

# Collaboration and Teaming Across Disciplines in the University Setting for School Counselors-in-Training

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## Abstract

This article describes an exploratory model for school counselors-in-training to acquire multicultural awareness and skills by working with English Second Language (ESL) students. Thoughts from the school counselors-in-training, ESL teachers, a foreign language educator, and a counselor educator are summarized.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) “endorses a comprehensive, developmental school counseling program as articulated in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005), so that school counselors can assist *all* students and negotiate the demands of the 21st century” (Studer & Oberman, 2006, p. 82). It is critical for school counselors-in-training to be familiar with the components of the ASCA National Model. *Early* direct school-based experiences using fundamental school counseling skills may be beneficial in facilitating this learning process. While much has been written about school counseling components and how to implement them (ASCA National Model; Baker, 2000; Cobia & Henderson, 2007; Davis, 2005; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Sink, 2005; Stone & Dahir, 2006, 2007), there has been a dearth of literature on the degree to which the translation of the ASCA National Model’s core components to actual practice fosters initial multicultural competency.

This article describes an exploratory school counseling model that led school counselors-in-training to acquire new skill and experience by working with several components of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005). The degree to which this knowledge fostered multicultural awareness and skill among beginning school

counselors-in-training is also discussed. Finally, we summarize the voices of: (1) the counselors-in-training and ESL teachers who utilized the exploratory learning model, and (2) the collaborators who coordinated and facilitated the exploratory learning model (i.e., a foreign language/ESL educator, and a counselor educator).

## *Aim of the Study*

The overall aim of this exploratory project was to provide school counselors-in-training with three important supervised educational opportunities at the *beginning* of their academic and clinical development. They were: (1) to translate knowledge of the school counseling components to practice, (2) to develop preliminary knowledge and skills to effectively counsel those who self-identify as ESL students, and (3) to practice adapting skills to embrace cultural differences. All three opportunities took place under the guidance of university professors from unique, but complementary, fields of study. Consequently, an innovative partnership, which was carried out across two disciplines in a college of education, was established. This successful collaboration was based on the tenets of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003, 2005), the unique needs of ESL students, and multicultural competency.

## *The ASCA National Model’s Major Systems*

The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003, 2005) is undergirded by four core systems of which school counselors must be aware: program foundation, delivery system, management system, and accountability, with the aim of increasing the school counselors’ provision of useful and efficient counseling services. The ASCA National

Model provides school counselors with a roadmap to best understand and guide their own role (e.g., advocacy, leadership, collaboration), their clients' role (e.g., students, families, school), and the school counselor's management of the multiple contexts (e.g., school, community, stakeholders) in which they are embedded.

Schwallie-Giddis (2003) asserted that the four established components of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003) "must be implemented in all schools in order to establish strong and effective programs" (p. 5). Further, numerous reviewers of the current ASCA National Model (2005) —and the four core components that underlie the model—affirmed that it is both efficacious (i.e., it works, and thus produces positive outcomes if used) and, at the same time, effective (i.e., it can be used and implemented in the everyday life and context of a school counselor). Although the ASCA National Model does not directly address ESL students and diversity issues, the authors find cultural sensitivity innately in ASCA's mission.

### *Counseling ESL Students*

Beyond the precepts of the ASCA National Model (2003, 2005), school counselors have additional reasons to work with ESL students. First, statistics show a rise of racial minority students in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Koskinen et al. (2000) discussed, "Schools in the United States are facing the ever-increasing challenge of educating students who do not speak English as their first language" (p. 23). A second reason for this exploratory, collaborative model is to address the limited contact and communication found between ESL programs and school counselors (Clemente & Collison, 2000; McCall-Perez, 2000). Clemente and Collison reported a general lack of interaction between ESL students and school counselors, with most ESL student interactions related to behavior, scheduling, or academic issues.

### *Multicultural Competency*

As the population with whom school counselors work continues to diversify, school counselors have a significant need to develop knowledge, skill, and awareness of how to best work with racial and ethnic minority students and their families (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). Cultural knowledge, skill, and awareness are necessary ingredients for multicultural competence (Roysircar, Arredondo, Fuertes, Ponterotto, & Toporek, 2003). However, counselor educators often have difficulty successfully integrating all of these concepts into a multicultural course and training (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004). Critical to building multicultural competency, school counselors-in-training need opportunities that allow for the translation of awareness and knowledge, evidenced in the university classroom, into their actual counseling skills with students in real-world settings. The given model proposes an innovative way to foster the development of school counselors-in-training with regard to multicultural knowledge, skill, and awareness.

In summary, this study and its resultant collaborative model incorporated all three of the aforementioned elements. The elements are: (1) the ASCA National Model (2003, 2005) and its underlying components, (2) the potentially unique needs of ESL students, and (3) multicultural skill and awareness.

### **Method**

In an introductory summer course for beginning school counselors-in-training, Dr. Joy Burnham, a counselor educator at the University of Alabama, sought practical opportunities for school counselors-in-training to learn about culturally sensitive school counseling and the components of the ASCA National Model (2005). Because local schools were not in session when the course was offered, Burnham sought unique, alternative methods for collaboration, suggesting that her primary goal was for the students to experience several school counseling components through direct exposure and hands-on experience with

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children and adolescents. A successful teaming effort was formed with Dr. Miguel Mantero, a foreign language/ESL educator at the University of Alabama. Mantero invited the school counselors-in-training to provide classroom guidance lessons in his ESL Summer Program at the University of Alabama, which involved approximately 120 students, ages 4-17, over two summers. Mantero stated that "being able to work with Dr. Burnham and the counselors-in-training helped to meet a vital goal of the ESL program: to build a foundation that ESL students can use to achieve academic success and thrive in their communities" (personal communication, June 23, 2004).

#### *Participants*

The participants included nine school counselors-in-training in the introductory school counseling course. There were eight females and one male enrolled in the school counseling course in summer 2004 and summer 2005. The ages of the students ranged from 22 to 30, ( $M=26$ ). All participants' self-reported race was non-Hispanic white. Of the counselors-in-training, five of the participants had no prior teaching background, while four were certified teachers. There were approximately 120 ESL students, ages 4-17, enrolled in the ESL program in summer 2004 and summer 2005.

#### *Procedure*

The school counselors-in-training, enrolled in an introductory school counseling course, were invited to take part in this unique learning opportunity. The participants spent approximately five hours working closely with ESL teachers and ESL students, above and beyond the time spent in their university-assigned class. At the end of the semester, the counselors-in-training were interviewed in a group setting and were asked to reflect on the meaning and value of their experiences with the ESL students and ESL

teachers. These data were collected at the end of the semester.

#### **Results**

##### *Outcomes: What the Collaborative Model Taught Us*

An important component of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) is the measurement of outcomes. Analysis of the school counselors' responses allowed us to consider the extent to which this exploratory, collaborative model yielded positive outcomes. While this study was specifically designed to assess the degree to which the *school counselors-in-training* experienced any measurable benefits in an early field experience, this section reports on the insights experienced by the *ESL teacher*, the *ESL educator*, and the *counselor educator* as well.

##### *School Counselors-in-Training*

The ESL program offered opportunities for the school counselors-in-training to practice and improve selected counseling skills as outlined in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005). For example, the student-participants enhanced leadership skills as they developed collaborative relationships with the ESL teachers. The counselors-in-training also learned about scheduling as they coordinated classroom guidance lessons with the ESL teachers. Consultation skills were honed as the participants learned how to plan and carry out developmentally appropriate classroom guidance lessons for the ESL students. Overall, the time with ESL students, contributed to a better understanding of such ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) themes as teaming, advocating, leadership, and removing barriers to success.

The counselors-in-training also faced multiple multicultural issues. They taught guidance lessons to students from Russia, Korea, Jordan, China, Mexico, and Japan. Not only were the ESL

students representatives of numerous countries, but they had a wide-range of English proficiencies. At the end of the semester, counselors-in-training shared the lessons they learned. The counselors-in-training summarized the knowledge they acquired in Table 1. The school counselors-in-training also elaborated on what they learned related to the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003, 2005) in Table 2.

### *Foreign Language/ESL Educator*

In stating the desire for collaboration between the programs to continue, Dr. Mantero suggested, "The ESL interns were able to act as a team with the counseling students. The counselors-in-training were able to apply their skills and expertise so that everyone involved learned more about themselves as educators and about the ESL students as dynamic individuals. We look forward to strengthening and developing this collaboration in the future" (personal communication, June 23, 2004).

### *ESL Teachers*

Several ESL teachers illustrated their views about the collaboration between the ESL and counselor education programs. One ESL teacher stated:

"What an amazing opportunity it was to collaborate with representatives of another essential element in the successful education of ESL students. Watching the counselors-in-training interact with my students provided me with insight which was only available from such an observation. It enabled me to move from the role of facilitator to observer. During this time, I became aware of nuances of interpersonal dynamics of which I had previously been unaware. As a classroom teacher, I appreciate the daunting requirement of these counselors-in-training to enter a classroom of students of myriad ethnicities and varying degrees of English proficiency and engage them in a discussion about personal concerns. Even though seasoned veterans

would be a bit unnerved by this task, these students worked to quickly put the students at ease and to elicit personal responses from them. I respect these students for their efforts to sensitize themselves to the particular needs of English language learners. I hope that this collaboration between the two programs in the college of education continues" (personal communication, June 23, 2004).

Another ESL teacher also offered insight about the collaborative effort, as found in Table 3.

### *Counselor Educator*

Burnham noted, "Dr. Mantero's cooperation allowed for us to not only talk about the components of a school counseling program, but to work with many of them. Undoubtedly, direct exposure to the counseling components was more effective and powerful than simply talking about them" (personal communication, June 23, 2004).

One ESL teacher intern summed the overall experience up when she stated, "The partnership offered many opportunities for information to be gained between the counselors, students, and ESL teachers. It was a very enjoyable and valuable experience for all involved" (personal communication, June 23, 2004). The participants in this collaborative effort provided useful qualitative data, which may inform larger quantitative efficacy and effectiveness studies going forward.

## **Discussion**

The present study investigated school counselors-in-training in their early fieldwork with ESL students, ESL teachers, and their assigned university professors. This model provides obvious benefits for the school counselors-in-training. For example, based on the comments

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after the ESL experience ended, the counselors-in-training were able to transform what they had learned in the university course into practice for the first time. Early field experiences in the school counseling program allowed for progression toward becoming culturally sensitive sooner because of the summer opportunities. In addition, implementation of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003, 2005) appeared to develop faster, because of the ESL experience.

This project highlights the usefulness of early field experience—with a particular focus on multicultural awareness, skill, and sensitivity—early in a school counselor-in-training academic program. The counselors-in-training, ESL teachers, and ESL students appeared to benefit from the summer programs. Such opportunities seem to provide innovative means to secure multicultural awareness and competency near the start of the school counseling program rather than near the end of the course of study.

Undoubtedly, with the current influx of ESL students in schools across the U.S., more innovative opportunities for collaboration with ESL students and teachers are indicated and needed in counselor education programs. Moreover, lessons learned from this exploratory, collaborative model may be extended and added to in students' practicum and internship field experiences. ♦

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**Table 1**

*Knowledge Acquired from the ESL Experience*

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Comments from Counselors-in-Training

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- “Children of any cultural background are just that . . . children who respond to games and activities with the same excitement. However, it is important to be aware of the language barriers.”
  - “Some things transcend barriers (e.g., music, art, play). Analogies do not transcend barriers as well as literal language.”
  - “Dealing with cultural diversity is an extremely important part of the school counselor’s role. It is my job to reach these students.”
  - “A simple concept may need further explanation for ESL students to understand.”
  - “Counselors must be aware of language acquisition stages and cultural restrictions among various students . . . be sensitive to cultural differences and not expect each student to be westernized.”
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**Table 2**

*Knowledge Related to the ASCA National Model*

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Comments from Counselors-In-Training

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- “Working with the ESL students helped me to conceptualize some of the reasoning behind the National Standards. I can better understand the need for disaggregated data and advocacy because otherwise the ESL students could be easily overlooked.”
  - “I think it is important for school counselors to realize that the ASCA National Model must be implemented to reach all students even if the students speak a different language and are from a different culture.”
  - “It is the counselor’s responsibility to make sure these students receive the same opportunities as other students.”
  - “I had to find a way to communicate my lesson across many cultural barriers. It gave me a first look at many of the challenges I will face as a school counselor.”
  - “The ESL classroom experience taught me how to take the components of the ASCA National Model and actually apply them. I learned how to plan and implement a group guidance lesson and was taught firsthand about children’s different learning styles and varying attention spans.”
  - “Working with the ESL students helped me understand the ASCA National Model. This experience was all about being able to actually implement the model, not just read about it.”
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**Table 3**

*ESL Teacher Views*

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Comments from an ESL Teacher

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- “The smiles and enthusiasm of the counselors made the ESL students much more at ease.”
  - “The students used concrete objects in the guidance lessons that helped make meaningful connections to the topic and theme of the lesson. The ESL students could hear what was being discussed and then they could connect visually with the item.”
  - “The counselors encouraged interaction among the students in a non-threatening manner. The ESL students were from five countries and would have enjoyed staying comfortable within ‘the box.’ But the counselors encouraged the students to branch out and to respect other opinions.”
  - “This opportunity to work with the ESL students provided the counselors valuable lessons they needed before interacting with wide-scale ESL student populations.”
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