

Self-Efficacy and School Counseling

Dr. Yair Maman

Chair, Graduate School of Education
Touro University

ABSTRACT

The author discusses culturally relevant efficacy measurement in a school counseling Master of Science degree program. Challenges in the process of measurement include the indication by candidates in the program of higher confidence levels than would be anticipated at the starting point in the program. Utilizing coaching techniques with candidates allowed the program chair and faculty to elucidate that this has been a result of candidates not fully understanding the purpose of the instrument. It had appeared the candidates did not realize that the instrument was intended for simply measuring their level of confidence for the purpose of development. Actions for improvement are suggested.

KEYWORDS: Self-Efficacy, School Counseling; Counselor Education, Cultural Relevance

SELF-EFFICACY

Our counselor education program at Touro University trains candidates from underserved and underrepresented populations. They are recruited and work with marginalized children in high-need schools. Self-efficacy is where candidates in our program believe in their abilities to not only complete a task or goal but also how well they can do it (Vincenzen, Pechek & Sprong, 2023). The program is in New York City and is culturally relevant. New York City can be looked at as a microcosm, as far as diversity of population and views. While many global cities are very diverse, I came to the realization that New York is unique in both its number of ethnic groups and the way in which they have successfully integrated themselves into society at large. People from immigrant groups have been elected to office and hold many types of positions in government, business, education, etc. New York City provides services through its many diverse organizations. Moreover, people from all over the world come to New York to find a better life and some of them must find ways to deal with people from other countries that they would consider enemies in their country of origin.

In the program chair we have students from many different countries and my challenge is to find ways to teach them not only about treating people from their own communities, but from other communities as well. Coaching them to perceive their work within a larger context is paramount and tremendously helps their work in the community and correctly ascertaining self-efficacy. My mission is to train students to work with historically underserved and underrepresented populations. I believe that in the long term this will have a significant impact as my two goals converge. First, by arranging for students to work with these groups they will be made aware of their needs and ways to successfully address them as future practitioners. Secondly, through approaching and interacting with people from different communities I can make the leaders in those communities aware of the services available, their benefits, and ways to access them.

To view self-efficacy in the right light I use perspective coaching (Maman, 2022). This is where candidates in the program work on *not* impeding the 'flow'. This is where any intercommunity collaboration takes place, with seeing someone else's perspective, where what you don't do is as important as what you do. Sometimes, not reacting and offering advice before you know all the facts about someone's culture is the best way to go about things. There is a sense in New York that tolerance towards one's fellow man is a cornerstone of people's way of life. A variety of different ethnic groups live side by side in a harmonious patchwork quilt that encompasses people from all corners of the world. Fundamentally, in other places I worked at the focus seemed to be more on the educational institution and less on the student. Even interviewing processes for faculty at a program that is very similar to mine (at other institutions) were somewhat different in their recruitment methodology. Usually, the initial interview is in a group, where the scrutiny is not always well-positioned, to see interaction in the interviewed group. At times they would rather save time for unnecessary lengthy interviewing with faculty members, disregarding students' needs (which can be best ascertained when student are part of the interviewing process). They may mostly focus on the faculty and school needs and not spend a lot of time on the student's needs. It has come to my attention that once hired, most faculty would want to follow a daily routine and not focus as much on students. Self-efficacy works best when an institution is student-centered. Over the years, nothing in my struggle was routine, and it proved to be a rewarding process. I do not regret 'putting the extra hours' into the recruitment process of faculty and my attention was always paid to the needs of students and their communities. Ultimately it had successful results and made the journey more meaningful.

This is where I relied on perspective coaching, and it has also helped with self-efficacy, especially when it was juxtaposed our departmental (the faculty and I) approach to promoting independent thinking. Working as mental health professionals with children and their families in diverse schools and communities, over several decades, led us to seeing a larger perspective as far as what needs to happen in the education field. Our focus was always, of course, on the general well-being of students. Still, there was an emerging need to stress to new generations -one that seemed unengaged in learning- that technology can have a huge impact if used properly, stressing how changing things, especially in high-need schools, can lead to ‘opening’ students’ minds, to independent thinking, to really see and hear when something can be important. For example, making career and college readiness activities wonderful and exciting for at-risk high schoolers - that doesn’t include them constantly following a celebrity or a YouTuber for advice.

Self-efficacy needs to be measured without the distractions of modern life. It is where the student view people and any community need from a genuine and caring place. Previous generations didn’t have the ability to Google anything and everything, they also did not have artificial intelligence do a lot of the heavy lifting for them. Leaders throughout history exploited myths and uncorroborated tales when people had to rely on rumors and fables. They didn’t have many tools to be able to research for truths. Technology (alongside and balanced with nature) can be looked at from eyes full of wonderment. With newer technologies, savvy new generations can gain so much from their newfound knowledge, and they don’t have to trust much of anything because they can easily conduct their own research. To that extent our candidates are coached to see self-efficacy as self-expanding and not self-limiting. It is baffling how both in learning and teaching we choose to self-limit what they want or need to know about anyone and everything. It is evident to us when we work with students, teachers, and parents in schools and communities across the New York metropolitan area. On all ends there are extremes, of wanting to disengage from the modern world to the other extreme, where some may have digitized to the point that they are losing perspective on what is important. It is that perspective that I wanted to develop before measuring self-efficacy in our candidates. As such, here is a discussion that includes the instrument I utilize, as well as some of our challenges in measuring self-efficacy.

PURPOSE

The Purpose of the School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSE) is to measure candidates’ perceived self-efficacy and confidence levels in the provision of school counseling services.

ADMINISTRATION

The instrument will be piloted in fall 2021. Levels (rubrics) were collected via Qualtrics after failed to be collected at the start, middle and end points in the program (2020 cohort; 2021 cohort) but will be moved to Chalk & Wire in spring 2021 through fall 2023 2024.

INSTRUMENT

The SCSE is considered to be suitable for use across settings such as schools. The development of SCSE involved a series of four studies (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005). The instrument is used alongside other professional development schemes in the program for helping students with reflection and self-understanding (such as with self-monitoring) and is intended to unambiguously ascertain the candidates’ perceived self- efficacy.

The instrument is comprised of 43 items that require Likert response format to examine indicators of self-efficacy and confidence levels in the provision of school counseling services. As criteria for success, candidates are expected to indicate levels 1 and 2 as their responses at the start of the Program (showing lower confidence in their overall abilities and skills) and progress to indicating levels 2 and 3 responses at the middle of the program and levels 4 and 5 at the end of the program (as their confidence in their overall abilities and skills increases).

This instrument is aligned with the Touro CLOs and CACREP standards.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

As a proprietary instrument, the reliability, validity, and efficacy is provided in the technical report (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005).

ANALYSIS

Mean scores for each of 43 items and the overall score will be collected and analyzed for each candidate as well as for the cohort.

We data will be collected on Qualtrics in order to provide the opportunity for in-depth statistical analysis for each item of the self-efficacy scale.

ACTIONS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

Previous piloting attempts to properly administer the SCSE by the program chair and faculty have been unsuccessful. This was because the program chair and faculty realized that candidates will most likely require some sort of professional orientation to what the instrument is intended to measure from an administrative perspective (focusing on candidates' professional development). It has been previously administrated in fall 2021 and spring 2020, using Survey Monkey technologies. However, the results had to be invalidated because: 1) Candidates reported that they were experiencing technical difficulties with using the Survey Monkey technology and were discouraged from filling out the surveys with great care. They have freely offered that due to technical difficulties they ended up not paying the necessary attention for reflecting on their answers and offering as candid as possible responses. 2) Candidates have been indicating higher confidence levels than would be anticipated at the point that they were in the program. Prompting candidates further the program chair and faculty discovered that this has been a result of candidates not fully understanding the purpose of the instrument. It had appeared candidates did not realize that the instrument was intended for simply measuring their level of confidence for the purpose of *development*. Despite the fact that at any time when the program chair and faculty introduced the survey it was stressed that the instrument was not a 'test', the candidates (on their own accord) contacted the program chair and faculty to offer that they did end up indicating slightly higher levels of confidence in the survey as they consider the instrument an overall assessment of their inherent abilities as helping professionals. In fall 2022 the program chair and faculty have attempted to decrease the chance for technological difficulties by having the SCSE available for administration using Qualtrics (Chang & Vowles, 2013; Rubin, 2019). The program chair and faculty have also started coaching candidates on the need for candid responses for the purpose of professional development. Seminars were then offered to present the perspective of the community that the candidates will be serving (Gaber, 2017 ; Sherf & Morrison, 2019) for providing candidates with motivation and rationale for the reflecting candidly on self-efficacy and on other developmental measures that will be needed for professional development as candidates progress through the program.

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