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## **A Review of Program Evaluation in School Counseling: Improving Comprehensive and Developmental Programs**

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# A Review of *Program Evaluation in School Counseling: Improving Comprehensive and Developmental Programs*

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## Abstract

This book review includes a detailed overview and discussion of Michael S. Trevisan and John C. Carey's book: *Program Evaluation in School Counseling: Improving Comprehensive and Developmental Programs*, New York, NY: Routledge, 132 pages, \$124.00 (hardcover), ISBN 9781138346574. The review includes strengths and potential issues regarding the text's value and uses in graduate programs and school counseling practice. Overall, the book is a great resource and would be helpful knowledge for anyone working in the context of school counseling.

**Keywords:** school counseling, program evaluation, assessment, program improvement

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) identifies research and program evaluation as core areas of foundational knowledge for all students in counselor education programs (CACREP, 2015). Additionally, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2019b) *Professional Standards and Competencies* identify planning and assessment activities, including the assessment of the school counseling program, as an essential behavior that school counselors must demonstrate. However, when asked in a recent study, school counselors report a lack of training regarding program evaluation (Kiper Reichel et al., 2020). Professional school counselors and those training to become professional school counselors are often exposed to the concepts and practices of program assessment in a research class, which may or may not directly connect with the evaluation of school counseling programs specifically.

The first edition of *Program Evaluation in School Counseling: Improving Comprehensive and Developmental Programs* (Trevisan & Carey, 2020) is a groundbreaking book that focuses exclusively on knowledge, context, methods, procedures, and evaluation examples specific to school counseling programs. This book provides historical data underpinning the foundation and relevance of school counseling program evaluation and presents a comprehensive framework for evaluating school counseling programs. This review will consist of brief details about each chapter's contents and overall structure, along with a critical analysis of strengths, observations, and contributions, and finally, suggestions for future texts related to school counseling program evaluation.

## Book Structure

*Program Evaluation in School Counseling: Improving Comprehensive and Developmental Programs* is divided into ten chapters. The authors conveniently break the evaluation process down in the first chapter, provide information and rationale for the use of program evaluation in the second chapter, and detail the six components of the framework in Chapters 3 through 9. Each chapter begins with relevant questions to consider, includes critical points in boxes, and concludes with a brief summary.

In the first chapter of this book, the authors provide a clear definition of evaluation, differentiate program evaluation from research, pinpoint two key purposes for conducting evaluations in schools, and introduce a six-component evaluation framework for school counselors. They offer details about each component, giving the reader a clear rationale for inclusion and a greater understanding of the overall framework. This chapter serves to outline the information presented in more detail throughout the remaining nine chapters.

As a resource for practicing school counselors, the structure is helpful. A brief overview may be sufficient for explaining some components, while school counselors may desire a more in-depth description of other components. The authors introduce the five attributes that categorize the 30 standards established by the Joint Committee for Standards in Education Evaluation (JCSEE; Yarbrough, et al., 2010). They also provide details for how the suggested school counselor evaluation framework aligns with each of those attributes. Finally, they identify cultural awareness and culturally responsive evaluation practices as an overarching topic of consideration.

Chapter 2 addresses the question of "why" program evaluation knowledge is essential in school counseling. When this book was written, the third edition of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) was the most up to date edition. The authors identify features of the ASCA National Model, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition related to program assessment, and identify underemphasized aspects of program evaluation. The vignette in this chapter gives an example of a program that is effectively using a comprehensive program evaluation framework. This vignette serves to compare evaluation practices and highlights areas where improvements could be implemented to existing methods. The authors differentiate between evaluations that include the entire school counseling program and those that attend to specific interventions, services, or activities within the school counseling program.

This chapter provides details about the history of the school counseling profession. It connects existing evaluation practices to the use of data-based decision-making (DBDM) methods, which have risen out of K-12 education reform initiatives. While most school counseling students and licensed school counselors will understand school counseling history, this information is helpful as it provides context for the current evaluation methods typically being used. The historical context and connection to DBDM methods may also inform administrators or others who may be using this book to support school counseling program evaluation.

Chapter 2 provides information about the evolution of school counseling models and the ASCA National Model. A table highlights the evaluation-related tools from the third edition of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012). The authors identify areas related to evaluation that are considered insufficient in the 2012 ASCA National Model. The fourth edition of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019a) does provide some adjustments related to evaluation, such as streamlining the *School Counseling Program Assessment* template and adding emphasis on the inclusion of more formative data in the assessment process. Still, most of the points identified in this text as underemphasized aspects of program evaluation remain consistent. Overall, this chapter is particularly critical as the authors provide a robust professional rationale for school counselors to have competence in program evaluation.

*Component 1: Involving Stakeholders* is the focus of Chapter 3. School counselors are aware of the need to involve stakeholders, as their position requires them to serve the needs of students, parents, teachers, and administrators simultaneously. As the authors point out, the existing school counseling literature has limited information on strategies to engage and support stakeholder involvement.

The JCSEE Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough et al., 2010) specific to supporting stakeholder involvement are presented. The authors identify different stakeholder levels and delineate specific reasons for stakeholder interest in the school counseling evaluation process. Three unique models demonstrate the process of organizing and coordinating the work of stakeholders. These are not overly structured or prescriptive templates but give various contextual ideas that school counselors can pull from based on their setting and context. Recommendations informed by the JCSEE Program Evaluation Standards and attentive to multicultural competence in working with stakeholders are identified.

The authors introduce *Component 2: Theory of Action* in the fourth chapter. They provide multiple examples to demonstrate the utility of logic models in a school counseling context. School counseling students and practicing school counselors are likely familiar with the use of action plans, as recommended in the third and fourth edition ASCA National Models (ASCA 2012; ASCA 2019a). Still, the concept of constructing a theory of action and developing a logic model is conceivably new and highly valuable information for most school counselors.

Martin and Carey's (2014) logic model of the ASCA National Model (2012) is introduced, along with one for the

True Goals counseling intervention curriculum (Martin, 2015) referenced in the vignette. Together these examples provide the reader with clear examples of format and use of logic models in evaluation. The authors propose five benefits in using program theory evaluation, including using theories of action and logic models over action plans. As a tool, school counselors can use logic models to increase transparency, gain buy-in for programs, identify and advocate for needed support, and align expected outcomes and specific activities. The authors conclude with a section on recommendations for including stakeholders that represent the school's culture throughout the logic model development and attention to program implementers' cultural competence.

*Component 3: Evaluation Questions* includes the development of questions that will provide direction for the program evaluation. In Chapter 5, the authors explain the importance of having well-developed questions created in collaboration with stakeholders. Suggestions are included for developing a workable, sound set of evaluation questions using standards from the JCSEE Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough et al., 2010). The authors make a case for using a logic model to help develop evaluation questions relevant to the program's inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Sample evaluation questions are provided, along with some consequences of poorly constructed evaluation questions. As with other steps in the evaluation process, the authors recommend working with stakeholders throughout the course of developing questions and appreciate the strengths that school counselors possess that enable them to navigate diverse perspectives and competing priorities. The emphasis on steps and strategies for including stakeholders and facilitating the process of question development are details that make this chapter unique and truly differentiate it from information that may be otherwise obtained in a research or assessment course.

Chapter 6 provides readers with a brief overview of evaluation designs and addresses *Component 4: Develop an Evaluation Design and Select Methods*. School counselors and other educational leaders will likely have an introduction to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs in their graduate research courses, so much of the information covered in this chapter will be a review. What makes this review particularly helpful is the authors' attention to relevant educational setting details and suggestions for designs and methods that naturally fit within a school counseling context.

The reader should be able to identify a particular methodology, and information shared in Chapter 6 would highlight the types of support or expertise needed in terms of analysis. The authors summarize common quantitative designs used in school settings and compare these methods from weakest to strongest. Qualitative techniques have been less often used in a school counseling context but can offer complex, nuanced data related to program procedures and improvement. The authors mention case study, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology, and suggest that "phenomenological designs offer practical, powerful, and easy to learn designs for the formative and summative

evaluation of the school counseling program” (p. 71). They note that comprehensive evaluations will often require a mixed-methods design and briefly mention Subedi’s (2016) exploratory sequential mixed-methods design as an especially powerful and flexible approach. The information in this chapter provides the reader with an overview of designs and methods and can help to clarify which method best addresses the identified evaluation questions.

*Component 5: Data Analysis and Findings* is broken down into quantitative methods in Chapter 7 and qualitative methods in Chapter 8. The authors identify the use of quantitative data, almost exclusively, in the evaluation and assessment of school counseling programs in the third edition of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012). They reiterate aspects of the ASCA National Model deemed insufficient and offer suggestions to support the recommended evaluation processes. Additionally, they outline the benefits of using quantitative data in formative and summative evaluations and provide specific information about the use of surveys.

Chapter 7 covers quantitative considerations, including quantitative data levels, sampling issues, statistical procedures, and errors in a clear and concise manner for the reader that has already had some exposure to these concepts. The level of detail is useful in that the coverage remains comprehensive and understandable. This can help to reduce the fear or lack of confidence many school counselors may feel concerning statistics and research methodology. When covered across one or more research classes, it can be challenging to know when, what, and how to apply these concepts in the practice of program assessment and evaluation. The authors make a recommendation for four analytic procedures that school counselors should be able to conduct. The chapter concludes with attention to consideration of cultural appropriateness when choosing and developing survey instruments and analyzing quantitative data.

The third edition of the ASCA National Model (2012) does not include the use of qualitative data in evaluating school counseling programs. Although the fourth edition of the ASCA National Model (2019a) added formative assessment use, attention to qualitative data remains limited. In Chapter 8, the authors highlight qualitative data as an important way to document the human impact of a counseling program and recognize the subjective experiences of those that are involved with and served by the program. They identify qualitative data collection strategies to align with school counselors’ skillset and provide necessary program improvement information.

While the authors do not go into great depth about different qualitative methodologies, they provide information on qualitative data collection strategies commonly used in program evaluations. The vignette at the beginning of Chapter 8 demonstrates how themes extracted from qualitative data can give subjective experiences that quantitative data may miss. The authors use tables to provide examples of open-ended questions, individual interview questions, and focus group questions. These tables are beneficial as they pertain specifically to school counseling

scenarios and give the reader clear examples of questions and structure that would support the process of collecting qualitative data. The authors identify trustworthiness and cultural responsiveness as critical pieces of any qualitative approach.

Chapter 9 covers the essential details around *Component 6: Communicate and Use the Evaluation Results* in a school counseling context. As with the other chapters, the vignette provides a relevant example that helps the reader put the material into a school counseling context. This vignette is especially helpful in that it describes a district in which the school counseling program effectively integrates evaluation and subsequent reporting.

The authors expand on ASCA’s (2012) recommendations for communicating results by providing more detailed and practical ideas for using and sharing results. They delineate five types of use (instrumental, conceptual, persuasive, process, and symbolic) and emphasize connecting the communication strategies and reporting formats effectively to foster a particular type of result use. The authors provide an example structure for writing evaluation reports, along with tips, tools, and resources for presenting results effectively. These tips and tools should be a review for most readers but provide specific concrete recommendations that cannot be overstated.

The authors highlight three important suggestions for reporting school counselor evaluations. School counselors may be inclined to report the same results to all stakeholders and miss out on buy-in obtained through more intentional use and sharing. They recommend (a) consulting with individuals who are knowledgeable and skilled in the methodologies used in the data collection and analysis process; (b) developing a framework for reporting findings, such as using the evaluation questions to guide the reporting of results; (c) beginning any presentation of results with data that is most relevant and important to the audience. This chapter provides the reader with useful information for using intentionality when reporting any kind of data or evaluation results.

Chapter 10 identifies aspects of program evaluation that are not connected to components of the framework but are relevant to program evaluation competencies and manageability. The authors recommend competencies based on the work of Kose (2019) and the ASCA National Model (2012). They include checklists for field-specific competencies, technical program evaluation competencies, and nontechnical program evaluation competencies.

Six guidelines for managing the tasks related to program evaluation are included with emphasis on using this text and suggestions in this book as a supplement to support the implementation of the ASCA National Model. The authors recognize the programmatic and professional value provided by the ASCA National Model and begin their guidelines with a statement about the essential nature of the model’s tasks. The authors conclude this final chapter with a gentle message of hope for ongoing development and learning in the field of school counselor program evaluation.

### Critical Analysis

*Program Evaluation in School Counseling: Improving Comprehensive and Developmental Programs* is the first and only text that provides a clear framework for school counseling program evaluation. As a stand-alone textbook, it would not likely be sufficient to cover the necessary material in a graduate class dedicated to school counseling program evaluation; however, that does not negate its value. It could easily serve as a resource or supplement in a research, assessment, or leadership course or as a guide for an evaluator or practicing school counselor involved in a program evaluation.

One of this text's strengths is how information serves to strengthen tasks already being completed as part of comprehensive school counseling program management and assessment. Additionally, the distinct chapters detailing the evaluation framework's components make this book a valuable supplement for school counselors. It provides a comprehensive foundational framework presented in an easy to digest manner. The attention to specific evaluation tasks and the JCSEE Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough et al., 2010) offer relevant professional backing for recommendations provided in each component of the framework.

The attention to the ASCA National Model (Yarbrough et al., 2012) is helpful and may also provide a challenge for this text. It includes language and concepts understood by most school counselors-in-training and practicing school counselors. The ASCA National Model currently exists as the primary framework for the development, management, and delivery of comprehensive school counseling programs and, as such, has tasks and resources that are widely used. The challenge lies in the fact that this text refers exclusively to the third edition of the ASCA National Model and may confuse newer readers who are now learning and using the fourth edition of the ASCA National Model.

The presentation of types of data and varying methodologies is another area that is both helpful and challenging in this book. The level of depth used in describing quantitative and qualitative approaches provides specific methodologies and addresses the point that the school counselor may or may not have the training to complete the respective analysis. Narrowing down the methods makes these concepts less intimidating. The recommendation for the inclusion of more qualitative data is also helpful as it would provide more depth to the data collected and address more of the experiences of stakeholders and areas for improvement.

It may be important to acknowledge that qualitative approaches can be quite involved and time-consuming to complete. Although they have the skills to facilitate the interviews and collect the data, school counselors would want to make sure they had resources and further training to support the necessary qualitative data analysis. Additionally, many quantitative and mixed-methods designs would require advanced training rarely offered at the master's level. It may help to simplify the data analysis sections in Chapters

7 and 8, as the material covered would be insufficient to complete any analysis thoroughly.

One area that later editions or similar works could improve would be more comprehensive attention to cultural considerations. Although touched on in each chapter and addressed within each component of the presented framework, future authors could better integrate cultural considerations into examples throughout the text. Future editions or authors working on similar works could better integrate evaluation questions and practices related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability status. The addition of culturally responsive evaluation information is presented as the final part of most chapters and could be better integrated throughout the chapter.

Another suggestion that could support this book's use as either a supplement within a graduate research or assessment course or as a self-study tool would be the inclusion of a few samples of completed school counseling program evaluations. These samples could include a variety of individual program evaluations and comprehensive evaluations. Practice questions, activities, and tasks (e.g., identifying key stakeholders, developing a logic model, creating a set of qualitative questions) could then be added to relevant chapters so that readers may apply the knowledge with completed examples.

*Program Evaluation in School Counseling: Improving Comprehensive and Developmental Programs* is a valuable resource for anyone engaging in school counseling program evaluation. The authors have integrated key information from the ASCA National Model (2012) and the JCSEE (Yarbrough et al., 2010) to create a comprehensive school counseling program evaluation framework. The book's structure adds to its usefulness as a guide for school counselors who are training or engaging in the process of program evaluation. It provides school counseling specific examples and suggestions, clear professional support for using a comprehensive program evaluation framework, and foundational program evaluation knowledge.

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