

# Introduction

*If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?*

—Albert Einstein

## **SCHOOL COUNSELORS COLLABORATING FOR HIGH STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

Positively impacting school culture and enhancing learning are central to the work of educators. School counselors can partner with educators while utilizing practitioner inquiry to support high achievement and learning for all students.

Historically, school counselors have worked in isolation. However, twenty-first-century school counselors must include in their professional work membership on leadership teams, advocating for all members of the educational institution, using data to guide and inform daily practices, and collaborating to create systemic change. School counselors are ideally positioned to conduct *systemic practitioner inquiry*—that is, working extensively outside of the classroom, seeing and hearing the larger learning community as a whole—even if, at times, they'd rather not be aware of what they see and hear!

Research conducted by educators in the field is vital, and school counselors are no exception. We must continuously question and evaluate daily occurrences in our schools. Only by asking questions, gathering data, and allowing ourselves to be informed as a community of learners will we continue to provide high quality learning for all students.

**xii • THE REFLECTIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S GUIDE**

We believe this is the only guidebook *specific* to practitioner inquiry for school counselors. Teacher inquiry provides wonderful insights for the classroom. Missing are questions targeting the larger learning community. School counselors have long recognized the importance of asking difficult questions. What has not been readily apparent is (1) how to frame and ask the questions, (2) how to gather authentic data, and (3) how to use results to create lasting systemic change. Practitioner inquiry for school counselors embraces more than gathering data about students. In the larger context, school counselor practitioner inquiry can encompass the entire school and/or community and reach beyond the school counselor's everyday work in the building. Practitioner inquiry for school counselors can best be defined as a quest or journey to better understand the issues pressing on the system that potentially create barriers for students.

**SCHOOL CULTURE IN  
THE TIME OF SCHOOL REFORM**

We write this book in the midst of school reform. Many elementary, middle, and high schools are being placed on remediation lists. We watch as morale plummets in the buildings, parents voice frustration, and state legislatures mandate yet one more layer of bureaucracy for all school personnel to decipher. Despite all of the apparent negatives, we find educators embracing their profession, continuing to evaluate their work while designing and implementing creative, thoughtful, and engaging learning experiences for students. School personnel continue to come together and defy the odds: students *are* demonstrating achievement far exceeding the bottom line. Schools *are* making the national roster for closing the achievement gap (Chenoweth, 2007).

We have been fortunate to work with committed professionals who believe in themselves, their students, and their transforming schools. A culture of caring, concern, and genuine commitment is repeatedly demonstrated by educational professionals. Culture is a direct result of hard work and continuous effort by all stakeholders, extending beyond the school building to include the community as a whole.

Partnerships have been developed in new and exciting ways between schools and communities. These partnerships bring individuals from all walks of life together for a common goal: educating all students to high standards. A common thread can be identified in partnership success: collaboration between all stakeholders. We have been fortunate to have Laura Pedersen, school counseling program coordinator at Lewis & Clark College, share her expertise on building stakeholder partnerships in Chapter 6. This chapter provides strategies that will enable you to reach out successfully to all potential members of your community.

### TIPS FOR USING THE BOOK

A side note to the writing of this book: We began the journey after learning of the need for the text from school counseling practitioners and counselor educators. As we began the work, we struggled with the idea of research versus educational research versus inquiry. We were aware of the reluctance, and even fear, that many educators have when it comes to doing “research.” This is why our book title encourages readers to begin the journey of becoming researcher-practitioners in their schools. After soul searching and evaluating existing writings, we chose to guide school counselors to undertake their data and research endeavors through the lens of *inquiry*, a user-friendly word without the negative connotation so many educators attach to the word *research*. As David Hagstrom wrote in *From Outrageous to Inspired*, “The way of inquiry evokes participants’ understandings, values, and intents, as well as their gifts and talents. Taking the way of inquiry allows the group to become the leader in the school community” (2004, p. 91).

We have designed this book as a practical tool. We realize some chapters may be of more interest than others. For example, Chapter 2, *Discovering the Territory: Exploring Others’ Expertise*, might not be essential to your question as a practitioner but might be more essential for pursuing potential solutions. Do not hesitate to peruse the book and find chapters or sections speaking to your current work or area(s) of concern. An ongoing case study at the end of each

**xiv • THE REFLECTIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S GUIDE**

chapter highlights the salient points with a hands-on example of how it can be done.

We hope this book will assist you and your fellow professionals in mutual discovery of essential questions to very real and pressing issues, concerns, or questions you may have in your school. We wish you well in your journey—and we would love to hear your stories!