

## **Cross Curriculum Modules in Counseling and Instructional Leadership**

William K. Kiser, Ed.D., Instructional Leadership Program, Department of Educational Resources, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama.

Nancy J. Fox, Ed.D., Counselor Education Program, Department of Educational Resources, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama.

Mary M. Owens, Ph.D., Instructional Leadership Program, Department of Educational Resources, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama.

### **Abstract**

School Counselors and Instructional Leaders have demanding roles in school settings with collaborative goals for enhanced student achievement. The purpose of the article is to explore the School Counselor-Instructional Leader relationship and provide feedback about the integration of cross curriculum training modules for school counseling and instructional leadership programs in higher education. Jacksonville State University has implemented Master's level cross curriculum modules in a two-part project. Part one involves bringing Instructional Leadership faculty into a Counselor Education course to enhance leadership qualities. Likewise, part two brings Counselor Education faculty in an Instructional Leadership course conducting modules that teach the requirements for quality school counseling programs. The cross curricular modules have been implemented over a three year time period with candidates from both programs yielding more improved awareness of specific roles and opening communication channels for candidates from both programs.

### **Cross Curriculum Modules in Counseling and Instructional Leadership**

Educational leaders, principals to superintendents, are responsible for the success of all instructional programs, a challenging, but exciting assignment. One part of this assignment is administrative support for school counseling programs. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) provides counselors with a curriculum in order to maintain high standards for counseling programs. Alabama, as do many states, also provides counselors with a state plan aligned to ASCA's curriculum. Crucial to the success of the program and its benefits to students are mutual trust, principal-counselor communication, and respect and understanding (College Board, 2009a). However, the overwhelming daily responsibilities of school counselors and administrators often leave little time for communication. In addition to lack of time for communication and the building of trust and a shared vision, both groups of educators may not adequately understand each other's roles.

Professors from educational leadership and school counseling programs point out that lack of training is a challenge to developing strong partnerships between school counselors and principals. There has been little or no collaboration between counselor education programs and educational leadership programs. School counselors and principals must discuss their professional skills in order to work as a team to strengthen the school improvement process. Principals who work with counselors to strengthen school improvement create partnerships that affect everyone within the community (Mallory & Jackson, 2007).

The counseling program is an integral part of the school community. Counselors provide individual, small, and large group guidance. However, group-counseling sessions may not be scheduled or may be scheduled less often. This may be due to counselors being assigned non-counseling duties at the local school. These activities include registration and scheduling of all new students, coordinating or administering high-stakes testing, performing disciplinary actions, covering classes when teachers are absent, performing clerical duties, and preparing Individual Educational Plans (IEP's) (Mallory & Jackson, 2007). In response to an ASCA survey, counselors who indicated they did not utilize small group counseling, identified several factors why group work was not supported in their schools (College Board, 2009b). These factors include large caseloads, administrative duties, lack of support from administrators and faculty, and lack of parental support, especially from parents living in small towns. As a result, school counselors may not be able to fully deliver quality counseling programs.

Counseling programs that have made a difference in improving student achievement are numerous. Many elementary counselors have integrated academic interventions within small group settings by using small groups to help increase learning behaviors and personal/social development of students (Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007). One program organized by a school counselor as part of a school improvement program to reduce infractions that kept students out of class involved spending time with the principal. High-school students who were assigned detention for minor infractions spent 30 minutes of the detention hour walking on the school's track with the principal. The principal used this time listening to the concerns of students, which was helpful in building relationships with them. Another counselor worked with the school improvement team to develop strategies addressing the needs of the school's growing Hispanic population (Mallory & Jackson, 2007).

Accreditation standards for both school counselors and administrators only briefly mention the counselor-principal relationship, as these standards focus on the content areas of their respective fields. That the roles of educational leaders and school counselors may be misunderstood suggests that higher education institutions perhaps consider bridging the gap for these two kinds of students as they complete initial certification programs at the master's level. Therefore, the question is, "How can university pre-service programs address the needs of both school counselors and leaders and bridge the gap of communication and understanding between them?"

At Jacksonville State University (JSU), Instructional Leadership and School Counseling faculty have begun to plan and implement cross-program training modules as a possible solution to bridging the gap between administrators/principals and counselors. The training modules are conducted by faculty from the two programs and range in time from 30 minutes to an hour over one to two class meetings. The Instructional Leadership faculty conducts modules for the School Counseling Program in leadership, ethics, and the principal's role in using counselors as key members of the school leadership team. The School Counseling faculty conducts modules for the Instructional Leadership Program in counseling curriculum of the *ASCA Model* and *State Plan*, postsecondary transition counseling, and the counselor's role. At the present time, the modules have been presented to each of the two groups of students separately, but in the future the module on the principal's role in using counselors as leadership team members will be conducted jointly, giving both groups of students the opportunity for interaction and discussion relative to the topics. Three modules—the Leadership Module for School Counselors, the Principal's Role

in Using Counselors as Key Team Members, and the *ASCA National Model* and *Alabama Comprehensive Model* for School Leaders—have been developed, and others are in stages of development.

### **The Leadership Module for School Counselors (SC Module One)**

This module, conducted by Instructional Leadership faculty, focuses on the relationship and interaction of building-level leaders—the principal and the school counselor. These are positions the beginning counselor or administrator will fill and should be of most interest to pre-service graduate students.

The module begins with a frank discussion of students' current conceptions of the school counselor role as "helper-responders" rather than that of "...proactive leaders and advocates for the success of all students," which House and Sears (2002) saw as an essential part of equity in the education of all students and in the overall school improvement process. These authors believed counselors do not involve themselves in proactive roles for several reasons: inadequate pre-service training, conflicting roles, administrators who fail to use counselors' skills, pliable and overly accommodating counselor behavior, and other stakeholders (such as parents and community members) who insist upon their agendas for counselors.

Discussion focuses on the need for school counselors to be assertive and to develop the political skills needed to establish their leadership role in managing and implementing the comprehensive counseling and guidance program in their school. Such program management includes classroom guidance activities; group activities to respond to students' interests or needs; interdisciplinary curriculum development, as teams of teachers and counselor(s) integrate subject matter with the school guidance curriculum; and parent workshops and instruction (*Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance State Model for Alabama Public Schools*, 2003). With such comprehensive responsibilities, counselors cannot accept a role that includes tasks unrelated to the counseling and guidance program.

Following these discussions students are provided in-depth information on the principal-counselor relationship from a recent College Board survey and monograph: *Finding a Way: Practical Examples of How an Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship Can Lead to Success for All Students* (College Board, 2009b). In the summer of 2008, the College Board used a survey from this document with more than 2300 principals and counselors across the nation. Of this sample, 15% were principals and 85% were counselors. Students review the document and related survey data. Using the survey, students are asked to rate the schools in which they currently teach on characteristics of an effective principal-counselor relationship with the ten-item survey "*Taking One Step Forward: A Self-Assessed Tool.*"

Discussion continues on the importance students assigned to various characteristics (scale 1-5) and the extent to which they believed these characteristics are found in their school (also scale 1-5). As a classroom activity, the leadership faculty shares how the *JSU* counseling student ratings compare to those of the national sample and also how the *JSU* current students in pre-service leadership programs compared to the national sample.

As did the national sample, the *JSU* school counseling majors and leadership majors most often agree on the major issues that should drive their relationships—mutual trust and respect, communication, and shared vision and decision making. However, leadership

students have a more positive view of the principals' relationships with counselors than do the counseling students of that same relationship. The national sample also showed this difference in terms of the ten characteristics of the survey instrument: open communication that provides input to decision-making; opportunities to share ideas on teaching, learning, and school-wide initiatives; sharing information about needs within school and community; school counselor participation on leadership team; joint responsibility in development of goals and their assessment; mutual trust between principal and counselor; shared vision on what is meant by student success; mutual respect between principal and counselor; and a collective commitment to equity and opportunity (College Board, 2009b).

The Leadership Module ends with a discussion of what each of the ten characteristics means in terms of everyday school behavior on the part of both school counselor and principal. Probably the most important responsibility of the counselor is to find a way to communicate to the principal what he or she needs to know, to back up these efforts with data, and to understand the principal's perspective in dealing with larger issues (College Board, 2009b).

### ***The ASCA National Model and ALSDE Comprehensive Module for Leaders (IL Module One)***

The *ASCA National Model* (American School Counselor Association, 2005) has placed a curriculum in the hands of school counselors in the United States to deliver personal, social, academic, and career education to students. As mentioned before, many states, such as Alabama, have state curriculum plans aligned with the *ASCA National Model (Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Model for Alabama Public Schools, 2003)*. The curriculum is in place for delivery in counseling programs at elementary, middle, and high school levels, yet delivery seems to be the stumbling block for school counselors. There may be many contributing factors; however, reviewing a few of these can possibly expand others' view to see from the school-counseling chair.

The most prominent recent research of school counselor views involves a survey of over 1200 elementary, middle, and high school counselors in Alabama by Dahir, Burnham, and Stone (2009). The survey asked school counselors their perception of school counseling programs. Results for the elementary level confirmed previous literature that indicated emphasis is placed on the strong personal social growth of their students, the need to implement large-group guidance, and strong program management with little or no involvement in career development. Surveys of middle school counselors, although less prevalent in the literature, garnished some new findings that contradicted previous research. Middle school counselors seemed to be delivering programs more closely aligned with the *ASCA National Model*. High-school counselors reaffirmed the traditional priorities of individual counseling, educational and career planning, and preparing for postsecondary opportunities for all students. The authors suggested specialized professional development opportunities for school counselors similar to those opportunities offered teachers. In an additional article also specific to Alabama, the authors stated, "overwhelmingly, the school counselors revealed that principals or other administrators (not counseling coordinators) viewed school counseling in a traditional fashion" (Burnham, Dahir, & Stone, 2008, p. 8). School counselors believed administrators were not aware of the "State Model" and as a result expressed frustration. Eighty-five percent of those surveyed viewed working closely with school administrators and teachers on school improvement issues as a high priority

(p.13). In a subsequent study examining common practices of Alabama school counseling programs concerning counseling and non-counseling duties Chandler, Burnham, & Dahir (2008) found concerns related to role issues and that counselors and principals view counseling duties differently. Evident in the results of this study was a pattern that counselors were “automatically assigned clerical and administrative tasks” (p.50).

In a survey of 337 practicing school principals in Iowa (127 women and 207 men) Leuwerke, Wade, Walker, and Shi (2009) found over half of participants reported no exposure to the ASCA National Model including its four components of counseling (foundation, delivery system, management system, and research). A second part of the study reviewed the impact of different types of information about professional school counseling and administrators’ perceptions of how counselors should allocate their time. The principals’ view of time allocations across delivery mechanisms was most impacted by the description of the *ASCA National Model* and exposure to any type of information about school counseling impacted ratings of time for responsive services. Principals’ recommendations regarding counselors’ time allotments were impacted by exposure to different types of information about school counseling. A third finding of the study was that principals thought that appropriate tasks were more important than inappropriate tasks. This research demonstrated that a “brief, non-dynamic information set can impact principals’ view of how counselors should spend their time and decreased their view of the importance of inappropriate tasks” (p.8).

Although the Counselor Education and Instructional Leadership faculty at *JSU* already recognized the need for curriculum exchanges, the studies reviewed herein led to further development of training modules. The *ASCA National Model* and specifically the *Alabama Comprehensive Model* are simply shared with Instructional Leadership students to begin an awareness of, and interest in, an effective counseling curriculum. Counselor Education faculty come to Instructional Leadership courses and prompt an awareness, an interest, and an exposure to the curriculum. Discussions center upon the roles of both the school counselor and school administrator. A future plan for evaluating the effectiveness of cross curriculum modules will include emailing a copy of the survey “*Taking One Step Forward: A Self-Assessment Tool*” (College Board, 2009b) to instructional leadership and counseling students after they have worked in respective educational positions for a year. Both programs communicate with their graduates via newsletters and email communication. Programs also use data from surveys of graduates for program improvement.

### **The Principal's Role in Using Counselors as Key Members of the Leadership Team Module (IL/SC Module One)**

IL/SC Module One, also conducted by the Instructional Leadership faculty, is presented to students in the instructional leadership program as well as students in the school counseling program. The module focuses on the principal’s role in using counselors as key members of the school leadership team. The module begins with a discussion of effective leadership and the instructional role of the principal. Principals are ultimately responsible for the success of the instructional program, which includes the counseling and guidance program.

The mission, vision, and goals of the school can best be met by the principal empowering the faculty. The effective principal identifies and establishes leaders in each program area and invites them to become part of the school leadership team. The leadership team is

given the power to advocate for their programs and student needs. The principal provides the team with opportunities to share information about student needs and the leadership team is included in the decision-making process.

This module includes a discussion of leadership and the skills of effective school leaders. Gorton and Alston (2009) defined leadership as “those activities engaged in by an individual or members of a group that contribute significantly to development and maintenance of role structure and goal direction” (p.5). Gorton and Alston described the difference between administrators and leaders. Administrators are concerned primarily with maintaining rather than changing established structures, programs, and goals. Leaders, on the other hand, are concerned with initiating changes in established structures, programs, and goals. “An administrator can become a leader by attempting to introduce change, but is not a leader simply because he or she happens to occupy what has been referred to as a leadership position” (p.6).

To exercise leadership, a principal must try to influence the faculty. The principal must possess knowledge and skills in utilizing group dynamics. An essential priority for the principal in working with a leadership team is the development of cohesiveness and trust. Group cohesiveness is the degree to which the faculty is attracted to the group, are willing to take personal responsibility for the tasks assigned to the group, and are willing to engage in cooperative actions to achieve the mission, vision, and goals of the school.

Members of the leadership team must feel that their membership is valued and that they can make an important contribution to the effectiveness of the programs of the school. Goal sharing is essential for leadership team members. They must understand the mission, vision, and goals of the school and the extent to which these goals are compatible with members’ personal goals. Finally, team members must have a spirit of cooperation and collaboration. The principal and the leadership team must be able to work cooperatively among themselves (Gorton and Alston, 2009).

The second part of the module includes a discussion of the roles of the principal, counselor(s), and teachers in implementing the school counseling program as described in the *Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Model for Alabama Public Schools* (2003). The principal must understand the role of school counselors and provide the necessary support for counselors to fulfill their roles just as administrators must understand the roles of faculty in each program area. The principal must provide input into program development and encourage support and participation of all school personnel.

The school counselor must assume a leadership role for managing and implementing the comprehensive counseling and guidance program in the school. Counselors are responsible for the delivery and evaluation of services to all students and must work directly with students individually as well as in small and large groups. In addition to serving students and responding to their social needs, counselors are consultants to administrators, teachers, parents, and others. The counselor must also coordinate activities within the school that are related to student welfare.

Since teachers have the greatest contact with students, they are in the best position to recognize and help provide for the needs of the students. Open communication with counselors provides adequate opportunities for student-counselor contact. Teachers can help counselors deliver programs that facilitate the academic, career, personal and social

development of students. Teacher support, input, and expertise make it possible for the school counseling program to become an integral part of the total education program in the school (*Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Model for Alabama Public Schools*, 2003).

The final part of the module focuses on how effective principal-counselor relationships can lead to success for all students. The students read and discuss case studies of how principals in various schools have developed positive working relationships with counselors in developing an effective leadership team. They are provided a copy of *Finding a Way: Practical Examples of How an Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship Can Lead to Success for All Students* (College Board, 2009b). The case studies of actual elementary, middle, and high schools included in this monograph provide the final discussion in the module for counseling and instructional leadership students.

The JSU Counseling and Instructional Leadership faculties will continue to develop and implement cross curriculum modules. Faculty will analyze the checklist evaluations from modules and completed presentations. Data from surveys of practicing counselors and administrators will be analyzed at the end of each school year. Based upon these data, current modules may be revised for implementation, or modules on new topics may be developed. In the future, both faculties wish to see the modules become not only a sharing of information but also activities imbedded into additional courses or into the internships of these two programs.

### Conclusion

In our effort to enhance the counselor-principal relationship, cross-curriculum training modules have been developed. Although implementation has been approximately three years, the feedback from counseling and instructional leadership students has been positive. The authors contend that both programs have strengthened primarily as a result of awareness and communication. As predicted by the national study, the dialogue between both faculty and students developed a better understanding of counseling and leadership roles.

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