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Experiential Learning in School Counselor Preparation: Supporting Professional Skill Development

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Abstract

Professional standards require school counselor educators to prepare students to competently perform the many necessary skills of a school counselor. Integration of experiential learning activities into existing pre-fieldwork school counseling courses supports both skill development and standard compliance. A framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating this classroom pedagogy is detailed.

Keywords

school counselor education, experiential learning, professional skill development

Many students face a variety of obstacles that can have a significant impact on their academic success including behavior challenges, poverty, substance abuse, depression, and suicide (Bagalman & Cornell, 2018; Centers for Disease Control, 2019; Ghandour et al., 2019; Taylor & Vollman, 2017). School counselors must be ready to address these issues through leadership of a data driven, culturally responsive, and comprehensive program (ASCA, 2019a). Stakeholders expect school counselors to demonstrate a high level of competence performing numerous tasks (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Ruiz et al., 2019). Furthermore, school districts often contend with limited budgets when hiring (Dahir et al., 2019), making it more likely resources will be maximized by hiring applicants with experience so that the impact on student success is more immediate. Thus, school counselors entering the profession cannot afford a lack of on-the-job skills to impede their ability to design and deliver a comprehensive program with positive outcomes for students (ASCA, n.d.).

Counselor educators who teach, supervise, and mentor the next generation of school counselors have the challenge of preparing them for a profession where they will assume many, and sometimes undefined, roles (Havlik et al., 2019). Training is further complicated by the expectation to simultaneously adhere to different student preparation regulations including those from national accrediting bodies (e.g., The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, CACREP, www.cacrep.org; Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, CAEP, www.caepnet.org), state certification requirements, and discipline specific standards (ASCA, 2019b). Closer examination of these mandates reveals in addition to knowledge acquisition, there is a distinct emphasis on practical skill development. For example, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies outlines 24 behaviors and 134 competencies related to skills school counselors

must measurably perform while on the job (ASCA, 2019b). Sample items include “demonstrate advocacy in a comprehensive school counseling program,” “consult to support student achievement and success,” and “evaluate and report program results to the school community” (ASCA). Likewise, the 2016 CACREP specialty area standards for school counseling programs lists 15 practice standards, each expecting that counselor preparation programs demonstrate how students have mastered each competency (CACREP, 2015). For example, students must know how to implement “interventions to promote college and career readiness,” to facilitate “core curriculum design, lesson plan development, classroom management strategies, and differentiated instructional strategies,” and to incorporate “use of data to advocate for programs and students” (CACREP). Finally, ASCA’s position statement on school counselor preparation highlights the need for programs to teach students the knowledge, attitudes and skills to design and implement their school counseling programs (ASCA, 2014). These competencies include collaborating with stakeholders, facilitating appraisal and advisement, addressing legal and ethical issues in P-12 schools, and using data and advocacy to close achievement gaps (ASCA).

It is clear from the professional standard language that to lead a successful school counseling program students must possess requisite skills in the areas of advocacy, curriculum development, data analysis, and collaboration. However, just because a skill is taught does not automatically translate to competent performance (Eyler, 2009; Girvan et al., 2016). Students are better prepared when they participate in practical, carefully planned, feedback rich activities throughout their training (Granello, 2000). Required fieldwork experiences such as practicum and internship are a common best practice for clinical skill development (Akos & Scarborough, 2004). However, value is added to training when students are presented with activities prior to fieldwork that offer opportunities to practice real world application as part of their academic coursework

(Furr & Carroll, 2003). Integration of pre-fieldwork experiential learning activities into existing courses can not only support standard mastery but also cultivate skills and abilities needed to be a successful school counselor. Eyster (2009) explains this is because “students in experiential education learn as workers or community participants with a need to know in order to get a job done, not just as students who need to take a test” (p. 29).

Experiential learning is a pedagogy that emphasizes a transformative process of creating knowledge through experiences and includes any direct exposure to concepts under study (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). It has been cited by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2008) as a high impact instructional practice widely used in various disciplines including management (Tomkins & Ulus, 2016), social work (Beest et al., 2018), and education (Girvan et al., 2016). Students participate in experiential learning through carefully planned exercises balanced between experiencing, reflection, thinking, and action (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). In contrast to traditional lecture methods, learning occurs when students become involved in and adapt from the experience. Experiences encompass a wide variety of classroom (Dollarhide et al., 2007; Ricke, 2018) and field-based (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Ricke, 2018) learning opportunities. Examples include service-learning (Burnett et al., 2004; Choi et al., 2018; Ricke, 2018), project-based learning (Efstratia, 2014), and immersion trips (Shannonhouse et al., 2018).

Furr and Carroll (2003) recommended applying experiential learning principles to counselor preparation so students can link concrete experiences, knowledge, and self-reflection to professional competencies. Additional benefits include intentional exposure to the realities and roles of school-based practice, (Burnett et al., 2004), increased access to the affective domains of learning, (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Furr & Carroll, 2003), and students’ perceptions of such activities as stress relieving and enjoyable (Ziff & Beamish, 2004). Likewise, counselor education

literature reveals successful application of experiential activities to specific counselor preparation areas such as social justice advocacy (Decker et al., 2016), group counseling (Anderson & Price, 2001), micro-skills development (Bayne & Jangha, 2016; Osborn & Costas, 2013) and multicultural competence (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Villalba & Redmond, 2008). Bemak and Chung (2011) explained how counselor trainees learn valuable social justice advocacy and counseling skills through participation in field-based post disaster community service. Similarly, Arthur & Achenbach (2002) discussed how when properly implemented and correctly debriefed, experiential classroom activities increase students' abilities to provide effective multicultural counseling. Experiential learning is also present in the form of personal growth groups where students participate as members and/or facilitators (Anderson & Price, 2001; Springer & Schimmel, 2016). Research suggests this type of instruction allows for modelling of group facilitation skills, fostering of group leader self-efficacy (Springer & Schimmel, 2016), and experiencing emotions similar to that of clients. Finally, experiential learning has been explored in creative course activities such as popular film critique (Villalba & Redmond, 2008) and improvisation (Bayne & Jangha, 2016).

This growing body of research suggests that experiential learning is not new to counselor education (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Rather, experiential learning has been clearly established as a valuable instructional practice particularly with skill acquisition (Granello, 2000; Springer & Schimmel, 2016). What is currently missing is a discussion of how experiential learning activities can be integrated into pre-fieldwork school counseling courses to reinforce skill development. Moreover, suggestions for how to align such experiences with professional standards as well as recommendations for evaluation is absent. Practical, detailed examples that school counselor educators can replicate in their classrooms are needed to ensure both skill-based training and

standard compliance. Therefore, the purpose of this manuscript is to provide a framework for the integration of experiential learning activities within pre-fieldwork school counseling coursework to enhance professional skill development. First, experiential learning modes (Kolb, 1984) as a foundation for planning, aligning, and evaluating activities are outlined. The final section explains how three community-based experiential activities were implemented within school counseling courses by a full-time school counselor educator.

Experiential Learning Modes

The central tenet of experiential learning theory is the transformative process through which a student engages with four dynamic but distinct learning modes during participation in an experiential activity: (1) concrete experience (experiencing), (2) reflective observation (reflecting), (3) abstract conceptualization (thinking), and (4) active experimentation (acting) (Kolb, 1984, 2015). Concrete experiences involve students in carefully designed learning activities such as role plays, service-learning projects, or field trips. The intention is to minimize bias and anxiety by preparing students to be fully engaged with open minds during the experiences. Following the event, formal (e.g., graded journal entry) and/or informal (e.g., class discussion) reflection occurs. The purpose of reflection is to encourage expression of feelings and emotions, to consider new perspectives, and to make meaning from the experience (Kolb, 2015). Regular reflection has been shown to help students make explicit connections between experiences and course content (Choi et al., 2018). Abstract conceptualization encompasses thinking about how the experience connects to relevant concepts under study, including integration of lectures, class discussions, or required readings. New theories, strategies, or perspectives are considered, modified, or rejected. Finally, students apply what they have learned to various professional roles and responsibilities. Through active experimentation students not only test and evaluate concepts and ideas formed during the

experiential activity, but also distinguish between effective and ineffective problem-solving strategies (Kolb, 1984, Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Using the experiential learning modes as a framework, activities can be integrated into existing pre-fieldwork school counseling coursework to support professional skill competency. Compliance with professional standards is simultaneously increased because students have more opportunities to demonstrate proficiency with tasks associated with the leadership of a comprehensive school counseling program. An explanation of how each of the four learning modes (i.e., concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation, Kolb, 1984) contributes to the development of experiential activities will assist school counselor educators with proper implementation and assessment.

Concrete Experiences

A concrete experience is an intentionally designed event conducted in the classroom or community that becomes the foundation for student observation and reflection (Dollarhide et al., 2007; Furr & Carroll, 2003; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Ricke, 2018). For example, as part of counseling theories course, students participated in didactic role plays where the session could be stopped by the counselor to invite feedback from the audience (Dollarhide et al., 2007). In a creative arts course, students experimented with different media to learn how to integrate the arts into their counseling practice (Ziff & Beamish, 2004). Field-based activities include cultural immersion as a concrete experience for students to increase their multicultural counseling competence (Shannonhouse et al., 2018). Likewise, directed contact with non-profit organizations outside of the classroom can increase program evaluation skills (Hausheer, 2019).

When developing concrete experiences for students, there are several important considerations. First, what courses would be best suited for inclusion of experiential activities? For

some school counselor educators, such activities may be most appropriate in classes utilizing extensive lecture. Including just one experiential activity may increase engagement with class content as ideas and concepts come to life. Others may decide courses with opportunities for community engagement as possibilities to accommodate experiential activities. For example, faculty can opt to design a parent or teacher consultation experience with a willing partner school(s). Finally, faculty in programs with adequate resources and willing instructors may decide to incorporate a concrete experience in every school counseling course. In this case, each learning opportunity could focus on a different skill based on professional standards.

Once the course(s) have been selected, accreditation and/or certification standards that emphasize skill development must be identified and aligned with the concrete experience. An initial exercise is to review relevant standards from all required accreditation/certification bodies for each school counseling course. Faculty can look for action-oriented language such as “demonstrate,” “model,” and “collaborate”. Then a decision can be made for which standard(s) will be most meaningfully addressed by a concrete experience. When writing student learning outcomes, concrete experiences should incorporate the most salient aspects of the appropriate standard(s) and emphasize what skills(s) the student should be able to demonstrate after completion of the activity. Creating a simple table detailing each standard, how relevant content is covered, and how skill competency is assessed by the concrete experience solidifies the connection between the experience and the standard.

Each concrete experience must be clearly detailed in the syllabus and discussed in class prior to implementation. Students should understand the purpose of the activity, specific skill(s) to be demonstrated, expectations for participation, and grading policies. Finally, end-of-course student evaluations of concrete activities will guide future revisions and improvements. If

university evaluations do not allow for assessment of specific experiences, faculty can consider developing a brief, supplemental evaluation which asks students to rate on a Likert-type scale the degree to which the concrete activity contributed to skill development and standard mastery.

Reflective Observation

Following the concrete experience, students should participate in informal or formal reflection opportunities defined by Harvey et al. (2016) as “a deliberate and conscientious process that employs a person’s cognitive, emotional and somatic capacities to mindfully contemplate on past, present or future (intended or planned) actions in order to learn, better understand and potentially improve future actions” (p. 9). To engage in deeper levels of critical thinking, students should develop the ability to reflect on their concrete experience from many perspectives (Kolb, 2015), arguably prior to fieldwork (Tobin et al., 2009). Furthermore, reflective observation is particularly important because research suggests some experiential learning activities, especially those that include service-learning, can cause students and faculty to elicit emotional responses in one another during the experience (Carson & Domangue, 2013). For example, students, seeing compassion modelled from their instructor, may also feel empathy towards a specific student group. Incorporating regular opportunities for reflection can help students manage strong emotions that may emerge during and after a concrete experience (Choi et al., 2018). It is important for faculty to cultivate a safe environment for reflection where students feel comfortable sharing, diverse viewpoints are encouraged, and confidentiality is respected (Tobin et al., 2009).

Strategies to promote reflection in the classroom have been explored in the literature and include written (Woodbridge & Rust O’Beirne, 2017) and video (Parikh et al., 2012) journaling, as well as class discussion (Goodman-Scott et al., 2019). In a study by Parikh et al. (2012), school counseling interns used video journaling as a method to record their experiences working with

economically disadvantaged students. Results indicated this technique was effective in reinforcing the value of self-reflective practice and increasing clear communication with their students. Similarly, in a course focused on effective service to students with diverse learning needs, school counseling students engaged in focused class discussion as a way to consider their skill development (Goodman-Scott et al., 2019). The reflection exercises required students to share a description of the activity, their feelings and thoughts pertaining to the experience, and how they would apply the knowledge and skills gained while working with students living with disabilities (Goodman-Scott et al.). During these reflective discussions, the Socratic method can be employed by the instructor to investigate student values related to their clinical decision-making process (Griffith & Frieden, 2000). Students can be asked to identify their values, explore how they impact clinical judgement, and evaluate alternative intervention options.

If the assignment includes a writing component, asking students to reflect on the experience, describe the relationship between the experience and other school counseling concepts, or detail a plan for application are effective self-report measures of skill development. In addition, each activity can be infused with key themes such as multicultural competence, ethics, research, and advocacy. For example, students can be asked to apply relevant research, modify interventions for students with diverse learning needs, identify ethical considerations, or develop an advocacy plan for stakeholders.

Abstract Conceptualization

As part of the reflection process, it is important that students think about how the experience is connected to concepts within the school counseling profession. Abstract conceptualization occurs through an experiential activity when existing knowledge is revised, tested, and/or changed to form new ideas or actions (Kolb, 2015). For example, students may begin

an experiential activity focusing on collaboration with families holding a particular set of beliefs that may be reinforced or discarded after the experience. Faculty can prime a conceptualization discussion or journaling activity by asking questions that evoke comparisons, constructive critiques, brainstorming ideas, or problem-solving skills. Prompts such as “connect this experience to two concepts you have learned about school counseling in this course,” “what would you have done differently and why?,” and “describe the steps you would take to solve this problem” promote new learning and help students to generalize the experiential activity to their roles as future school counselors.

Active Experimentation

Finally, students must apply learning from experiential activities to professional roles. Kolb (2015) emphasizes simply that simply contemplating an experience is not sufficient. Rather, the student must be provided ample time to hone the targeted skills. Due to time constraints and the large amounts of content to be covered, extensive practice may not be possible in all school counseling courses. However, skill application can be promoted through the development of an essential learning log that students complete during their fieldwork experience. Log activities connect the experiential activities learned in class with opportunities to practice during fieldwork. For example, if students participate in an experiential activity focused on career development in class, in fieldwork they can be required to develop a career plan with a high school student, create a classroom guidance unit on career exploration or participate in college and career programs. Likewise, after completion of an experiential activity involving advocacy, students can become involved in some form of student or professional advocacy at their fieldwork placement. Ideas include staff presentations, collaboration with educational partners, and meeting with administrators. To increase accountability, instructors can require students to obtain signatures

from site supervisors which then can be included in professional portfolios as evidence of skill competency for potential employers.

Experiential Learning Integration in School Counseling Coursework

The following examples of experiential learning activities apply each of Kolb's (1984) learning modes: concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE). Mention of learning modes in each of the featured activities will be noted by these abbreviations. All activities were created and facilitated by the author, a full-time school counselor educator and imbedded in the curriculum of a nationally accredited, state department of education approved, PK-12 school counseling program. This 60-credit program is one of two counseling tracks offered within a moderately sized counseling program located in a small, private university in the northeast. The school counseling degree requires successful completion of four school counseling specialization courses (12 credits) that emphasize the knowledge and skills needed to effectively fulfil the responsibilities of a professional school counselor. The first two courses include an intense focus on the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012, 2019a) and leadership of a comprehensive school counseling program. The other two courses are devoted to the school counselor role in supporting student social/emotional development and college and career readiness respectively. Each course includes a minimum of one field-based and one in-class experiential activity. All field-based activities include some form of interaction with local school districts totaling 15 hours across all four courses. Detailed assignment descriptions, standard alignment, and grading rubrics are included in the appropriate course syllabus. Prior to participation, content lectures, detailed explanation of expectations, feedback on assignments, and opportunities to ask questions are provided. After the experience, student-developed products such as handouts and lesson plans become part of an

electronic professional portfolio that serves as evidence of skill competency for potential employers.

School Board Advocacy Project

The purpose of this activity is to teach students skills for building effective, collaborative partnerships with administrators that are built on role clarification, data sharing, mutual respect, and open communication. Students must become competent in professional advocacy skills to educate administration, including school boards, on the appropriate role of school counselors. To accomplish this, students attend 1-hour of a school board meeting of their choice (CE). Public meeting information can be found on the school district website. After the meeting, students write a reflection paper which becomes part of a future class discussion on successful advocacy skills (RO). The following information is required: agenda highlights, description of attendees, atmosphere, meeting organization, group dynamics, feelings experienced during the observation, and a preparation plan for speaking at a school board meeting. The group discussion emphasizes making connections to concepts learned in class (e.g., advocacy skills), as well as implications for their roles as advocates (AC). Discussion questions include: “for what reasons might it be important to advocate at a school board meeting?” and “what steps would you need to take to be prepared to advocate at a school board meeting?”

Meeting attendance and the reflection paper become the foundation for the creation of a school board advocacy presentation. Students develop and present during class a timed 5-minute advocacy presentation and corresponding 1-page handout (AE). Students choose between two perspectives: (1) Why school counseling positions should not be eliminated from the school district budget or (2) Why school counseling positions should be added to the budget to reduce student-counselor ratios. Presentations must be supported by reliable and recent data as well as motivate

school board members toward action. Handouts must include all salient information shared in the presentation, be reader friendly to all stakeholders, and include APA style citations and references. To ensure the experience is as close to reality as possible, school counseling students not enrolled in the class are invited to portray various school board member roles. Audience volunteers are provided with predetermined scripts and asked to remain ‘in character’ throughout all presentations. They are expected to ask questions of and respectfully challenge all presenters. Examples of roles include school board chairperson, a board member who believes district monies should not be spent on counseling services, a parent whose child was supported by a school counselor, and a teacher who desires more programming from school counselors for their students at-risk for academic failure.

ASCA (2019b) professional competencies measured by the school board advocacy project include: “advocate responsibly for school board policy and local, state, and federal statutory requirements in students’ best interests” and “explain the benefits of a comprehensive school counseling program for all stakeholders, including students, families, teachers, administrators, and other school staff, school boards, department of education, school counselors, school counselor educators, community stakeholders, and business leaders”. Likewise, CACREP (2015) specialty area standards assessed by this activity include “competencies to advocate for school counseling roles” and “use of data to advocate for programs and students”.

Career Exploration Service-Learning Project

School counselors must be able to identify and eliminate gaps in educational opportunity, increase equity and access, and support students’ preparedness to choose from a variety of post-secondary options. To accomplish this, school counseling students participate in a project which includes the development and facilitation of a college and/or career readiness unit for middle

school students. First, a collaborative partnership with the principal of a local, independent, faith-based middle school with a nearly 100% racially and/or ethnically diverse student population was established. The school's mission is to provide a tuition free, academically rigorous education to children living in urban, low-income areas. The project was explained first via email, then an in-person meeting including the principal, school volunteer coordinator, and instructor was scheduled at the middle school. Agenda items included college and career readiness topics that would most benefit the middle school students, facilitation dates/times, available technology for lessons, and methods of communication to families. Parent permission forms explaining the project were created and translated into Spanish by the university's foreign language department. The instructor also attended an evening family question and answer session at the middle school. Finally, parental consent forms for all middle school students were collected by classroom teachers prior to the start of the project.

In preparation, school counseling students were required to produce copies of all required clearances. They participated in instruction on lesson plan creation, adolescent development, classroom management strategies, and relevant college and career readiness activities for racially and/or ethnically diverse middle school students. Additionally, students were assigned a cultural awareness paper based on one of the racial or ethnic groups represented at the middle school. The purpose of this component was to increase culturally sensitive intervention development and delivery. Paper requirements included a description of the student population, the impact of bias, stereotypes, oppression, and discrimination on the population, family culture and norms, specific cultural considerations for counseling, strategies for increasing equity and access to post-secondary options, and identification of appropriate counseling techniques. A cultural awareness roundtable, facilitated during class, allowed each student to present the unique needs of their

specific population to their peers. Students were encouraged to apply their research to stress the most important factor a school counselor must know to work effectively with this group. Finally, students participated in a 2-part class journaling activity where they wrote about their own perceptions and biases of their identified cultural group. Entries were discussed in class with a specific focus on what they learned about themselves and how their backgrounds, cultures, and values impacted their worldview.

After the extensive preparation, pairs of school counseling students developed 1 lesson to contribute to a 6-lesson career exploration classroom guidance unit. Topics were based on the following five career families: Arts and Communication, Business, Engineering, Human Services, and Science and Health (<https://www.onetonline.org/find/family>). Each lesson was required to contain all of the following components: title, learning goals, ASCA developmental domain, a standards crosswalk including ASCA and state department of education standards, materials needed, total time required, procedures (i.e., warm-up, introduction of topic, activity for teaching or modeling, activity for individual or group practice, and closure activity), evaluation of learning, modifications for diverse learners, and a consideration for delivering a culturally responsive lesson. Lessons included information about careers found in each family as well as a corresponding employability skill. For example, the Arts and Communication lesson explored careers in graphic design and public relations, and also reinforced the importance of effective communication and active listening skills within these jobs. School counseling students were encouraged to report on their lesson plan development progress during class for peer support and feedback. The instructor also offered revisions to all lessons and emailed the final versions to the middle school principal for approval. Lessons were uploaded to a shared Google drive which students could use as a resource for fieldwork.

Each weekly 45-minute lesson was facilitated by a pair of school counseling students and directly supervised by the instructor (CE). Schedules were coordinated so that the school counseling students and instructor met at the middle school and delivered the lessons during the first hour of class before returning to campus (a 20-minute drive from the middle school). Students who were not scheduled to facilitate observed and provided feedback to presenters. The instructor developed a classroom guidance delivery feedback form to measure student performance during lesson presentations. The skill-based evaluation included 13 items assessed by a 9-point Likert-type scale with possible scores ranging from 1-3 = Emerging (no or little demonstration of skills), 4-6 = Satisfactory (satisfactory to good demonstration of skills), or 7-9 Advanced (strong to excellent demonstration of skills). Sample items included: prepared for the lesson, evidence of classroom management strategies, clear and confident communication style, remained flexible to meet the needs of students, and appropriate professional and ethical behavior. At the conclusion of each lesson, a reflective discussion with the school counseling students was facilitated by the instructor (RO). Sample questions posed during this conversation include “what did you learn about classroom guidance lesson delivery?”, “what was the impact of culture on the lesson?”, and “did adolescent development play a role in the lesson? If so, explain how”. The students also participated in a second class journaling activity where they revisited their perceptions and biases of their selected cultural group (AC). For this post experience assessment, the emphasis was on (1) what they had learned about their cultural group, (2) what had changed based on their experience, and (3) how they would apply what they learned to their work as future school counselors. During internship, students are required to have direct involvement with facilitating both an individual and classroom college and career readiness activity at the elementary and

secondary levels (AE). Activities are documented via an essential learning log which site supervisors sign to verify completion.

ASCA (2019b) standards measured by the career exploration service-learning project include: “demonstrate pedagogical skills, including culturally responsive classroom management strategies, lesson planning, and personalized instruction” and “include career opportunities, labor market trends, and global economics to help students develop immediate and long-range plans”. CACREP (2015) specialty area standards assessed by this activity include “interventions to promote college and career readiness” and “core curriculum design, lesson plan development, classroom management strategies, and differentiated instructional strategies”.

Parents of Students with Special Needs Panel

For this in class activity, parents raising students with special needs were invited to be part of an interactive panel. The purpose of this experience was for families to showcase the realities of navigating the educational system to support the academic success of their students as well as how school counselors can play a positive role in this process. Parent(s)/Guardians(s) were identified through personal contacts and local social media support sites and invited via email by the instructor. To inform student interaction with the panelists, class lectures included information on the school counselor’s role in the special education process, implementation of a comprehensive program which serves all students, advocacy skills, and modification of interventions to address diverse learning needs. Students were required to develop three questions for the panelists based on information presented during lectures. The panel took place during class and was moderated by the instructor (CE). Each parent shared their child’s educational story, emphasizing what educators, including school counselors, did to support their child as well as the challenges they faced with regards to equity and access. Parents detailed what school counselors needed to know

about working with children with special needs, including advocacy efforts. Examples included providing explanations when needed at school meetings, following up to ensure interventions were being implemented with fidelity, and providing encouragement during difficult times. Past panelists have included parents with children living with severe food allergies, Down's Syndrome, and Autism Spectrum Disorder. A class discussion took place immediately following the panel to highlight students' perceptions, reactions, and emotions (RO). Students were asked to provide written responses to the following prompts: (1) most salient ideas or concepts learned, (2) personal biases and stereotypes confronted, (3) theories and techniques best suited to address the needs of this population, and (4) specific application of learning to their work as future leaders and advocates (AC). Opportunities for in-class practice include (1) dyadic role plays in which one student embodies common concerns experienced by parents while the other conveys the empathy and understanding of a compassionate and informed school counselor and (2) a mock multidisciplinary meeting in which each student plays the role of an educational partner, including parents and the school counselor (AE). Additionally, during internship, students are required to devote a minimum of twenty hours to working with students with special needs at both the elementary and secondary levels (AE). Evidence of compliance is recorded in an essential learning log which site supervisors verify with written signature.

An example of an ASCA (2019b) standard measured by the parents' panel includes: "gather information on student needs from families, teachers, administrators, other school staff and community organizations to inform the selection of strategies for student success". CACREP (2015) specialty area standards assessed by the panel include "school counselor roles in consultation with families, P-12, and postsecondary school personnel, and community agencies".

Implications and Future Research

To meet the needs of all students, future school counselors must graduate possessing the skills to perform and advocate for their many roles (Havlik et al., 2019). This lofty objective is nearly impossible to accomplish solely through traditional lecture methods (Granello, 2000; Griffith & Frieden, 2000). During training, school counselor educators must not only provide opportunities to practice real world skills but also simultaneously satisfy several sets of accreditation and/or certification requirements. Experiential activities give students direct contact with real issues and people, allowing them the freedom to practice problem solving skills in a safe environment which encourages tolerance of ambiguity (Eyler, 2009). Applying experiential learning activities to pre-fieldwork school counseling specialization courses is one instructional strategy that provides both structured opportunities for practical application and skills-based standard compliance. Experiential learning activities can be easily adapted to meet program needs because the instructional possibilities are endless.

For faculty interested in experimenting with this pedagogy, performing a course audit may be a reasonable starting point for discovering where experiential activities will make the most meaningful impact on student learning. It is wise to consider the length of time the students will spend participating in experiential activities as well as how many are appropriate for inclusion per course. Research suggests the depth of an experiential learning experience is associated with higher order thinking skills while number of experiences is correlated with increased ability to work collaboratively with others (Coker et al., 2017). Once an experiential activity has been added to the syllabus, students must also be presented with theory and relevant content so that they are able to make the most of the experience (Dollarhide et al., 2007). Faculty must ensure that before students participate in an experimental activity, they understand essential concepts undergirding

the experience. Ideally, students should begin the experience with a full understanding of what the learning outcomes are. This can include a review of the activity expectations, specific skills to be learned, and grading rubrics. It is also imperative that experiential activities be implemented responsibly and with full adherence to ethical standards. For community-based activities, students must be respectful of the culture and policies. They should seek to cultivate an openness to the experience, viewing challenges as learning opportunities rather than situations for judgment or criticism. They must understand their responsibilities with regards to confidentiality and responding to crisis situations. For example, students should comprehend what to do if abuse or harm to self or others is expressed by any member of the participating community. Regular, preferably direct, faculty supervision is imperative with established plans in place for emergencies. For class-based activities, boundaries should be established via the syllabus to limit inappropriate self-disclosure and maintain the faculty-student relationship (Ziff & Beamish, 2004). Students should be reminded that experiential activities are for training purposes only and not intended to be used to address personal therapeutic needs. If it becomes clear a student could benefit from mental health care, referrals can be provided for counseling.

For faculty who have already integrated experiential learning activities into their courses, a critical review of student feedback or a re-evaluation of standard alignment might be a logical next step. It is important that at the beginning of each semester, activities are reviewed to ensure they still capture the skill-based learning objectives associated with the standards they are aligned with. Likewise, student feedback can be reviewed for trends. For example, if the evaluations indicate students need more time for practice, class time can be adapted to accommodate role plays or demonstrations.

Finally, faculty with expertise in this area might consider revising existing activities to reflect the most recent professional trends or seeking new ideas from colleagues or current literature. For example, transitioning activities to meet the expectations of the newest version of the ASCA National Model for School Counseling Program (ASCA, 2019a) helps students stay at the forefront of their professional skills. Similarly, cultivating a network of colleagues who are vested in experiential learning, attending professional development opportunities, and joining relevant social media networks are all ways to keep current with trends in experiential learning.

Although experiential learning is empirically supported as an effective pedagogical tool, it is associated with implementation challenges (Bergsteiner et al., 2010). A primary argument is that experiential learning is more concerned with techniques and process to the exclusion of theory and content (Kolb, 1984). Likewise, faculty may view such activities as too time intensive, especially in courses with higher enrollment (Wurdigner & Allison, 2017). Furthermore, students may perceive faculty involvement in experiential activities such as role plays and group facilitation as problematic with regards to dual relationships and privacy concerns (Anderson & Price, 2001). Finally, students' perceptions of the experience can be subjective and influenced by bias, making it difficult to see opposing perspectives the experience provides (Kolb, 2015). Thus, activities may initially cause a "roller coaster" of emotions which based on the students' past histories, can include stress, anger, and bitterness toward the experience. Given these cautions, it is important that faculty are aware of both the benefits and challenges when deciding to incorporate experiential activities into their courses. Ample time must be devoted to student understanding of the experience, reflection opportunities, and connection of skills learned to future roles.

To firmly establish experiential learning as effective for school counselor preparation a stronger empirical foundation is required. Student feedback pertaining to the activities presented

in this manuscript reveal a positive trend towards a more complete understanding of course objectives, more confidence in performing school counseling related tasks, and an overall increase in enjoyment of learning. However, more research is needed to determine the true impact on skill development. Future studies could establish the extent to which experiential learning activities are currently being implemented and evaluated in school counselor preparation programs. Additional inquiries could determine whether or not a relationship exists between students who are exposed to experiential learning activities during training and increased competence once on the job. Finally, research targeting employers could explore whether or not they are more likely to hire candidates who demonstrate more experience with essential professional skills. Regardless of how the future scholarly agenda associated with experiential learning unfolds, this type of instructional approach holds exciting possibilities for better preparing school counselors to confidently fulfil their many professional responsibilities.

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