

# Examining the Efficacy of the Spanish Cultural Translation of the Student Success Skills Program to Improve Academic Achievement

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*This study examined the efficacy of a Spanish cultural translation of the Student Success Skills classroom program, influenced by individual psychology and humanistic counseling, to improve standardized test scores of Hispanic high school students (N = 352). Analysis of covariance findings revealed a statistically significant difference between treatment and comparison groups.*

*Keywords:* Student Success Skills, social-emotional learning, Hispanic students, English language learner, individual psychology

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The positive impact of implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions in schools has been well evidenced in the preschool–Grade 12 literature (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Rosenblatt & Elias, 2008). More specifically, researchers have documented the effectiveness of delivering interventions influenced by individual psychology and humanistic counseling to improve students' academic and behavioral outcomes (Bal, Thorius, & Kozleski, 2012; Bowers, Lemberger, Jones, & Rogers, 2015; Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Brigman, Lemberger, & Moore, 2012; Brigman, Villares, & Webb, 2011; Lemberger & Clemens, 2011; Lemberger, Selig, Bowers, & Rogers, 2015; Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 2013; Webb, Lemberger, & Brigman, 2008).

For example, the Student Success Skills (SSS) curriculum, a school counselor–led SEL curriculum, teaches students key cognitive, social, and self-management skills within the context of a safe, caring, and supportive classroom to encourage them to become active change agents in their own

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lives (Lemberger, 2010; Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, & Webb, 2011). Results from previous SSS studies have indicated that when school counselors foster learning environments that are individualized, responsive, supportive, and encouraging, they can have a direct impact on students' academic and behavioral outcomes (Bowers et al., 2015; Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman, Webb, & Campbell, 2007; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Lemberger & Clemens, 2011; Lemberger et al., 2015; Mariani, Webb, Villares, & Brigman, 2015; Villares, Frain, Brigman, Webb, & Peluso, 2012; Webb, Brigman, & Campbell, 2005). Although the previous studies involved ethnic minority students, more research is needed to determine the impact of culturally translated SEL programs on English language learner (ELL) students' academic achievement (Castro-Olivo, 2014; Rosenblatt & Elias, 2008). Therefore, in this article, we (a) provide an overview of the challenges Hispanic students face in education, (b) examine the role of the school counselor in promoting social-emotional development, (c) describe the SSS curriculum and the Spanish Cultural Translation of the SSS (SCT-SSS) classroom program, and (d) discuss results from a quasi-experimental study conducted to determine the effectiveness of implementing the SCT-SSS program to improve Hispanic and Hispanic ELL students' achievement scores.

## HISPANIC ELL STUDENTS AND THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAP

The adolescent brain undergoes hormonal, structural, and functional changes from the onset of puberty to one's early 20s (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH]; 2011); thus, adolescents experience both negative and positive consequences. For example, increased hormone levels and changes in the prefrontal cortex can contribute to oversensitivity, self-consciousness, and impulsivity, as well as struggles with emotion regulation and abstract thinking (Feinstein, 2009). For ELL students, these emotions can be further heightened due to difficulties in communicating, understanding, and assimilating to societal norms and attempts to be accepted by others (Bal et al., 2012). On the plus side, research indicates that an individual's learning capacity peaks during adolescence, making this an integral period for cognitive development when academic gains can be optimized (NIMH, 2011). Therefore, incorporating SEL programs during the regular school day can offer a way to bridge these gaps (Castro-Olivo, 2014).

Hispanic ELL students make up 11% of the U.S. school-age population (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES]; 2011). These ELL students represent a large portion of youth considered at risk for other negative behaviors (e.g., alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, gang activity), consistently score lowest on state standardized tests, and are less likely to graduate from high school and earn a postsecondary degree compared with their Caucasian or other ethnic peers (Balfanz, 2009; Castro-Olivo, 2014; NCES, 2011; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009; Silva, 2015). Researchers have

identified numerous academic issues (e.g., low grade point average, low standardized test composite and/or reading and math scores, higher number of grade retentions, and more frequent placement in special programs), social-emotional challenges (e.g., poor attendance; less school engagement/participation in extracurricular activities; and higher numbers of discipline referrals, suspensions, transfers, and pregnancy), and individual and family variables (e.g., gender, ethnicity, language spoken in the home, parents' educational level, and socioeconomic status) as common factors related to students potentially dropping out of high school (Balfanz, 2009; Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007).

In addition, several school and sociocultural factors contribute to the achievement gap of ELL students, including the language barrier, lack of accommodating curriculum, and differing cultural norms. The language barrier indeed poses a serious obstacle for ELL students (Hammond et al., 2007). Because the process of a second-language acquisition can take several years, this difficulty, coupled with lack of support and academic stressors, places ELL students behind academically when compared with English language native speakers (Hulya, 2009). Schools rarely adjust to accommodate the needs of ELL students, who may feel alone, confused, and unable to learn what is expected of them. Blanco-Vega, Castro-Olivo, and Merrell (2008) argued that educators must find ways to deliver culturally adapted interventions to systematically teach the SEL skills critical for academic and social-emotional success.

Researchers have reported that participation in culturally translated interventions has been linked to higher rates of engagement and improved student outcomes (Castro-Olivo & Merrell, 2012; Smith, Domenech Rodríguez, & Bernal, 2011). When information is translated and relayed in a student's native tongue, the student can understand that information more easily, assimilate that new knowledge into his or her everyday life, and significantly improve his or her chances of success (Gándara, 2015). Furthermore, researchers have supported the use of students' home language to help ELL students acquire the English literacy skills essential for school success and workplace competitiveness (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Considering the impact of SEL interventions on students' academic and social-emotional development, school counselors need to explore opportunities to implement SEL programs that have been culturally translated with ELL populations.

## ROLE OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR

The school counseling literature continues to echo the need for counselors to demonstrate the impact of their services on student outcomes, including academic achievement and behavior (Dimmitt, Carey, McGannon, & Henningson, 2005; Villares & Dimmitt, 2016; Whiston, Tai, Rahardja, & Eder, 2011). Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, and Yoon (2007) emphasized the need for collaboration among school counselors, administrators, teachers, and

ELL support personnel. For example, mentoring, advocacy, and creation of partnerships among school professionals promote the healthy development and adjustment of ELL students. In addition, school counselors are required to demonstrate professional knowledge about the complexities related to various students' cultures (American School Counselor Association, 2012). By increasing their own knowledge and sensitivity, school counselors can help foster a learning environment and school culture that support the success of all students, including ELL students. School counselors can also partner with teachers and ELL support personnel to deliver educational programs that create opportunities for Hispanic ELL students to experience positive social support and engagement, focus on small improvements and personal assets, and build on their interests and strengths.

August and Hakuta (1997) identified best practices for ELL reading instruction, such as providing (a) direct skill instruction, (b) student-directed learning activities (e.g., cooperative learning), (c) strategies that enhance understanding (e.g., embedding redundancy in lessons, facilitating discussion, teaching metacognitive skills), (d) opportunities to practice (e.g., independent and small-group practice), (e) multiple opportunities to respond (e.g., choral responses and all-response activities), and (f) systematic student assessment (e.g., student progress monitoring). Incorporating ELL best practices in SEL classroom lessons provides students with repeated exposure to critical skills linked to positive academic outcomes (August & Hakuta, 1997). School counseling services that benefit Hispanic students must focus on reducing the cultural barriers that impede their academic achievement (Amatea, Smith-Adcock, & Villares, 2006). Addressing everyday concerns, helping students learn in a cooperative classroom, using instructional conversations, and providing cognitively guided instruction are four specific teaching strategies that have been proven effective in educating Hispanic students (Verdugo, 2006).

## THE SSS PROGRAM

The SSS program is a school counselor-led, evidence-based SEL curriculum (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015) that is grounded in individual psychology (Brigman et al., 2011, 2012; Villares et al., 2011; Webb et al., 2008). SSS includes both a classroom and a small-group component focused on helping students develop cognitive/metacognitive, social, and self-management skills considered critical for academic success (Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Evidence supporting SSS indicates that students thrive when they are provided with opportunities to connect and encourage one another; practice goal setting and progress monitoring; and share successes in a climate of caring, support, and encouragement (Brigman et al., 2011, 2012; Webb et al., 2008).

Previous SSS studies have documented academic improvements for students in Grades 5–9 across various ethnic groups, including Hispanics (Bowers et al., 2015; Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman et al., 2007; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Lemberger & Clemens, 2011; Lemberger et al., 2015; Miranda, Webb, Brigman, & Peluso, 2007; Webb et al., 2005). However, validating the effectiveness of the intervention with diverse ELL populations across grade levels is still needed. Miranda et al. (2007) reanalyzed the findings from four original SSS studies (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman et al., 2007; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Webb et al., 2005) to determine if there were differential outcomes among White, Latino, and African American students and found no main effects for ethnicity. Although all ethnic groups showed similar academic achievement gains in math and reading after participating in the SSS classroom and small-group programs, the researchers did not report effects on ELL students specifically. Working with Hispanic students in Grades 4 and 5, León, Villares, Brigman, Webb, and Peluso (2011) implemented a Spanish cultural translation of the SSS classroom program and found significant improvements in reading and math test scores with a large effect size ( $d = .37$ ). Villares et al. (2012) conducted a subsequent SSS meta-analysis that also demonstrated the program's effect on students' standardized math ( $d = .41$ ) and reading ( $d = .17$ ) scores and reported an overall effect size of  $d = .29$ .

Three SSS research studies focused specifically on assessing the curriculum's impact on underserved, minority populations. In the first study, Lemberger and Clemens (2011) evaluated the impact of the SSS small-group intervention on the metacognitive skills, executive functioning, and feelings of connectedness of fourth- and fifth-grade, inner-city, African American students, a subset of students who regularly experience social inequities and who are at significant risk for school failure. Participating students ( $N = 100$ ) were randomly assigned to either a treatment group who received the SSS group intervention or a waitlist control group. Two student self-report measures, the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS; Malecki, Demaray, & Elliott, 2000) and the Junior Meta-Cognition Awareness Inventory (Sperling, Howard, Miller, & Murphy, 2002), along with a parent–teacher rating scale, the Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Functioning (BRIEF; Gioia, Isquith, Guy, & Kenworthy, 2000), were used to determine differences between groups. Results revealed that students in the treatment group reported significant changes in their metacognition compared with those in the control group; however, differences between students related to connectedness to people in their school were not supported. Furthermore, teachers and students did not report consistently on measures of executive functioning. Lemberger and Clemens suggested that further research was needed to validate the effectiveness of the SSS curriculum with minority groups.

In response, a second study by Lemberger et al. (2015) focused on assessing similar constructs for a sample of 193 Hispanic middle school

students after they participated in the SSS classroom program. The study followed a cluster-randomized trial design with randomization occurring at the classroom level. Students in the treatment group received SSS and students in the control group received the SSS program after the initial phase of the study. All students who returned consent forms completed the CASSS, BRIEF, and the Discovery Education Assessment (DEA), a formative academic achievement reading and math assessment. Because differences were revealed between groups at pretest, a random-effects analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted, and findings indicated significant treatment effects for the intervention on five of the eight executive functioning scales (i.e., Shift, Emotional Control, Plan/Organize, Organization of Materials, and Task Completion) and on one of the five feelings of connectedness scales (i.e., Classmate Support). Students in the intervention group also scored significantly higher on reading and math achievement tests than the control group.

In a third study, Bowers et al. (2015) examined the impact of repeated exposure of the SSS small-group program with 201 predominantly Hispanic eighth-grade students from the Southwest. The students' classrooms were randomly assigned to either the treatment or the control group, and all participating students completed the BRIEF-Self-Report (Guy, Isquith, & Gioia, 2004), CASSS, and DEA. Results from the multiple path analysis indicated that students who received the treatment used better behavioral relation skills, reported a higher sense of connectedness, and improved their reading achievement. Together, these studies provide evidence that the SSS curriculum had a positive impact on the academic growth and SEL skill development of Hispanic students. However, more research is needed to determine the influence of the programs with Hispanic ELL students.

## THE SCT-SSS CLASSROOM PROGRAM

The SCT-SSS classroom program is a cultural translation of the SSS program (Brigman & Webb, 2004, 2009). The process of culturally translating the program involved the careful selection of words that would ensure a universal understanding by Hispanic students and their families, regardless of their country of origin. In specific situations where words would differ from one country to the other, multiple words were used. For example, an orange is called *naranja* in many Spanish-speaking countries, but in Puerto Rico the fruit is referred to as a *china*. The SCT-SSS developers also embedded culturally specific examples of famous Hispanic U.S. public figures (e.g., astronauts John Olivas and Jose Hernandez who completed a 13-day mission to the International Space Station and the appointment of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor). Although the program was culturally translated into the Spanish language, the structure, integrity, and goals of the original SSS program were retained. For example, the Coyote Story was kept intact because it is a commonly known folktale

in both Hispanic and Native American cultures. Another story retained from the original SSS curriculum is the Goose Story, which impresses upon students the importance of creating a caring, supportive, and encouraging community. (Interested readers can contact the second author for the Coyote Story and Goose Story.) Congruous with the SSS curriculum, the SCT-SSS program provides students with explicit instruction and multiple opportunities to practice skills, discuss ideas, and share successes in pairs, in small groups, and as a whole class and monitors the students' progress. After the program was initially developed, a school counselor piloted the program in elementary and high schools in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and Ecuador and in one U.S. elementary and high school. Feedback was provided to the developers via e-mail, and minor edits were made to the text before the SCT-SSS classroom program.

The SCT-SSS program consists of five 45-minute classroom lessons. These five lessons are presented to students weekly for 5 consecutive weeks and are then followed by three monthly booster lessons. The beginning of each SCT-SSS classroom lesson focuses on reviewing and setting personal goals, progress monitoring, and success sharing based on five life skills that the students work to improve between class meetings. The middle of each lesson reinforces new concepts, skills, and strategies to assist students in making both academic and social gains. The end of each session reintroduces goal setting, progress monitoring, and success sharing specific to academic success and teaches/reinforces students' use of various stress- and anxiety-relieving techniques and memory strategies. Students share gains or setbacks with peers, monitor their individual progress toward set goals, and develop specific action plans to help them continuously improve.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the SCT-SSS classroom program at increasing Hispanic and Hispanic ELL students' academic performance. Therefore, we posed the following research questions: (a) What is the impact of the SCT-SSS classroom program on Hispanic students' reading and math scores, as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT; Florida Department of Education, 2005)? (b) Do Hispanic ELL students perform better on the FCAT reading and math tests after participating in the SCT-SSS program when compared with Hispanic ELL students who did not receive the intervention? We hypothesized that students who received the SCT-SSS intervention would perform better on the FCAT reading and math assessments compared with students who did not receive the intervention.

## METHOD

A quasi-experimental research design with an untreated control group was used in this study. This type of design is widely used in schools where

researchers must use intact groups of students (Cook & Campbell, 1979); the design provides adequate control for possible sources of invalidity (Gay & Airasian, 2000). A univariate ANCOVA was used to determine if there were statistically significant differences on reading and math standardized achievement test scores between students who received the SCT-SSS intervention and those who did not.

### *Participants*

The sample included 352 (100%) Hispanic students in Grades 9 and 10 from two public high schools in southeastern Florida. School A ( $n = 166$ ) served as the treatment group and included 89 (54%) male and 77 (46%) female students. Ninety-two students in the treatment group were classified as ELL students. School A had an enrollment of 1,882 students; 46% of the students identified as White, 35% Hispanic, 14% Black, 3% Asian, and 2% other, with 24% of the total student population in School A classified as ELL students. School B ( $n = 186$ ) served as a comparison group and included 101 (54%) male and 85 (46%) female students. One hundred and five students in the comparison group were classified as ELL students. School B had an enrollment of 1,965 students; 31% identified as White, 43% Hispanic, 20% Black, 1% Asian, and 5% other, with 20% of the total student population in School B classified as ELL students. The schools were selected on the basis of their similarities in ethnicity and percentage of ELL students. In addition, both schools offered the Spanish for Native Speakers (SNS) foreign language elective course.

A G\*Power a priori power analysis (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) with an alpha level of .05, a power level of .80, and a medium effect of .50 revealed that a minimum sample size of 74 was required. To be eligible to participate in the study, students had to identify themselves as Hispanic on their school registration form, be enrolled in an SNS course, and have FCAT reading and math scores available from the previous school year, Grades 8 and 9, respectively.

### *Intervention*

The intervention used in this study was the SCT-SSS classroom program (Brigman & Webb, 2004, 2009). A bilingual, certified school counselor delivered the SCT-SSS program in the treatment school's five SNS classrooms. As previously mentioned, the SCT-SSS program included five, 45-minute classroom lessons spaced 1 week apart followed by three, 45-minute monthly booster lessons.

### *Procedure*

Following institutional review board approval, the first author delivered a 1-hour SCT-SSS training workshop to the SNS teacher in the treatment



school. The bilingual school counselor was responsible for delivering the intervention, and the SNS teacher cued and coached her students to use the SCT-SSS strategies while teaching the SNS content. The SNS teacher in the treatment group was also provided with a set of SCT-SSS curriculum posters that were displayed in the classroom and referred to throughout the day.

To ensure treatment fidelity, the bilingual school counselor implemented the program using the standardized SCT-SSS manual and lesson PowerPoint presentations, and also completed a weekly log documenting the number of students who received the intervention, any problems that were encountered during the lesson, and her level of confidence when delivering the lesson. In addition, the counselor met with the SNS classroom teacher on a weekly basis to address any concerns related to the program delivery and strategies for reinforcement. Beginning in October of the fall semester, the students in the treatment school received the SCT-SSS intervention, whereas the students in the comparison school received their standard school counseling curriculum. In January, the counselor then delivered monthly booster sessions to help reinforce the strategies taught in the SCT-SSS program leading up to the spring administration of the FCAT.

The school district's multicultural specialist provided the first author with all nonidentifying, study-related data for student participants who gave their assent and whose parents gave consent. The participants' demographics characteristics and FCAT reading and math pretest scores were received 2 weeks prior to the intervention, and FCAT reading and math posttest scores were shared 2 months after the implementation of the final booster lesson.

### *Measure*

The FCAT is a standardized, criterion-referenced assessment used to assess academic achievement in Florida from 1998 to 2009. The FCAT was designed to measure students in Grades 3 through 10 in their ability to meet the statewide reading and math benchmarks. Individual student scores were reported as developmental scale scores ranging from 0 to 3,000 and were used to track progress across grade levels and to indicate students' academic growth over time (Florida Department of Education, 2005). The FCAT was norm based on the scores obtained from 5,171 students who represented Florida's ethnic groups by including 60.8% White, 20.6% African American, 15.1% Latino, 1.8% Asian American, 0.2% Native American, and 0.8% multicultural children. (Percentages do not total 100 because of rounding.) Solid coefficient alphas were reported for the FCAT measures for criterion and construct validity for reading (.86 and .88) and math (.91 and .92), respectively (Florida Department of Education, 2001).

### *Data Analysis*

This study used a quasi-experimental, untreated control group research design. The independent variable was the SCT-SSS classroom guidance

intervention, and the dependent variables were the FCAT reading and math scores. We analyzed data using the SPSS 23 statistical software package (IBM Corporation, 2015). An alpha level of .05 was set to test all hypotheses. Students who missed more than one SCT-SSS lesson were excluded from the data analysis. An ANCOVA was conducted on the participants' posttest FCAT reading and math tests scores. We used the participants' reading and math pretest scores as covariates to control for any academic achievement differences between groups prior to the intervention. A partial eta-squared statistic ( $\eta_p^2$ ) was calculated by SPSS and used to determine the practical significance of the SCT-SSS program. The strength of the effect size was interpreted using the Sink and Mvududu (2010) rubric of small (.01), medium (.06), and large (.14).

## RESULTS

The primary research question examined whether Grade 9 and 10 Hispanic students who participated in the SCT-SSS classroom program (School A) experienced an increase in their FCAT reading and math posttest scores compared with their peers who did not receive the SCT-SSS (School B). Findings from the ANCOVA, followed by a Bonferroni correction, showed there was a statistically significant difference between groups on the posttest FCAT reading scores,  $F(1, 350) = 48.39, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .12$ , a medium effect size, and FCAT math scores,  $F(1, 350) = 11.08, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , a small effect size. These results indicated that students who received the SCT-SSS classroom program scored higher on the statewide reading ( $n = 166; M = 1,996.60, SD = 266.64$ ) and math ( $n = 166; M = 2,000.02, SD = 175.10$ ) standardized achievement tests than students in the comparison group (reading:  $n = 186; M = 1,876.88, SD = 257.72$ ; math:  $n = 186; M = 1,963.18, SD = 132.93$ ).

We then conducted a second analysis to answer the question: Do Hispanic ELL students perform better on the FCAT reading and math tests after participating in the SCT-SSS program when compared with Hispanic ELL students who did not receive the intervention? Findings from the ANCOVA showed there was a statistically significant difference between groups,  $F(1, 194) = 25.52, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .12$ , a medium effect size. A Bonferroni post hoc test of posttest scores showed that ELL students in the treatment group ( $n = 92; M = 1,956.12, SD = 293.41$ ) performed better on their annual reading assessment than their ELL peers in the comparison group ( $n = 105; M = 1,831.22, SD = 280.72$ ). Similarly, findings from the ANCOVA on the FCAT math posttest scores showed there was a statistically significant difference between groups,  $F(1, 194) = 4.621, p = .033, \eta_p^2 = .02$ , a small effect size. A Bonferroni post hoc test of posttest scores revealed that students in the treatment group ( $n = 92; M = 1,984.07, SD = 184.36$ ) performed better on their annual math assessment than their ELL peers in the comparison group ( $n = 105; M = 1,947.53, SD = 137.01$ ).

## DISCUSSION

This study explored the connection between delivering a culturally translated, counselor-led SEL intervention, which is grounded in the principles of individual psychology, and closing the achievement gap between Hispanic students and their peers. Lemberger and Hutchinson (2014) suggested that combining academic content with cognitive and social skills training maximizes students' learning and achievement capacities. Our study specifically highlights how school counselors can successfully collaborate with classroom teachers to deliver academic content infused with cognitive and social skills training.

The findings of this study revealed that Hispanic students who participated in the SCT-SSS classroom program improved their standardized reading and math scores at a higher rate than Hispanic students who did not receive the intervention. This result is consistent with previous research implementing the SSS program (Bowers et al., 2015; Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman et al., 2007; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Lemberger et al., 2015; León et al., 2011; Webb et al., 2005). In addition, a strong reading effect size ( $\eta_p^2 = .12$ ) provided evidence of the practical significance of the SCT-SSS intervention with Grade 9 and 10 Hispanic students (Sink & Mvududu, 2010). Equally important, this study revealed the SCT-SSS had a positive effect on Hispanic ELL students' reading achievement scores ( $\eta_p^2 = .12$ ). This result is consistent with previous research results that cultural adaptations of existing evidenced-based interventions can have a similar influence on Hispanic ELL populations (Castro-Olivo, 2014; Castro-Olivo & Merrell, 2012). Instruction in the students' first language may have helped students understand and practice the skills needed to improve their performance on the state standardized achievement tests in a safe and supportive classroom environment.

The results of this study lend support for addressing the specific needs of all students, including offering SEL evidence-based interventions in students' native language to help bilingual students build the skills necessary to succeed academically (Gándara, 2015; Zalaquett, 2006). Considering the FCAT was a state-mandated assessment, the participants in the treatment group not only improved their performance on the exams when compared with their peers but also indirectly improved their chances for graduating from high school.

### *Implications for School Counselors*

This study supports the premise that implementing culturally adapted programs can result in desired outcomes (Blanco-Vega et al., 2008; Castro-Olivo & Merrell, 2012; Smith et al., 2011). Furthermore, our findings suggest that when school counselors collaborate with classroom teachers, students get additional exposure to habits that lead to academic success. The SCT-SSS

program supports the notion that when students feel connected to their community (such as their school), they are more likely to thrive (Webb et al., 2008). Hispanic ELL students are the fastest growing group of school-age students in U.S. public schools (NCES, 2011) and present with numerous risk factors (e.g., poor academic performance; social-emotional challenges; individual, family, school, and sociocultural adjustment issues) related to potential dropouts (Balfanz, 2009; Hammond et al., 2007). The SCT-SSS program was developed to intentionally target Hispanic students and to teach them the SEL skills necessary to succeed academically while at the same time acknowledging and celebrating their social and cultural values. School counselors play an instrumental role in modeling these efforts by maintaining high standards within the educational community; demonstrating cultural sensitivity and respect for all minority groups, including the Hispanic population (Bornsheuer & Polonyi, 2010); and implementing services that reduce the cultural barriers that impede the students' academic achievement (Amatea et al., 2006). Bornsheuer and Polonyi (2010) recommended that when working with Hispanic individuals, counselors must implement culturally sensitive services in the clients' preferred language; educate themselves and other counselors about the cultural norms, values, and beliefs of the Hispanic population; and demonstrate respect, sensitivity, and appreciation for their clients' cultural values. When students are taught critical metacognitive, social, and self-management skills in their language of origin, such as in the SCT-SSS program, their confidence increases along with the effort they are willing put forth, which leads to higher academic performance.

Consistent with the principles of individual psychology, the SSS curriculum and SCT-SSS program aim to help students foster a sense of belonging, explore their strengths and areas for improvement, and establish purposeful goals. Fostering a supportive learning environment in the language Hispanic students can emotionally navigate best is also key to shaping their thoughts, feelings, options, likes/dislikes, and behaviors about school. Furthermore, the Adlerian principle of social interest holds that when students engage in programs that facilitate group work, this can result in increased levels of perceived support and feelings of connectedness. The SCT-SSS program offers several guided activities in which students collaborate in pairs and small groups so they have many opportunities to share ideas and build relationships. This aspect of the program is particularly fitting for Hispanic students because their culture strongly values cooperation and socialization (Garza & Watts, 2010).

### *Limitations and Future Research*

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to Hispanic students of different countries; no attempt was made to differentiate the treatment effect by country of origin. Although Hispanics have many

common cultural traits and share the Spanish language, specific differences make Hispanics a vast population with cultural differences based on country of origin; therefore, future research would benefit from classifying Hispanic students by their country of origin. Second, the study included Grade 9 and 10 students in two high schools from one school district in southeast Florida; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to Hispanic or Hispanic ELL students in other grade levels or living in other locations. Additional research should include Hispanic students in other grade levels, different schools, and different states so the results are more generalized to the Hispanic student population in the United States. Conducting this research with elementary and middle school students may help identify if implementing this intervention at early years can have an impact on results over time.

Third, the first author was responsible for delivering the intervention in the treatment school, which may have inadvertently introduced a researcher bias. Fourth, although we attempted to account for academic differences between students prior to the intervention by using pretest scores as covariates in the data analysis, the study did not account for potential differences among students nested within the classrooms. Future study designs should attempt to increase the number of schools, school counselors, teachers, and students, as well as randomize participant involvement and treat nested classes as the units of analysis. Increasing the number of schools, school counselors, teachers, and classrooms and designing a study that involves random assignment that accounts for nested classes as the units of analysis would improve the credibility of the findings.

Lastly, this study involved one treatment modality (classroom) and did not examine the effect of the SCT-SSS intervention over time. However, school counselors utilize other modalities when offering direct services to students, including individual and small-group counseling. Future studies can combine the SCT-SSS with the SSS classroom and SSS small-group programs. Also, follow-up studies are needed to support the long-term effectiveness of school counselor–led interventions that increase Hispanic students’ academic achievement, as well as the effects of the program on noncognitive and SEL factors associated with academic performance.

## CONCLUSION

School counselors are responsible for providing a comprehensive school counseling program that meets the needs of all students. The SSS curriculum, influenced by individual psychology and humanistic counseling, has been linked to student academic and behavioral improvements (Bal et al., 2012; Bowers et al., 2015; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Brigman et al., 2011, 2012; Lemberger & Clemens, 2011; Lemberger et al., 2015; Nelsen et al., 2013; Villares et al., 2012; Webb et al., 2008). The SCT-SSS classroom program was

designed to teach students, in their native language, key cognitive, social, and self-management skills necessary for school success. The results of this study demonstrate that students who receive the SCT-SSS classroom program (Brigman & Webb, 2004, 2009) improve their FCAT reading and math scores compared with students who do not receive the intervention. By helping ELL students to develop in the context of an accepting, safe school and classroom environment, they are better able to establish a sense of connectedness with their peers and maintain purposeful goals that lead to positive actions and behaviors (Adler, 1937; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Dreikurs, 1989).

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