

Exploring Pre-Service Training and School Counselor Interns Use of the ASCA Model Tasks

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Abstract

Activities performed by school counselor interns perform that are related to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model and Performance Standards were explored in this study. Interns were more likely to perform tasks that included individual and small group counseling, monitoring student progress, and conducting individual planning with parents. School counseling interns were less likely to meet with an advisory board, plan programs with the administration, and perform tasks associated with the management system.

Keywords: ASCA Model, school counseling, interns

Use of the ASCA Model Tasks

The profession of school counseling has been in existence since the beginning of the industrial revolution (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012), and the discipline of school counseling continues to make significant advancements; most notably with the development of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model. While ASCA (2012) continues to advocate for school counselors to serve

as leaders of a comprehensive, developmental school counseling (CDSC) program, the profession continues to struggle with the differences between recommended practices, and what actually takes place in school settings (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

Role Confusion

Despite ASCA's efforts to define and educate stakeholders, current literature continues to reveal that the professional school counselor's position is misunderstood (Dahir, 2004; Payne 2011). While some differences may be accounted for based on employment at an elementary, middle, or high school (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012), a lack of job consistency persists for professional school counselors (Moyer, 2011; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

The 3rd edition of the ASCA Model (2012) recommends that 80% of one's time is focused on direct student services that include the core curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services. The remaining 20% of time is to be used conducting indirect student services such as program planning time and school

support. While the Model provides direction for best practices the counselor must also be proactive in helping stakeholders to clearly understand school counselor education and training that mirror their role within the school environment. Communicating the school counselor's role assists in increasing an awareness of counseling versus non-counseling related tasks, as well as specifying the types of direct student services provided by the professional school counselor. Burnham and Jackson (2000) indicated that school counselors at all levels spend a large amount of time conducting indirect activities; tasks that pull their time away from performing more appropriate duties. Scarborough and Culbreth (2008) supported these findings, and reported that school counselors preferred to spend more time focusing on "positive student outcomes" and less time on non-counseling tasks (p. 455). More recently, Payne (2011) surveyed secondary school counselors in Michigan and found a "moderate to strong relationship" between working in a CDSC program and job satisfaction. This study supported the work of Studer, Diambra, Breckner and Heidel (2011) who reported higher levels of job satisfaction among primary/elementary counselors when compared to middle and high school counselors because of more frequent engagement in direct services. While the school counselor should be a team player within the school environment, s/he should also be an advocate for participating in tasks that benefit the overall school environment.

Role definition and professional identity are additional challenges for the professional school counselor. The ASCA (2011) position statement calls for the engagement of school counselors in the following components of the ASCA National Model: (a)

foundation, (b) delivery, (c) management, and (d) accountability. These components provide a road map for a CDSC program that meets the needs of all students; however, the counselor also needs to be in a school where the stakeholders value the counseling department (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Furthermore, school counselors need to view the ASCA Model as an asset, that its implementation can positively change the daily work environment (Scarborough & Luke, 2008).

The School Counselor Intern

Educating and training students about the importance of implementing a CDSC program is increasingly important because the school counseling profession is regularly targeted for budget cuts. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP) echoes this assertion in their 2016 Standards through the mandate that counselor education programs teach the skills and practice to design, implement, manage, and evaluate CDSC programs. Although program faculty educate and work with school counselor practitioners in understanding and developing a CDSC program, not all programs have fully implemented or embraced the ASCA Model (Blakely, 2009; Oberman et al., 2009). While not all school counseling programs are CACREP accredited, the training standards set by this organization serve as a benchmark for school counselor training programs.

Recent research has shown that many school counselor interns are learning about a CDSC program during their clinical experiences (Blakely, 2009; Leuwerke, Bruinekoel, & Lane, 2008; Oberman et al., 2009); however, the extent to which this training occurs continues to vary throughout the literature (Myrick, 2011). Leuwerke

et. al. (2008) examined the time logs of school counseling interns from elementary, middle, and high school placements, and found that the tasks most often completed by elementary and middle school interns were classroom guidance and individual counseling, which are consistent with the direct service expectations set forth by the ASCA Model. However, high school interns reported more frequent engagement in indirect activities such as planning, professional development, consultation, and administrative tasks. This disparity is consistent among high school counselors as well, as these counselors reported practicing within a CDSC program less often than elementary and middle school counselors (Baker & Gelter, 2008; Myrick, 2011; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

Oberman et al. (2009) surveyed practicing school counseling supervisors of school counseling interns to compare their perceptions of the tasks they performed that were associated with the ASCA National Model, compared with those tasks conducted by their school counselor interns. While some tasks were similar, there were still significant differences ($p < .05$) in the frequency in which counselors and interns spent on identical activities such as making appropriate referrals, discussing program planning strategies with administrators, managing the school counselor program, monitoring student academic achievement, consulting with parents and teachers, and evaluating the overall school counseling program. It is noted that although some of these tasks do require a more complex understanding of the community and resources, a concerted effort should be made to expose interns to these activities because when school counseling students matriculate into a professional school counselor position they are often expected to have

the same knowledge and skills as a more experienced member of the profession.

Purpose of the Study

The ASCA National Model has been existence for over a decade and is considered by most in the field to be the hallmark of a solid CDSC program, with benefits supported through numerous studies (Johnson & Johnson, 2003; Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2003; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). However, while many of the studies have focused on the implementation of this programming by the professional school counselor, the research on this topic does not focus on the extent to which the school counselor intern is exposed to the various components. For instance, Blakely (2009) focused on the role of supervision at schools using the ASCA Model compared to programs who did not; however, there was not an emphasis on the utilization of the ASCA Model as part of the internship experience by the school counselor intern. In this present study, a CDSC program is defined as one that is implementing the ASCA Model framework. A non-CDSC program is defined as a program that is not implementing the ASCA Model, or is currently working towards establishing these components into their program. The purpose of this exploratory investigation was to determine school counselor interns' perceptions and observations of the activities conducted during their internship experience, and the frequency with which they engaged in activities supportive of a CDSC program.

Research Question

- What is the frequency in which school counselor interns perform activities reflective of those supported by the ASCA National Model?

Methodology Participants

A sample of 50 of the over 200 CACREP accredited school counseling programs were randomly selected to gain a better understanding of the tasks related to the ASCA Model that are being conducted by school counselor interns. A total of 10 school counseling programs, which included 75 graduate students returned the surveys for a response rate of 20%. Although this 20% rate was lower than desired, a 23% response rate is normally found in psychology and education journals (Edwards et al., 2002). Female students comprised 88% ($n = 66$), and males 12% ($n = 9$) of the respondents. The average age of the participants was ($M = 28.0$, $SD = 5.5$), with a range from 22 to 52 years of age. The majority of school counselor interns 86% ($n = 65$) self-reported being educated and trained in a school counseling master's degree program that emphasized the ASCA National Model or their state school counseling model), compared to 12% ($n = 9$) who did not believe they were trained in a program that focused on the ASCA Model or respective state school counseling model. One student did not respond to this question. Additionally, 84% of the interns ($n = 63$) reported being placed in internship experiences in which the school counselor supervisors subscribed to a CDSC program, approximately 5% ($n = 4$), reported that their school site was in transition to a CDSC program, and 11% ($n = 8$) reported that their internship site was a non-CDSC program.

Procedure

The school counseling program coordinator was identified for the 50 randomly selected schools and was mailed a packet containing a letter addressed to him/ her explaining the purpose of the study, acknowledgment of IRB approval from the primary

researcher's institution, with a request for the program coordinator to share this packet with the faculty member(s) who taught the school counselor internship class. The letter to the internship instructor also addressed the purpose of the study, and requested that the internship instructor provide the study questionnaire and informed consent to interested students to complete the survey without repercussions. The internship instructor was also given permission to make additional copies of the survey, if needed. A single, self-addressed, stamped envelope was provided for the instructor to mail back all the completed student intern surveys. The packets were sent during the middle of an academic semester to ensure that the school counselor interns had adequate time to conduct various tasks at their placement. After approximately three weeks, a reminder e-mail was sent to program coordinators to encourage study participation.

Instrument

The SCTS consisted of 22 questions divided into two sections: demographics and school counselor activities. The demographics section consisted of four questions regarding gender, age, student perceptions of their training program and its focus on the ASCA National Model, and the students' perceptions of whether their internship placement followed a CDSC program. The second section of the instrument was comprised of 18 questions based on the ASCA School Counselor Performance Standards. The participants were asked to indicate the types of tasks they were performing, and the frequency in which they performed these tasks using a four point Likert-type scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = usually). Sample questions included topics such as, planning and organizing the school

counseling curriculum, individual and group counseling, consulting, making referrals, meeting with an advisory council, collecting and analyzing data, developing program strategies and meetings with the administration, program evaluation, monitoring student progress, and promoting student equity.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the SPSS by comparing the means to determine the rate of occurrence of each of the School Counselor Performance Standards, and conducting t-tests in conjunction with Levene's Test for Equality of Variances to determine the significance of all variables. The effect size was calculated for each comparison using Cohen's *d*.

Results

Means and standard deviations were calculated for the 18 School Counselor Performance Standards (ASCA, 2005). (See Table 1). Research Question one focused on how frequently the school counselor intern conducted the various activities contained in the School Counselor Performance Standards that are reflective of a CDSC program. The activities the interns performed "sometimes" to "usually" included conducting individual and small group counseling ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.49$), monitoring student progress ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.50$), and conducting individual planning with parents ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.70$). Conversely, the trainee was less likely to meet with an advisory board ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 1.06$), plan programs with the administration ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.95$), and perform other tasks associated with the Management System ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.96$).

Data Analysis

The purpose of this exploratory study was

to determine the extent to which school counselor interns perceived they conducted tasks that supported a CDSC program during their internship. Regardless of their training program and/or the philosophical approach of their school internship site, school counselor interns conducted activities that are consistent with a CDSC program. This finding was in contrast to Blakely (2009) who reported that interns in a CDSC environment were more likely to utilize this framework than interns who were not.

The most frequently conducted activity for all school counselor interns regardless of internship placement was individual and group counseling. This information is not only an important part of a CDSC program, but also critical for the school counselor interns ability to engage in the direct student contact hours required by the CACREP even for interns not at a placement utilizing a CDSC program.

Some of the less frequently conducted tasks included meeting with an advisory council, program planning with the administration, and tasks associated with the management system. These results were supported in a separate study in which practicing school counselors who served as site supervisors reported that interns engaged in these tasks to a lesser extent (Oberman et al., 2009). It is possible that interns did not have exposure to these activities because they don't occur on a daily basis, and the intern may not be at the school when these tasks were completed during the academic year. In addition, interns are often focused on accumulating a set number of direct contact hours as part of the internship experience. This requirement could limit exposure to more comprehensive tasks the practicing school

counselor performs on a yearly basis. Since there is a potential deficit in this area, practicing school counselors should be cognizant of exposing interns to opportunities that may be considered beyond the interns' developmental level (e.g. planning programs with the administration), but has the potential of increasing interns' awareness of several aspects integral to a CDSC program. The trainee will eventually be a fully functioning member of the profession, and it is imperative that the practicing counselor support the intern to gain greater exposure to the management system. At times, complete immersion into an activity is not practical or developmentally appropriate. In these instances, supervisors could consider inviting the intern to observe activities that are more complex, and providing time to process the experience after the event, or discussing various considerations related to a particular task. For example, the trainee may not have been present when the supervisor was working out the annual calendar of school counseling events. The supervisor could follow-up with the trainee during supervision or another convenient time to walk through the steps and reflect on this experience with the trainee.

Limitations

Although this preliminary study provides insight into the internship experience of the school counselor trainee, there are several limitations worth noting. The low response rate from the 50 randomly selected programs was a concern. Although the researchers selected CACREP-accredited school counseling programs from across the country, 12% of the participants were not trained from an ASCA National Model perspective. Therefore, the low response rate may be due to program area faculty not distributing the packets because they did not wish to reveal that they do

not teach school counselor interns about the ASCA Model. The researchers also received communication from one program that there were no interns during the term selected, which may have been the case at other programs, too. Another possibility is that the program coordinator did not provide the packet of materials to the internship instructor due to personal time constraints, or the internship instructor did not have available time to distribute the materials within the internship class itself.

The self-report nature of this study was another weakness. With the number of participants who indicated that they were not being trained with the ASCA Model, it is possible that interns wished to be perceived as being trained in a program that is up-to-date on current trends or effective absent training from a CDSC perspective. Since the ASCA National Model is a proposed national standard for school counseling programs, it is possible that some interns responded in a way to indicate that they were participating in a greater number of activities that support the standards.

Implications

The importance of incorporating experiences that reflect the philosophy of the ASCA National Model (2012) into all aspects of the profession of school counseling is an opportunity for school counselor interns, practicing school counselors, and counselor educators. At times, school counselor interns miss essential opportunities when they are not exposed to all of the tasks conducted by the professional school counselor. This discrepancy could create an unrealistic performance expectation by evaluators, particularly among those who are not aware of contemporary school counselor training and education, or who

have the unrealistic belief that these novice school have the same training and experiences as their more experienced professional colleagues. A greater emphasis on the implementation of tasks appropriate to a CDSC program at all training levels, and continued conversations among school counselors and administrators will help to narrow this gap between training and practice (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

In addition, school counselor practitioners and interns who have not had the benefit of learning about the ASCA National Model are able to attend professional development activities such as state and national conferences, or participate in webinars and other educational events sponsored by the ASCA to help fill-in potential training gaps. Furthermore, interns and practitioners who have not incorporated a CDSC program could map out the activities they are conducting within the components of the Model to recognize the integration of these tasks (Oberman & Studer, 2012). The school counselor and trainee might work together to map out selected components or targeted areas that the trainee could help the school counselor to implement pieces of the ASCA National Model. For example, the school counselor and trainee could work together to develop and align the mission of the school counseling program with the school and district wide missions, or possibly focus on creating assessment tools to help improve the data collection/analysis practices to further demonstrate the importance and overall effectiveness of the school counseling program to the overall school mission.

Furthermore, school counselor supervisors have a professional obligation to facilitate educational training by gaining knowledge that reflects the best practices in coun-

seling and program effectiveness, and sharing this knowledge with their interns. Many of the current practicing school counselors in the field were not trained in a comprehensive model, yet they may be in a position to train new interns about the ASCA Model including the accompanying ethical standard if the interns are placed from an institution that expects exposure to this argued advancement (i.e., implementation and use of the ASCA or another state Model) (ASCA Ethical Standard, F.1.e). Collaboration with counselor education faculty members is an important part of the overall supervisor process to help ensure the trainee has experiences consistent with current trends in the field, as well as the day-to-day role and function of the professional school counselor. Further, it would also be helpful for the school counselor to attend professional conferences at the national or state level to help them in maintaining a current knowledge of available resources and trends within the profession. Additionally, counselor education faculty members who specialize in school counseling have a responsibility to expose students to the ASCA or other state models and teaching best practices and strategies (Akos & Scarborough, 2004), as well as placing interns in the best possible school site.

Future Directions

The results of this exploratory study provided insight into the activities that school counselor interns engage as they learn about a leadership role within a program that is representative of the ASCA National Model. Additional research is recommended with a more robust group of participants to provide greater insight as to the types of tasks school counselor interns conduct. With the educational agenda evident in our society school counselors have a

greater responsibility to assure that school counselor interns are engaged in activities that promote student success and exposed to activities that are associated with best practices.

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Table 1

Activities Conducted by all Interns in Rank Order from Least to Most Frequently

Performance Standards (n= 75)	M	SD
Meets with Advisory Board	2.21	1.06
Plans Programs with Admin.	2.55	0.95
Management System	2.60	0.96
Conducts Program Evaluation	2.72	1.07
Analyzes Data	2.77	0.99
Collects Data	2.89	0.95
Puts Together a Calendar	2.95	1.08
Individual Planning (Students)	3.08	0.83
Refers Students	3.24	0.88
Delivers the Guidance Curriculum	3.27	0.64
Promotes Student Equality	3.29	0.82
Evaluates Student Progress	3.31	0.81
Plans the Guidance Curriculum	3.32	0.76
Consults with Staff	3.35	0.85
Comprehensive Program	3.43	0.76
Individual Planning (Parents)	3.67	0.70
Monitors Student Progress	3.67	0.50
Individual/Group Counseling	3.80	0.49