

Professional Development Schools: A Model for  
Preparing School Counselor Trainees

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### Abstract

This article discusses a training model, based on The Education Trust, The American School Counselor Association, and The Holmes Partnership, consisting of school counselor trainees completing their clinical experiences in a Professional Development School. A case study demonstrating the role of the school counselor is presented along with implications for counselor educators.

## Professional Development Schools: A Model for Preparing School Counselor Trainees

Professional Development Schools (PDSs) were created as innovative institutions to form mutual partnerships between professional education programs and p–12 schools. The mission of a PDS partnership is an approach based on: (a) the preparation of new teachers; (b) faculty development; (c) inquiry directed at the improvement of practice; and (d) enhanced student achievement (NCATE, 2007). Oftentimes this four-fold approach includes developing exemplary practice to maximize student outcomes. This is accomplished by providing highly supervised sites for preservice training. The partnerships established between a p-12 school and university is important because a shared belief exists that together, students are better prepared for the world of tomorrow. The collaborative relationship supports a diverse community of learners at all levels of educational development. Through mutual trust, respect, and shared decision making, emphasis is placed on professional growth, effective instructional practices, and mentoring.

Professional Development Schools differ from traditional schools in that PDSs are organized as communities of learning (Woloszyk & Davis, 1993), where all persons within the “community” take part in education, and adults as well as children are simultaneously learning. One way simultaneous education takes place is by integrating the preservice and in-service education of school and university faculty, (i.e. teachers, administrators, parents, and other personnel) in the context of a learning community. Prior to the development of PDSs, schools would focus primarily on the academic instruction of children of a specific age group. However, it was discovered that

education reform could occur if major improvements in teaching incorporated the development of community partnerships for improved learning (Schlechty, 1991).

Traditionally, PDSs have provided training opportunities for preservice teachers. On the contrary, participation of school counselors and counselor educators has been minimal (Clark & Horton-Parker, 2002). To increase school counselor and counselor educator involvement, Clark and Horton-Parker discussed placing school counselor interns in PDSs. These early immersion experiences strengthen the school counselor trainees' collaboration skills with teachers, principals, and other school personnel. Preservice school counselors have opportunities to show leadership qualities and evaluate the success of their interactions with students. As a result, these authentic experiences gained in a PDS benefit school personnel and the students.

It is important to note that placing school counselor trainees at a traditional school (rather than a PDS) provides similar opportunities to collaborate with teachers, administrators, parents, and staff, however, the amount of time and the type of experiences are inconsistent with the school counselor profession's recommendations (Zalaquett, 2005). In other words, there is a lack of consensus in how school counselors should function and this is often complicated with the variation of roles and responsibilities depending on their internship placement.

Another consideration is that traditional schools also allow flexibility at the school site therefore allowing an easy transition for a novice school counselor trainee to acclimate to what is expected at the particular school they are placed. This is somewhat different in that a school counselor trainee placed at a PDS site may be called upon to continue work that was started the previous year by a different counselor (Clark &

Horton-Parker, 2002) and meeting expectations of the precedent set at times may be difficult.

Nonetheless, similar to preservice teachers, school counselor interns are able to refine counseling program implementation (through collaboration), integrate theory, and develop a reflective practice in a PDS. Recently, criticism has focused on counselor education programs that teach a massive amount of theory but do not adequately prepare school counselors in areas of applied practice (Dimmitt, 2003). With the integration of the PDS into counselor education, prospective school counselors and counselor educators could be provided with unlimited opportunities to plan, implement, and evaluate programs within public schools (Clark & Horton-Parker, 2002, Whittmer, 2000). This method may prepare school counselor trainees to become familiar with the unique ebbs and flows occurring throughout an entire school year that often gets overlooked in traditional practicum and internship experiences.

Unfortunately, there is limited evidence to support counselor education within PDSs. Therefore, we believe there are numerous descriptions of professional development schools linking universities and public schools but discussing partnerships involving counselor education is unavailable (Borgen, 1981). This article builds on Clark and Horton Parker's work with PDS by integrating implications from three national organizations (i.e., The Education Trust, ASCA, & The Holmes Partnership). Also, a case study is used to demonstrate the role one school counselor trainee took when placed in a PDS. In this example, the school counselor illustrates these various philosophies into a working concept. Essentially, a school counselor preparation

program that substitutes a traditional practicum and internship with a placement in a PDS needs to be considered (Osborne & Gray, 1995).

### Recommendations of the Education Trust

The Education Trust was established in 1990 to provide high academic achievement for all students at all levels (pre-kindergarten through college). In a study sponsored by The Education Trust, Perusse, Goodnough, and Noel (2001) suggested how the role of the professional school counselor might be improved. The authors surveyed counselor educators to determine if the principles of the Education Trust were reflected in school counseling preparation programs. Perusse et al. discussed five domains of the Education Trust as basic tenets in developing courses for instructing school counselor trainees. The domains of leadership, advocacy, teaming and collaboration, counseling and coordination, assessment and use of data, emerged after identifying the needs of counselor educators and professional school counselors. Data from the study showed that 77% of counselor educators believed their programs did include the domains suggested by of the Education Trust. As a response to the Perusse et al., study, the Education Trust recommended the previously mentioned domains be emphasized within school counselor preparation programs.

It is important to note the Education Trust's recommendations, the five domains, were developed to guide the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI). The Education Trust's TSCI emphasizes changing the role of the professional school counselor. According to the mission of the TSCI, the professional school counselor serves as a leader, advocate, and collaborator working with faculty, staff, parents, and

community members to ensure that all students succeed paying particular attention to those overlooked and often underserved (Education Trust, 2002).

In conjunction with the Education Trust's revised definition of the professional school counselor, implications regarding the professional school counselor's role in the PDS have been developed. For example, professional school counselors must be concerned with individual and systemic issues (Dimmitt, 2003). Furthermore, professional school counselors are integral members of the educational team collaborating with all educators in the school, helping to resolve issues pertinent to the entire school and surrounding community (Clark & Horton-Parker, 2002). Finally, professional school counselors should no longer be seen as quasi-administrators, ancillary support personnel, or those who work in isolation or only with other professional school counselors (Bemak & Cornerly, 2002; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004).

#### Recommendations of the American School Counselor Association

The American School Counselor Association's focus is to support school counselors' efforts to help students focus on academic, personal/social and career development so they achieve success in school and are prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society. ASCA created a The National Model for School Counseling Programs to provide consistency in the role and functioning of the school counselor that helps to establish school counseling as an integral component of the public school mission. ASCA's National Standards outline competencies that are the foundation for ASCA's National Model. The competencies are academic development, career development, and personal/social development. Each student competency

defines the knowledge, attitudes or skills students should obtain or demonstrate as a result of participating in a school counseling program (ASCA, 2005). Additionally, the ASCA National Standards and National Model for School Counseling Programs ensure school counseling programs are comprehensive in design and encourage academic success for all students. One major challenge for counselor educators is how to integrate ASCA's philosophy into school counselor training and preparation. Another challenge is that school persons outside of counselor education are not fully aware of the National Model or Standards. Schwallie-Giddis, ter Maat, and Pak (2003) stated that a current obstacle for ASCA is to "get the word out" about the National Model and Standards (p. 170). ASCA is encouraged, by the ASCA Governing Board, to disseminate the National Model and Standards to the many states, school districts, individual schools, and practicing school counselors across the country.

The ASCA National Model encourages the continual training of the school counselor, as well as addresses historical concerns, current challenges, and the future of the profession. Concerns noted by ASCA include school counselors working in isolation, lack of consistency in school counselor preparation, and uncertainty in the school counselor's role, function, purpose, and focus (ASCA, 2005). Therefore, the recommendations garnered from ASCA include redefining the role of the school counselor so the duties provided are delivered with clarity and confidence. School counselors need to be able to operate without doubt, indecision, and hesitation.

#### Influence of the Holmes Partnership

The Holmes Partnership is a network of colleges of education, public schools, and community organizations whose goals are to improve the quality of teacher training

and to improve urban education. Because of the challenges facing educators and the commitment of the school counseling profession, counselor educators and professional school counselors have assumed an important role in the implementation and sustainability of The Holmes Partnership (Holmes Partnership, 2008). This understanding is a result of the type of reform spawned by the Holmes Group. The Holmes group was organized after Ronald Reagan's Nation at Risk Presidential Address. President Reagan's address challenged our educational system and specifically teacher preparation programs to engage in educational reform.

The primary work of the Holmes Partnership takes place in PDSs, where the premise of the partnership is to make schools better places for teachers to work and learn (Holmes Partnership, 2008). Ideally, the PDS provides a venue to develop a knowledge base of teaching by becoming a place where practice and practice sensitive research can be carried out collaboratively by teachers, teacher educators, and researchers. The Teacher Reform Model offered by the Holmes Partnership suggests that prospective teachers, undertake an intensive internship in a PDS where they will encounter state-of-the-art practice and a range of diverse experiences under intense supervision (Darling-Hammond, 1994).

Despite these current initiatives, it appears as if counselor educators have not consistently engaged pre-service school counselors in educational reform (House & Martin, 1998; Johnson, 2000). Traditional counselor education programs often do not prepare school counselors on the policy and merits of educational reform or how to implement and sustain educational reform strategies in schools (Colbert, Vernon-Jones, & Pransky, 2006). There are some examples of school counselors participating in

school reform and defining a new role for counselor in education reform (Dimmitt, 2003). Colbert, Vernon-Jones and Pransky (2006) also developed a conceptual framework that innovatively informed school counselors about specific schooling processes that can enhance/hinder student academic, personal/social and career development. However, typically school counselor trainees have not been actively involved in experiential activities necessary to prepare them for facilitating systemic change (House & Martin, 1998). Consequently, providing professional development opportunities for school counselor trainees to participate in educational reform must be a concerted effort.

The PDS is a public school (elementary school, middle school, or high school) in which the transition from educational theory-to-practice is two-way, where a mutually beneficial relationship between educators in partnership schools and colleges of education is created. Through this joint venture, the PDS brings new practices, points of views, and ideas for novice teachers and preservice interns. Also occurring at the PDS is training for experienced educators as well as research projects in which educators are engaged. For example, school counselors work collaboratively with other professional educators from universities, school districts, and professional or community-based organizations as teams to improve the quality of the training of all educators and to influence student achievement. The relationship between the school counselor trainee and the other team members is symbiotic, integrative, and systemic. The learning environment created in the PDS is aligned with the ideal role outlined in the ASCA National Model. Likewise, the training received by the school counselor at the PDS compliments the Education Trusts' emphasis on serving all students particularly those who are marginalized.

## Case Study

In 1991, parents who came together in search of a better educational experience for their children founded a school. These parents assembled a team of dedicated teachers and academic advisors to create an independent, full-spectrum school. In 2007, this K-8 school was accredited by and is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). This school features a child-centered environment that focuses on the social, emotional, and academic well-being of students. In addition, the school uses the best practices of pedagogical methods to recognize and accept individual learning styles. These practices include (a) an integrated curriculum; (b) cooperative learning; (c) real world applications focusing on problem solving; (d) creativity and critical thinking; (e) multi-age classrooms, (f) small class sizes; and (g) frequent and varied fieldtrip experiences.

The school obtained membership from the Holmes Partnership based on the highly qualified and involved staff, cutting-edge instructional considerations, and consistent implementation of ongoing professional development. The local university assisted the school by providing undergraduate and graduate education interns. The interns represented the following programs in education: Counselor Education, Early Childhood, Teacher Education, Education Leadership, and Curriculum and Instruction. These undergraduate, masters, and doctoral-level interns provided teaching and counseling services to the school under the supervision of university faculty members.

In this case study, school counseling interns who were typically responsible for providing responsive services (i.e., individual counseling, small group counseling, and large group guidance) sometimes worked as consultants to help facilitate services that

made an impact on a systemic level. For example, the school counselor intern placed at this school discovered that an achievement gap existed between the African American fifth-grade students and their European American counterparts. More specifically, standardized testing data revealed that a significant number of African American fifth graders in previous years had not been successful on the Language Arts State standardized tests. This school counseling intern within the PDS took a leadership role by creating a guidance program aligned with the ASCA National Model that teachers and administrators embraced. This program promoted academic development by integrating the acquisition of Language Arts skills for the rising sixth graders. Some direct responsive services, such as identifying students and facilitating psychoeducational groups incorporating culturally relevant literature and poetry, were necessary in order to implement this program. However, other considerations including a focus on accountability, another component of the National Model, were performed by collecting pre- and post- data from these students (e.g., grades, reading interests, identity measure, and successful learning behaviors) and continued until the standardized testing took place the following spring.

While implementing these strategies, the school counselor intern had the opportunity to fulfill multiple leadership roles; one of which involved the sharing of results and insights with parents, teachers, and administrators. In fact, the data collected were presented to the entire school community during a town hall style meeting involving the school faculty and staff, and community members held at the end of the academic year. Although disseminating information is usually seen as an administrative duty, it was critical for the school counselor trainee to be able to perform

this role in preparation for future responsibilities. As a result, the school counselor intern was recognized as a vital member of the leadership team and as an asset to the extended community. The community recognized the school counselor trainee's commitment to student academic success and applauded their influence on the improved standardized tests scores for the subcategory group of African American students. Targeting the needs of students of color and their academic development within the framework of the ASCA National Model compliments the mission of the Education Trust. In this case, the PDS provided an opportunity for the school counselor intern to gain invaluable experience that is more probable when spending an entire year in a school.

In another instance, the school counselor intern was able to participate in professional development opportunities that included observing teacher/student interaction in the classroom as a means to identify catalysts and barriers to effective teaching and learning. First, the school counselor trainee made a classroom visit in order to document and record observations and process notes. Next, the school counselor intern consulted with the teacher to provide strategies, interventions, and plans of action for improving the learning environment. Included in the analysis was practical research on goal orientation (e.g., mastery versus performance) and academic motivation. After collaborating with the teacher, the school principal recognized that similar information might be helpful for the entire faculty and staff. Therefore, the school counselor intern was given the opportunity to conduct an onsite training workshop for school personnel. Throughout this process, the preservice school counselor was supervised by university professors and onsite school counselors. Having the

opportunity to do an internship within a PDS and the knowledge learned proved to be extremely beneficial to the preservice preparation for the school counselor, those with whom they worked, and the students they served.

### Discussion

From the literature reviewed and the given case study, we put forward that the PDS educational environment provides a unique opportunity to improve on the overall professional development for school counselor trainees. Not to mention that the designation of “PDS” advances the learned experience to a higher level of interaction by the integration of university faculty and student. As discussed, traditionally, school counselor trainees’ onsite experience is varied and unequal; possibly a result of limited opportunities available to the school. The training process of professional school counselors has become one that encompasses responsibilities and skills that go beyond traditional counseling duties and learned theory. The case study presented offers an alternative approach to prepare school counselors to become active leaders in the field.

There are limitations to using a Professional Development School for a school counselor trainee’s clinical experience. One challenge might be trying to initiate the establishment of the PDS within a school district. If a PDS currently does not exist within an ideal school district, starting the process of building relationships is complicated. For example, public school systems and communities are not necessarily looking to initiate change within their system or to the status quo. Therefore, university faculties need to be innovative and creative by developing concepts and guidelines that augment the ongoing work of the solicited school districts.

Another challenge is that some school counselors, school administrators, and other school personnel may not be accustomed to or skilled in collaborative research and development. This lack of research competency may stem from limited research opportunities during pre-service training and preparation for school personnel or the lack of emphasis and professional development opportunities once working in the field. Either way, creating and pursuing research opportunities is not an easy task. And, facilitating these collaborative research efforts is equally complex.

Consequently, the development of a Professional Development School partnership as described in this manuscript might not be a viable alternative for every school or school counselor trainee program. However, if a university seeks to restructure its school counselor preparation program through the use of the PDS concept, then certain activities and planning should occur to improve the chances for successful implementation of the partnership.

### *Recommendations and Conclusions*

The PDS improves on the quality of learning for the school counselor in training. Additionally, the PDS and school community benefits from the school counselor being trained in this multidisciplinary environment (Esters & Douet, 2001). Once integrated into a PDS, a school counselor interns' competency and work experience is enhanced through constant application of what is learned in the classroom to real live experiences onsite within a PDS. Monitoring and supporting the personal/social, career, and academic developmental needs of students is a regular occurrence. In fact, by allowing a school counselor trainee to spend an entire school year at a PDS, additional data becomes available to conduct action research regarding school counseling

effectiveness and related practices (Hart & Jacobi, 1992). Additionally, the success of students who are served by school counselor interns at a PDS to determine if there was an increase in academic achievement can be tracked and the results disseminated to interested stakeholders.

It is recommended that a) the university administration supports the philosophy of using the PDS to prepare school counselors, b) Colleges and Schools of Education establish and maintain partnerships with schools and/or school districts so school counselor interns can be placed in optimal training environments, c) school counselor programs receive funding to partner with organizations supporting PDS work (e.g. Holmes partnership), d) counselor educators consistently place students at PDS sites to maintain a PDS training component, e) counselor education programs continually invest their students into the PDS so that partnership schools can benefit from the extension of the university.

In conclusion, training implications based on the Education Trust, ASCA, and the Holmes Partnership can enhance school counselor preparation programs by using a PDS training model. The impact a school counselor trainee can have by taking on roles that align with the Education Trust and the ASCA National Model within a PDS was also presented. It is believed that PDSs offer training opportunities for school counselor interns that prepare them to make immediate and significant contributions to their schools and communities.

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