school community, including parents and community members. As partnership efforts unfolded, we built upon the school's strengths of celebrating cultural pride by integrating culturally responsive practices in curriculum delivery and planning dance and drama performances. PLT members developed a shared vision and action plan for program implementation to assist newcomer Latina students by focusing on social-emotional development, literacy skills, and democratic collaboration with parents. In taking action and evaluating and celebrating progress, the research team integrated culturally relevant curricula and

group activities, and encouraged meaningful parent engagement through biweekly phone outreach and invitations to attend dance and drama performances. Program evaluation outcomes demonstrated support for participants' academic and social-emotional learning.

Intentional efforts to integrate culturally relevant activities and events may have helped to strengthen partnership relationships. Researchers have identified the importance of providing cultural enrichment activities for families as a vehicle for facilitating a sense of connectedness between school and community members and reducing isolation, particularly in urban settings (Yull, Blitz, Thompson, & Murray, 2014). The authors also discussed the need for increasing diversity among school personnel to enhance school-family-community partnerships. Relatedly, the PLT recognized the integral position that culturally similar role models can serve in working with children and families. With this in mind, program delivery was co-led by at least one Latina and/or Spanish-speaking group leaders.

As the PLT and research team reflected on outcomes, we recognized the need for greater parent voice and planned to actively seek direct parent input in program planning through greater participation in the PLT. Although one parent participated as an active member, the PLT identified ways to increase school-family collaboration, including active outreach through parent councils, providing childcare, and conducting PLT meetings during afterschool hours. Through these efforts, members of the PLT emphasized the need for inclusivity and cultural sensitivity.

Researchers have identified the importance of inviting parents to participate in open conversations to encourage the exchange of community perceptions and experiences (Price-Mitchell, 2009; Yull et al., 2014). Consequently, it would be helpful to provide ample time and space for PLT members to engage in open dialogue about their experiences and concerns, allowing time for sharing without critique, rather than focusing solely on task-oriented issues. This type of dialogue helps to promote meaningful parent engagement and reduces the practice of unidirectional exchanges, which characterizes many relationships between school personnel and families in urban school settings (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009). Considering the benefit and importance of creating a safe space for dialogue, when implementing the partnership process model, counselors are encouraged to intentionally facilitate shared and open communication with parents and community members. Specifically, the kind of dialogue that permits perspective taking and increased awareness about others' identities needs to include opportunities to share personal experiences related to cultural pride and racism (Dessel & Rogge, 2008). Such dialogue creates opportunities for learning and change, and can facilitate a strengthening of trust between school and community members (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Given school counselors' training and skills, as partnership liaisons, they play an integral role in breaking down barriers to engagement and promoting trust among school-community stakeholders.

The school-family-community partnership at the center of this investigation has developed significantly since the study concluded. Several new community-based partners have established partnerships, and the PLT has expanded to represent the different stakeholders and new voices within the community. Although there have been changes in school staffing, the PLT maintains its momentum through ongoing commitment to its vision and supporting children's development. Sustaining partnerships over the long-term requires commitment, effective communication, trust, and use of available resources, particularly as changes in staffing, needs, objectives, and expectations occur (Peters, 2011). Having a PLT in place that regularly recruits incoming parents, teachers, faculty, and community members can be responsive to ongoing changes, thereby contributing to the durability and effectiveness of partnerships.

Recommendations for School Counselors

Despite the overall success of the present partnership, there are significant challenges that school counselors may encounter in similar collaborations. In this case, the higher education program approached the school to build a new partnership. Exploring potential organizations to partner with requires time to ensure fit and to assess shared vision. Building mutual trust to meet mutual needs can also take time, a process that can be facilitated when existing relationships are already in place.

Alternatively, time must be dedicated to investigating and conducting outreach, such as reviewing mission and vision statements and setting up informational/exploratory meetings. During this initial investigative process, it is helpful to ascertain the potential for collective and collaborative engagement, whereby partnership programming can meet reciprocal needs and become integrated into the learning process of the school (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Partnerships can also start out well, with a lot of energy and passion driving the initial development, but then dissolve over time. Putting in place a PLT is a helpful way to sustain momentum, as members of the PLT can take the lead in sustaining partnership implementation to reduce the school counselor's workload (Bryan & Henry, 2012)—which can simultaneously help to empower parents and community members to have greater impact on partnership work (Reece, Staudt, & Ogle, 2013). Identifying the right partner is vital to creating deep, lasting relationships.

Taking the time to communicate information related to the school's culture and practices with the partner organization is also important. Building and improving a mutually beneficial and sustainable partnership with a university or organization can be achieved by helping the collaborating institution to understand the school culture and role in the school (Blom-Hoffman et al., 2009; Harkavy & Hartley, 2009). In the current investigation, the initial PLT, comprising the school counselor, dual language teacher, and university researchers, understood the importance of aligning its work with the school's vision and culture. One recommendation for school counselors who are creating partnerships with outside organizations is to ensure that all stakeholders co-create and respect a shared vision. Particularly in urban settings with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations, counselors can help external collaborators adopt a culturally sensitive lens. All of these efforts require time and planning for successful partnership building and implementation.

While ensuring that partnering organizations understand the school's culture is a priority for school counselors who are facilitating partnerships, it is not the only role counselors play in creating successful partnerships. According to Walsh (2006), a significant factor for successful collaborations is having contact people who support, understand, and are familiar with the collaborating process. Walsh (2002, 2006) suggested two levels of contact people for facilitating successful implementation of university-school collaborations. The initial contact person, often an administrator, can assume responsibility for establishing a collaboration with an outside organization. The secondary contact person, who serves as the liaison between the school and organization, can handle site-support responsibilities such as recruitment, coping with particular student issues, and describing the partnership to colleagues at the school. The secondary contact person is key to facilitating and executing a successful partnership. School counselors, given their extensive interaction with students and school faculty, often assume this role. It is possible that students perceive them as more trustworthy than outside collaborators (Walsh, 2002, 2006). Parents may also feel more comfortable allowing their children to engage in an intervention led by outside organizations with the school counselor involved. School counselors are in a unique position to educate collaborators about the school's culture and vision, while providing logistical support and maintaining trusting relationships with students and families. The partnership process model described herein can serve as a guiding framework for building and sustaining partnership programming to ultimately promote positive youth development.

Limitations

Conducting community-engaged research that is truly collaborative means ensuring that all voices are heard, particularly individuals from marginalized communities whose voices tend to be underrepresented (Fricker, 2007). Although a strength of the present research was its focus on actively empowering these communities through shared decision making and democratic collaboration, the documentation and investigation of findings was led by the research team. Parents participated in interviews, during which they shared their experiences and perspectives, but they were not involved in verifying researcher interpretations. Trustworthiness of qualitative findings could have been improved through the addition of

parent member checks, thereby further privileging parent voice (Lyons et al., 2013). Parent member checks were not conducted due to the close of the school year and to families moving on to a new middle-school community. Despite this limitation, the school counselor actively shared her perspective throughout the partnership and program implementation, which helped to create a shared understanding and vision among PLT stakeholders. Additionally, in practice it may not be necessary to have formal outcome assessments of partnership programming. Ideally, members of the PLT, in collaboration with program partners, would identify the most appropriate ways to evaluate programmatic success.

Another limitation involves parent participation at the PLT level. In this study, parents provided formal feedback about their experiences as members of the school community during program implementation through interviews and shared informal comments and reflections during biweekly phone check-ins. Parent voices through interviews and participation on the PLT helped to ensure successful implementation of culturally responsive practices and effective partnerships (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Durand, 2010). However, no parent participated in the very beginning stages of the partnership; rather, they joined later as the initial PLT actively sought to expand collaboration. School counselors and partners can take active steps to ensure parent participation on the PLT. Reece et al. (2013) suggested engaging in active outreach to parents to impart confidence and communicate the value and relevance of their participation in their child's schooling.

Lastly, school counselors may be limited in the capacity to implement partnerships due to unique programming needs, school-community relationships, and resources available at cooperating organizations and institutions. Given that school counselors' perception of involvement in school-family-community partnerships is influenced by their role perceptions, school climate, and self-confidence, it is beneficial for school counselors to work in an environment that reinforces and celebrates collaboration (Bryan & Griffin, 2010). A school culture that values collaboration with internal and external stakeholders will facilitate the partnership-building process. Despite these limitations, the type of partnership described herein can serve as a starting point for school counselors who wish to begin establishing partnerships with universities and community-based organizations.

Conclusion

School counselors have a critical role in promoting academic achievement and youth development. Fostering meaningful school-family-community partnerships presents an opportunity to effectively address student needs, particularly in under-resourced school communities. The outcomes and implications from this study can guide school counselors in developing and assessing existing partnerships. It can also help to inform equitable contributions of stakeholders and promote best practices for developing democratic partnerships. While developing and implementing school-family-community partnerships can be challenging, particularly during the initial stages, there is great potential to make a positive impact on increasing connections to the community and promoting positive youth development and achievement.

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