Accountability in Action: Service-Learning Partnerships in Practice

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Abstract

This article begins with an exploration of the issues facing beginning school counselors and the educational requirements for school counselor education programs. Following this exploration, the discussion moves into a description of how service-learning can be used to foster understanding and transfer abstract professional concepts into practice. A case example of a class incorporating service-learning is presented, providing counselor educators with an in-depth understanding of the key foundational underpinnings necessary for effective service-learning projects in school counseling coursework. Potential challenges are discussed and suggestions for future research are shared.

Keywords: service-learning, counselor education, engagement

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As school counselors enter the workforce, they are faced with a client population teeming with multifaceted, complex concerns and presenting issues. More than ever before, primary and secondary students are struggling to be academically successful in the grip of tumultuous systems and increased mental health needs (New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003). The issues facing students in today's schools include abuse and neglect, pervasive poverty, substance abuse, mental health needs, and limited or inadequate access to health care coverage (Children's Defense Fund, 2008). School counselors are often the first line of defense for students and families and as such they must be prepared from day one on the job to start helping families and students.

Counselor education programs work diligently to prepare students to be cognizant of theory and able to apply theory in practice. However, in the academic setting, it can prove difficult to provide experiences allowing for the practical application of theory by students. Many counselor educators turn to case studies and there are notable texts providing powerful representations of the practice of school counseling, including Golden and Henderson's (2007) Case Studies in School Counseling. However, service-learning is another valuable tool that can be used to infuse graduate school counseling programs with intensity and real-world application of theoretical concepts.

Unfortunately, service-learning is often viewed as a teaching modality most appropriate for undergraduate students. This article is offered in an effort to encourage counselor education faculty to consider the use of service-learning as a tool for

strengthening and expanding the learning of graduate school counseling students. The article begins with an exploration of the issues facing beginning school counselors and the requirements for counselor education programs. Following this exploration, the discussion moves into a description of how service-learning can be used to foster professional development and transfer abstract professional concepts into practice. A case example of a class incorporating service-learning is presented. The primary focus of sharing this case is to illustrate the key foundational underpinnings necessary for the development of effective service-learning initiatives in counselor education courses. Potential challenges are discussed and suggestions for future research are shared. Counselor educators reading this article will better understand the process for infusing service-learning into their curriculum and will gain a sense of some of the challenges they may encounter, challenges which hopefully can be minimized through pre-planning during project development.

Contemporary Student Needs

Contemporary school counselors face a plethora of student social, emotional, physical and academic needs (New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003). Addressing the complex intersections of social, emotional and physical needs and the overall mental health and well-being of students is central to positive academic outcomes. In a cyclical process, the mental health of students is impacted by the social, emotional and physical needs present in their lives and the academic success of students is impacted by students' overall mental health (Roeser, Eccles, & Freedman-Doan, 1999). These concerns are particularly salient as a multitude of studies have

documented powerful relationships between mental health needs and the following issues which impact student academic engagement and outcomes:

- teen pregnancy (Harden et al., 2007);
- substance abuse (Cuellar, Markowitz, & Libby, 2004);
- gang participation (Corcoran, Washington, & Meyers, 2005);
- low academic performance (Weissman et al., 1999); and
- school failure (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998).

Each of these issues impacts the mental health and subsequently the school engagement of students and as such school counselors must be prepared to implement comprehensive school counseling programs to address these needs. Comprehensive programming to address such serious student concerns requires that school counselors develop collaborative relationships with a wide range of stakeholders. Pre-service counselor education which includes a focus on developing and implementing collaborative relationships with stakeholders prepares students to develop and engage in such collaborative partnerships when they enter the workforce (Clark & Horton-Parker, 2002).

School Counselor Pre-Service Training

The school counseling education standards set forth by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP, 2009) establish the educational requirements for the pre-service training of school counselors. In accordance with these standards, school counselors have the training necessary to facilitate referrals and collaborative relationships among community professionals, educators and family members to meet the mental health and academic support needs of students (CACREP, 2009). Unfortunately, many school counselors continue to be

bogged down in non-counseling related work and do not have the time to plan and implement collaborative work with other professionals (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Burnham & Jackson, 2000). To create a space and time for collaborative work focused on meeting the mental health needs of students, school counselors must demonstrate how this work impacts the academic outcomes of students.

Contemporary education operates in a data-driven world and in schools, the gold standard is data linked to academic outcomes. In recognition of the importance of data and accountability, the field of school counseling and accordingly, school counselor pre-service training has evolved to include the use of data to discern the impact of school counseling on the academic, personal/social and career development of students (Isaacs, 2003). In contemporary data-driven schools, counselors use a myriad of data to demonstrate the impact of their counseling program and to make decisions about program development and changes (Isaacs, 2003). School counselors who do this successfully are able to advocate for the necessity of comprehensive counseling programs for students and reduce the time they are expected to spend on non-counseling related tasks.

Traditionally, school counselor graduate programs have focused on helping students understand the history of the profession, the multifaceted, evolving role of the school counselor and the linkages between the history and the future of the profession (Schmidt, 2003). In response to the powerful force of the Education Trust's "Transforming the Role of the School Counselor" (1997), an infusion of data, advocacy and collaboration was shot into the hearts of school counseling graduate programs. At the pre-service level, counseling students are now steeped in the elements of data,

advocacy and collaboration (CACREP, 2009) and, in the hopes of most counselor educators, graduate ready to transform professional practice in the schools and systems where they gain employment.

      Unfortunately, learning about these concepts in a classroom setting does not always prepare students for the challenges they may face as advocates in the professional field. Since many administrators and faculty in schools in which students will take school counseling positions will be unfamiliar with the transformed role of data-driven, collaborative school counselors, students will need to advocate for their transformed role. Lambie and Williamson (2004) asserted that school counselors must educate their administrators about the transformed role of contemporary school counselors in order to combat the role ambiguity that holds many practicing counselors in a debilitating cycle of non-counseling related duties and overwhelming student need. However, learning to advocate for oneself professionally takes time and practice. Thus it is important that pre-service school counselor education include a focus on developing skills in the area of collaboration and advocacy (Blackman, Hayes, Reeves & Paisley, 2002). Blackman et al. (2002) asserted that partnerships between school counselors and counselor educators help to foster a sense of community and expand the professional development of both practicing counselors and graduate students. Consequently, service-learning partnerships serve as the proverbial two-bird stone, allowing graduate students to put into practice the advocacy and data-driven program development skills they have developed through their graduate coursework, while also providing practicing school counselors with professional development training focused on advocacy and data-driven decision making.

Service-Learning as a Training Tool

Often the world of academia, counselor education programs included, is criticized for focusing on abstract ideas, the notion being that colleges and universities are isolated from the social environment (Angelidis, Tomic, & Ibrahim, 2004). The inherent danger in such isolation is that programs might fail to prepare graduates for life outside of the classroom. Experiential learning has long been recognized as a viable method for helping students make the connection between theory and practice in counselor education (Achenbach & Arthur, 2002).

Using practical learning activities to teach complex theoretical principles, experiential learning encourages the student to generalize classroom information to professional practice (Glass & Benshoff, 1999). Service-learning takes this process one step further, moving beyond application of theory in the professional, real-world environment into developing a collaborative relationship with an identified partner to address a defined need through the student's learning experience in a real world setting. Simply put, the student provides service to the community through the integration of classroom instruction and professional practice (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004). Both the community and the students benefit from service-learning engagement. Through service-learning, the community is provided with assistance and students evidence increased civic engagement, diversity awareness, and political awareness, all of which are inherently important to the advocacy component of the transformed school counselor's role, and most importantly, students have the opportunity to apply academic knowledge to a "real world" setting (Angelidis, Tomic, & Ibrahim, 2004).

The possible benefits of service-learning experiences are numerous and the impact of such engagement is potentially far-reaching. While the experiences affect the students, it is also likely that others will be impacted as well, including the academic programs, university and community. Valerius and Hamilton (2001) suggest that service-learning courses provide faculty members opportunities for greater contact and mentoring with students, which could aid in increasing student retention. Furthermore, students gain a better perspective on the value of being a contributing member of the greater community (Collier & Lawson, 1997; Gabelnick, 1998). Finally, offering service-learning courses can strengthen the reputation of the program with the community (Valerius & Hamilton, 2001), and this may benefit the university as well as the individual program.

Foundational Underpinnings for Successful Service-Learning

From a review of the extant literature and our experience implementing service-learning with students, we have discerned five foundational underpinnings necessary for successful service-learning in school counselor professional preparation programs. Successful service-learning projects:

- are planned and developed collaboratively with the community/professional partner;
- have clearly communicated expectations;
- integrate support from stakeholders and colleagues;
- are developmentally appropriate and provide opportunities for reflection; and
- continually evolve based on collaborative evaluation of impact and outcomes.

To help readers understand how to develop service-learning projects that integrate these key characteristics, a case example illustrating the parameters of these

foundational underpinnings within one school counseling graduate level class project is shared.

Case Example

Counseling in Schools is a foundational class taken by students who are preparing to become school counselors at a large southeastern university. Within this class, students explore the multifaceted role of school counselors, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model and the importance of accountability, among other topics pertinent to the practice of counseling in schools. As instructor of the course, the lead author struggled to develop course curriculum that met three central goals:

1. to share foundational information about the history and process of school counseling;
2. to prepare students to act as transformational school counselors who use data to inform practice and connect with stakeholders at all levels (Keys & Bemak, 1997); and
3. to prepare students for the wide diversity of expectations for school counselors held by school administrators.

Integral to this struggle was the awareness that many students will not be entering "transformed" schools upon graduation. In fact, many enter schools where the previous counselor had little interaction with students and stakeholders and the ASCA National Model is the stuff of myths and dreams. With this awareness, the instructor felt it necessary to apprise students of the potential challenges in some settings and to prepare students to enter these settings and advocate effectively for the transformed role of the professional school counselor. To be able to serve as effective advocates, it seemed that more than ever before students needed opportunities to put into practice

what they would be expected to do once they enter the workforce. As such, the instructor developed a service-learning project that was data driven and ended with the compilation of outcomes into Stone and Dahir's (2007) MEASURE tool.

The North Carolina Professional School Counseling Standards require that school counselors demonstrate through the use of evidence-based practice their school counseling program's impact on student achievement and contributions to the school's instructional program (NC Student Services, 2008). One accountability tool, the MEASURE, developed by Dahir and Stone (2007) has been supported by the NC Department of Public Instruction Student Support Services Division (Smith, 2009) as appropriate for demonstrating accountability of school counselor programs. As a result of the NC Department of Public Instruction's support many Local Education Agencies (LEA) have adopted this tool as the required outcome for school counselor accountability evidence.

The MEASURE tool provides a template for reporting information about the counseling program and the impact of initiatives implemented in a counseling program. The acronym, MEASURE, stands for Mission, Element, Analyze, Stakeholders-Unite, Results and Educate. This template compiles the mission of the school counseling program, the element the counselor was trying to impact, a description of the program and all the stakeholders that were involved and the analysis of data collected and inferences that were made by the counselor based upon the data about the impact of the program into an organized format easy to share with multiple, diverse stakeholders. Since an in-depth discussion of the structure of the MEASURE tool is beyond the scope

of this article, the authors refer readers to Stone and Dahir's text *School counselor accountability: A MEASURE of student success.*

To prepare students to use the MEASURE, a semester long service-learning project was developed by the first author for the Counseling in Schools course. This project required that students partner with a local school counselor to develop a service initiative that addressed a need present within the school counselor's school community. The graduate students used the MEASURE tool to assess the impact of the service initiative. The foundational underpinnings necessary for implementing projects such as this in school counseling programs will be described using this class project as a case example.

Foundational underpinning #1: Successful service-learning projects are planned and developed collaboratively with the community/professional partner. For the project, the defined community partner was the school counseling community of the LEA. After defining our community partner for the service-learning initiative, the planning and development of the project involved collaboration on two main levels. The first level of collaboration was between the instructor of the university course and the director of student services for the partner LEA. The second level of collaboration occurred between the students enrolled in the course and the practicing school counselors within the LEA.

The instructor for the course began the service-learning project development by reaching out to the director of student services for the local education agency (LEA) serving the community surrounding the university. The instructor's goal was to develop a project that allowed students to develop data-driven projects to meet the need of the

community partner. The director of student services was seeking to improve accountability by preparing counselors to use the MEASURE tool for demonstrating the impact of the counseling programs across his LEA. Working collaboratively, the instructor and director of student services decided to have graduate students identify a topic in either the social/emotional, career or academic development domains, develop an initiative to address the topic and collect data to assess the impact of the initiative. The practicing school counselors would work with the students to complete the project and would gain valuable experience and understanding of how to use the MEASURE in their counseling program.

The second level of communication and collaboration evolved as students began to reach out to practicing school counselors within the LEA. Working in pairs, students chose a school in their local community and contacted the school counselor. Once the students had formed relationships with the schools and counselors, they worked with the school counselor to determine on what area of need their service-initiative should focus. The course instructor provided students with a list of issues relevant for contemporary school counselors as potential starting points, and students were free to explore other topics as deemed important for their partner school's student population by the collaborating school counselor. Students indicated that allowing each student team to choose the counselor and school with whom to work increased their investment in the project. One student stated, "I'm excited to begin this project and to have the chance to use my skills to help my own community. Being able to work with my local school counselor made this project more meaningful for me" (Tamika, Graduate Student). The school counselors who partnered with students also shared their

excitement of having students with fresh perspectives and training in accountability tools to come into their school and work collaboratively with them. One practicing counselor shared her perspective, "Having a chance to share what I know about counseling with the student makes me feel good, but having the student help me to learn about the MEASURE tool while I'm helping the student learn about counseling, that's teamwork and I think we all really benefit."

After choosing a topic of focus, students were required to conduct a literature review to develop a professional understanding and awareness of the chosen topic. The integration of their professional understanding gleaned through their review of the literature and the site-based need identified by the collaborating school counselor provided the initial structure for the service-learning initiative development. In a reflection paper/journal entry submitted shortly after beginning her literature review, one student revealed her perceptions of the importance of this project, "I'm looking forward to this work because I get to help combat a real counseling issue. I get to be part of a project that could possibly make a huge difference in the lives of children."

Foundational underpinning #2: Successful service-learning projects have clearly communicated expectations. Students were provided with an assignment description (Appendix A) at the beginning of the semester and each week they were given information explaining at what stage in the project they should be and what they should have completed at that point in the semester. A rubric (Appendix B) detailing all criteria used in grading the project was also distributed at the beginning of the project. A discussion board thread was opened in the course's online instruction site for questions regarding the project. The instructor responded to all questions posed in the discussion

board thread as well as encouraging students to respond to the queries of their colleagues. Supporting student leadership and collaboration in this manner was intended to empower students to feel invested in the process of project development and to heighten learning through critical thinking. Students met throughout the semester with the counselors at their partner school to ensure that both the students' and practicing counselor's expectations for the project were clarified.

Foundational underpinning #3: Successful service-learning projects integrate support from stakeholders and colleagues. Integrating support from stakeholders and colleagues is essential to the success of service-learning in graduate programs. By integrating support and feedback into the planning and implementation of the project, one is able to strengthen the investment of all stakeholders in the success of the project and to make necessary changes to ensure that community needs are met. As the project was planned and implemented, the instructor for the course sought feedback from colleagues through a peer-review process to assess the structure of the project, goals for student learning and alignment with aims and objectives of the counselor education program for course outcomes.

Students enrolled in the class were required to work closely with a partner (colleague also participating as a student in the course) and a practicing school counselor to develop, implement and evaluate the initiative. This active engagement allowed students to develop an understanding from the beginning of the project that they were involved in an effort to change the existing expectations concerning the role of the school counselor to include the use of data to highlight the impact of the program on student achievement and outcomes. In order to do that they too would need to

integrate support from many sources including colleagues, faculty, and other stakeholders. Highlighting the way this process empowered students to better understand the role of the school counselor in relationship to other stakeholders and students, Amy, a student explained, "I like that, as a counselor, I can look at the needs of the students in my school as a whole and find a way to help the students improve their lives. I like that my work helps me reach out to others to help the students."

Guiding students in planning and collaboration for this work provided an opportunity for practicing school counselors to model the process of seeking support from colleagues and stakeholders for program development. Students began to realize that it is important to gain involvement and support of the whole school. Open doors, collaborative conversation, and intentional efforts to share in professional development helped to enhance positive relations and increase support. Systemic change demands patience and persistence (Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007) requiring planners to make efforts to include all parties and nurture support from stakeholders. One student articulated her awareness of the importance of understanding the systemic processes and context of her school community, sharing, "Another thing we could have improved upon was pacing." She went on to describe how implementing projects at her school required that the counselor meet the needs of the students, the expectations of the administrators while also respecting the time constraints placed on teachers.

Foundational underpinning #4: Successful service-learning projects are developmentally appropriate and provide opportunities for reflection. It is imperative that before initiating any service-learning experience, the instructor

determines the students' readiness for engaging with school communities and stakeholders. Students must have a high level of professionalism and must be able to recognize the impact of their presence and engagement in a school community. University-community relationships can be dramatically and negatively harmed by students who are unprofessional or unprepared to engage with school communities with cultural competence.

To create a developmentally-appropriate initiative for this course, the instructor included a community cultural context essay, a poster proposal, and four reflective journal entries. The community cultural context essay required that students visit the community served by their partner school and engage with local residents. Following this engagement, the students submitted a one-page essay reflecting on how cultural characteristics may impact the school and stakeholders. This essay gave the instructor an opportunity to gauge the students' readiness to engage in culturally competent ways with their partner school. By providing feedback to the students, the instructor attempted to support the students' development of the cultural competence necessary for community engagement. The poster proposal assignment required that students submit a proposal using a state School Counseling Association annual conference graduate student poster proposal form to describe the initiative they planned to develop and implement. From this assignment, the instructor worked with students to provide feedback to help the students plan developmentally-appropriate and achievable projects.

The four reflective journal entries also helped to ensure that the project planning and implementation process was developmentally-appropriate. The students were given

prompts for the reflective journal entries (Appendix C) and the instructor planned the prompts to provide insight into how students were engaging with the material presented in the course and their community partner. Based on information shared by the students in the reflective journals, the instructor worked closely with the students to make modifications in the project planning and implementation to ensure that the process was appropriate for the developmental levels of students.

Foundational underpinning #5: Successful service-learning projects continually evolve based on collaborative evaluation of impact and outcomes. Throughout project development and implementation, the instructor provided a discussion board forum for students to share suggestions for ways to improve the project process. As students shared suggestions, the class would discuss the proposed suggestion and if appropriate, the project would be modified to incorporate the new suggestion. Upon conclusion of the course, students were asked to complete an evaluation to assess their perceptions of the appropriateness, utility and learning outcomes as related to the project. The instructor solicited feedback from the partnering school counselors to assess their perceptions of the project and the process of working with a pre-service school counselor to implement such a project. The feedback from students and community partners was incorporated into the project process and requirements to improve the experience for future classes. It is critical that instructors utilizing service-learning consistently and intentionally evaluate the impact and outcomes of the service-learning experience.

By developing service-learning projects that address the five foundational underpinnings articulated above, counselor educators can design learning experiences

that prepare their students to develop and facilitate collaborative partnerships with other professionals. Being prepared to develop and engage in collaborative partnerships will help students enter schools ready to transform the counseling program in innovative ways to meet the multi-tiered needs of contemporary PK-12 students. Keys, Bemak, and Lockhart (1998) asserted that counselors are better prepared to implement collaborative partnerships when they have had opportunities to engage in that process in their pre-service training programs. Service-learning provides one way to infuse practical experiences applying theory in a "real-world" setting and the five foundational underpinnings described previously can help ensure success in implementing service-learning projects.

Project Impact for Students and Counselors

Students who have participated in completing the service-learning project have reported a range of impacts and outcomes on their personal and professional development. The primary areas that students share most often as being impacted by the project are increased awareness of the multifaceted role of school counselors, improved understanding of the need for collaboration with stakeholders and heightened knowledge of the importance of accountability and advocacy.

Students often share that engaging in this project opened their eyes to the complex and multifaceted roles and responsibilities of school counselors. One student asserted, "Sometimes I do not understand how school counselors ever get anything done, given all that they are supposed to do!" Other students shared that completing the project allowed them a chance to observe the wide range of counselor responsibilities and become aware of "how many hats school counselors are expected to wear and with

style no less!" (Brayley, Counseling Student). The project also appears to open pre-service school counselors' eyes to the importance of collaborating with stakeholders to address student needs. Addressing the importance of collaboration, Kayla stated, "Another great thing about the MEASURE was that it reinforced in me the importance of getting others involved in your work. I think we can garner a lot more support for what we're doing in schools if we keep parents and other stakeholders apprised, and invite them to join us in our efforts to make life better for the children we work with." Tamika also reflected upon the importance of collaboration:

> I learned just how important it is to elicit feedback from stakeholders when implementing any project because by having more input from those truly involved with the students will provide a more thorough way to plan for the future. There are so many more voices to consider when planning school programs and I had no idea just how vital they can be to ensure success of such programs until I engaged in this service-learning project.

To run comprehensive school counseling programs, counselors must collaborate with stakeholders and other professionals and helping pre-service counselors understand this importance and develop skills to support their collaborative efforts is a major benefit of using a service-learning project such as the one described.

Finally, students report that the service-learning project improved their professional development in the area of accountability and advocacy. In a discussion focused on professional development, one student explained what she felt was most important about the project, "Professionally, I learned how crucial it is that we stay abreast of the topics in the counseling field and challenge ourselves as counselors to

meet those needs. This requires us to be flexible in our approaches and advocate for these changing needs." Many students upon taking a professional position as a school counselor have written the instructor to share that the project helped them feel better prepared to use data in their program planning, implementation and evaluation.

The school counselors with whom the graduate students partner also report positive results from engaging in the service-learning project. One counselor expressed her appreciation for the student's efforts at her school remarking, "The students' willingness to tackle a tough issue met a critical need for my school's student population. We will continue to use the curriculum they developed to help support the social and emotional health and academic success of our students!" Another school counselor exclaimed, "ALL of the teachers and many of the kids remarked that it was helpful in getting them to understand more about themselves and possible career plans. I hope to see you back again on another topic at a later date!" Other suggestions of the benefits of this partnership include that school counselors feel more competent using the MEASURE tool after working with the pre-service counselors to complete one and that the path to using data to drive programming became more clear as the counselor and students worked collaboratively on the project.

Challenges & Ways to Overcome

There are some potential challenges that counselor educators may encounter when planning and implementing service-learning with graduate students. Three challenges arose when implementing the case described earlier. The challenges of time management, curriculum alignment and developing projects that were relevant and

appropriate for the community partner were most prominent in this particular service-learning partnership initiative.

Time Management

One particular challenge encountered by the instructor in the previous case example was the challenge of time management and organizing shared planning opportunities. Time or lack of time has historically presented multiple challenges in service-learning initiatives as a methodology for teaching (Mantooth & Fritz, 2006). Service-learning initiatives developed with PK-12 school partners require increased planning time, additional collaboration with key individuals and staff, other stakeholders, as well as more time addressed to seeking administrative support. Challenges posed by the time limit under which students were working to stay consistent with the university and course calendar also presented some pressure and forced them to plan in ways they had not previously done. However, awareness of good time management skills (shared through class discussions and modeled by site supervisors) helped students overcome this problem. "From doing this project, I learned more about the role of a school counselor" Darla explained. She went on to specifically address time management, "A school counselor must balance his or her time wisely between individual counseling, implementing projects, assessing data and effectiveness, and a number of other responsibilities!" Students learned through this experience that a counselor's job requires thoughtful planning, organization, and time management. Observing mentor skills in this area provided students with models to follow in future endeavors. Tasha, a student who particularly struggled with the aspect of time management shared her perspective, "Professionally, I have learned to be more

realistic when making plans and commitments, especially those that include others' time and effort. I will also remember to be cautious when proposing programs, to be sure that I can deliver what I promise to all involved stakeholders."

Finally, it is important to note that the time available to school counseling students to focus on a specific initiative is much different than the time available to multi-tasked school counselors. By leaving behind the artifacts created to implement the projects (curriculum materials, public relations materials, etc.) the instructor hoped to assist school counselors with implementing programming to address counselor-identified student needs. By using the graduate students' focused time to plan, develop and initially implement this programming, the school counselor has a good foundation for continuing the services and collecting data to use to advocate to administrators for the need for increased counseling time and reduced time used on non-counseling related tasks.

Curriculum Alignment

Another significant challenge faced by planners in this project was to ensure that the service-learning experience was pertinent to the student's curriculum, and was appropriate for the setting in which it was to be implemented. This concern was addressed through instruction, course discussions, and course readings with attention to the goals/objectives of the course. The course instructor provided a broad list of topics appropriate for project foci, which were directly related to the goals and objectives of this course and to the broader curriculum as well. She did not, however, limit students to this list, but carefully monitored and mentored students in the choice of any topic not previously reviewed. Emphasis was centered, naturally, on enhancing the learning that

takes place within the course, and the evaluation of that learning. Consequently, additional time and effort were demanded of the professionals involved, primarily the course instructor, in the quest to be certain that projects were bounded by course objectives and were academically appropriate to the standards of the academic course. It is essential that faculty realize this commitment and "buy-in" to this investment of time and resources before beginning a service-learning project as time is a key issue of concern.

Relevant and Appropriate for the Community Partner

A further concern was the necessity to determine and develop projects that were relevant and appropriate for the community partner. It proved challenging to prepare students for communities that were in some cases very different from those in which the students had previously lived. It was important to assure that students did not go into an area with preconceived ideas about the community. One school counselor explained that the student she worked with "had a lot to learn about my school community and students! She had some expectations that were different than our reality, but by working together we were able to both learn something about each other and even about ourselves!" Care had to be taken to impress upon students the need to take time to learn about the community and be accepted by the community. For example, one student wanted to work on the issue of teen pregnancy in a small rural school with high incidence of teen pregnancy. This topic was relevant and appropriate, but called for careful planning in order to prevent certain highly visible students from the perception that they were a "project" themselves. This may not have been an issue in larger schools with greater numbers, more diverse populations, and other significant issues,

but it was a challenge in this instance. Consideration and sensitivity to the student body in planning this project called for foundational skills all counselors must develop. Integrating support from stakeholders and colleagues provided an opportunity to overcome this and similar challenges, as teachers, counselor, student and course instructor worked together with sensitivity to particular student populations in planning for specific goals and expectations based upon needs identified. One of the desired outcomes of this work was that students develop a true conceptual sense of the school in which they were working, as this is absolutely essential for counselors in professional positions.

Program Evolution and Sustainability

Sustainability of the projects concerned both students and stakeholders in these initiatives as both groups had invested much planning, energy and resources into the implementation of the initiative. It was important to students be able to see how their work could live beyond their personal involvement and continue to be an asset to their partner school community and continue to evolve based on collaborative evaluation of both impact and outcomes. One student shared, "In assessing the impact of this project, I came to see how important it is to think about how the larger school community is impacted by each person's role – how what I do as a counselor will impact not just students, but teachers, parents, principals, the entire school community. I think it is easy for each of us to forget just how interconnected we all are, and the MEASURE is a good way to really see that relatedness firsthand." This recognition of the interconnectedness of our practice as school counselors is an important outcome of partnering with practicing counselors to implement school-based initiatives. In order to encourage

sustainability and program evolution, students and partner counselors met together to discuss the outcomes of the initiative. Following this meeting, the students left electronic and hard copies of initiative materials to allow school counselors to continue the implementation and use of the initiative the students' developed for the project. Additionally, students gave a copy of the MEASURE document to the school counselor to be included in the school counselor's accountability evidence supporting the impact of the counseling program during the academic year.

Conclusions

The intended purpose of this discussion was to present a description of how service-learning can be used to foster understanding and transfer abstract professional concepts into practice. It is particularly important that counselor educators continue to examine the multifaceted process of role development in future school counselors in order to meet the demands of the 21st century students. Students who have participated in the graduate level school counseling course presented in this manuscript have responded very positively to the service-learning component. Students report that engaging in the process of developing and implementing collaborative service-learning projects has helped them feel more confident about initiating and implementing collaborative partnerships in their role as school counselors after graduation. Furthermore, students have expressed their pleasure at being able to competently use the MEASURE tool to assess data and share the impact of their school counseling program with administrators and stakeholders. Further research, such as quantitative measures assessing understanding and competence in professional practice, is needed to fully discern the impact of using service-learning initiatives in counselor education,

but the anecdotal positive feedback from students suggests that service-learning is a useful tool to consider when planning school counseling education curriculum. The authors hope that the foundational underpinnings shared in this discussion will help other educators seeking to integrate service-learning into their counselor education classes. Though it takes time and planning, in the end using service-learning provides students with an opportunity to develop their professional identity and an opportunity for empowerment. One student's final reflective journal entry captured this impact. She concluded her reflection about the project with "This experience was great – it helped me see how important it is to be able to justify the types of activities a counselor does and make the best use of the time spent with the students. I understand much more about how and why it is necessary to show accountability. I especially like that the project we did was something that the school needed and that we are going to be able to leave the counselor with a program and data that can be used again!"

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Appendix A

Initial Description for Students

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Learn & Serve Clearinghouse, 2008).

Service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity will change both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills and knowledge content (Learn & Serve Clearinghouse, 2008).

For this project, you will need to partner with a school counselor with a local school. After forming a relationship with the school counselor, you and your partner should work with the school counselor to identify an area of need for her/his school and counseling program. Some topics that are relevant for school counselors and might be topics your school counselor wishes to focus on, include:

- Preventing gang violence
- School-based mental health services (important to contact Eastern AHEC for information)
- Creative arts in school counseling
- Students who are dealing with homelessness
- Meeting the needs of immigrant student & families
- Supervision for school counselors
- Family-school-community partnerships
  truancy & attendance

- Transitioning to college (including rates of scholarship application and awards, financial aid, etc.)
- Sex education and healthy behaviors
- Meeting the needs of exceptional children
  improving the referral process for the exceptional children's program
- The school counselors role in literacy programming
- Self-care to reduce anxiety and improve job satisfaction for educators

After choosing your topic, you will need to explore the professional literature to determine what is known about your topic and the population with which you plan to work. Then you need to use this knowledge as you develop an initiative to address this concern at your partner school. You are NOT expected to completely eradicate the issue (if it is negative) or to have 100% support and involvement if it is positive. You are only asked to plan and implement a program/event/tool/resource/etc that makes a meaningful contribution around the topic you choose. Examples of adequate and effective projects would be a parent education seminar on the FASFA, a brochure that could be used to offer faculty suggestions of resources to help immigrant families and the process for accessing these resources, a brief series of lesson plans designed to help the counselor integrate the creative arts into his/her classroom counseling sessions, an awesome interactive PowerPoint show to use at a faculty in-service focused on relaxation, exercise and the benefits of self-care. This list is just a brief start of possible ideas and your creativity in developing your project will be highly valued by your instructor.

Additionally, we will be using this project as the hub of our exploration of accountability measures necessary for data driven school counseling programs. You are required to complete a full MEASURE and Report Card to serve as the presentation

of your process for developing and implementing your project and the impact your project made at your school. Stone and Dahir's MEASURE serves as a fabulous template for showcasing "What We Do" and "How We Impact Our Students" as school counselors. Throughout the course we will learn how to insert the different aspects of your project and the data you gather into the MEASURE and Report Card templates. This project is designed to help you:

1. Learn what the professional literature says about a particular contemporary issue facing school counselors.
2. Learn about the inner workings of a school.
3. Experience the process of developing a collaborative relationship with other professionals.
4. Experience the process of identifying a concern, developing a strategy to address the concern and assessing the impact of your strategy.
5. Open your imagination and use your creativity to tackle the issue in a manageable way.
6. Help the school counselor who allows you the opportunity to partner with her/his school by leaving the school counselor with a tool/resource for future use in her/his work.
7. Provide the school counselor with whom you partner an outcome assessment to share as evidence of her/his school counseling program's impact with her/his administrator.
8. Increase the awareness of your colleagues about your identified issue and possible strategies for addressing it through sharing your MEASURE template, report card and the artifact you leave with your school counselor.

Though it seems complex, you can't really go wrong with this project if you identify a school that will allow you entry and the opportunity to engage with the school counselor, you energetically and creatively explore an issue and try to come up with one small way to address it and you open-mindedly learn about the MEASURE template and how you

can use it to showcase the work you do. I will be here to help you every step of the way.

We also have a BlackBoard Discussion Board thread dedicated specifically to questions

and discussion about this project—please feel free to use it. In closing, I am extremely

excited about the good work you are going to be doing for schools in eastern NC. Let's

begin!!

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        servicelearning.org/what_is_service-learning/service-learning_is/index.php

Appendix B

Grading Rubric for Project

Your integrative data driven service-learning project is designed to have students:

- select a topic impacting contemporary school counselors;
- develop an initiative (the service-learning component) to address the topic;
- evaluate the success of your efforts using the MEASURE accountability tool; and
- contribute to the professional development of colleagues by presenting the work they completed.

You must submit 4 components for this project:

1. A 2-3 page description of the service-learning initiative you implemented.

    a. This should begin with a brief description of why the topic you chose was important. This explanation should be based in the professional literature. Please remember that your explanation should be brief (it is not expected to be a lengthy literature review)

    b. After your explanation of why your topic is important professionally, please briefly explain why it is important at your school (if you don't work at the school, please just share the information that was shared with you when you were making your decision about what to focus on for the project).

    c. Then, share what you did—explain your service-learning initiative.

    d. Finally, share what meaningful contribution you intended for the service-learning initiative to make and if and/or how it might continue to be used or have an impact at your site.

2. Full MEASURE

    a. Your Full MEASURE should follow the guidelines shared in the Stone & Dahir text. Examples have been posted and I'll be happy to answer other questions you might have about the MEASURE.

b. This Full MEASURE should demonstrate the impact of the initiative you implemented—it meets the accountability/data driven component of your project.

c. This is your chance to really show how what you did mattered!

d. Remember: your report card and the results of your MEASURE will be distributed to a wide range of stakeholders and you want to inform them of your work in a manner they are able to understand which means that brevity and clarity are essential—this is why tables and charts are so helpful.

3. Report Card

a. This is just a snapshot of your Full MEASURE.

b. Use Stone and Dahir's description of how to develop your report card. Please do not try to include all of your "Stakeholders UNITE" section on the report card (it will be too much!). Just present a brief description of the stakeholder strategies you felt were most important.

4. Any artifacts you created that will be left behind for the school counselor's continued use.

Here is the rubric that will be used to grade your project:

PROJECT COMPONENTS		Pts Possible
Service-Learning Initiative	Described why topic was chosen, with description based in the professional literature	10 pts
	Shared intended meaningful impact and how it will/might continue to have an impact at your site	10 pts
	Fully described service-learning initiative (what was done)	10 pts
	Shared artifacts that were created and left for the school counselor's continued use	10 pts

	Followed APA format, including 12 pt font and double-spacing	5 pts
Full MEASURE	Includes all components included in template (Stone & Dahir's format)	30 pts
	Demonstrates impact of initiative	10 pts
	Information was presented in a manner that was clear and easily understood by a wide range of stakeholders	5 pts
MEASURE Report Card	Information quickly and effectively demonstrated the impact of your project as reflected by your Full MEASURE	5 pts
	Information was presented in a manner that was clear and easily understood by a wide range of stakeholders	5 pts

Appendix C

Reflective Journal Prompts

Students will keep a journal reflecting on the experience of planning, developing and implementing the IDSL project. Four entries are required for this journal. This journal is to help the student, the professor and the collaborating school counselor reflect upon and understand the student's process of engagement with the IDSL project. Please make sure that each journal entry is shared with the collaborating school counselor. Journal entry length is at the discretion of the student.

Prompt 1: ***Beginning the journey***: After having met with my collaborating school counselor and having begun the process of joining with my school and the community serving my school, I feel...

Prompt 2: ***The particular meaningfulness of my project for my school***: I am developing this project for a purpose; I hope to positively impact the students, school and stakeholders with this project. My perceptions of the importance of this project for my students, school and stakeholders at this time are...

Prompt 3: ***Improving my project***: At this time, I think I could further improve my project by...

Prompt 4: ***Impact on my professional growth and development***: From developing, implementing and assessing the impact of this project, I learned...

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