articles

Experiential Training: Connecting School Counselors-in-Training, English as a Second Language (ESL) Teachers, and ESL Students

Joy J. Burnham, Miguel Mantero, and Lisa M. Hooper

English as a second language (ESL) students present challenges to counselors who are unaccustomed to working with students who speak limited English. A field experience prepared school counselors-in-training to develop cultural sensitivity while working with ESL teachers and students. The counselors suggested that early experiential learning fostered multicultural sensitivity and refined counseling skills.

Los estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua (ESL) presentan desafíos para aquellos consejeros que no están acostrumbrados a trabajar con estudiantes con un nivel de inglés limitado. Una experiencia práctica de campo preparó a los consejeros escolares en formación para que desarrollaran una sensibilidad cultural mientras trabajaban con profesores y alumnos de ESL. Los consejeros indicaron que el aprendizaje experiencial en fase temprana fomentó su sensibilidad multicultural y perfeccionó sus habilidades en consejería.

This exploratory project examined the potential benefits of a school counselor-in-training experiential exercise that combined classroom learning with early field experience. This project also examined the extent to which counseling students found that early field experience fostered multicultural sensitivity and awareness when working with English as a second language (ESL) students and teachers.

Three practices in school counseling training models informed this experiential project: the use of collaboration, multicultural awareness and sensitivity, and working with ESL students. Because the use of collaboration has lagged behind other techniques as an important component in school counseling (Sink, 2005) and because creating "collaborative environments" is still misunderstood (Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, & Yoon, 2007; Kim, 2005; Sink, 2005), the school counseling training approach offers a means to practice collaboration with an underserved and rapidly increasing population of ESL students who oftentimes have limited interactions with school counselors (Clemente & Collison, 2000; Goh et al., 2007; Hagan, 2004; McCall-Perez, 2000).

In addition to the importance of collaborative helping in the context of the school setting, the practice of multicultural counseling is essential for school

Joy J. Burnham and Lisa M. Hooper, Department of Educational Studies in Psychology, Research Methodology, and Counseling, and Miguel Mantero, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, all at The University of Alabama. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lisa M. Hooper, Department of Educational Studies in Psychology, Research Methodology, and Counseling, The University of Alabama, PO Box 870231, 315B Graves Hall, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487 (e-mail: lhooper@bamaed.ua.edu).

counselors. As the population with whom counselors work continues to diversify, school counselors have a significant need to develop knowledge, skills, and awareness in how to best work with racial and ethnic minority students and their families (Roysircar, 2003). Critical to building multicultural competency is to provide school counselors with opportunities that allow for the translation of awareness and knowledge evidenced in the university classroom into their actual counseling skills with students (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004; Dickson, Jepsen, & Barbee, 2008). School counselors who demonstrate cultural sensitivity and awareness see increased levels of responsiveness and positive outcomes among their students in both academic and therapeutic contexts (Clemente & Collison, 2000). Moreover, empirical research has established that when counselors—irrespective of orientation (e.g., school, family, community)—are sensitive to multicultural issues, clients often feel more understood and respected (Zhang & Dixon, 2001). This translates into the counselor having both an increased sense of clinical and technical skill (Welfel, 2003) and a support role in helping ESL students build "cross-cultural bridges" (Goh et al., 2007).

the significance of and need for multicultural competency in school counseling

Changes in demographics have underlined the need for professionals working in school systems to examine the extent to which they are prepared and competent to offer the needed services to culturally and linguistically diverse populations. There are few "multicultural training opportunities in naturalistic settings . . . for graduate counseling students" (Roysircar, Gard, Hubbell, & Ortega, 2005, p. 18). Even though opportunities to practice skills are sparse, the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA; 2005) national framework for school counseling programs emphasizes the criticality of recognizing and respecting students' racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Furthermore, ASCA (2004) has also asserted that school counselors ought to be prepared to assist in the mental health and academic progress of racial and ethnic minority students entering school systems in the United States.

  Most professional helping organizations (e.g., the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development, the American Psychological Association, and the American Counseling Association) operationalize multicultural competence into three core areas: knowledge, skills, and awareness (see Roysircar, Arredondo, Fuertes, Ponterotto, & Toporek, 2003; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). *Knowledge* refers to the counselor's familiarity with and understanding of human diversity and culture broadly defined (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and country of origin). *Skills* refer to the

counselor's ability to consistently translate his or her knowledge and personal awareness of a client's diversity and culture in the context of the therapeutic and learning environments. Finally, *awareness* refers to the counselor's self-awareness regarding his or her worldview, values, assumptions, biases, and theoretical approaches that likely influence and shape the counselor's work with clients. Each of these areas is related to and often overlaps with the other two. These three areas undergird the multicultural guidelines put forward by many counseling associations—including ASCA—and inform the principles that have been distilled into specific multicultural competencies (Roysircar et al., 2003).

the significance of serving ESL students in school counseling

There are many reasons for professional school counselors to work with ESL students. The *ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counseling* (ASCA, 2004) mandate several propositions, including the need for school counselors to be open to serving a diverse population of students. In addition, the standards clearly state that school counselors are expected to examine their own biases and attitudes and to formulate meaning for and understanding of such terms as oppression, racism, and so forth.

  Beyond ASCA's ethical standards, there are additional reasons for school counselors to work with ESL students. First, the present population statistics show that the inflow of minority students in the United States is on the rise. Koskinen et al. (2000) noted, "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). As the population shifts in the United States, the need for school counselors to have training experiences with youth from diverse backgrounds becomes more vital. A second reason for the experiential exercise is to address the current lack of interaction between ESL programs and school counselors (Clemente & Collison, 2000; McCall-Perez, 2000). Clemente and Collison, in discussing a general lack of interaction between school counselors and ESL students, reported typical counselor/ESL student interactions as often related to behavior, scheduling, or academic issues. Yet, when counselor/ESL student interactions are experienced, positive outcomes have been described (Hagan, 2004; Roysircar et al., 2005). For example, Roysircar et al. (2005) offered counselors the training opportunities to develop multicultural awareness through mentoring ESL students, and Hagan described her own positive interactions as she tutored an ESL student and gained multicultural competence in the process. Third, the described experiential training project addresses the fact that school counselors are often ill-prepared to work with ESL students (McCall-Perez, 2000) and lack necessary counselor training to do so (Roysircar et al., 2005); therefore, this

training offers a means to prepare school counselors for positive interactions with ESL students. The fourth intention is to parallel suggestions found in the literature; for example, Clemente and Collison recommended that school counselors converse with the ESL teachers at least once each week about the issues the ESL students face and to work together to figure out ways to correct problems at school. The fifth purpose relates to the dearth of ESL-related literature in school counseling journals and the need to fill this major gap (Roysircar et al., 2005). In summary, we believe that the experiential training project we describe herein offers an innovative shift from traditional classroom-based multicultural training to practice initiatives related specifically to the ESL population.

the significance of and need for collaboration in school counseling

Campbell and Dahir (1997) postulated that a collaborative model for the school counselor and the school counseling program was foundational. This viewpoint was reiterated when ASCA (2005) developed its National Model. As examples, the ASCA National Model encouraged school counselors to "serve as change agents, collaborators, and advocates" (ASCA, 2005, p. 10) and to "build effective teams by encouraging genuine collaboration among all school staff to work toward the common goals of equity, access, and academic success for every student" (ASCA, 2005, p. 25). The inclusion of collaboration in recent research suggests that collaboration should be viewed as a vital function of school counseling programs (Sink, 2005; Stone & Dahir, 2006). In addition, Sink examined the evolution and significance of collaboration in school counseling programs and affirmed that the "value of collaboration" (p. 367) has now been established.

rationale for the experiential training project

With an influx of ESL students in the school districts in the state in which this training project was conducted, an ESL summer program at a major university was formed to offer summer opportunities for ESL students to adjust to their new culture. The public school/university partnership involving the university's Program in Counselor Education was created to provide additional services for the ESL students (e.g., classroom guidance, mentoring) and to offer school counselor trainees early training experiences with classroom management, preparation and delivery of guidance lessons, coordination, teaming, and other school counseling–related components described in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005). The subsequent experiential exercise was developed with three specific needs in mind for school counselors-in-training: (a) to

create early clinical and field training opportunities for counselors-in-training to work with racially and ethnically diverse populations; (b) to have focused assistance in preparation and delivery of classroom guidance lessons, especially for the school counselors-in-training without formal teaching experience; and (c) to gain preliminary multicultural competency (i.e., knowledge, skills, and awareness). With the three aims, the described approach was woven into an introductory school counseling course for master's-level students in a school counseling program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. This afforded counselors-in-training a unique opportunity—the context in which culture-specific clinical skills and self-assessment could be practiced while working with students from numerous countries with various levels of English proficiency.

A final rationale for the experiential project is the importance of school counselors to see the student as both an individual and a member of his or her community and particular cultural groups. This requires that counselors-in-training develop the ability to distinguish (a) the role of racial or ethnic group membership in the socialization of the student; (b) the importance of the uniqueness of the individual; (c) the presence and place of values in the counseling process; and (d) the uniqueness of learning styles, vocational goals, and life purposes of individuals (Atkinson, 2004; Roysircar et al., 2003). Additionally, and consistent with the development and use of multicultural competencies (Sue et al., 1992; Roysircar et al., 2003), this experiential project was designed to assist individuals with developing self-awareness, sensitivity, knowledge, and skills. This training, in turn, would facilitate the developmental processes of the aforementioned abilities in trainees. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, we approached this project using qualitative research interviewing (Kvale, 1996; McCracken, 1988) as the primary data gathering tool.

method

COUNSELOR-PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 9 graduate-level school counselors-in-training (8 women, 1 man) who were enrolled in an introductory school counseling course. The self-reported racial background of all of the graduate students was White, and their ages ranged from 22 to 30 ($M = 28$ years). Five students had no prior teaching experience and 4 were certified teachers. There were approximately 120 ESL students (ages 4–17) in two summer programs.

PROCEDURE

There were six components to the experiential exercise for the school counselors-in-training: (a) pretraining education and assignment to an ESL class; (b) collaboration, coordination, consultation, and teaming with ESL teach-

ers, which involved guidance curriculum planning, development, and implementation based on ESL student needs in the classroom; (c) teaching classroom guidance lessons; (d) critiquing guidance lessons (i.e., self and peer critiques); (e) ongoing synthesis during class discussions; and (f) posttraining education.

The pretraining component required an ESL methodology lesson taught by an ESL instructor. Pertinent school counseling literature on ESL students was also assigned. After the pretraining, the counselors were assigned to specific ESL classes (i.e., preschool, elementary, middle, and high school levels), where the counselors-in-training were expected to collaborate, coordinate, and consult with ESL teachers prior to preparing lessons or working with ESL students. This was done to ensure that appropriate guidance lessons were developed on the basis of the developmental needs of the students. Certain themes from the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) were the focal point (i.e., classroom guidance activities, guidance curriculum, collaboration). Ongoing synthesis took place in class discussions, journal writing, and feedback. The last component, posteducation, was facilitated through semistructured, 30-minute group interviews regarding the participants' use of the described experiential training in the context of the ESL classroom.

These group interviews (data) were conducted at the end of the semester when assignments were completed. The counselors-in-training were asked the following questions related to their experiences with the ESL students. What was most interesting about working with ESL students? How did the ESL experience prepare you for your future as a professional school counselor? What did you learn from your experience? What is your advice for future ESL collaborations? What aspect of the ESL work was challenging?

results

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The group interviews provided data for qualitative analysis. Qualitative research allows for a distinction to be made between the various areas of inquiry within the same context and also clarifies how these areas may be interrelated (Ponterotto, 2002; Pope-Davis et al., 2002).

The interviews were transcribed by a graduate-level research assistant and independently coded by two of the principal investigators (i.e., the first and third authors). When consensus of the coding structure was achieved among all research team members (Crabtree & Miller, 1999), responses from the counselors-in-training were reviewed for themes and patterns. The following four themes emerged.

Theme 1: The need to reach all students. School counselors-in-training hear throughout their school counseling courses that they are "to reach all students." The following sample responses indicate that interacting with ESL students

seemed to enhance the conviction to reach all students. The counselors-in-training agreed strongly with the following statements: (a) "Dealing with cultural diversity is an extremely important part of the professional school counselor's role. It is my job to reach these students," (b) "The challenge of working with ESL students was most interesting along with trying to meet all of the students' needs," and (c) "I learned how to work with, communicate, and identify with students that come from different backgrounds."

The counselors-in-training learned about ethnic and cultural diversity as they reached out to students who represented various countries and who had varying levels of English proficiency. For example, one counselor-in-training stated, "The most interesting thing about the ESL experience was working with such a diverse group of students. It helped me understand that you have to tailor lessons for each group." The collaborative experiences offered realistic multicultural opportunities for the school counselors-in-training and will hopefully increase the likelihood that ESL students will attempt to develop rapport with professional school counselors in the future. Certainly, one goal was for the relationships established during the ESL summer program to serve as a preliminary building block for establishing communication with the students' families and the general community, thus supporting the applicability and transportability of knowledge and skills that may serve as a strong foundation for academic and personal development.

The counselors-in-training grasped ideas about advocating for all students through their work with ESL students. The following statement from one of the participants illustrates this idea well: "It is the counselor's responsibility to make sure that these students receive the same opportunities as other students." Counselors-in-training learned firsthand about their role in ensuring that ESL students receive the same opportunities to develop academically as they simultaneously learn English. The counselors also learned that ESL students are an integral part of the school's community.

Theme 2: General and unique skill-building when working with ethnically diverse students. The skill-building theme was related to the opportunities for the counselors-in-training to practice and refine counseling and guidance skills that had been discussed in class and the skills they needed to function well in the school setting. Some of the participants' comments regarding their teaching role included the following: "I learned what it was like to be in front of a classroom of kids." "The ESL [assignment] gave me classroom experience early on in my program."

Working with the ESL students appeared to help the counselors-in-training apply such valued concepts as teamwork, collaboration, advocacy, removing barriers to success, and showing accountability through data-driven decisions. The counselors-in-training used leadership skills as they initiated and built collaborative relationships with the ESL teachers. Coordinating the classroom

guidance lessons with the ESL teachers provided the counselors-in-training with fundamental knowledge about juggling schedules, balancing counseling duties, working with teacher timetables, and teaching guidance lessons. One counselor-in-training remarked, "Working with such a diverse group of students helped me to understand that you have to tailor lessons for each group." The counselors-in-training also used consultation skills to work with the ESL teachers as they planned suitable classroom guidance lessons that were developmentally appropriate and based on the needs of the ESL students.

The comments from the counselors-in-training also illustrated their thoughts about how to use the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005). For example, students made the following comments: (a) "Working with the ESL students helped me to understand the ASCA National Model. This experience was about implementing the ASCA National Model, not just reading about it"; (b) "I think it is important for professional 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"; and (c) "The ESL 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 guidance lesson and was taught firsthand about children's different learning styles and varying attention spans."

The comments under this theme were also strongly related to preparation and performance in the classroom setting. For example, "This helped me think about guidance lessons and classroom management and prepared me for the teaching aspect of school counseling," "This gave me classroom experience," and "This helped me learn how to plan and deliver a lesson to students."

The counselors-in-training recognized that ESL students must have positive interactions at school if they are to build cultural awareness and become more proficient in English as they advance academically. By allowing counselors-in-training to work with ESL students, the experiential program improved communication between the teachers, students, and the students' parents. Teaming with ESL students was positive for both sides. The ESL students were encouraged to interact with fellow students who were both similar to and different from them and to respect the diverse opinions of those students; similarly, the counselors-in-training assisted with vital goals of the ESL program (e.g., to build a foundation for ESL students to achieve academic success and thrive in their communities).

Theme 3: Culturally related challenges with ESL students. The counselors-in-training learned that not all students are alike nor do they represent the same culture. The trainees became acutely aware of language barriers, the process and stages of language acquisition, and culturally influenced reactions and behaviors among the various students. Counselors-in-training were also reminded of cultural diversity and their role in working with all

students. The following comment from a counselor-in-training character-ized this thought: "I had to find a way to communicate my lesson across cultural barriers. It gave me a first look at many of the challenges I will face as a school counselor." In the same light, another counselor-in-training stated that counselors must "be aware of language acquisition and cultural restrictions among various students, . . . be sensitive to cultural differences and not expect each student to be westernized." There is no doubt that the ESL challenges prompted positive, productive class discussions in the counseling course; these discussions focused on what was taking place in the ESL setting.

The counselors-in-training also enhanced their introductory understand-ing of the impact that the dominant culture has on such issues as student self-confidence. Likewise, they observed the ESL students' reactions and behaviors as they were exposed to and embedded in a new community and culture. One counselor-in-training suggested that children are more similar than they are different: "Children of any cultural background are just that . . . children who respond to games and activities with the same excitement as American children." Other comments were similar: "A simple concept may need further explanation for ESL students to understand" and "It forced me to try to target specific needs and issues, rather than simply teach lessons."

Other emerging concepts were related to teaching guidance lessons and the frustrations that new counselors-in-training face with little or no teach-ing experience. One trainee stated that counselors-in-training struggled with "the extremes of ESL students (e.g., abilities, language acquisition)." Other trainees stated that they had more to learn (i.e., "I have so much more to learn and experience," and "I still have a lot to learn about the guidance curriculum"). Several counselors-in-training also vocalized other challenges, for example, "trying to take the time to think where the children are developmentally," "working with the wide range of ESL students and meeting all of their needs," and "keeping the attention of the ESL students."

Theme 4: Limitations in the ESL experience of counselors-in-training. The com-ments of some of the counselors-in-training suggested limitations in their ESL experiences. The time restrictions were illustrated in the following state-ment: "I wish I could have heard their stories and about how they got here." Other counselors-in-training pointed to the need for more training prior to the ESL experience. They recommended that subsequent programs "teach more about guidance lessons and classroom management before working with the ESL students" and "offer more suggestions about the kinds of les-sons that would be beneficial for ESL children. Sometimes, the teachers do not know enough about counseling to help." Another counselor-in-training stated, "We need more interactions with the ESL teachers before we do

guidance lessons." Thus, the school counselors-in-training seemed to need to build rapport with the ESL teachers and ESL students before they began collaborative assignments.

discussion

The collaborative school counseling exercise described in this study brought ESL students, ESL teachers, and counselors-in-training together, allowing them to "[build] cross-cultural bridges," as recommended by Goh et al. (2007, p. 67). The ESL teachers appeared to gain an understanding and perspective from observing the counselors. Teaming together to ensure successful personal, academic, and linguistic development for all of the students was beneficial. Certainly, the counselors-in-training became more aware of cultural diversity and the need to work with *all* students, as stated in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005).

The collaboration of ESL and counselor education programs was a positive venture for all parties involved. The required academic program mirrored collaborative relationships expected of professional school counselors and ESL teachers in their future careers. The counselors-in-training realized the importance of collaboration and the need to be an integral part of the school environment rather than a part of an ancillary program. We believe that through the ESL experiences, the counselors-in-training saw the need to shift to a team member approach to reach students and to have a "culturally competent practice," as recommended by Goh et al. (2007, p. 67).

The collaborative approach offered other benefits to the counselors-in-training. For instance, the trainees were able to apply for the first time what was learned in their university course to the school counseling setting. This appeared to be more beneficial than applying the knowledge and skills through practicum or internship approaches, as is done traditionally. Because collaboration is a major component of school counseling, partnering with the ESL program was a favorable teaching tool. The ESL program involved the trainees in layers of collaboration, from coordinating with the ESL teachers to teaching guidance lessons and teaming with peers, all of which made collaboration more pertinent. Similarly, working with the ESL program gave the counselors-in-training firsthand knowledge regarding how to fit counseling duties into teacher schedules and how to address typical conflicts that occur at school.

The counselors-in-training experienced challenges and frustrations that were similar to those reported in past studies. For example, in Roysircar et al.'s (2005) study, the counselors reported their frustrations in dealing with language barriers and the lack of information about students. This was also the case in this study, particularly in Theme 3. Additionally, the culturally related challenges described by Hagan (2004; i.e., how she could accidentally "impose [her] culture" and how she needed to "be more aware of [her] own cultural bearings as a white middle-class European American woman," p. 447), were

also common thoughts among the counselors-in-training in this study. Yet, even with reported hindrances, we believe that the frustrations were actually a platform for growth and real-world experience, rather than a drawback to the experiential exercise. Roysircar et al. (2005) came to a similar conclusion about their experience, wherein the themes of interpersonal "connection" with middle school ESL students, as expressed by trainees, increased in frequency after the expression of interpersonal "disconnection" in initial one-to-one mentoring sessions.

Results of this program indicate that field experiences assigned at an early point in the school counseling program allowed the school counselors-in-training to move toward cultural competence sooner than is typically expected. Furthermore, the trainees moved from familiarity with the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) to actual implementation.

In summary, the experiential exercise we have described in this article offers an innovative, collaborative approach between an ESL public school program and a counselor education program. An experiential exercise served as a means for early counseling experiences, meaningful skill-building opportunities, and multicultural experiences for school counselors-in-training. Dickson et al. (2008) also found that counselor education students' proximity to and participation in experiential training exercises were significantly associated with increased levels of comfort with racially diverse populations. Because school counselors are expected to advocate and become leaders who are ready to ameliorate the "prejudices, discrimination, and racism of many adults and peers in U.S. schools" (McCall-Perez, 2000, p. 19), it is important that programs such as the one described here offer ways for school counselors-in-training to hone essential skills. As demonstrated in our study, one method of introducing new learning, knowledge, and skills among counselors-in-training is to encourage close proximity to racially and ethnically diverse populations, such as working with ESL teachers and ESL students (Goh et al., 2007; Hagan, 2004; Roysircar et al., 2005).

recommendations for future research

Despite the limitations of this study, the following recommendations are offered. Researchers should consider additional questions to ask counselors-in-training. Future research questions should include "What ways did the ESL training prepare you for the future?" and "What had you hoped to learn?" Additionally, data collection should go beyond the post–ESL experience group interview. A follow-up interview, after the counselors-in-training are hired as school counselors, is necessary to allow researchers to identify (a) useful experiences for the counselors-in-training and (b) areas where these future professionals need more preparation and training to work successfully with ESL students. From a linguistic perspective, the need to examine whether or not counseling in a new

culture or community would be more effective in the student's first language or through a translation service, even if the ESL student is relatively proficient in English, is noteworthy. This study is the first step in the development of a training model that focuses on reaching ESL students.

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