



04.20.2023

[Rural School Counselors Broaching Conversations on Race with Students](#)

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PURPOSE OF THE STUDY To explore rural school counselors' experiences of broaching conversations on race with students in the U.S. South, including what barriers to broaching, if any, exist and what support rural school counselors working in the South might need to engage in broaching.

HOW THE RESEARCH ADVANCES THE PROFESSION The 2019 ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies B-PF6 state that school counselors must “demonstrate understanding of the impact of cultural, social, and environmental influences on student success and opportunities ... and demonstrate the ability to communicate with persons of other cultures effectively” (ASCA, 2019b, p. 3-4). Additionally, school counselors have the ability to serve as change agents in their schools, highlighting and dismantling white supremacist systems that oppress students of color (Edirmanasinghe et al., 2022). The skill of broaching offers a way to operationalize this essential multicultural cultural and social justice work. According to Day-Vines et al. (2007), broaching behaviors are those in which a counselor demonstrates an ability to explore and consider how race, culture and ethnicity connect to the client's presenting concern. As such, the skill of broaching may be a helpful tool in striving to meet the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies and helping students be successful in school. This article offers recommendations to school counselors to enhance their ability to broach conversations on race with students.

GUIDANCE FOR PRACTICING SCHOOL COUNSELORS Rural school counselors must advocate for their time and express the essential responsibilities of their role to school administrators to have more direct service opportunities to address race-related topics. This might be achieved by educating administrators on the positionality of school counselors as outlined in the ASCA Position Statements (2018), particularly those related to The School Counselor and Anti-Racist Practices regarding school counselors adopting and implementing anti-racist practices and promoting and advocating for cultural diversity (ASCA, 2021b, p. 6). Learning more about the sociopolitical landscape of a school's community environment appears to be an important task for rural school counselors. This could be accomplished by increasing their social capital via actively engaging in their schools' community (e.g., community organizations, social networks, etc.) (Bryan et al., 2011). Rural school counselors connecting with other rural school counselors who have similar professional experiences can also help to validate work issues they might experience, such as the challenges of broaching conversations on race with students. This can be accomplished through membership in state school counseling professional organizations and rural school counselor divisions. They can also connect with school counseling program alumni for support on how to effectively integrate conversations regarding race into their school counseling curriculum. Rural school counselors can adopt a culturally responsive multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) from an antiracist lens (Edirmanasinghe et al., 2022). Herein, they must be aware of their own culture and practices and those of their students, families, and community; attempt to hear, prioritize and incorporate the voices of students, families and community members; and use data to increase opportunities, equity, access, and outcomes (Edirmanasinghe et al., 2022; Levenson et al., 2021).

ETHICAL DIMENSIONS The research has implications for school counselors to create environments that are inclusive and founded in multiculturalism and social justice. In rural communities and schools in the South, the student population in schools are racially and ethnically diverse, and many families are economically disadvantaged (Davis, 2009; Edmonson Grimes et. al, 2013). School counselors in southern rural schools are well-positioned to address educational inequity and support students from all backgrounds (Cuervo, 2012; Edmonson Grimes et al., 2013). According ASCA, school counselors can serve as advocates for the equitable treatment of all students within their schools through maintaining knowledge and skills for working in a diverse and multicultural work setting, and creating an environment that encourages all students to feel comfortable discussing concerns. This study addresses broaching as a skill and strategy in schools that can help all students feel seen and valued. When it comes to addressing race equity concerns in schools, research shows there are gaps in the capacity of school counselors to implement these efforts (Crethar et al., 2008; Ratts et al., 2016). In particular, research noted that a school environment that is positive and racially inclusive can help alleviate negative racial interactions, which in turn leads to improved student behavioral and academic outcomes (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Mattison & Aber,2007). In the implications of this study, it is important for counselor educators to teach school counselors in training the importance of engaging in anti-racist practices. One strategy which is highlighted in this work is to explicitly teach school counselors-in-training the skill of broaching conversations on race with K-12 students.