

# TEACHING ABOUT THE PRINCIPAL AND SCHOOL COUNSELOR RELATIONSHIP: ELCC 2.1A\*

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## Abstract

This instructional module, which is used in a principal certification graduate class entitled School and Community Relations, is fixed within the literature that describes school stakeholders' confusion about the explicit roles of school counselors, especially principals. The authors begin by creating a framework for the lesson activity in which the literature is reviewed surrounding the principal and counselor relationship with special attention paid to the perceptions of each about the roles of the school counselor. The authors provide an activity in which educational leadership faculty engage pre-service principals in a discussion around the appropriate and inappropriate duties of school counselors.

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### Sumario en español

Este módulo instruccional, que es utilizado en una principal certificación clase que graduada permitió la Escuela y Relaciones de Comunidad, son fijadas dentro de la literatura que describe la confusión de tenedores de apuestas de escuela acerca de los papeles explícitos de consejeros de escuela, especialmente directores. Los autores empiezan creando una armazón para la actividad de lección en la que la literatura es revisada rodear la relación de director y consejero con atención especial pagada a las percepciones de cada acerca de los papeles del consejero de la escuela. Los autores proporcionan una actividad en la que facultad educativa de liderazgo compromete a directores de pre-servicio en una discusión alrededor de los deberes apropiados e inadecuados de consejeros de escuela.

NOTE: Esta es una traducción por computadora de la página web original. Se suministra como información general y no debe considerarse completa ni exacta.

In order to meet the needs of diverse learners, public schools have under gone tremendous pressure to reform leadership practices that focus on collaborative processes (Beale & McCay, 2001; Militello & Janson, 2007). Although historically receiving little attention (Militello & Janson, 2007; Stone & Clark, 2001), collaboration between school leaders and school counselors is important for student success in academic, social, and career development (Armstrong, MacDonald, & Stillo, 2010; Isaacs, 2003; Stone & Clark, 2001). The push to develop a partnership between school leaders and school counselors is due in part to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), which underscored school counselors' roles in improving various student outcomes (Ross & Herrington, 2005-2006; Sink, 2009). To utilize school counselors effectively, principals must clearly understand their roles and communicate those roles to stakeholders (Stone & Clark, 2001). In sum, the effectiveness of the school counseling program hinges on the support of principals and their effective communication about the importance of the counseling program (Chata & Loesch, 2007).

However, principals' opinions concerning the roles of counselors do not always align with the American School Counseling Association's (ASCA) recommendations (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005). Principals too often categorize school counselors' roles as broad in scope, vague in definitions, and heavy on administrative duties (Zalaquett, 2005). When principals' beliefs about the roles of the school counselor are not congruent with ASCA recommendations, the breadth of the counseling program is compromised (Ponec & Brock, 2000).

Given the current thrust to adopt a shared leadership approach to school site management (Alexander, Kruczek, Zigelbaum, & Ramirez, 2003), it is important to highlight research conducted within the last ten years that focused on the relationship between principals and school counselors, two critical stakeholders in the functioning of effective schools. By doing so, we hope to support recommendations by Lieberman (2004) who suggested that

"a re-evaluation of the fundamental and basic issues of role clarity of members of a school staff, of ambiguous expectations among various personnel as to each other's functions and outcomes, and a shared mission and school goals, would predict a substantive move towards increased efficiency and school success" (p. 554).

To begin to clarify the role of school counselors, it is logical to connect ASCA standards for school counselors to the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, NPBEA, 2002) standards for school administrators. In the end, this manuscript concludes with an instructional module designed to provide educational leadership faculty an activity that promotes student discussion about the ASCA model.

## 2 Literature Review

Literature illuminates the fact that key stakeholders within the school, namely counselors, teachers, and school leaders, "do not know what a school counselor's role is, and when they do, they do not always agree

on that role” (Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner, & Skelton, 2006, p. 250). More specifically, principals typically exhibit skewed views of school counselors’ roles (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Baker & Gerler, 2008; Chata & Loesch, 2007; Lieberman, 2004; Rambo-Igney & Grimes, 2006), yet current school reform models pivot on the notion that student achievement is only possible when leadership is a shared endeavor (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001; Spillane, 2006). As a result, the literature presented highlights the relationship of principals and school counselors that was published within the last ten years. The literature reviewed is organized into the following headings: (a) a discussion about the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) model, (b) a discussion about the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) model, (c) connection between the ASCA and ELCC, (d) perceptions of professional school counselors, (e) perceptions of principals about school counselors, and (f) communication and collaboration between principals and school counselors. Finally, the manuscript concludes with a teaching module designed to acquaint educational leadership students about the roles of school counselors.

## 2.1 American School Counseling Association (ASCA)

The American School Counseling Association developed the ASCA National Standards and Model highlighting the unique ways in which school counselors can assist in helping students to achieve academic success (ASCA, 2004, 2005). The standards include three main domains: Academic Development, Career Development, and Personal/Social Development. ASCA (2008) describes four major quadrants for school counselor responsibilities, with the third quadrant being Management System. Expectations from this quadrant ask school counselors to communicate with principals about what they are doing to include their role, functions, and duties. ASCA recommends that school counselors negotiate and contract with administrators to agree on the services provided by the counseling program at the beginning of the school year (Brinson, 2004; Lieberman, 2004).

As a result of the ASCA standards and model, training programs across the country graduate school counselors who are united as to the role of school counselors in identifying ways to increase academic achievement. This movement has created a clearer definition of school counseling and the pertinent role that school counselors play in education reform. Although counseling graduates are seasoned as to what their roles in the schools are, many principals are not (Beesley & Frey, 2006; Brinson, 2004). Administrators remain unaware of the ASCA standards and model, thus creating confusion over the role of the school counselor and stifling collaboration (Perusse, Lally, Haas, & Mische, 2009; Williams & Wehrman, 2010).

## 2.2 Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC)

To ensure principal preparation programs are developing effective school leaders, a standards-based approach to principal preparation began with adoption of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards in 1994. Throughout the late 1990s, many universities organized their school leadership curriculum around the ISLLC standards (Eller, 2010). By 2002, the ISLLC and National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE) initiatives were incorporated into the NPBEA (2002) program standards for school administrators (Harris, Ballenger, & Leonard, 2004). By 2005, one-third of all universities that grant certification in school administration had been accredited by ELCC (Orr, 2006).

ELCC contains standards that serve as a framework for what practicing principals are expected to master and include both technical and relational skills (Eller, 2010). These standards include: (a) creating a vision, (b) promoting a positive school climate, (c) managing the organization, (d) collaborating with stakeholders, (e) acting with ethics, and (f) responding to the political context of schools. Although many universities adopt the ELCC standards to serve as a guide in preparing principals, few principal preparation programs provide training in their coursework on the ASCA standards (Bringman, Mueller, & Lee, 2010). As a result, many practicing principals learn about the roles of school counselors through field experience, and most importantly, do not understand how to use the school counselor to increase student achievement (Mason & Perera-Diltz, 2010).

**ASCA and ELCC connection.** School counselors and principals are trained using different standards and theoretical stances (Shoffner & Briggs, 2001; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). As a result, the models they adopt to apply their skills are different (Kaplan, 1995), which in turn, impacts role perception (Ross & Herrington, 2005-2006). Guiding school counselor roles, the ASCA National Model (2005) promotes the third quadrant of Management System, which establishes a clear goal of improving the relationship between the school counselor and the principal (ASCA, 2005). This aspect of the model emphasizes the school counselor's responsibility to collaborate with the principal to negotiate the implementation of counseling services (ASCA, 2005). Edwards (2007) suggested that at the beginning of every school year, school counselors work with principals to create a management agreement, thereby defining their roles and responsibilities.

Likewise, the ELCC standards for school leaders address the importance of the relationship between school counselors and principals within standard two, which states school principals should, "have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by promoting a positive school culture" (NPBEA, 2002, p. 4). ELCC standard two explicitly delegates to the school leader the responsibility for forging the counselor and principal relationship. When school principals are able to model this standard in their daily discipline (Reeves, 2002), they convey the message that schools are a learning community which draw upon the unique talents of personnel, including school counselors, to meet the needs of students (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001). Michaelidou and Pashiardis (2009) referred to exhibition of this standard as a *cultural focus*, in which principals understand the importance of strong, positive relationships with colleagues, including school counselors. In sum, ELCC standard two requires universities who train future principals to incorporate shared leadership theory into coursework (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Lieberman & Miller, 2004). Also called distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005), principals who adopt this administrative style understand school improvement is a social, collective, and experiential effort rather than an isolated series of events (Nolan & Hoover, 2008).

### 2.3 Perceptions of Professional School Counselors about their Roles

The roles of school counselors have changed dramatically within the past few decades (Ross & Herrington, 2005-2006). Counselors are expected to play a significant role in promoting the academic success of students, aide in curriculum development, assist in school discipline plans, and provide clear communication and services to parents and the wider community (Beale & McCay, 2001). Yet, how school districts explicitly define these roles varies from district to district (Ross & Herrington, 2005-2006).

Vaugh, Bynum, and Hooten (2007) reviewed the actual duties performed as opposed to preferred duties of school counselors. They discovered that counselors prefer to spend time conducting individual and group counseling. School counselors also reported that they like to spend more time consulting with community agencies, administrators and parents. Results also indicated that counselors like to spend more time providing guidance curriculum in the classroom and to routinely inform stakeholders of their roles, training and interventions, and engage in activities that promote student achievement through academic, career and personal social competencies.

Job satisfaction and turnover rates for school counselors are often connected to the principal-school counselor relationship and how this professional role is perceived (Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009). Counselors view themselves as professionals who want to be involved in the decision making process regarding important school decisions. Research indicates that when school counselors advocate for this role in the school, they report higher job satisfaction regarding their school counseling program (Clemens et al., 2009). Therefore, strong advocacy and relationship skills are essential components for school counselors to support their role in the school environment.

Addressing the mental health needs of children and youth in school has also caused contention regarding the school counselor's role. Interestingly, school counselors perceive themselves as mental health professionals more readily than school administrators (Brown, Dahlbeck, & Barnes, 2006). School counselors have completed graduate level course work in areas such as group counseling, diagnosis, and assessments, yet feel that administrators do not value or understand their competency in these areas and refer children to mental health professionals and agencies in lieu of the school counselor (Brown et al., 2006). However, research

indicates that the majority of school counselors perceive their role as a combination of mental health and academic counseling (Brown et al., 2006).

## 2.4 Perceptions of Principals about School Counselors' Roles

Principals' influence concerning school reform efforts are difficult to quantify, yet all initiatives require their support if such models are to be embedded within school culture (Stone & Clark, 2001). The comprehensive school counseling program is no different and its success is dependent upon the support of principals (Zalaquett, 2005). Universities and colleges are charged with training pre-service principals concerning organizational management skills, yet most provide little training on the ASCA model (Bringman et al., 2010). Ross and Herrington (2005-2006) succinctly stated, "understanding the gap between the ideal and actual role that the school counselor assumes is not high on the agenda of most counselors or principals engaged in the day-to-day grind of running a school" (p. 1). As a result, principals typically endorse counselor responsibilities that do not align with the ASCA standards (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005). For example, principals have reported that school counselors should do whatever was needed such as lunch duty, bus duty, and/or coordinating testing. Such duties are not within the scope of counseling duties and are more appropriate for the assistant principal or even the clerical staff (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Brinson, 2004).

Recent research has underscored how the roles of high school counselors are misunderstood. For example, Armstrong et al. (2010) found that high school principals' views concerning the roles of counselors did not align with the self-reported roles of the counselors. When the perceptions of principals and counselors do not closely mimic one another, the divide can be a source of friction between counselors and principals (Armstrong et al., 2010). Additionally, Dodson (2009) found that high school principals were confused about the roles of high school counselors, especially in schools where the ASCA model was not widely adopted or communicated.

One prominent source of contention is the role of school counselors within the special education process. Monteiro-Leitner et al. (2006) found that principals reported that counselors spent too much time engaged in special education testing, a problem that is magnified by the accountability demands on principals in the workplace (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005). Interestingly, Bringman et al. (2010) also found that changing pre-service principals' beliefs about the role of counselors in the special education process was difficult, even after targeted instruction suggesting the role was inappropriate. Yet, Beale and McCay (2001) illuminated the fact that principals should seek to hire counselors who are familiar and willing to be change agents in the education of special needs students because they provide social and emotional support when monitoring behavioral goals. Such conflicting recommendations do little to help clear up role identification of school counselors.

However, some literature suggests that principals do perceive the roles of school counselors as appropriate. For example, studies have found that principals perceive the primary role of counselors as one that is consultative (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2006; Zalaquett, 2005). A job duty termed *collaborative case consultant*, school counselors provide services to all students and collaborate with teachers, parents, and outside agencies to meet their unique needs. Dollarhide, Smith, and Lemberger (2007) highlighted the hope of principals for school counselors to possess effective communication skills, focus on students' needs, and assume leadership roles within the school. Finally, Zalaquett (2005) found that elementary principals not only viewed school counselors as leaders within the school community, but were aware of the ASCA standards for school counselors and valued duties congruent with ASCA recommendations.

## 2.5 Communication and Collaboration Between Principals and School Counselors

Counselors and administrators cannot operate in isolation (Meyers, 2005; Wesley, 2001), and school stakeholders expect collaboration between principals and school counselors (Froeschle & Nix, 2009). Educational leaders and school counselors must collaborate to promote the academic climate of schools, underscoring the fact that both are leaders in the school (Dollarhide et al., 2007; Walker, 2006). As a result, it is imperative that counselors initiate communication with principals about their roles and advocate for responsibilities

that align with the ASCA model (Armstrong et al., 2010; Janson, Militello, & Kosine, 2008). Advocating for their roles helps school counselors define their identity and gain respect from members of the school (Vaughn et al., 2007).

Because school counselors are not powerless in influencing the perceptions of principals about their roles, they should take a proactive approach in communicating directly with principals (Dollarhide et al., 2007). Effective communication begins with trust building between school counselors and principals (Wesley, 2001). When trust is built, the boundaries between *aggressive* communication and *assertive* communication concerning role identification are clearly drawn (Fitch, Newby, Ballesterio, & Marshall, 2001). To foster assertive communication, Edwards (2007) suggested school counselors utilize data, graphs and charts to appeal to task-oriented principals.

Chata and Loesch (2007) recommended school counselors be explicit with their communication about their roles to principals. Specifically, counselors should emphasize the domains in which they work (academic, career, psychosocial) and provide concrete examples of activities within each area. Explicit communication can also be achieved when school counselors publish a weekly newsletter about their mission, vision, and plan for the counseling program (Edwards, 2007). This information can be disseminated to not only principals, but to all stakeholders, which in turn aids in clarifying roles. Finally, school counselors should engage principals in direct conversations about: (a) principals' perceptions about daily contact with school counselors, (b) training stakeholders within the school community about counseling roles, (c) principals' expectations concerning the most important assets of the counseling program, and (d) time spent delivering the guidance curriculum, responsive services, and system support (Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009; Dollarhide et al., 2007).

### 3 Implications for Principal Preparation Programs

Shoffner and Williamson (2000) asserted that because principals and school counselors are trained separately, there are few opportunities to learn about roles, responsibilities, leadership, and collaboration amongst the two disciplines. "Graduate programs that prepare school principals and counselors have a brief window of opportunity in which to influence the individuals who will become practitioners within schools" (Ross & Herrington, 2005-2006, p. 11). Within this window of opportunity, changes in beliefs occur as evidenced by researchers who have used direct instruction, vignettes, and group work to alter the perceptions of pre-service principals about inappropriate counselor duties along with dialogue about how ASCA and ELCC standards overlap (Bringman et al., 2010; Janson et al., 2008; Leuwerke et al., 2009; Perusse, Goodnough, & Bouknight, 2007; Rambo-Igney & Smith, 2006; Ross & Herrington, 2005-2006).

Thus, because principal preparation programs train future school leaders, they should take a proactive role in educating pre-service principals about the importance of school counselors. To do this, we recommend the following:

- Departments within universities that train both principals and school counselors should collaborate together. Whether through seminars or cross-categorical graduate classes, pre-service principals and pre-service school counselors should interact to discuss role clarity (Armstrong et al., 2010; Bringman et al., 2010; Mason & Perera-Diltz, 2010; Ross & Herrington, 2005-2006; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000).
- When pre-service principals and counselors are brought together, their discussions should be around major points of conflict that arise daily in schools. For example, dialogue concerning confidentiality issues, weak stakeholder communication, and student discipline assist pre-service principals in understanding school counselors' roles (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000).
- Because most ELCC accredited principal preparation programs have an internship component, a requirement of the internship should revolve around becoming familiar with the duties of school counselors. For instance, pre-service principals might be required to spend one school day shadowing school counselors or be required to interview school counselors about their roles.
- Educational leadership faculty should ask school counselor faculty or practicing school counselors to present during an educational leadership class about the ASCA model. Special attention should be paid to the appropriate and inappropriate roles of school counselors.

- Most educational leadership curricula have a course encompassing *school and community relations*. Such classes serve as a perfect vehicle to discuss ASCA standards and differentiate the roles of school counselors.
- To model the importance of collaboration, educational leadership faculty should engage in joint teaching and research projects with school counseling faculty (Janson et al., 2008). Research findings can be presented to pre-service principals, which in turn aids these students in understanding the roles of school counselors. Most importantly, it models for pre-service principals the importance of collaborative leadership in schools.

## 4 Instructional Module

This module was created for a master’s level principal preparation class called School and Community Relations or a master’s level counseling class entitled School Counseling. Both courses are designed to acquaint educational leadership students and counseling students with each other’s explicit roles. The module is to be used within the context of discussions surrounding collaboration with teachers, non-instructional staff, and support personnel. In sum, the module includes two options/lesson plans; option one is more structured while option two is less structured. Depending on how long the instructor allows for group processing, the module can be covered in about one hour.

### 4.1 Module Outcomes

The module’s broad goal is fixed within the context of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), in which school stakeholders work together to achieve the school’s mission (DuFour & Eaker, 2008). Specific learner outcomes for the instructional module include:

1. To ensure educational leadership/counseling students have an understanding of appropriate activities for school counselors according to the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2005).
2. To ensure educational leadership/counseling students have an understanding of inappropriate activities for school counselors according to the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2005).
3. To ensure educational leadership students have an inclusive attitude when involving school counselors in school reform efforts.

### 4.2 Option One

Prior to the lesson, the instructor should become familiar with the appropriate and inappropriate roles of school counselors (American School Counselor Association, 2005). These duties are provided in Table 1.

**Appropriate and Inappropriate Roles for School Counselors**

Appropriate Roles for School Counselors	Inappropriate Roles for School Counselors
1. Individual student academic program planning	1. Registration and scheduling of new students
2. Interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests	2. Coordinating or administering cognitive, aptitude and achievement testing
<i>continued on next page</i>	

3. Counseling students who have attendance problems	3. Signing passes for students who are tardy
4. Counseling students about appropriate dress	4. Sending students home who are inappropriately dressed
5. Collaborating with teachers to present guidance lessons	5. Covering classes when teachers are absent
6. Analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement	6. Computing grade point averages
7. Interpreting student records	7. Maintaining student records
8. Providing teachers with suggestions for better management of study halls	8. Supervising study halls
9. Ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations	9. Clerical record keeping
10. Assisting the principal with resolving student issues	10. Assisting with duties in the principal's office
11. Working with students to provide small and large group counseling services	11. Work with one student at a time in a clinical mode
12. Advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams, and school attendance review boards	12. Preparation of individual education plans, student study teams, and school attendance review boards
13. Disaggregated data analysis	13. Data entry

Table 1

NOTE: American School Counselor Association. (2005). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling (2nd ed.)*. Alexandria, VA: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/files/appropriat>

Before class, the instructor makes five or six sets of note cards and write one appropriate or inappropriate role on each card. Each set of cards will contain 26 individual cards, 13 with appropriate roles of school counselors and 13 with inappropriate roles of school counselors. Next, depending on class size, the instructor will divide classmates into groups of four or five. Each group will receive a set of 26 cards, one piece of chart paper, and tape. The instructor asks the team to divide the chart paper into two columns, with one heading being *appropriate duties of school counselors* and the other heading being *inappropriate duties of school counselors*. Groups are given about 30 minutes to discuss the cards' documented roles, determine which school counseling roles are appropriate or inappropriate, and tape each card to either side of the chart paper. When the groups are finished, the instructor has each tape their charts on a wall in the classroom where each groups' responses can be viewed side by side. Finally, the instructor leads the class in a discussion about the activity using the guiding questions discussed below.

### 4.3 Option Two

Depending on class size, the instructor will divide classmates into groups of four or five and provide markers, one piece of chart paper, and tape. The instructor will ask each group to develop a list of what they perceive as appropriate and inappropriate activities for school counselors. Groups are given 20 minutes to develop this list and tape their chart paper on the wall in the classroom. Each group will present their list to the class. After each group has presented, the instructor will provide them with the ASCA (2005) handout (see table 1) that outlines appropriate and inappropriate role for school counselors. The groups will then compare

and contrast the chart they developed to ASCA's (2005) recommendations. Finally the instructor will lead the class in a discussion about this activity using the guiding questions below.

#### 4.4 Guiding Questions

These questions are designed to guide the discussion post activity.

1. How familiar were you with the ASCA model prior to this activity?
2. What surprised you about the activity?
3. Are there any appropriate or inappropriate roles that you disagree with and why?
4. In your current work setting, do you think your school counselor is being used according to the ASCA model?
5. How can school principals communicate these appropriate and inappropriate roles to staff?
6. As a result of this activity, how have your perceptions of the school counselor changed?
7. How might this change your current or future relationship with your school principal/counselor?
8. As a result of this activity, how have your expectations of school counselors changed?

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