

Transforming Internship:
The Use of Contracts in School Counselor Education
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Abstract

Integrating school counseling standards, models, and initiatives can be overwhelming to all individuals striving to conduct comprehensive developmental guidance programs. The research in this area indicates a gap between the school counseling intern's ability to connect their learning of these initiatives to actual practice. This article focuses on an assignment that requires interns to transform their internship experience by using a contract based on school counseling standards to demonstrate best practice in the profession.

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The identity of school counselors has been changing slowly over the past several decades with the adoption of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005) National Model and programs developed through the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (Education Trust, 2003). With a focus on accountability, specifically through No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) legislation, school counseling programs and counselors are undergoing significant changes and school counselors are challenged with the transformation of the role of the school counselor (Jackson et al., 2002).

With these changes, counselor education programs are accepting the challenge of transforming their own curricula in order to not only prepare future school counselors to include an academic focus in their roles and school counseling programs but to support these new counselors as they enter into a profession that is in the midst of transforming (Jackson et al., 2002). In this article, the author will discuss the implications of utilizing a meaningful internship contract as it translates theory to best practice in the form of co-constructed goals and objectives between students, counselor educators, and site supervisors in school counseling internships.

A Meaningful Internship Contract

When creating contracts for school counseling internships, it is important to acknowledge that there are administrative components as well as theoretical/conceptual components that need to be discussed between the student/counselor education program and the internship site supervisor. In addressing both of these components, it

is necessary for the parties involved to acknowledge any expectations (i.e., roles, behaviors, interactions, and tasks) or particular outcomes for the student in internship (Ellis, Anderson-Hanley, Dennin, Anderson, Chapin, & Polstri, 1994). Contracting these expectations and outcomes enables a successful supervisory relationship between the school counseling student and site supervisor as well as prevent any covert agendas (Lazovsky & Shimoni, 2005).

One of the roles of faculty and site supervisors is to assume teacher roles as they focus on establishing a relationship with the student, set goals, and contract the conditions of supervision (Nelson & Johnson, 1999). In creating a contract between students, counselor educators, and internship site supervisors, participative working alliances are created that allow all parties to clarify and negotiate the expected roles, responsibilities, tasks, ground rules, boundaries, and assumptions that will guide them and in their work together (Lazovsky & Shimoni, 2005). Clarifying specific issues during the contract process might lead to less conflicts and crises arising from different expectations. In addition, this intentional communication during the contract process empowers the student as the process of co-constructing an internship contract encourages them to define their internship goals and create measurable objectives to evaluate their progress towards these goals.

One of the primary goals of the internship is to help students become more self-directed in their own learning by encouraging them to reflect on their own experiences as valid data for understanding their actions (Grantz & Thanos, 1996). Ideally, learning goals and objectives should be selected by students based on their own learning needs;

however, the requirements of counselor educators and internship site supervisors must also be considered.

Of the few counselor education programs that require internship contracts for school counseling students, there is no indication that these documents are either created by standardized guidelines mandated by the counseling profession or based on researched models (Akos & Scarborough, 2004; Lazovsky & Shimoni, 2005; Perusse, Goodnough, & Noel, 2001). Not basing internship contracts on standards and models prescribed by the American School Counselor Association (2005) is incongruent with transformative practices in the role of school counselor as leader, advocate, collaborator and user of assessment data (Education Trust, 2003; Jackson et al., 2002). In the next section, an example of an internship contract assignment based on these standards is described. Additionally, the reactions of the students who completed the assignment is reviewed and recommendations are offered to systematize creating school counseling internship contracts that are based on nationally recognized standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), models (ASCA, 2005), and initiatives (Education Trust, 2003).

Internship Contract Assignment

The specific components of the assignment are outlined as the responsibilities of counselor educators as faculty internship supervisors, school counseling site supervisors, and school counseling internship students. Additionally, the elements of the contract are explained in terms of the measurable goals, needs assessment, and evaluation.

Roles of counselor educators, school counseling site supervisors, and school counseling internship students. Counselor educators as faculty internship supervisors

should consider several aspects to the contract assignment to make it meaningful for school counseling interns and school counseling site supervisors. First, the assignment is preliminarily introduced as school counseling students complete the practicum experience to initiate their thinking about internship goals. The second step is to offer school counseling interns specific directions and examples for completing the contract during the first meeting of internship supervision. Counselor educators emphasize the need for school counseling internship students to collaborate with school counseling site supervisors and co-construct the interventions, needs assessment, and evaluation. The contract is required to be completed by the third meeting time for supervision with counselor educator faculty supervisors.

A third step is to determine how counselor educators and site supervisors will use the contract within supervision. Both of these supervisors can use this as part of the mid-term and final evaluations for the internship. If the contract is used for these evaluations, it is recommended that interns not be penalized for not achieving some of their goals. Interns' efforts in achieving these goals can be discussed during faculty supervisors' internship site visits, and faculty and internship site supervisors can discuss interns' contract achievements with the interns. Finally, students in group supervision are encouraged to share their contracts with each other via weekly check-ins on their progress with contract goals. In doing so, school counseling internship students can learn to use the language of the standards more effortlessly.

Elements of the contract. The main purpose of the contract assignment and what makes it innovative to school counseling practice is the focus on the integration of ASCA national standards and the national model in directing the activities of school

counseling interns. In using the language of standards and models, school counseling interns are able to bridge the gap between what has been taught at the university to school internship sites that may be using the standards and models but may also be conducting more traditional school counseling activities.

To begin this process as an introduction to applying standards to practice, school counseling interns are required to choose five standards from the comprehensive developmental guidance model (and/or state version of the national standards) and write at least three activities for each standard/goal that are appropriate for the grade levels they are responsible for in internship (see Appendix). The interns have a choice of academic, personal/social, or career standards in this model, which is consistent with the Comprehensive Developmental Guidance Programs (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006) and is part of the "foundation" of the ASCA National Model (2005, p. 34). School counseling site supervisors are the "experts" on the needs of the school and use this knowledge in helping school counseling interns match appropriate standards that can address these needs. Together, they co-construct the specific behavioral interventions that school counseling interns will implement at the internship site with the on-going supervision by site supervisors. This also includes calculating percentages of time they plan and expect to participate in for the four school counseling "delivery system" segments (ASCA, 2005; p. 40): responsive services, guidance curriculum, individual planning, and system support (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006), which means they need to consult with their internship site supervisors to co-construct these time percentages as well as appropriate and workable goals.

In addition, using this type of contract requires counselor educators to consider how to integrate measuring and collecting data within the assignment that is part of the "management system" (ASCA, 2005, p. 49). One way to address this is to require school counseling interns to write their goals in operational terms that allow the goals to be measured in some format. A second way to address this requirement is to have interns and site supervisors co-create needs assessments and evaluations of the activities they propose to address specific standards.

Feedback on the Use of the Contract

The author has implemented the use of this form of contract for several years with both verbal and written feedback required from the students specific to the use of the contract. The students report that the assignment is helpful in structuring their internship activities and in relieving some of their initial anxiety due to the overwhelming number of hours required in a short period of time. The written feedback on the use of the contract was elicited via an anonymous questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of the following questions: 1-What do you perceive as the purpose of creating this course? 2-What are the benefits of creating and using this contract at your site? 3-What was the feedback on this process from your site supervisors? 4-What are the advantages of using a contract like this in internship? 5-What are the drawbacks of using a contract like this in internship? 6-Any additions or modifications you would suggest for this process/assignment? The following results are grouped by similar responses.

Linking standards to practice. The responses indicate that students recognize the assignment as designed to help them create goals based on the state's comprehensive

developmental guidance program and ASCA National Model (2005) as well as encourage them to become familiar with the state school counseling evaluation procedures. One student recognized the need to base goals on these standards, "...to set reasonable goals for my internship experience in the areas of national/state competencies for a comprehensive guidance program." The school counseling interns reported that the supervisors reacted to the contract positively because it made them look at their schools in the context of applying national/state standards. One student reported, "This assignment helped the supervisor consider how her school is meeting competencies."

By having the school counseling interns co-create specific goals with their site supervisors and base them on national and state standards for a comprehensive developmental guidance program and accountability model, it assisted the school counseling internship student in the transition from the classroom to actual practice. Specifically, writing short-term goals that were measurable provided interns with an opportunity to practice a future requirement in being accountable as a professional school counselor.

Communication and self-advocacy. The majority of the students' responses indicate that they perceive this contract as an assignment that facilitated communication between them and their site supervisors. Several of the students reported to use the contract as a tool to advocate for meeting their professional needs in internship. One student remarked on the process of co-creating that illustrates the student's ability to advocate for self, "It helps to convey my needs and goals to my site supervisors. They also helped to brainstorm various ways to meet my goals."

In addition, many of the students provided feedback on the use of the contract that centered on the necessity of planning, co-creating goals and a plan with internship site supervisor to implement at the site. As one intern remarked, "The process helped my supervisor and I focus on, and gain a clearer understanding of tasks that should ideally be pursued and completed during the semester." The co-creating process of goals also was perceived as a benefit from the school counseling intern's perspective as it was seen as an opportunity for site supervisors to learn more about internship expectations, "...for site supervisors to better understand what we should be doing." Hence, a second purpose of using this type of contract was fulfilled as communication about internship expectations increased.

Recommendations and Conclusions

An initial self-criticism of the current internship contract assignment is the lack of standardization involved in the process. One of the first recommendations is to make the assignment more standardized with very specific instructions, format, and examples provided. In providing a more standard format and instructions for the students, a copy of this format with instructions should be provided to the internship site supervisor with a letter of explanation of the purpose of this assignment. Counselor educators may want to consider creating a questionnaire that the internship student gives the site supervisor that encourages them to create specific goals they believe are important for the student's learning at the site and as a future school counselor.

Timing the contract process is a second consideration in this assignment. In the current assignment, students were asked to complete the assignment of creating the contract with goals, needs assessment, and evaluation by the third week of internship.

However, there is flexibility in the timing with beginning the process in practicum or at the beginning of the internship semester. This flexibility may allow site supervisors to evaluate the needs of their interns by observing them in the first two weeks of internship. Requiring the contract later than three weeks into the internship semester may not be optimal in providing the student and site supervisor with feedback and recommendations.

A third recommendation addresses students' comments regarding the flexibility of obtaining the goals included in the contract. It is important for counselor educators, site supervisors, and internship students to discuss why and why not goals should be obtained. What are the repercussions for not working at and/or achieving a goal? How is that decided and documented with the internship site supervisor and faculty supervisor? These questions encourage students to recognize the importance of the assignment, their ability to self-assess, and their ability to be a professional school counselor.

Qualitatively, counselor educators and site supervisors may want to elicit more information from students throughout the internship through individual interviews. Listening to students in this arena and improving internship experiences provides a strong rationale for using the internship contract. Theoretically, a stronger connection between national school counseling standards and models with the transformative role that our students are learning is actualized. Practically, students are learning to communicate and advocate for not only their needs but the needs of their school community.

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Appendix

Example of Elementary School Counseling Internship Contract with Distribution of Time

Distribution of Time

Program Elements	State/National Recommendations	Intern's Goals
Guidance Curriculum	35-45%	40%
Individual Planning	5-10%	5%
Responsive Services	30-40%	40%
System Support	10-15%	15%

Semester Goals & Activities

Goal 1-Academic

Standard: Students will develop personal qualities that contribute to being an effective learner.

Activities:

- The School Character Education Program focuses on certain character words and links them to school success. The school counseling intern will create a bulletin board highlighting these words and how they can be applied at school.
- The school counseling intern will facilitate several small groups during the semester that have as a goal helping students to become better learners by developing their skills. The intern will create and facilitate two kindergarten success groups that will teach success skills such as good listening and appropriate school behavior.
- The school counseling intern will work with students on an individual basis in developing positive personal qualities that will help in school success. Some of the topics that will be addressed in session are promoting positive classroom behavior, anger management, getting along with peers, and dealing with teasing and bullying. Another important area is developing coping skills with children who are living in an unstable home situation.

Goal 2-Academic

Standard: Students will employ strategies to achieve school success.

Activities:

- The school counseling intern will attend at least 8 of 10 scheduled SAT (Student Assistance Team) meetings and individual student planning meetings in order to be a part of the process of developing a plan to help students achieve school success. The intern will also work with some of the students individually or in groups as part of the strategy developed.
- The school counseling intern will work with upper elementary students (3rd-5th grades) on developing academic success skills through the classroom guidance program.
- The intern will develop a resource of academic success tips to be shared in the school newsletter.

Goal 3-*Personal/Social*

Standard: Students will understand and appreciate self.

Activities:

- The September classroom guidance lessons are focused on understanding self and others. The school counseling intern will develop and deliver lessons.
- The school's Terrific Kids Program recognizes students for their own special qualities. The school counseling intern will assist the site supervisor in coordinating this program.
- The intern will also assist the internship site supervisor in coordinating the Breakfast Buddies Program which links at-risk students with adult mentors from the community.
- The school counseling intern will work on an individual basis with students and help them realize their own special gifts in order to boost self esteem and self confidence.

Goal 4-*Learning to Live (Personal/Social)*

Standard: Students will understand and respect others.

Activities:

- The school counseling intern will plan to facilitate at least one friendship group during the semester. The group will focus on how to be a good friend to others and how friends treat each other.
- The November classroom guidance lessons are focused on understanding and respecting others. The intern will develop and deliver lessons on this topic.
- The school counseling intern will help to coordinate service learning projects (one during Red Ribbon Week) which help students to reach out to others and understand the needs of people in their community.

Goal 5-Career

Standard: Students will demonstrate decision making, goal setting, problem solving and communication skills.

Activities:

- The school counseling intern will assist in coordinating the school student council elections and meetings. Students develop many skills through the election process and through serving the school on student council.
- The school counseling intern will assist in coordinating Red Ribbon Week which focuses on drug and alcohol awareness and also making good choices.
- October classroom guidance lessons focus on substance abuse awareness, peer pressure, and decision making skills. The school counseling intern will develop and deliver lessons that help students develop these skills.

School Counseling Intern Date

The school counseling intern and the internship site supervisor have met to discuss the needs of the school during the internship time frame. The above goals are co-constructed between the school counseling intern and internship site supervisor, adhering to the state's comprehensive developmental guidance program and ASCA national standards. The internship site supervisor will provide supervision to the school counseling intern to achieve these goals with any modifications co-constructed in a formative evaluation process.

Internship Site Supervisor Date

The faculty supervisor and school counseling intern have met to discuss the goals co-constructed between the intern and site supervisor. The faculty supervisor will monitor the achievement and modification of goals, which will be revisited at mid-term during the site visit with the faculty supervisor, site supervisor, and intern student.

Faculty Supervisor Date

Biographical Statement

Donna Gibson is assistant professor and program coordinator of counselor education in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of South Carolina. She has presented and written numerous journal articles on school counseling leadership, career counseling in the schools, consultation and assessment in the schools.