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Theory to Practice: Integrating Service-Learning into a Pre-Practicum Introduction to School Counseling Course

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Theory to Practice: Integrating Service-Learning into a Pre-Practicum Introduction to School Counseling Course

Abstract

Service learning is a method of instruction that integrates volunteerism, as well as reflection, in the classroom. The purpose of this article is, therefore, to describe the implementation and design of a pre-practicum service learning experience into an Introduction to School Counseling course. The authors describe the empirically grounded design of the service learning experience, as well as the course goals, how it was integrated into the class, and a summary of student experiences.

Author's Notes

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Keywords

Service learning, school counseling, experiential learning

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2016 standards assert that professional practice during counseling training programs allows for students to apply the theory learned in the classroom and to develop counseling skills while under supervision (CACREP, 2015). These clinical practices are considered the pinnacle experiences of counseling programs. The experiential learning that occurs outside of the classroom, such as in internship or practicum experience, may be more influential for students than their classroom learning experiences (Furr & Carroll, 2003). This may be particularly true for graduate students who have limited work experience (Lu & Lambright, 2010). Therefore, designing clinical experiences that expose students to schools and communities prior to entering practicum or internship may help students in school counseling programs ease into practicum and start to apply their theories and skills from the onset of their programs (Arman & Scherer, 2002). To this end, service-learning is a pedagogical approach that exposes students to diverse environments and experiences to gain a deeper understanding about the populations they intend to serve (Simons & Cleary, 2006).

Although the benefits of service-learning have been supported in studies (Simons & Cleary, 2006; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002), the description of how service-learning can be implemented specifically in school counseling programs is limited (Arman & Scherer, 2002; Ockerman & Mason, 2012; Wilczenski & Schumacher, 2008). More specifically, although there is ample literature available on practicum and internship experiences, few articles focus on pre-practicum experiences (Alvarado & Gonzalez, 2012). This is particularly true for school counseling. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to describe the empirically based design and implementation of a pre-practicum service-learning experience in an Introduction to School Counseling course. Along with presenting the design and logistics of

the program, this paper addresses the following research question: *What are the experiences of pre-service school counselors engaging in pre-practicum service-learning?*

Service-Learning

Service-learning, a holistic activity that elicits both academic and individual growth, has increased in popularity within the context of higher education in the last several years (McClam, Diambra, Burton, Fuss, & Fudge, 2008). This instructional method, first proposed by educators John Dewey and William Kirkpatrick in the early 1900s, integrates students' learning experiences through community service into a more structured learning environment (Barbee, Scherer, & Combs, 2003). The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2015) defines service learning as: "...a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instructions and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities."

Additionally, the *National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993* described service-learning as an opportunity for students to develop and learn through their participation in an organized form of service. Specifically, this act identified four characteristics of this learning method: (1) learning/development through a student's active participation; (2) integration into formal academic curriculum (i.e., structured time for reflection on experiences); (3) opportunity for students to apply their acquired/developing skills through real-life experiences; and (4) extending students' opportunity to learn outside of the classroom context (Cashel, Goodman, & Swanson, 2003). Across these definitions, it is worth noting the consistent mention of students' reflection on their experience, a process meant to facilitate a student's growth from their experience (McClam, et al., 2008; Molee, Henry, Sessa, & McKinney-Prupis, 2010). The effectiveness of student reflection in facilitating growth through their experience has been

documented in past studies (Long, Larsen, Hussey, & Travis, 2001; Valerius & Hamilton, 2001). Meta-analyses of studies have demonstrated service-learning as an effective pedagogical practice within higher education academic programs, as evidenced by several improved learning outcomes that include students demonstrating a more positive understanding of social issues, an increased development of personal insight, gains in cognitive development, and increased social responsibility (Warren, 2012; Yorio & Fe, 2012). Further, engaging in service-learning may also positively influence students' leadership development and interest in social justice (Barnes, 2016).

Service-Learning and Counselor Education

As an introductory experience, integrating pre-practicum service-learning experiences into counselor education programs can benefit counseling students. It can help students better understand the concepts discussed in class through direct exposure to issues and strengths in the community (Burnett, Long, & Horn, 2005). Integrating service-learning programs into curricula can also be beneficial for communities (Geller, Zuckerman, & Seidel, 2016). In counseling programs, such assignments can expose students to diverse environments and provide them with structured experiences for multicultural growth and development (Baggerly, 2006), and may also help to promote counselor competencies in advocating for clients against societal and systemic barriers (Murray, Pope & Powell, 2010).

As students progress through counseling programs they are required to engage in experiential learning activities, typically comprised of the practicum and internship experiences. These types of experiential learning activities provide students with the opportunity to apply what they have learned during their courses, receive supervision and feedback regarding their overall counseling experiences, and reflect on the interactions they have with their clients. Pre-

practicum, however, can offer an academically oriented service-learning opportunity for students prior to beginning their work in practicum and internship (Burnett, et al., 2005; Woodside, Oberman, Cole, & Carruth, 2007). For example, a course integrating a service-learning experience may require students to maintain logs of their hours and on-site activities site, keep a reflective journal, and complete a paper reacting to their service-learning experience overall (Burnett et al., 2005; Hansen, 2012).

Service-learning that is incorporated into counselor preparation is most often conducted prior to students' completion of their practicum experience (Jett, Edward, & Delgado-Romero, 2009). Pre-practicum experiences that offer introductory learning opportunities are different from later experiences counseling students will complete, based on factors such as range of responsibilities or successful demonstration of skills. These later experiences, like practicum and internship, often act as the capstone that prepares them for their approaching professional career. Pre-practicum service-learning, conversely, allows for students to have a first glimpse of the counseling field and related activities (Barbee, Scherer & Combs, 2003). The experience can help students increase their work readiness with future clients by improving their comfort in applying counseling skills learned in class (Arnold & McMurtery, 2011; Mattox & Hurt, 1992), or by increasing students' level of awareness of issues and needs in the cultural contexts and communities where they are working (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004).

Integrating service-learning into classes seems to enhance student learning and provide a strong connection to course content. In one study, counseling students developed a workshop for families as a pre-practicum service-learning project. The students ($N = 16$) reported the project enhanced class cohesion, helped develop their counseling skills, and provided insight into the counseling profession (Alvarado & Gonzalez, 2012). Burnett et al. (2004) also found students

($N = 11$) in a counseling program who engaged in the service-learning experience reported it increased their knowledge of multiculturalism. Moreover, in a study that examined the impact of experiential learning on counseling students ($N = 84$), students experienced personal growth through serving outside of the classroom versus traditional types of classroom education (Furr & Carroll, 2003).

Service-learning experiences can vary across programs. Examples include having students facilitate psychoeducational groups discussing diversity issues within a high school setting (Nikels, Mims, & Mims, 2007), having counseling students observe and/or run group play therapy at a community center (Baggerly, 2006), or having counseling students organize and coordinate a scavenger hunt designed specifically for children who have physical disabilities (Murray, Lampinen, & Kelley-Soderholm, 2006). These types of learning experiences can add a dimension to classroom learning and provide counseling students with opportunities to engage more deeply in the course content.

Service-Learning and School Counselor Training

Service-learning appears to be particularly well-suited for students in school counseling programs. For students who have limited experience in schools, service-learning experiences provide them with deeper insight into the communities where families live prior to beginning a practicum placement. Pre-practicum service-learning can reduce students' anxiety and increase their self-efficacy in counseling (Barbee, Scherer, & Combs, 2003). Since service-learning also provides school counseling students with opportunities for theory integration, students who engage in pre-practicum experiences may be better equipped to enter practicum settings the following semester (Arman & Scherer, 2002; Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Ockerman & Mason, 2012).

Further, service-learning experiences can help school counseling students to develop a social justice orientation and develop advocacy skills (Ockerman & Mason, 2012; Wilczenski & Schumacher, 2008). For example, students can see phenomena firsthand, like achievement gaps between students in school settings (Wilczenski & Schumacher, 2008). Pre-practicum service experiences can also expose students to settings where they may not have the opportunity to work and expose them to school settings early in their program to help affirm where they prefer to work after they graduate (Dockery, 2010).

The limited, existing literature available on the integration of pre-practicum service-learning programs into school counseling demonstrates varying methods of delivery. For example, Arman and Scherer (2002) described a program in which school counseling students identified a public school where they served for approximately 35 hours across the course of a semester. During that time, they provided individual and small group counseling, classroom guidance, and psycho-educational meetings. The purpose of this program was for students to affirm their career path and help them connect theory to practice.

In another study school counseling and clinical mental health students served weekly at one of four community agencies: a community center, a counseling center, a nursing home, or a local housing authority. The agencies and experiences were all selected to provide students with a cultural experience different from their own (Burnett et al., 2004). Ockerman and Mason (2012) described how school counseling students engaged in pre-practicum service-learning from a social justice framework to better understand school and community needs and design interventions based on those identified needs. In this program, students visited a school and designed an intervention with an integrated evaluation system. They also visited a community agency within their assigned school district and developed a newsletter for parents. Finally,

Wilczenski and Schumacher (2008) reported how pre-practicum school counseling students implemented a college persistence program designed for undergraduate students from an urban area located near their university. These examples demonstrate the wide range of possibilities for implementing pre-practicum service-learning experiences designed to fit school counseling program learning goals.

School Counselor Pre-Practicum Service-Learning: An Introductory Model

The dearth of literature that addresses how pre-practicum service-learning can be integrated into school counseling programs indicates the need for a deeper understanding of the different types of models utilized in the field. In response, the following sections provide insight into the methods and design of pre-practicum service-learning by explicating how service-learning can be effectively integrated into an Introduction to School Counseling course. Below is a description of one pre-practicum field-based learning experience.

Description of the Class

The Introduction to School Counseling Course was an overview of professional school counseling, designed to meet the CACREP 2009 standards. The course was taught from a systems perspective, giving particular attention to issues of social justice in schools and how the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model is used to deliver counseling services. The course specifically focused on preparing school counselors to address contemporary issues in K-12th grade education. This included a history of the school counseling profession and providing students knowledge and skills necessary to address the developmental needs of students. Themes of advocacy and leadership in school counseling were woven throughout the curriculum.

The Service-Learning Assignment

The service-learning assignment required students to be at a site for approximately 30 hours during the semester and were encouraged to serve for three hours per week over 10 weeks. Participation in the service assignment was worth approximately 20% of their grade. Five class sessions were specifically devoted to discussing the service experience. However, the instructor opened every class asking if there were any discussion points related to the service-learning experience and intentionally connected students' experiences to topics in class during the semester.

Objectives of the service experience. The university where the counseling program was housed encouraged service among the student body and considered it part of their mission. With this in mind, the instructor designed the experience to concurrently align with the university mission and with specific course goals and desired learning outcomes. The specific student learning objectives for the service experience: (a) practicing beginning level counseling skills; (b) working one-on-one with clients; (c) gaining knowledge of available community resources; (d) identifying barriers to access and equity for community members; (e) developing self-awareness and sensitivity to others while working with diverse populations; (f) identifying how policies, programs, and practices can impede client wellness and development; (g) working in a community agency to build connections to their school counseling-related experiences.

Methods

This study, which was approved by the authors' university Institutional Review Board, investigated the experience of school counseling graduate students engaged in service-learning prior to entering practicum. The experience was designed to engage students in a deeper level of reflection that may not have occurred in a traditional class experience. In order to learn more

about the experience of service-learning, the authors of this study sought to answer the following research question: *What are the experiences of pre-service school counselors engaging in pre-practicum service-learning?* In order to gain insight to answer this question, the researchers collected various forms of data, as well as engaged in personal reflection on the assignment.

Course Instructor and Researchers

The course instructor was an assistant professor in a graduate program for school and mental health counseling. She began integrating service-learning in her teaching during her first year working as an instructor at the institution. The instructor/researcher previously worked as a school counselor that served students from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Prior to integrating service into her courses, she had taught several different school counseling courses and supervised a number of students during their practicum and internship experiences. The second author was an assistant professor of special education and also integrated service-learning into her courses.

Participants

Participants in the pre-practicum service-learning experience were six ($n = 6$) first-year school counseling Master's level students. All participants were female, between the ages of 20-23, and enrolled full-time in the program during their first semester. This group of students was selected to participate in this research, as a convenience sample, because there was only one section of the Introduction to School Counseling course offered. In order to participate, the students reviewed and signed consent forms.

Service Sites

Four participants (Participants 2, 3, 5, 6) worked at Empower, a community-based, non-profit agency that served clients currently or previously considered homeless or in poverty. The site was located in an urban community approximately 20 minutes from the university. The students provided direct services via working one-on-one with clients who came seeking job or housing support. The students' responsibilities included assisting with job applications, resume creation, helping to identify affordable housing or other support as necessary. This site was intentionally selected over a school site because it presented an opportunity for a more comprehensive understanding of K-12 students they might serve and the communities where they live. The additional two participants served at alternate sites because of scheduling and transportation challenges. Participant 4 served at a shelter for women and children (i.e., Family Supportive Housing), where she helped coordinate programs and field phone calls from families who lost housing. Participant 1 served at a middle school (i.e., Starter Middle School) where she primarily assisted middle school students with high school applications.

Data Collection

In order to gain insight on students' experiences of engaging in service-learning and to encourage student reflection, the course instructor integrated several procedures for assessment and analysis of learning. Reflective practices were integrated throughout the semester so students could analyze their experiences and develop reflection habits (Dubinsky, 2006). All students: (a) submitted weekly activity records; (b) wrote monthly reflective journals; (c) engaged in partner and group reflection during class time; and, (d) filled out post-course surveys on two separate intervals (i.e., immediately after the experience and one semester prior to

graduation). The following section provides a description of data sources and collection methods.

Weekly activity records. Students were required to submit a weekly record of hours they served at the site, including a brief description of the activities in which they engaged. The log was signed each week by the site supervisor. The purpose of the logs was to encourage student accountability and provide a comprehensive account for of their activities.

Reflective journals. Students were also required to submit reflective journals on a monthly basis. The purpose of the journals was to bridge experiences at the site to the content in the course (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999). In order to help students develop their reflective writing, the course instructor taught how to reflect internally about the experience and not simply provide narrative on-site activity accounts. The reflective journal was structured to allow students to engage in free reflection, in which they could share various thoughts and feelings (Sturgil & Motley, 2014).

In-class reflection. The instructor facilitated guided reflection throughout the semester to encourage students to connect the content and course goals they were learning to the service-learning experience (Sturgill & Motley, 2014). She designed the course to allow for class time to process experiences at service sites. This reflection time provided students and the instructor to engage in large and small group work to enhance their connection to the content and to other students in their class (Deeley, 2010). Throughout the course, the class instructor integrated process questions that tied the course material back to students' service at their sites.

Post-experience surveys. Students were given post-surveys immediately following completion of the service-learning requirement. They also completed a second post-survey during their last semester in the counseling program to assess any lasting impact of the service

experience. The purpose of both surveys was to gain insight on the service activity, assess the impact on students, and find out how it could be improved. The post-surveys encouraged structured reflection and included questions such as: (a) In what ways do you feel the experience as your service site prepared you to enter your practicum? (b) How could this experience be improved? (c) In what ways do you feel you have changed as a result of this service experience? (d) What were some challenges you faced in this experience? (e) Looking back on the experience, what do you feel was most valuable?

Data Explication

In order to answer the research question for this study, the researchers primarily focused on critically analyzing the students' reflective journals and post-surveys using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis. This inductive approach was selected in order to allow for flexibility in the data analysis, as well as to organize the data to identify patterns and common themes across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process started with initial coding whereby the authors initially reviewed participants' journals and surveys to become familiar with the data. This led them to generate initial codes across the data. Next, the authors searched for themes within the documents, based on the initial coding. After uncovering several themes that emerged across the data, they reviewed themes and defined and named them. Lastly, after making adjustments to the themes, they produced a report that included participant quotes supporting each of the themes. As a result of this process, four shared themes emerged across all six participants describing their service-learning experiences: a) basic counseling skills practice; b) preparation for practicum; c) witnessing social injustices; and d) increased knowledge of community resources.

Trustworthiness

The researchers took several steps to establish trustworthiness in the findings. First, an audit trail was kept to evaluate the accuracy of the emerging themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through the audit trail, researchers were able to track the course of development of the data collection and analysis. Researchers also triangulated the data by using several data sources (Creswell, 2007). Further, the course instructor (i.e., first author) engaged in journaling throughout the semester and reflected on in-class student discussions of service experiences to further corroborate findings (Creswell, 2007). The researchers also used peer review by asking a graduate level student to review the transcripts and themes and provide feedback. Lastly, in order to establish credibility, the first author (i.e., course instructor), was involved in prolonged engagement throughout the semester with the participants and in the field (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Below is a description of the four themes that emerged from the data explication. These themes are supported by selected quotes from the participants and were present across the participants' experiences.

Basic Counseling Skills Practice

Aligned with the course objectives, the service experience allowed students a space to begin to practice their counseling skills. Across the sites, all of the students specifically talked about the value of the opportunities they had at their service sites to apply the skills they were learning in the classroom. For instance, Participant 5 reflected in a journal:

I think [Empower] allowed us as counseling students to apply some of the skills we learn in class to real life. Even though we are not counseling clients we still use skills such as

active listening, reflecting feelings, asking open-ended questions, and establishing rapport.

Another participant highlighted her skill development by saying, “I grew as a counselor because it was my first 1 v 1 setting. I got valuable time collaborating with clients on an equal goal” (Participant 6). Participant 1, who served in a school setting, stated in a post-survey, “It helped me learn the different ways to communicate with the young adults I would be working with and how to engage them.” Across these experiences and regardless of the site, all of the students discussed how their work with clients was enhanced because they were able to apply their counseling skills and build stronger connections to their clients.

Preparation for Practicum

All six of participants offered that the pre-practicum experience helped them feel better prepared to enter their practicum settings. Participant 2 stated that service “helped me by giving an experience early on and giving confidence.” In this sense, the students felt more prepared since they had this experience in the beginning of their program. Participant 6 (post-survey) reflected that working at the provided site gave her a deeper understanding of her students when she entered practicum: “It helped me in my practicum site because my site was in a similar neighborhood. It gave me an adult perspective to family issues in everyday life.” This was true for the student in a school setting who stated, “I find myself constantly thinking of different things that I might be able to do as a practicum student that might make even the littlest difference in the school life of these students” (Participant 1).

Witnessing Social Injustice

Across all of the sites, students' awareness of social injustices may be one of the hallmarks of the experience. Students were exposed to institutions with limited funding and environments where individuals were experiencing poverty or homelessness, providing them an opportunity to engage with these issues firsthand. Participant 2 shared in a post-survey that the experience helped her to "open my eyes to what other people's lives were like here. [It was an] All around eye opening experience. Changed my perspective on poverty/welfare/opportunities available." These experiences increased students' awareness of realities faced by many adults and helped them learn how they could provide support. For example, Participant 3 offered, "I feel I am much more aware of the challenges faced by those experiencing poverty, homelessness, and unemployment and how to offer support and resources. Participant 6 stated the "most valuable aspect of my experience was hearing personal stories and struggles of those in temporary or chronic poverty, and then learning how I can help." She went on to share that through the service experience, "I have become more comfortable in speaking about personal topics, such as finances, lack of housing, and other necessary needs that are often unavailable to those in poverty."

At the Family Supportive Housing site, Participant 4 reflected in her journal she had similar experiences to her peers, "I have also gained an appreciation for the struggles that individuals face and the barriers that exist in helping him or her find appropriate resources." Through the combination of being exposed to individuals facing economic distress and discussion and reflection in the classroom, students increased their awareness on issues of social justice.

Increased Knowledge of Community Resources

Students gained a deeper understanding of the types of services and resources that are available in the community. All six students discussed how the experience showed the importance of knowing these resources. At Empower, students learned skills to identify and reach out to community resources. For instance, Participant 3 shared that, “the site gave me a chance to utilize some basic counseling skills as well as learn about resources such as public benefits and community agencies.” Participant 5 echoed this sentiment by sharing she, “learned about community resources related to food, housing, and employment.” Participant 6 elaborated on the importance of helping clients make connections for resources. “It showed me how important the referral process is.” In settings where resources were limited but critical, students were able to reflect on difficulties they had in locating resources, but also valued successes when they found helpful referrals.

Critical Incidents in the Service Experience

There were critical incidents, or influential experiences, across all of the students’ experiences that provided opportunities to engage in deeper reflection (Griffin, 2003). Two examples of critical incidents occurred for students at Empower, as reflected in their journals.

Participant 3 wrote about a client who experienced setbacks in obtaining employment and becoming financially independent. The student wrote: “Though she has had many setbacks along the process of gaining employment and becoming financially independent, she is probably the most positive person I have met.” Due to the client’s living situation, she could not provide proof of an address, which made it nearly impossible to get a job. The student further wrote, though these challenges have prevented her from at least one opportunity for employment, she spends the entire appointment making sure she is doing all she can and

even finds the time to brighten my day and continues to make appointments with me. Although many of her clients were frustrated with barriers they faced, the positivity of this particular client provided the student with a level of optimism that helped her move forward with other clients.

Participant 2 shared an experience that made her recognize the barriers adults face in getting jobs:

I had a client who was incarcerated and needed help finding employment despite his criminal record...When the incarcerated man came, he told me how he was in need of employment but could not get hired. He explained how he had a felony for drug distribution charges and had spent a few years in prison. He vented about how he wanted to 'get right with the law' and get a job.

The student went on to describe how she gave the client suggestions, which frustrated him. She reflected that she was able to see the systemic injustices firsthand for those who been previously incarcerated but were trying to amend for past challenges.

Discussion

The results of this study describe a pre-practicum service-learning assignment integrated into an introductory school counseling course. Data were collected on students' experiences engaging in the assignment in order to answer the question: *What are the experiences of pre-service school counselors engaging in pre-practicum service-learning?* The experience was designed through utilizing current literature on counseling and service-learning as an empirically based approach to help students connect their coursework to real world settings (Arman & Scherer, 2002; Baggerly, 2006; Barbee, Scherer & Combs, 2003; Burnett et al., 2005; Jett et al., 2009; Ockerman & Mason, 2012)..

Through the service experience, students reported they practiced their basic counseling skills and felt more prepared to enter the field. This finding is supported in other research on service-learning (Alvarado & Gonzalez, 2012; Burnett et al., 2005). In the present example, even though the service experience at Empower was not held in a formal counseling setting, students reported using their counseling skills to work with clients, establish relationships, and enhance their work. Additionally, through this experience they felt more comfortable applying counseling skills during practicum the following semester.

Student reflections suggest that community settings are appropriate for pre-practicum experiences in school counseling. Although unanimously valuable, particularly in exposing them to issues of social justice (Barnes, 2016), students' overwhelming feedback was a preference to work with children. Arman and Scherer's (2002) findings support this reflection; in their research, they found pre-practicum service-learning provided an opportunity for students to become more aware of the school counselor's role. Therefore, by engaging in a setting outside of the school, students may have missed this opportunity. One example of how services can be provided in community settings, while helping orient participants to the nuances of school counseling, may be through facilitating psycho-educational groups or parental workshops for children in shelter or other community settings (Baggerly, 2006).

Dixon, Tucker, and Clark (2010) recommended pre-service school counselors introduced to social justice issues have opportunities to integrate related discussions into the curriculum. The authors suggested this will help them become change agents and advocates for the families they serve. As reflected in this study and in Hopsapple (2012), service-learning experiences can yield diversity growth outcomes for students. This pre-practicum service experience offered students an important and educational perspective on diverse communities. Based on student

reflections, pre-practicum service-learning experiences provided opportunities for students to identify barriers to social justice while having supportive supervision. Providing students with such experiences early in a program allows them more time to develop critical thinking skills and multicultural awareness in a supportive space.

Limitations

There were several limitations with this study, two of which are methodological. First, the sample was a small convenience sample comprised of solely female students. The authors acknowledge results from this study are not generalizable to school counseling students, nor are they intended to be. The second limitation is related to confirmability of the findings. Although the authors used different trustworthiness strategies, these methods did not include member checking. While member checking may have enhanced the findings' confirmability, it may have led students to simply agree with their course instructor that the findings were accurate in order to please her. A final limitation was related to site placement. The authors acknowledge that placing students in an educational setting may have been more directly related to their school counseling training.

Recommendations for School Counselor Preparation and Research

From the experience of designing, implementing, and facilitating this assignment, several recommendations for integrating pre-practicum service-learning experiences into introductory school counseling courses emerge. First, school counselor educators must consider how to effectively develop partnerships with potential sites for pre-practicum experiences. These partnerships must be mutually beneficial, which requires school counseling faculty to help determine potential partners' needs and discuss how they can collaborate toward shared goals (Dockery, 2010). In building such partnerships, it is also important to ensure that site

supervisors have clear expectations of their supervisory roles and students' assignments (Arman & Scherer, 2002). Supervisors should be encouraged to allow students to provide direct services to clients, but also be cognizant of students' developing skills.

A second recommendation for school counselor educators is to be transparent about the logistics of the pre-practicum service learning experience. This includes informing students of issues of necessary clearances (e.g., fingerprinting, background checks.) to avoid placement delays. Related is the need for faculty to be prepared with alternatives for students who have demands that limit their availability during the day (e.g., spouses, families, full-time work). A third recommendation is related to facilitating reflection. School counseling faculty need to be flexible regarding how they will engage their students in the reflection process. Engaging students in reflection is an important requirement across clinical settings, in order to help counselors gain self-awareness in their practices (Akos & Scarborough, 2004). For this study, students engaged in three different modes of reflection (i.e., journals, in-class, structured surveys) providing them with ample opportunities. This helped assess what students were learning and assisted the students in processing the meanings of what they were doing. However, students may need a more structured journal in which they are provided with prompts to reflect as suggested by Sturgil and Motley (2014).

Lacking from this description of a pre-practicum service-learning experience is feedback from the site supervisors. Gathering insight from site supervisors is a critical piece of developing and implementing service-learning programs (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000). Therefore, future research on school counseling and service-learning should include perspectives of site supervisors and clients/students served would provide a more comprehensive description of the experience of service-learning. Second, additional research should engage a more diverse and

representative sample. Participants in this study were relatively young with limited work experience. Research indicates younger students may benefit more from service experiences (Lu & Lambright, 2010); future research can investigate the benefits of service-learning for older students who have prior work experience. Finally, more research should investigate the various designs of service-learning programs in school counseling programs to help determine whether certain models are more effective for learning.

Based on participant reflection about this pre-practicum service learning experience, an introductory school counseling course may be an appropriate place to include a pre-practicum service experience. These types of experiential learning opportunities are important for counselors to develop their critical thinking skills and to be able to apply the theories and skills learned in the classroom to practice. This study provides a rationale for further inquiry about this important topic for pre-service school counselors.

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