Spirituality and School Counselor Education and Supervision

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Abstract

Spirituality is an area that has not received a great deal of attention in supervision, yet it can have substantial effects on the counseling process. A definition of spirituality that allows for a variety of worldviews can be useful to both counselor and client as it helps strengthen the counseling relationship and lessen differences between them. In addition, there are counseling models that have been created to integrate the role of spirituality within supervision and to provide a framework for supervisees. Recommendations in how to incorporate spirituality for supervisors to use with school counselors in training are provided.

Spirituality and School Counselor Education and Supervision

Spirituality has become an increasingly more visible topic in the counseling literature (Bishop, Avila-Juarbe, & Thumme, 2003). Researchers as well as practitioners are realizing the importance of addressing spirituality with their clients (Bishop et al., 2003). Spirituality plays an important role in ways that many people make meaning, clarify their values, and even attempt to solve problems (Bishop et al., 2003). Counselors have an obligation to consider a client holistically, and this includes attempting to understanding of their spiritual beliefs. Because counselors work to understand their clients, it is logical for counselor educators and supervisors to train future counselors in how to address issues of spirituality with their clients. This paper explores how spirituality can play a part in supervision, specifically in regards to school counseling, which involves an environment that has often avoided the role of spirituality (Sink, 2004; Lambie, Davis, & Miller, 2008).

The demographics of the United States are changing and with these changes come important considerations for counselors who work with clients from different backgrounds. One of these changes is in the diversity of spiritual and religious beliefs that have become even more prominent (Hage, Hopson, Siegel, Payton, & DeFanti, 2006). There is a strong movement toward incorporating more spiritual and religious content into counselor education (Hage et al., 2006; Hall, Dixon, & Mauzey, 2004). The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) is one of the only accreditation agencies that incorporates standards that specifically mention the consideration of spirituality (Hage et al., 2006). Kelly (1994) conducted a national survey of counselor education programs and found that a minority

of the programs include courses incorporating spiritual issues though many educators believe this is an important issue. Less than 25% of the programs included an aspect of spiritual education and this carried over into supervision discussions during internship. Interestingly enough, many counselor educators and researchers agree that spiritual issues are an important aspect of counselor preparation (Kelly, 1994; Young, Cashwell, Wiggins-Frame, & Belaire, 2002; Hage et al., 2006; Ripley, Jackson, Tatum, & Davis, 2007; Aten & Hernandez, 2004). One possible explanation regarding the absence of spiritual issues in counselor training (at least in state institutions) could be the trepidation of violating the requirements of separation of church and state (Kelly, 1994; Kelly, 1995). State employees (faculty) may be cautious in exploring these issues with students in fear of interfering with their private lives (Kelly, 1994). School counselors can be included in this group as they often work in the public school setting. It is recommended counselor educators expand research and dialogue around spiritual issues and incorporate this into training future counselors (Kelly, 1994).

It is important to note that although it is difficult to find research that addresses counselor educators' ability to train future counselors in the area of spirituality, there is substantial support for incorporating spiritual education and competencies into their training (Young et al., 2002). There has been a strong push from the counselor educators for more training and curricular guidelines to remedy this deficit (Young et al., 2002). Hage et al. (2006) also found that though faculty members are willing to lead classroom discussions and facilitate research, they do not feel qualified to support these activities.

There is no longer a question of whether or not spirituality should be addressed in counseling. Spirituality is believed to be an integral part of human growth and change (Myers & Williard, 2003; Kelly, 1995; Fowler, 1981). Counseling is designed to help individuals with their personal development, problem-solving, and ability to overcome stress, all of which require an understanding of the client's cognitive, emotional, and psychosocial abilities (Kelly, 1995). It is helpful for the counselor to understand what the client values and how they make meaning in their life (Kelly, 1995). It is important to consider a definition for spirituality that both counselors and clients will understand. Myers and Williard (2003) use the following to define spirituality, "… the capacity and tendency present in all human beings to find and construct meaning about life and existence and to move toward personal growth, responsibility, and relationship with others" (p. 149). This definition allows readers to understand how spirituality can be incorporated into the counseling relationship and how spirituality can be seen as essential for growth and wellness.

Myers and Williard (2003) recommend taking a holistic view of the client considering how body, mind, and spirit integrate in determining how well one is doing. In attempting to define spirituality, counselors are cautioned to avoid using terminology that would discount or minimize a particular orientation and instead use phrases that would be inclusive and accepting of a variety of traditions (Myers & Williard, 2003). The success of counseling is often tied to the relationship between the counselor and client, therefore, a relationship built upon trust and a congruent understanding of how spirituality impacts life can be critical to positive growth (Kelly, 1995). It is important for a counselor to consider the many different meanings and traditional practices that can be

part of an individual's spirituality (Kelly, 1995). Polanski (2003) makes an important distinction between how individuals view their spirituality and the consideration counselors should make regarding this distinction. For example, some clients view spirituality as a connection to their religious experiences whereas others view spirituality without a tie to religious practice and more of a connection to the transcendental nature of the universe (Polanski, 2003). School counselors in training may be unaware of these differing viewpoints unless they are addressed during a course.

Recommendations from the literature provide useful strategies for counselor educators to consider with students. Some of these include: helping students identify how their own spirituality impacts their development, helping them utilize spiritual dialogue within their counseling sessions, recognize countertransference reactions to unfamiliar areas of spirituality, and how to use counseling skills to learn more about their clients' spiritual experiences (Ingersoll, 1997; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997). Incorporating these concepts into coursework for counselors in training can help students feel more comfortable with spiritual issues.

Another factor to consider concerns when it is appropriate to address spiritual issues with the client (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997). Students need to consider how to utilize spiritual issues within the session to enhance the client's growth and development, if spiritually sensitive issues are addressed at the wrong time, this could negatively affect the counseling relationship. The use of modeling by counselor educators can help students conceptualize the appropriate times to incorporate spiritual dialogue. Modeling can also be used to demonstrate how spiritual issues can be addressed from within the client's cultural context (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997). It is

important to not make judgments regarding the client's spiritual beliefs even if they are different from one's own. Once again, the counseling students should consider a holistic view of the client.

Some final recommendations for counselor educators to consider include: to promote the creation of a class environment where students feel safe to openly discuss learning about spiritual issues; to investigate of their own spiritual beliefs; and to understand that respecting differences is an important part of counseling (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997). The literature available reveals a lack of curricula to guide counselor educators in the area of spirituality. Recommendations such as those listed above could provide helpful strategies to alleviate this deficit.

Spirituality in Supervision

Supervision is an important part of every counselor's training and development (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Effective supervisors not only address the supervisee's growth and development, but also need to consider the welfare of the client to whom the supervisee is assisting (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Polanski, 2003). An important aspect of supervision is helping the supervisee consider the client from a holistic perspective, which includes their spiritual well-being and how this impacts counseling sessions (Polanski, 2003). In addition, supervisors need to have a basic understanding of what spirituality means to them so that they may adequately address spiritual issues during supervision (Bishop et al., 2003).

Hage et al. (2006) indicated that if spirituality was to be addressed, it most likely happened during supervision, although they noted that it was difficult to determine the frequency or the consistency of the spirituality topic during supervision. Hage et al.

stressed the importance of spiritually competent supervisors working with supervisees in understanding how a client's spiritual or religious beliefs can impact their development and outlook on life. A positive focus on spirituality can aid in the client's overall emotional health and development (Bishop et al., 2003).

According to Parker (2009), there has been an increase in spiritual issues that clients are bringing into counseling, yet it is difficult to find research that addressed spirituality within supervision. This leaves counselors in training vulnerable to a lack of support as they address spiritual issues with their clients. It is important for counselors in training to work to find ways to minimize the differences between clients and themselves (Bishop et al., 2003). Similar to the recommendations for counseling courses, supervisees need to understand how their own spiritual beliefs and values surface in counseling and how these may affect the therapeutic relationship (Parker, 2009). It is especially important to consider these variables in different environments (for example, schools) and how this may impact the counseling session. Bishop et al. (2003) recommend consideration of the setting and whether or not spiritual issues and discussions are allowed, for example, public schools. The authors recommend consulting with spiritual authorities in situations where it is unclear if discussions are allowed.

The Use of Models with Spirituality and Supervision

Although there is a lack of literature available related to the incorporation of spirituality into the supervision experience, there are some models that have been developed to assist counselors and counselors in training. Parker (2009) recommends incorporating the faith development theory to help address spiritual development with

clients that can provide structure during supervision. The faith development theory utilizes Fowler's (1981) stages of faith within the supervision setting. It can also help supervisors assess where supervisees stand in their faith development and how their stance may impact their counseling sessions (Parker, 2009). This assessment can assist supervisors in helping supervisees continue to grow in their development so that they may adequately address spiritual issues within counseling sessions (Parker, 2009). Understanding Fowler's stages of faith could contribute positively to providing appropriate supervision, especially when incorporating another model such as the integrated developmental model (Stoltenberg & McNeil, 2010) to fully understand where the supervisee is in their development.

Ripley et al. (2007) utilized a developmental model for religious and spiritual development than incorporates Kohlberg (1981) and Fowler's (1981) theories. Suggestions are given in working with supervisees within each of the six stages. Supervisees within the first stage of the model need help exploring how their own spiritual beliefs can impact counseling sessions through the use of support and direct feedback. In the second stage, supervisors assist supervisees to develop more autonomy in addressing spiritual issues with clients. Supervisees in this stage may struggle with clients whose spiritual beliefs are different than their own and may tend to focus on their own growth versus the needs of their clients. Within the third stage, supervisors continue to foster independence and self-efficacy within the supervisee, encouraging a deeper understanding of clients with different spiritual viewpoints. In the fourth stage, supervisees begin to develop their own perspective on addressing spiritual issues with clients and are no longer dependent on the supervisor's recommendations.

They shift away from a focus on themselves and are able to adequately address the needs of the client. Supervisors are encouraged to help supervisees maintain a balance in not becoming too confident but also not avoiding opportunities to address spiritual issues. In the fifth and sixth stages, supervisees become ready to engage in meaningful, non-defensive discussions with clients whose spiritual backgrounds are different than their own. They are able to accept that there are multiple truths and perspectives in how people make meaning. Overall, it is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that the supervisee is increases their own spiritual awareness and development.

Aten and Hernandez (2004) recommend another model to address religion in clinical supervision. Their model incorporates Stoltenberg and Delworth's (1987) integrated development model (IDM) with supervisor actions in order to facilitate supervisee growth. The authors highlight supervisor actions within the eight domains of the IDM. Recommendations regarding types of questions, multicultural sensitivity, modeling of interventions, and alignment with the client's worldviews are identified for the reader. The authors caution supervisors and supervisees against making assumptions regarding a client's spiritual beliefs based solely on a particular religious affiliation they might follow. They recommend gathering the information necessary to determine how the client's religious beliefs play a role (if at all) in the issues they are addressing through counseling.

Polanski (2004) utilizes Bernard's (1997) discrimination model to provide a framework for addressing spirituality within supervision. Within the three areas of supervision (intervention skills, conceptualization skills, and personalization skills), Polanski identifies questions, skills, techniques, reflections, and assessments for

supervisors that are important in addressing spiritual issues with supervisees. In addition, it is important for supervisors to model how to address spiritual issues for their supervisees, as well as embracing discussions of spiritual issues within sessions (Polanski, 2004).

There is a need for counselors and counselor educators to embrace spirituality as a construct necessary to meet the needs of the clients they serve. Researchers encourage supervisors and supervisees to become more self-aware regarding spiritual beliefs, become involved in examination of spirituality and its definitions, and work to include spirituality into the counseling environment (Bishop et al., 2003). Supervisors could also focus on building a positive supervisory relationship with their students in the beginning stages to help encourage future spiritual dialogue. Hull, Suarez, Sells, and Miller (2013) found that addressing spirituality early in the supervisory relationship increased positive perceptions of the relationship. The authors noted that from their study, spirituality and religion were more often discussed in relation to meaning and purpose of life and less often discussed in relation to diversity. The authors cautioned supervisors from neglecting discussions of spirituality that fall within the diversity lens and instead encouraged discussions that will help increase supervisees develop competencies. As identified by Bernard and Goodyear (2009), the concept of spirituality and its place in supervision is still relatively new and therefore, limited empirical research has been conducted. This provides a great opportunity for current and future counselor educators and supervisors to develop spirituality-related research that can contribute to the future of the profession.

Implications and Future Directions for School Counseling

The importance of spirituality in clients' lives is not limited to the clinical setting. According to Sink (2004), spirituality is essential to human functioning and therefore, cannot be ignored even in children and adolescents. Children and adolescents spend a large percentage of their time in schools, therefore, it makes sense that many of them will interact with their school counselor more often than even an outside counselor. Ignoring students' spiritual development issues would not only affect them negatively but also be considered unethical according to the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA, 2010) ethical standards (Smith-Augustine, 2011; Lambie et al., 2008). Spirituality can be considered another aspect of development, similar to cognitive and psychosocial development (Smith-Augustine, 2011). It is important to consider how spirituality would impact the school counseling environment.

Although there is limited research that addresses spirituality and school counseling, a common theme has surfaced in what has been published. A common barrier to addressing spirituality within schools is the school counselor's trepidation of violating school policies or breaching *church and state* (Sink, 2004; Lambie et al., 2008). School counselors also may fear that conversations on spiritual issues may not be appropriate with children who are still forming their own value systems and ideals. According to Lambie et al. (2008), school counselors may also avoid spiritual discussions because they do not feel qualified or worry their own value system will impact the relationship. It is important to note potential drawbacks to incorporating spirituality within school counseling supervision. Adequate training can be difficult to find due to time constraints and the availability of professionals to provide professional

development for counselors (Lambie et al.). Another potential drawback may be lack of stakeholder agreement in offering these types of discussions with students. Parents and guardians may have concerns that the school counselor might offer differing viewpoints or values than those held by their respective families (Smith-Augustine, 2011).

Nevertheless, in order to fulfill the needs of the whole child, school counselors should attempt to use best practice and address the spiritual development of their students (Sink, 2004; Lambie et al., 2008; Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). "Spirituality is often a fundamental socializing force in one's development" (Lambie et al., 2008, pg. 212). Supervisors will play an important role in helping school counselors in training by modeling appropriate ways to address spirituality with students.

As with adults, counselors work to understand how their clients make meaning and explore misunderstandings they may have in order to help them work through these issues (Sink, 2004). Helping students identify how their spiritual beliefs may assist in responding to obstacles and stressors is an important aspect for school counselors to consider (Smith-Augustine, 2011). It is important for school counselors to allow students to fully express themselves, including their spiritual side. As stated by MacDonald (2004), this requires openness from the counselor, not a new or special set of skills. Sink (2004) suggested that counselors must maintain an attitude of openness that allows students to identify their spiritual beliefs without fear of criticism or judgment: It is important for counselors to model "genuineness, flexibility, a non-critical spirit, caring, and sensitivity" (p. 313) when working within the school setting. Sink also recommends using non-controversial language in addressing spiritual issues with students and focusing on their expressions of meaning making. Nonetheless, it is possible some may

oppose talk of spirituality within the school setting and school counselors will need to be prepared to address these issues. Encompassing a holistic view of the child and proposing spiritual dialogue as a way to enhance problem-solving methods can reinforce the ability of the student to overcome obstacles (Sink; Lambie, et al., 2008).

As explained by Ingersoll and Bauer (2004), spiritual wellness can also be described as incorporating elements of connectedness, hope, meaning making, compassion, purpose in life, and forgiveness into discussions between students and counselors. These constructs can be discussed on a philosophical level as well as the spiritual, which may make it easier to integrate into schools. This approach can be especially helpful when conversations regarding grief or trauma arise with students (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). The authors believe that because spirituality is part of every child's development, it can be addressed in a guidance program. They also suggest that spiritual development will look different for children of all ages.

MacDonald (2004) notes that the debate around spirituality in counseling is often connected to the different definitions people may use when defining it. He also describes the dualistic worldview that is so common in western culture, that it is possible to separate the spiritual and the secular. This type of belief has shaped how counselors work in the school setting that counseling can happen without acknowledging the spiritual aspect of life (MacDonald). Therefore, a need for more training and research to incorporate differing worldviews into counseling would be beneficial (MacDonald). New conceptual models are beginning to develop and graduate programs are recognizing the importance of spiritual training (MacDonald). "Children who are hungry find learning difficult, as do children in emotional pain. People are not one-dimensional and the

institutions that serve them cannot afford to be either" (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004, p. 306).

Spirituality has been described as a dimension of human diversity that school

counselors have a duty to acknowledge (MacDonald).

Lonberg and Bowen (2004) advocate for school counselors to work with other

staff to create the type of environment where students from differing spiritual

backgrounds feel accepted. Spiritually adjusted students will be better friends to their

peers and help create a more positive school environment (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004).

The authors caution school counselors to pay special attention in areas where there is

not a lot of spiritual diversity. Counselor educators need to prepare future school

counselors to become multiculturally sensitive especially within the area of spirituality

(Lonberg & Bowen).

School counselors must not only acknowledge spiritual issues, they must also be

competent in handling these issues with students (Smith-Augustine, 2011). In a study

by Smith-Augustine, results indicated that if the opportunity arose, students preferred to

address spiritual issues with their school counselors (2011). Lambie et al. (2008)

suggest school counselors be willing to discuss spirituality when the student chooses to

focus on it. School counselors have begun to actively engage in these issues even

though their level of comfort is not yet high (Smith-Augustine, 2011). This level of

comfort could be increased if supervision and training were available related to

competency, assessment of personal values, legal issues, and moral obligations of

spirituality issues (Smith-Augustine, 2011).

Lambie et al. (2008) recommend three steps and strategies to support spirituality

in school counselors' ethical practice. The first step is to increase their self-awareness

of personal and professional beliefs. School counselors may reflect on their own spiritual experiences and the impact this may play in working with students. The second step is appreciation of students' spirituality in the counseling process. It is important for school counselors to be open to the different spiritual and religious backgrounds of the students they serve as to not misinterpret their behaviors. The third strategy is to tailor counseling interventions to meet the individual needs of the student. This includes accounting for the child's developmental level. The authors also emphasized that school counselors retain awareness of professional boundaries and competencies in working with spiritual issues inside the school setting. This does not mean school counselors cannot address their own spiritual beliefs with students when it is appropriate as long as they are able to keep the student's interest as their focus (Lonberg & Bowen, 2004).

With the changing population, future research conducted on meeting the needs of diverse students will be beneficial. In addition, conducting a survey of current school counselors' level of awareness, comfort, and knowledge may provide relevant information and give researchers direction in moving forward with this topic. Shaw, Bayne, and Lorelle (2012) proposed a constructivist perspective in teaching future counselors in how to incorporate spirituality into their practice. The authors used the competencies of the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC, 2009) combined with a constructivist approach that could assist counselor educators and supervisors in teaching, organizing, or expanding this topic. Examining the effectiveness of this or other types of approaches could provide valuable information for counselor educators as they teach and supervise future school counselors. Smith-Augustine (2011) also supports future research that could assist in

the development of strategies to increase counselors' comfort level when dealing with spiritual and religious issues.

In conclusion, it is important for counselor educators and supervisors to be aware of the impact spirituality may play in clients' lives. As counselors, there is an obligation to explore this topic in order to help clients find meaning, overcome struggles, and identify support systems. Many researchers recommend addressing spirituality not only in coursework, but also in supervision where counselors in training will begin to encounter individuals from many different backgrounds. School counselors engage in ongoing professional development in order to meet the changing needs of the students they serve: This includes working to become a spiritually sensitive counselor.

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