

Counselor and Teacher Collaboration to Improve Precollege Curriculum: A Qualitative Case Study

Amanda Vonetta Williams, EdD

Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership
Walden University
USA

Ellen B. Scales, PhD

Senior Contributing Faculty
Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership
Walden University
USA

Sunddip Panesar-Aguilar, EdD

Academic Program Director
College of Health Sciences
University of St. Augustine
USA

Michelle McCraney, EdD

Senior Contributing Faculty
Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership
Walden University
USA

Chris Cale, PhD

Global Consulting Faculty
Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership
Walden University
USA

Abstract

Teachers and counselors in a large suburban high school in the Southeastern United States strive to learn to prepare students with the skills needed to succeed in their first year of college. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how teachers and counselors collaborate formally and informally as they engage in work to improve the precollege curriculum. Knowles's theory of andragogy and collaborative relationships provided a framework for exploring the routine work of four teachers and four counselors as they plan curriculum and instruction to sustain student transitions into college. Four certified secondary teachers working with four certified high school counselors involved in educational collaborative relationships address curriculum that prepares secondary learners for the academic demands of college, while instilling social and academic behaviors and habits for a successful transition were interviewed. Interview transcripts were reviewed through inductive analysis and line-by-line axial relationships using a general coding system to look for teacher-counselor collaborative themes. Findings indicated that developing a common language and a mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities may affect positive social change for teachers and counselors and may eventually allow graduates to achieve success in college.

Introduction

High school teachers and counselors confront demands of 21st century college readiness for precollege students (Camara, O'Connor, Mattern, & Hanson, 2015; Thibodeaux, Deutsch, Kitsantas, & Winsler, 2017). Teachers and counselors must learn to improve collaboration to assure that the curriculum prepares students to meet the academic demands of college (Hanson, Prusha, & Iverson, 2015), while meeting the challenge of instilling social and academic behaviors and personal characteristics recognized as integral for the successful transition to college and career (Wibrowski, Matthews, & Kitsantas, 2016). The teacher-counselor collaboration may be crucial to advancing pedagogy that improves student outcomes (Calvery & Hyun, 2013). The collaborative relationship between teachers and counselors consists of adult learners who work together to address precollege curricula needs through andragogical practices (Calvery & Hyun, 2013). Collaboration, however, has not been a traditional role or responsibility for teachers and counselors (Thibodeaux et al., 2017).

The traditional work of counselors involved providing services for some students who needed additional support outside the classroom, with few opportunities to collaborate with teachers for student success in college (Calvery & Hyun, 2013). As Shamsuddin (2016) found in researching the role of counselors, the traditional work focused on forms and facts, with little emphasis on the student transitions to higher education. The traditional work of teachers was limited to work inside the classroom, with few opportunities to lead collaboration with counselors (Gonzales & Lambert, 2014).

A shift in the 21st century paradigm, as reported by Camara et al. (2015), urged collaboration between counselors and teachers to build higher academic knowledge and effective problem-solving skills in students who aspire to transition from high school to college (Atik & Atik, 2017). This transition demands that students possess a learning style that promotes a range of cross-disciplinary competencies, including a command of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking skills, in addition to healthy mental habits, trustworthy character, and time management required to make a viable contribution to the workforce (Thibodeaux et al., 2017). Merriam (2015) defined the transitional process as one that equips individuals to take the initiative and the responsibility for the learning process and extended the definition to include characteristics of adult learning, such as planning, implementing, and evaluating one's own learning experience. Learners who participate in the transitional learning process can build confidence and improve skillsets (Atik & Atik, 2017).

The teacher-counselor collaboration can nurture a self-directed, student-centered environment that allows students to take on intellectual risks and to develop a growth mindset through challenging opportunities designed to develop 21st century skillsets and competencies (Wibrowski et al., 2016). Researchers contend that a student-nurtured environment is made possible only when teachers and counselors abandon traditional pedagogy in exchange for collaborative instruction (Calvery & Hyun, 2013). In fact, DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2016) stated that in order to become more effective in preparing students to learn, "the adults in the organization must also be continually learning" (p. 3). Understanding how this collaboration advances as teachers and counselors adopt new roles is critical for building effective collaborative models and for forging precollege curriculum and counseling programs (Calvery & Hyun, 2013). Teachers and counselors are beginning to

acknowledge their own self-directed learning style as part of Knowles's (1970) theory of andragogy and collaborative relationships (Louws, Meirink, van Veen, & van Driel, 2017).

Driving the initiative for collaboration are the data showing that a significant number of college students find themselves disadvantaged in their academic preparation (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016). Students are underprepared if they perform below standards in reading, math, and writing skills (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016). Staff in the North Valley School District (NVSD, a pseudonym) indicated that their students are entering college without adequate preparation for the academic rigors and lack the social demand traits essential for postsecondary success (Counselor B, personal communication, December, 2019). The NVSD staff share a belief that college students must be independent learners (Bryant, 2015). Colleges report that teachers and counselors need to change their work to assure student success in their first year of college and beyond (DuFour et al., 2016). Teachers and counselors who address the various challenges of a precollege curriculum through collaboration become adult learners who implement Knowles's (1970) andragogy.

In response to the lack of college readiness for students across the United States (U.S.), NVSD followed the lead of districts that have implemented the American School Counselor Association National Model Framework (ASCANMF) designed to allow counselors to lead collaborations with administrators and teachers in an effort to build the competence and confidence in students for postsecondary success (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2017). The ASCANMF features a planning programming tool, the ASCA *Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success*, designed to assist counselors with implementing a school curriculum that builds competence and confidence through four domains: mindsets, behavioral learning strategies, behavioral self-management skills, and behavioral social skills (ASCA, 2017). The 2010 Common Core State Standards (CCSS) used by teachers to apply rigor to the curriculum provide counselors with benchmarks to understand colleges' expectations of preparedness (National Governors Association [NGA], 2010). The NVSD also operationalized the CCSS to support college and career readiness for each student in the district. Currently, both the ASCA model and the CCSS drive curriculum at the study site, informing the changes.

College and career readiness is a documented concern on both a local and a national level (Turner & Albro, 2017). As a result of the NGA's initiative in 2010, states encouraged teachers to become more accountable for increasing rigor at the local district level through the implementation of the CCSS. The ASCA has both acknowledged and integrated the CCSS into guidelines to instill academic proficiency, self-directed learning, metacognitive knowledge, and problem-solving capability in the high school curriculum. Though seemingly unrelated on the surface, the CCSS and the ASCA's (2017) *Model Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success* are essential guidelines used by counselors to assist a student's preparation for and successful transition to college. The ASCA *Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success* is an effort to identify cognitive skillsets and behaviors expected of college-ready students. Teachers and counselors in the secondary school setting collaborate as adult learners to equip students with the essential skillsets needed to succeed in college and career, and their collaboration utilizes assumptions of Knowles (1980, 1984), which entail: (a) adult learners are self-directed, (b) adult learners bring life experience and knowledge, (c) adult learners are goal oriented and ready to learn, (d) adult learners are relevancy oriented, and (e) adult learners are internally motivated.

At NVSD, teachers and counselors are challenged to provide instruction and curricula enhancements to address the cognitive and behavioral skills of the whole student through the CCSS and the ASCA model. As adult learners, teachers and counselors fulfill Knowles's (1980, 1984) assumptions as they plan and implement precollege curricula changes and establish their own collaborative relationships to transition students from the secondary to the postsecondary setting. Of Knowles's five assumptions, the research will focus on how teachers and counselors, as self-directed adult learners, bring life experience and knowledge to collaborate formally and informally to improve precollege curriculum.

Research Questions

Gaining a greater understanding about how teachers and counselors collaborate in the NVSD school environment to prepare students to succeed in college and career could both benefit the district and inform practitioners nationwide about how to effectively address the academic and behavioral needs in the college classroom. Because teachers and counselors work closely with the cognitive, social, and emotional needs of students, the following questions guided the research study:

RQ1: How are teachers collaborating formally and informally with counselors to improve precollege curriculum, as seen through Knowles's theory of andragogy?

RQ2: How are counselors collaborating formally and informally with teachers to improve precollege curriculum, as seen through Knowles's theory of andragogy?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

Andragogy, a term Knowles (1980) introduced to the modern educational lexicon, refers to autonomous adult learning. Knowles asserted that andragogy was based on the observation that due to the rapid changes of knowledge and technological inventions and mobility, adults of the 20th century must be prepared to face a variety of experiences throughout their lifespan, and the then-current pedagogical methods alone were insufficient and lacked fulfillment for adults. Prior to the emergence of andragogy, the precollege curriculum was built on the concept of pedagogy (Knowles, 1970, 1980, 1984).

Pedagogy subsumes a number of assumptions. The first assumption asserts that the learner is a dependent personality who lacks knowledge. This dependency and lack of knowledge leads to the second assumption that the curriculum should be subject-centered. The third assumption is that the learner needs to be motivated by extrinsic factors, such as rewards and punishments. The fourth assumption is that any prior knowledge or experience of the dependent learner is not relevant to the learning process (Knowles, 1970).

These assumptions, Knowles (1980) asserted, did not prepare the learner to transition from dependent learning to independent learning. Knowles, working in the 1970s on theories of adult learning, argued that knowledge alone was not enough, but a more meaningful process was necessary for the adult student. Knowles (1984) reasoned that it was no longer practical to define education as a means of passing on what is familiar; it must now be defined as an enduring, persistent way of examination and discovery. The most important learning of all—for both children and adults—is discovering how to acquire knowledge, the skills of self-directed inquiry (Knowles, 1980).

Though Knowles (1970) in his original work limited the concept to helping adults learn, Knowles (1980) later acknowledged that andragogy is situation-specific and could be applied to adult or child alongside pedagogy, if needed. He referred to these various kinds of experiences as a way of learning how to learn (Knowles, 1980). Unlike pedagogy that features the teacher as the one who leads children in dependent learning, andragogy features the teacher as a facilitator of self-directed learning of mature, more independent minds (Knowles, 1984). Knowles introduced andragogy to accommodate the natural process of human transition from childhood to adulthood. In the secondary setting, in professional learning communities in schools, teachers, administrators, and counselors become adult learners as they tackle the issues related to preparing all students to transition from a secondary to a postsecondary setting (Calvery & Hyun, 2013). Given the challenges of meeting the social and academic demands of preparing students to transition from high school to college, teachers and counselors assume the role of the self-directed adult learner as they collaborate to create more learning opportunities in the precurriculum for students.

Teacher-Counselor Collaboration Through ASCANMF Social Support Approach

The ASCANMF empowers the teacher-counselor collaboration as adult learners who assist students through its mission to build knowledge and skills for college and career readiness, with further emphasis on social and emotional development (ASCA, 2017). The model features four main principles that support the counselor as an adult learner: foundation, delivery, management, and accountability (Camara et al., 2015). The ASCA required counselors to meet the academic, career, and social needs of every student through the use of data (ASCA, 2017). To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the school's comprehensive program, ASCA created a framework that enables the counselor to lead collaborative teams with data-driven decisions to promote student achievement (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016). In addition, the framework redefined the counselor's role as a leader, an advocate, and a catalyst for change (Studer, 2015). Given the counselor's expanded role as a leader and advocate for change, the ASCANMF allows the counselors to participate in self-directed inquiry and collaborative relationships to address various challenges within the school environment (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016).

As teachers address the academic needs within the classroom, counselors can provide support to students through comprehensive counseling services (Williams, Greenleaf, Albert, & Barnes, 2014). Equally important, a

collaborative effort of counselors and teachers can address the cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions each student must develop in order to succeed in college (Calvery & Hyun, 2013). Within the secondary setting, school leaders who support teacher collaborations as adult learners strengthen their positions and improve their professional space (Honingh & Hooge, 2014).

Researchers asserted that collaborations among a variety of stakeholders that grouped teachers and counselors together created the mental and emotional impetus needed to motivate students to take the necessary steps to prepare for college (Honingh & Hooge, 2014). In addition, the collaborative effort of teachers and counselors has long-term effects beyond the college experience. According to Calvery and Hyun (2013), students whose academic commitment aligned with their college major and personal preference achieved high levels of career readiness toward the end of their college education.

In addition to addressing needs within the classroom, the teacher-counselor collaboration can help students deal with the pressures of high stakes testing. Welton and Williams (2015) confirmed that the intense pressure created by high stakes tests produced a negative impact on students in high poverty areas. Researchers noted that without the support of all school personnel participating to establish a college-going culture within the school, the achievement gap widened (Welton & Williams, 2015). More significant, Welton and Williams cited Holland and Farmer-Hinton's (2015) social support approach as an effective model that required small learning communities to provide the social, emotional, and character skills in the form of social capital that could be used to sustain student achievement within the high school classroom.

NVSD in the southern U.S. has expressed the intention to research the effects the ASCANMF has on student achievement. The NVSD maintains the goal of increasing the graduation rates and entrance into postsecondary institutions for high school graduates. Woods and Domina (2014) recommended that counselors employ data-supported strategies to minimize school dropouts, and the ASCANM presents a results-driven framework that empowers counselors to analyze the needs of their schools and meet the needs of their students through data collection (ASCA, 2017).

How Collaboration Improves Outcomes

Multiple researchers contend that collaboration within the educational setting yields positive outcomes for teachers and students. As teachers and counselors collaborate to implement curricula and instructional strategies, they become adult learners who use self-directed inquiry to create systematic coherence, transparency, structure, and content to address the challenge of assisting students to transition successfully out of high school into college (Honingh & Hooge, 2014). As practitioners, the teacher-counselor collaborative relationship can enhance both the educational experience and the outcome for practitioners and for the students they serve; however, collaborative experiences, especially within the secondary setting, are often challenged by lack of time and limited professional development opportunities (Honingh & Hooge, 2014).

Regardless of the lack of time and professional development, researchers find that even an average collaboration bears a positive impact on student achievement (Muijs, 2015). In addition, researchers discovered that the higher the quality of the collaboration, the better the student achievement outcome in reading and math (Muijs, 2015). By exchanging ideas, a collaborative setting improved teacher quality. High-quality collaboration involves the interactive process of diverse people working together as equals and participating in shared decision-making. Stanton-Salazar (2016) reported that the teacher-counselor collaboration serves as an institutional network for high school students in the process of transitioning from adolescents to adulthood. Teachers and counselors can facilitate the process of developing strong, self-directed learners to meet the demands of proactive learning in the college setting.

Self-Directed Inquiry in Collaborative Teams

An outcome of highly self-directed learning is effective collaboration (Honingh & Hooge, 2014). Self-directed inquiry, as defined by Knowles (1980) and extended by Merriam (2015), is a process that allows the individual to take the initiative to assess needs, develop learning goals, identify human and material resources, choose learning strategies, and evaluate outcomes (Slavit & McDuffie, 2013). Teachers and counselors who are self-directed create buy-in for their own educational development, which is a derivative of Knowles (1970) assumption of the learner's experience (Slavit & McDuffie, 2013). The self-directed inquiry forged in the collaboration creates the

developed expertise and common purpose needed to meet student needs through a precollege curriculum (Garmston & Wellman, 2016). Equally important, the self-directed inquiry leads to conversations among teachers and counselors that affect how students learn (Garmston & Wellman, 2016). Knowles reasoned that self-directed inquiry must include competencies that create a strong self-directed learning style. Those competencies include a concept of self as a self-directed learner, the ability to collaborate with peers, and to view peers as human resources who help to diagnose needs, plan learning, and give and receive help as needed.

The theory that undergirds most precollege curriculum focuses on Knowles's theory of andragogy that promotes a self-directed learning style characteristic of adult learners who participate in an ongoing professional dialogue that differentiates to the needs of each participant in the collaborate team (Merriam, 2015). The teacher-counselor collaboration can serve as a resource to facilitate the self-directed learning competencies endorsed by Knowles. Introducing self-directed inquiry into the collaborative team can build proactive adult learners who take charge of their learning. Lai (2015) discovered that adult learners who abandoned their traditional roles and became social agents facilitated the learning process and developed as students with a stronger self-directed learning style.

Critical Areas of the Teacher-Counselor Collaboration

Transitioning of high school students to college. The summer after graduation and before postsecondary fall enrollment is a critical period for high school graduates, who face challenges ranging from financial issues to completing all the necessary paperwork and procedures needed to ensure successful enrollment (Louws et al., 2017). While high school curriculum and instruction mainly consist of pedagogy (as lamented by Knowles), something has to take place to prepare students to become adult learners. An investigation of how teachers and counselors address this transitional gap is the focus of this study.

According to U.S. News and World Reports (2017), an increasing number of students who gain entrance into college are not retained in college, and in fact, one out of three freshmen fail to advance to their sophomore year. Family dilemmas, financial instability, and other societal problems contribute to a significant number of freshmen who lack academic and coping skillsets needed to succeed beyond the first year of college (American College Testing [ACT], 2016). As a direct consequence of these issues, students with underdeveloped skillsets are placed into developmental courses, grow discouraged before they see progress, and drop out. This phenomenon underscores the need to investigate how teachers and counselors collaborate formally and informally to improve college curriculum.

High school graduation rates are improving (Bryant, 2015). In spite of improving graduation rates, however, a new area of concern involves students entering colleges without the academic skillsets and behaviors needed to remain in college (Muijs, 2015). Given the high expectations of colleges and the current demands of a 21st century workforce, teachers and counselors, who serve on the front lines of equipping students with academic skills and behaviors, have to prepare students for postsecondary academic success through collaboration.

Research Design and Methodology

Participants

Participants for this study were selected based on years of experience, an awareness of Knowles's theory of adult learning (andragogy), and participation in the ASCA for counselors. As such, certified secondary teachers and counselors who had taught/counseled for a minimum of 3 years in order to understand their perspective of formal and informal collaborations were selected. Participants were employed in the NVSD and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study through the means of a signed, written consent form. A selective sampling method was employed to select eight participants consisting of two teachers and two counselors from each of two schools in the district to participate in the study. Eight participants were selected in order to explore a variety of views about the collaborative processes of adult learners and sought an equal number of teachers and counselors to obtain a balanced exploration of each educator's views. All eight participants completed a questionnaire. In addition to the questionnaire, interviews were conducted with each participant using a checklist informed by Knowles's theory of andragogy.

Data Collection

Creswell (2016) stated that the type of data collected depends on the research question. Data was collected about formal and informal collaborations from teachers and counselors through the following data collection tools and sources: a questionnaire and an interview protocol. A modified version of the published questionnaire *Motivation in Relation to Self-Directed Learning and Collaborative Learning Questionnaire* was created (Choy, Deng, Chai, Koh, & Tsai, 2016), with permission from the authors. The modified version of this published questionnaire was designed to collect data that asked how teachers and counselors perceive self-directed learning and collaboration, formally and informally, to answer the research questions. The data collected through the questionnaire covered Knowles's principles related to self-directed learning, such as: planning, goal-setting, tracking progress, working together to understand material, and problem solving.

In addition to the questionnaire, teachers and counselors were interviewed to discover their perceptions about how to improve collaboration through a self-developed, 10-question interview protocol based on Knowles's theory of andragogy. Together, the questionnaire and the interview protocol provided the district with informed perspectives that answer the research questions of how teachers and counselors collaborate formally and informally to improve precollege curriculum, as seen through Knowles's theory of andragogy.

Data Analysis

The descriptive thematic analyses provided a rich understanding of secondary teachers' and counselors' perceptions of how they collaborate formally and informally. Through thematic analysis, each participant's perceptions into broader themes that explore how teachers and counselors collaborate in formal and informal ways to improve the precollege curriculum was organized. Furthermore, the data analysis through the lens of Knowles's (1970) theory of andragogy to discover how teachers and counselors in the NVSD collaborate formally and informally to improve implementation of the precollege curriculum for students was conducted. Throughout the interview with each teacher and counselor, Knowles's (1970) theories created the framework for exploring the phenomena of how teachers and counselors collaborate to improve the implementation of the precollege curriculum for students.

Themes Identified in Data

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, How are teachers collaborating formally and informally with counselors to improve precollege curriculum, as seen through Knowles's theory of andragogy? Knowles's (1970) theory of andragogy encompasses how adults use self-directed learning, their life experiences and prior knowledge, and their readiness to learn to collaborate in formal and informal ways to ensure student success. In the NVSD, Knowles's theory of andragogy occurred within the context of collaboration within the professional learning communities established by the district.

Theme 1: Formal and informal collaboration for teachers. The teacher-counselor collaboration yields a rich learning experience as adult learners collaborate to explore ways to improve implementation of the curriculum, which can result in a common framework that establishes how teachers and counselors can help students master the challenges of the curriculum (Harron & Hughes, 2018). However, the collaborative process between teachers and counselors within the secondary setting often reveals barriers and yields differing perceptions and levels of satisfaction with such collaboration, as well as continued discovery on ways to revise and improve curricula (Harron & Hughes, 2018). NVSD strives to create a collaborative community that promotes student success through the implementation of professional learning communities. Specifically, the district's initiative strives to conduct weekly, collaborative meetings within all schools that drive student success. Within each school, several collaborative communities use data to inform them on ways to adjust curriculum to help students succeed.

Formal collaboration for teachers. Based on the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews, teachers experience infrequent formal collaborations. Formal collaborations in the secondary setting are arranged to support teacher-to-teacher collaboration rather than teacher-to-counselor collaboration, which results in limited, infrequent teacher-counselor collaboration. Teacher A asserted, "I do not usually collaborate with counselors except in a parent-teacher conference setting or in preparation for one. Counselors send requests for information from me, but

I could not say that we collaborate in any substantial, formal way.” On the contrary, Teachers B, C, and D responded in light of their interactions with other teachers in their collaborative teams, as opposed to counselors. Results from the interviews revealed that teachers in the secondary setting have limited, infrequent collaboration in the form of parent-teacher meetings such as 504 or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings with counselors. Both the 504 and the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) are protocols designed to ensure that students with disabilities receive equal access to education. The IEP provides a comprehensive, detailed, specialized instruction and support for students who require services as outlined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Fain, 2019). A 504 plan dictates how students who do not require detailed, specialized instruction will learn within the general educational environment with stated modifications (Fain, 2019). Teacher D stated, “I don’t have a lot of work with counselors, but every once in a while, I do have to go visit with them when I don’t have grades from previous schools.” Teacher D asserted, “If there’s a suicide type of thing, which has occurred on occasion, then it would be more to me, personal issues with kids or emotional issues with kids.” Teachers A and C explained that while they have experienced formal collaborations with counselors in other schools within the NVSD, their current school was “not as active.”

Informal collaboration for teachers. Teachers, as self-directed learners, are having informal collaborations with counselors to explore the best ways to implement the precollege curriculum. Informal collaborations are centered around acquiring knowledge from counselors that helps teachers gain additional understanding of students in order to implement the required curriculum more effectively. Teacher D expressed that she deals with counselors to gain knowledge of the “type of curriculum” the student has learned, in order to close learning gaps and seek help on how to deal with the student’s personal or emotional issues. Teacher C first analyzes the students’ needs, then converses with the counselor to find out what interventions, if any, are in place to help the student master the curricular challenge. Teacher C went on to discuss interventions he has in place and tries to get resources from the counselor that can help him effectively help the students. Teacher B sees the counselor to address the specific needs of the population of students to discover the motives for student behavior in order to address specific needs of the population.

Informal collaborations within the secondary setting, unlike formal collaborations, occur with greater frequency and breadth and preference. Based on the questionnaires, informal collaborations between teachers and counselors occur in the form of intermittent conversations, in which teachers explore how to adjust their curriculum to meet the needs of students. Teacher C seeks to “discuss best practices and how bringing innovating teaching methods either improve or take away from students learning experiences.” Teacher B collaborates via “short emails and quick conversations” about how “to improve student learning.” He asserted that “informal collaborations tend to be more anecdotal.... We share ideas on what activities/strategies are most effective [to make] the required curriculum relevant for all of our students.”

As self-directed learners, teacher participants prefer informal collaboration. Based on Knowles’s three principles, self-directed learners need the freedom and unstructured nature of the informal collaboration to actively share ideas and information to promote precollege curriculum, determine the best way to problem solve, and actively work together to improve the precollege curriculum. The teachers in this study demonstrated the following Knowles’s Principles of Andragogy in their collaborations.

Knowles’s principles of andragogy in teacher collaborations. Knowles put forth three key principles of andragogy. Principle 1 described how adult learners manage their educational needs. Principle 2 described how adult learners bring their life experiences and prior knowledge to collaborations. Principle 3 described how adult learners exhibit a readiness to learn. However, barriers in the secondary school environment made adopting these principles challenging.

Knowles’s Principle 1. Adult learners manage their educational needs. Teacher A uses the Teams platform to share documents and learning experiences. All teachers shared ideas and teaching strategies that work to advance student’s mastery of the precollege curriculum. Teacher D explained that she “share[d] teaching strategies that have worked well and that have flopped” in the collaborative team meetings. She gained knowledge to help her differentiate tasks. Teacher C noted his “conversations/collaborations with counselors have to be ongoing in order to take effect” on student learning.

Knowles's Principle 2. Adult learners bring life experiences and prior knowledge to collaborations. Teacher B stated his informal collaborations tend to be “anecdotal.” He concentrates on the most effective strategies “in our classes at making the required curriculum relevant for all students.” Teacher C noted the importance of “ongoing” collaborations “to improve the experiences of students.” Teacher A emphasized reflection as an integral part of her informal collaborations. She asserted, “I often think of the students’ point of view and use my own memories and experiences with my own children to inform my perspective.”

Knowles's Principle 3. Adult learners possess a readiness to learn. Teacher C discusses “challenges and innovative techniques with counselors” to address the issues and best-working parts of the curriculum. His goal is to problem solve through dialogue with counselors. Teacher B noted how his informal collaboration tends to be “looser,” and this allows him to exchange those ideas “in the period of time between formal collaborations” that he believes are most beneficial to address the challenges of the curriculum.

Barriers to formal collaboration for teachers. Teacher participants in this study are willing to engage in formal collaborations, but barriers within the secondary school environment limit formal interactions. Teacher-counselor collaborations occur during parent-teacher counselor meetings, such as 504 or IEP meetings. Outside of these meetings, formal collaborations were limited. School A did not have official implementation of the ASCA model and lacked the infrastructure needed to create additional collaborative experiences with counselors. Teacher A confirmed that “there are not enough conversations” happening between teachers and counselors. For the 2019-2020 school year, however, School A will be in the process of applying to become a Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) school. An administrator within School A verified that the goal is to require counselors to make additional classroom visits, as well as visits to collaborative teams to ensure more frequent teacher-counselor collaborative experiences. Furthermore, Teacher A noted, “I have received an email from a counselor wanting to attend our [collaborative team] sessions, so maybe that’s in the process of changing.”

Barriers to informal collaboration. Compared to formal collaborations, informal collaborations occurred with greater frequency and were the preferred mode for teachers. Teacher participants in this study felt more comfortable with their informal collaborations with counselors. Teacher participants appreciated the flexibility of the informal collaborative mode.

Roles and responsibilities. Teacher participants struggle to understand the broader roles of counselors in the formal and informal collaborations. The teacher participants tended to seek counselors’ help on a “case-by-case basis” (Teacher B). Teacher A stated that the lack of teacher-counselor collaborations in her current setting may be the “result of everybody being on their own island ... and not necessarily ... connected in terms of time or in terms of students. I might want to talk about a certain student, but the counselor has a different roster.” Teacher C stated, the counselors in his current setting were not as “active” as counselors in his previous secondary school setting. Teacher D stated, “I don’t have a lot of work with counselors, but every once in a while, I do have to go visit them when I don’t have grades from previous schools.” This lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities may limit the interactions between teachers and counselors.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, How are counselors collaborating formally and informally with teachers to improve the precollege curriculum, as seen through andragogy? Knowles’s (1970) theory of andragogy posits that adult learners are self-directed and use their self-directed learning style by actively sharing ideas, accessing their prior knowledge and life experiences to address professional challenges within their environment, and demonstrating a readiness to learn new information to help solve problems. In the NVSD, counselors engaged in these activities through their formal and informal collaborations with teachers.

Theme 1: Formal and informal collaboration for counselors. Formal collaborations for counselors with teachers in the secondary setting from a counselor’s perspective happen within the context of the IEP and 504 meetings in non-RAMP schools; however, for RAMP schools, counselors seem to have more focused and more specific collaborations centered on improving the implementation of the precollege curriculum. Counselor A reported that the formal context of the IEP and 504 meetings with teachers allow them the chance to explore “ideas to assist the student in the classroom.” Counselor B uses the formal context of the parent-student conference to work with teachers “to learn how they structure their teaching time and how information is disseminated to students.” Counselor B elaborated on the importance of the formal teacher collaboration that

allows her “understanding [of] a teacher’s teaching style and how their class is structured to allow me to help students when they are struggling.”

Full implementation of the teacher-counselor collaboration in a RAMP school has more direct involvement with the curriculum. Counselor D, who serves in a school that has applied to receive RAMP status, asserted that counselors in her school “are required to use Career Cruising to the requirements for [the state’s] Bridge Law.” She continued to elaborate on the specific collaborative process with the teacher centered around combining the counseling curriculum with the academic curriculum, “To ensure the task is more meaningful, we work with the Economic teachers to merge the lessons.” In addition to merging purposeful lessons to improve the precollege curriculum, counselors in Counselor D’s school invite teachers “to attend the counseling CCC [collaborative team] meeting to discuss ways in which teachers’ lesson plans can incorporate counseling.”

Informal collaborations. Counselors, like teachers, preferred the mode of informal collaboration. Counselors stated that informal collaborations happen in the form of role-playing ideas, administering needs assessments, and inviting teachers to informal meetings and informal conversations. Counselors, like teachers, noted the benefits of informal modes of collaboration. Counselor D asserted, “Teachers are able to be more relaxed and comfortable and able to open up about what they would like. Just to be honest about whatever it is we’re talking about.” Counselor A noted,

When it comes to teachers, it’s more just an informal conversation. Maybe they come up with a situation or maybe I have a curious situation, and you’re just trying to figure out what is happening. So, I would think it’s more informal type of learning setting, collaboration.

Counselor B reflected that with informal collaborations, “I can drive any which way I want. Like I can draw from my experiences, I can work from my knowledge of the student. And, I can drive those conversations, basically, any which way they want.” Counselor B, in particular, noted, “If it was as parent-teacher conference ... not that I don’t have that flexibility there, but I think I am bound more by what the parent wants to get out of that meeting with the teacher.”

Knowles’s principles of andragogy in counselor collaborations. Challenges also existed for counselors adopting Knowles’s principles of andragogy.

Knowles’s Principle 1. Adult learners manage their educational needs. As self-directed learners, counselors manage their collaborative experiences with teachers as they address ways to help teachers help students master the precollege curriculum. Counselor B seeks to understand how teachers structure their classrooms in order to “use that knowledge to direct the strategies I give to students to use to get better academic outcomes.” Counselor D, who works with teachers to merge lessons, also meets with teachers and local businesses “to help determine role-play ideas for students who plan to attend college or join the workforce.” Both formal and informal collaborations allow self-directed learners the opportunity to explore ways to problem solve the challenges student faces in order to master the precollege curriculum.

Knowles’s Principle 2. Adult learners bring life experiences and prior knowledge to learning experiences. The learning experiences for counselors as self-directed learners significantly enhances the application of prior knowledge and life experiences they bring to their collaborations. Counselor A expressed the importance of brainstorming with teachers and parents in 504 and IEP meetings. Counselor B brings “a unique perspective in understanding what students go through academically and emotionally.” Counselor B, who had a daughter in high school, is able to relate to the experiences of the students she’s serving. Counselor D invites teachers to counseling meetings, merges teacher-counselor lessons with them, and gives needs assessment to evaluate curricular options based on teacher responses.

Knowles’s Principle 3. Adult learners possess a readiness to learn. As self-directed learners, counselors are eager to acquire and disseminate information with teachers to help them improve the precollege curriculum. Counselor B endeavored to understand a teacher’s teaching style and classroom structure to help the student succeed with the curriculum. She mentioned specifically,

“For example, in working with a student who was struggling in Chemistry, I was able to use my knowledge of how the teacher structures their class to identify the fact that the student was not working their web-assignments in the classroom and consequently lost out on the ability to collaborate with the teacher and other students on concepts he struggled in.”

Counselor D meets with local college representatives, disseminates needs assessments, and invites teachers to meetings. Counselor C admitted that factors such as teacher and counselor absenteeism hinder collaborations. This may indicate in some ways a general lack of readiness to learn.

Barriers to formal collaboration for counselors. Formal collaborations for counselors who seek to collaborate with teachers face numerous challenges within the secondary setting. Counselor C admitted, “We can work together more, and it’s about finding time. It’s hard to do that.” Counselor C also reflected, “We need to be coming up and visiting the classrooms.” Counselor B confirmed that the “ongoing collaborative piece [with teachers] is missing.” In addition to the challenges of time and consistent collaboration with teachers, counselors noted that the environment also affects the teacher-counselor collaboration. Counselor D explained the importance environment plays in in collaboration, “If we make it a more comfortable environment for teachers, they’re going to want to come in. They’re going to want to share and come back and share more.” Counselor A confirmed “You feel more pressure when it’s a formal setting ... everybody feels like they have to come with something.”

Barriers to informal collaborations. Though counselors did not mention explicit barriers to informal collaborations, they expressed an overarching concern about the teacher-counselor collaboration within the secondary environment. Counselor C stated, “There are some things that we, as all of us together need.... And it’s about finding time. We need to be coming up and visiting the classrooms.” Counselor B confirmed the ongoing collaboration between teachers and counselors is missing. Counselor B stressed the importance of getting the information needed to help the student master the curriculum, regardless of the mode, when she reflected, “At the end of the day, it’s just getting the job done.” Counselor C admitted that absenteeism plays a role in the lack of more frequent teacher-counselor collaborations.

Roles and responsibilities for counselors. In this study, counselors seemed to possess a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the teacher-counselor collaborations than teachers did. However, counselors who are in official RAMP schools that consequently execute a full implementation of the ASCA model have more frequent and structured collaborations with teachers than counselors in non-RAMP schools. Counselor D, who works in a school that has officially applied to receive RAMP status, expressed more frequent collaborations that involved improving the precollege curriculum than those in the non-RAMP school. In addition to actively inviting teachers to collaborative team meetings, Counselor D possessed knowledge about the state laws that governed collaborations, reached out to stakeholders at the college level, and helped organize a Counseling Advisory Board that connects teachers, administrators, students, a variety of stakeholders. Schools with a full implementation of the ASCA model are likely to have more frequent and meaningful collaborations to explore more ways to improve the precollege curriculum. Table 1 illustrates the themes identified

Table 1: Themes for Research Questions 1 and 2

Research Question	Themes (Formal collaborations to improve precollege curriculum)	Themes (Informal collaborations to improve precollege curriculum)
RQ1: How are <i>teachers</i> collaborating formally and informally with counselors to improve precollege curriculum, as seen through Knowles's theory of andragogy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrequent formal collaborations with counselors • Formal collaborations in the form of parent-teacher conferences • Topics involve student performance within classroom regarding curriculum mastery • Barrier to formal collaboration: (1) No official implementation of ASCA Model Program, (2) Limited understanding of broader role of counselor as defined by ASCA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent informal collaborations with counselors • Informal collaborations in the form of intermittent face-to-face conversations and emails • Best practices to assist teachers who assist students • No major barrier to informal collaboration
RQ2: How are <i>counselors</i> collaborating formally and informally with teachers to improve the precollege curriculum, as seen through andragogy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrequent formal collaborations with teachers in non-RAMP schools; more frequent in RAMP school • Formal collaborations in the form of parent-teacher conferences • Topics involve student performance within classroom regarding curriculum mastery for students • Barrier to formal collaboration: (1) Finding common time with teachers, (2) No scheduled classroom visits, (3) Environmental barriers (i.e., physical separation of counselors and teachers' offices) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent informal collaborations with teachers • Informal collaboration in the form of role-playing ideas, administering needs assessments, informal meetings, and conversations • Topics involve problem-solving, sharing adult-learning experiences • Barrier to informal collaboration: No major barrier to informal collaboration.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how teachers and counselors in the NVSD collaborate formally and informally to improve the precollege curriculum. Teachers and counselors are key to ensuring change in the form of student success (Gonzalez & Lambert, 2014; Hanson et al., 2015; Muijs, 2015); therefore, the success of the research depends on their willingness to participate through ongoing, sustainable means. As teachers and counselors are feeling overwhelmed with new initiatives, balancing core curriculum, differentiating instruction, creating assessments, and large class sizes, their willingness to take part in collaboration is greatly diminished due to time constraints and a heavy workload (Shamsuddin, 2016). Because the success of the research study relies on the teachers' and counselors' willingness to participate, the limitation of this research focuses on participation. If teachers and counselors are unwilling to seek opportunities to grow together as effective collaborators, they will continue to struggle to find ways to effectively implement the precollege curriculum to serve the whole child (ASCA, 2017; Atik & Atik, 2017). The sample size was limited to four counselors and four teachers in the secondary school setting; thus, further research may include an increased

number of participants across all levels of the school systems (i.e., primary, elementary, and middle schools). For further research, it is recommended to explore participants' views on professional development formats and options that offer greater flexibility to meet the needs of overwhelming time constraints. Examining teachers' and counselors' ideas, opinions, and needs regarding professional development could provide additional data needed to design a more effective professional development (DuFour et al., 2016; Muijs, 2015).

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