

Counselor Education and Educational Administration:

An Exploratory Survey of Collaboration

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### Abstract

One way to inform educational administration faculty and future school principals about the role of the school counselor is for counselor educators to collaborate with educational administration faculty. However, there are very few recommendations about how these faculty members might collaborate. In an exploratory national survey, counselor educators were asked how they work collaboratively with educational administration faculty. Over 50% of counselor educators said they collaborated with educational administration faculty at their institution. Results suggested ways in which counselor education faculty might collaborate with educational administration faculty in preparing future school principals to work with school counselors.

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Studies that have looked at the perceptions of school administrators about school counselors have found that school administrators view school counselors differently than school counselors view themselves, and often inconsistently with national and state models (e.g., Pérusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004; Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, & Marshall, 2001). These studies have suggested that school principals might benefit from being better educated about the role of the school counselor as defined by national models, and some have suggested that the place to start educating principals about the role of school counselors is during pre-service preparation, while they are enrolled in educational administration programs (Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007; Amatea & Clark, 2005; Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, & Marshall, 2001; Rambo-Igney & Grimes Smith, 2005-2006; Shoffner & Briggs, 2001; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000; Williamson, Broughton & Hobson, 2003). In their study about conceptions school administrators had about the role of the school counselor, Amatea and Clark (2005) concluded that it would be helpful for “colleges of education to initiate courses, seminars, and field experiences in which graduate students in counseling, educational leadership, and teaching are enrolled together so that they can learn what each has to offer and how to work as a team” (p. 25).

There are very few studies regarding how counselor educators might work directly with educational administration faculty. Shoffner and Williamson (2000) described a pre-service seminar course aimed at increasing the interaction between preservice school counselors and principals. The object of the course was to increase

knowledge about one another's role in the school and to have students work collaboratively to solve problems presented in case study vignettes. The vignettes included discussion questions about the areas of potential collaboration, conflict, or both between the role of the administrator and the counselor. Students in the seminar believed that the seminar was helpful in increasing their awareness of each other's roles and perspectives in the school, and wanted to learn more about each other's professions. Shoffner and Briggs (2001) described creating an interactive CD-ROM to help preservice school counselors, teachers, and principals better appreciate each other's roles in addressing student issues. Rambo-Igney and Grimes Smith (2005-2006) brought together school counseling and educational leadership students for an open dialog during a mutual class time lasting 4 hours. In a pretest-posttest design, they found that this relatively short intervention may have produced a better understanding by future school principals about the school counselor's role. In each of these studies, the authors' hoped that pre-service exposure would help students take a more proactive role in establishing such collaborative relationships in the professional work setting.

Because school principals are instrumental in defining the school counselor's role within a school building (Ponec & Brock, 2000; Dahir, 2000) and collaboration between counselor education and educational administration programs has been suggested as a training model to help form collaborative relationships between future school counselors and principals, this research focused on pre-professional training. In this exploratory qualitative study, counselor educators were asked how they collaborated with educational administration faculty. This study addressed the following research questions: 1) to what extent do counselor education faculty members collaborate with

educational administration faculty; and 2) in what ways do counselor education program faculty members collaborate with educational administration faculty.

## Method

### *Participants*

The survey was sent to counselor educators of all 314 programs identified by Hollis (2000) and crosschecked with the 171 programs identified in Clawson, Henderson, and Schweiger (2004) as having at least a master's level school counselor preparation program. E-mail addresses and telephone numbers for counselor education programs were obtained from these sources, as well as from counseling program websites.

### *Procedure*

An e-mail survey was employed, followed by telephone and e-mail surveys. The initial e-mail survey was sent to one person at each of the 314 programs identified by Hollis (2000) and Clawson, Henderson, and Schweiger (2004) as having at least a master's level school counselor preparation program. The e-mail was directed to either the chairperson of the department or the school counseling coordinator whenever possible. While 314 e-mails were attempted, 105 were found to be invalid, leaving a total of 209 e-mails successfully transmitted. This e-mail survey was sent three separate times over a period of four months. The initial attempt resulted in 69 responses (33.0%). Further contacts of the non-responsive programs were made by telephone, either reading a script to the identified person, or leaving a voice mail. Within the voicemail script, it was explained that the survey question would come to them via e-mail, which was sent within 48 hours of the phone contact. These attempts increased the return rate

by 57 responses, bringing the total return rate to 126 (60.3% of 209; 40.1% of 314). Of those respondents, 22 no longer had a school counseling program or were not employed in colleges where there was also an educational administration program and could not provide an answer to the survey. This left 104 useable responses.

### *Instrument*

The following statement was sent to counselor educators: "Please tell us in what ways you collaborate with educational administration faculty (especially those who prepare future school principals). If you do not collaborate with faculty members in the educational administration program, please reply "NO" so that we may remove you from our mailing list." Responses to this open-ended question were coded into themes by a research assistant and the first and third authors, all of whom worked independently and reached consensus.

### Results

One-hundred and four counselor educators who also identified having an educational administration program at their respective colleges responded to the prompt. The themes were coded into non-mutually exclusive categories as follows: collaboration directly with educational administration faculty ( $n = 30$ , 28.8%), counselor educators and educational administration faculty guest speaking in one another's courses ( $n = 16$ , 15.4%), having students from both programs take required or elective courses together (included having educational administration faculty teach courses in required courses for counselor education students) ( $n = 14$ , 13.5%), and completing class projects together (included having students from both programs meet together during class time to work on common assignments) ( $n = 8$ , 7.7%). Out of the 104 total

respondents, 46 (44.2%) indicated that they did not currently collaborate with educational administration faculty.

Representative examples of ideas from those who responded and the coded themes assigned to them are listed below:

1. (Collaboration). Counselor education and educational administration faculty are both part of the same department in our university. We collaborate in many instances on a regular basis. Right now we are working on a joint Pupil Personnel Services Supervisory Certificate.
2. (Guest speaking in one another's courses). We do a class visit "exchange." Each year, the director of the principal training program meets with our graduating students in school counseling. The faculty members in school counseling attend one of the seminars for principals-in-training to discuss the role and training of the school counselor.
3. (Elective course). Our students have one elective course and, very occasionally, they make that a course in school leadership or the dynamics of organizational change. It works more often the other way around, with school administration students taking a counseling course or two.
4. (Required course). Educational Administration plan of study requires the Introduction to School Counseling course. Not only are we able to put administrators-in-training "on the same page" with school counselors, but we are also able to tap into their administrator preparation in class, as they interact with the school counseling students.

5. (Class project). We have the school counselors and principals meet together for an entire morning of class. We begin with introductions and a competitive activity that we process, then talk of the expectations and roles that each expect of the other (in small groups), and then process our interactions. We take a look at the ASCA school counseling standards and discuss school principal tasks.
6. (Class project). Our most successful endeavor was a collaborator problem-solving model which brought together school counselors-in-training, school principals-in-training, and graduate students training to be teachers. They followed a problem solving process which caused students to detail and articulate the roles of each profession to other members of the small group. The groups met for approximately three sessions. The "problem" for the problem-solving model was a case developed by the undergraduate teachers-in-training. The whole process focused on role clarification and systemic problem solving.

#### Discussion

A little more than one-half (55.8%) of counselor educators who responded to the survey said that they collaborated with educational administration faculty in some manner. Direct collaboration with educational administration faculty was the most popular way that ideas between the two groups were disseminated. Although fewer than 10% of respondents used class projects, this category contained examples that brought the two programs and their students together into active dialogue. This was accomplished during both the content and field placement phases of the respective graduate programs; for example, school counseling courses being scheduled on the



same night as an educational administration class, or the respective internship classes convening jointly on a periodic basis.

### Limitations of the Study

There was some discrepancy between the Hollis (2000) and Clawson, Henderson, and Schweiger (2004) books as to the number of entry-level school counseling programs in the United States. This was due, in part, to the lower return rate in the Clawson, Henderson, and Schweiger (2004) study. In addition, many e-mail and telephone attempts failed due to incorrect addresses and phone numbers. The investigator created survey and the relatively low return rate may serve to limit the wide applicability of the findings. However, the intent of this study was not necessarily to generalize the findings, but rather to ascertain: a) the extent to which counselor education faculty were collaborating with educational administration faculty; and b) in what ways counselor educators were collaborating with educational administration faculty.

### Implications and Conclusion

It is clear from national and state studies that school administrators' views about the role of the school counselor are not consistent with the views of school counseling professional associations. This finding implies that more needs to be done to inform school administrators about the current role of the school counselor. *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (ASCA, 2007) specifies the need for school counselors to be part of the leadership team and for school counselors and principals to work together. One way to help ensure that this type of collaboration occurs might be for counselor educators and educational administration

faculty to work together as well. This exploratory study serves to advance the knowledge about how some counselor education programs are collaborating with educational administration programs and provides examples of that collaboration. The results suggest that only a little more than one-half of the counselor education programs surveyed were collaborating with educational administration faculty. Because all of these respondents indicated that they were at institutions which also had educational administration programs, this finding suggests that many educational administration faculty may be teaching future school principals about the role of the school counselor without input from counselor educators located on the same campus.

One unexpected outcome of this research study was the perception these researchers had that simply conducting the study raised awareness about the importance of educational administration and counselor education faculty working together. One counselor educator respondent remarked, in response to the prompt regarding collaboration with educational administration faculty, "Sorry to say that I do not collaborate with the folks in the Education Leadership Department. Perhaps we should!"

If it is true that the simple act of bringing up the topic might have a stimulus effect on collaboration between counselor education and educational administration faculty, then it is incumbent upon school counselor educators to reach out to their colleagues "down the hall" to help them frame the education they are providing about the school counselor's role to future administrators. Working together, counselor educators and educational administration faculty can ensure that future school principals are aware of the role of the professional school counselor. Future research could then be focused on:

a) the effectiveness of each of the various forms of collaboration to determine which pre-service preparation might result in a better understanding on the part of school administrators about the school counselor's role; b) whether this understanding translates into better collaboration between school administrators and school counselors in the school setting; and c) whether this knowledge and collaboration leads to an increase in the school counselor engaging in appropriate school counseling tasks, as opposed to inappropriate tasks such as clerical work (Campbell & Dahir, 1997).

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