

TITLE Preparing School Counselor Leaders: An Intervention Study with First-Year School Counseling Students

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OBJECTIVE The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of an extended training intervention for school counseling leadership practice in an introductory school counseling course.

METHODOLOGY

School counseling students in their first school counseling course in a program in the Southeast US accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs comprised the population under study. All 12 students enrolled in the course during the third week agreed to participate in the study. Nine participants were women. Reported ages ranged from 21-28 years old ($M = 23.9$). Seven participants self-identified as white, four participants as Black or African American, and one as Latino/a. Most participants reported earning an undergraduate degree in psychology ($N = 8$). Most participants ($n = 10$) reported having prior work experience, with six reporting experience involved in K-12 education. All twelve participants reported prior leadership experience. Two participants reported leadership experience from working in education; one participant reported leadership experience in professional work (i.e., department chair, member of leadership team), while the other reported leadership experience at a “teacher leadership academy.” Ten participants reported leadership experience at the college or university level. Six participants reported leadership experience in both K-12 and university or college settings. Students completed as pre- and post-class administrations of the Leadership Practices Inventory, the School Counseling Self-Efficacy scale (Bodenhorn and Skaggs, 2005), and a “thought listing” technique.

KEY FINDINGS

The post-class LPI scores were all significantly higher than the pre-class administration, with large effect sizes. The largest areas of change were for Inspire a Shared Vision, Encourage the Heart, and Challenge the Process. No significant differences in pre- and post-class leadership scores were found based on gender, race/ethnicity, or extent of previous leadership experiences.

The author noted that “‘little guidance exists about how to train [students] to identify their leadership characteristics, cultivate their leadership skills, or measure the impact of their change agent practices’ (Kneale, Young, and Dollarhide, 2018, p. 1). Engaged in the intervention employed in this study, students reflected on leadership, learned more about leadership practice through simulated and actual leadership exercises, and explored how they might support, and even defend, those practices. Each of the preceding points connects back to the previous quote. Within a pedagogical intervention focused on leadership, students gained experience with school

counseling leadership through collaboration, advocacy, and, at the very least, an examination of how systemic change can happen (ASCA, 2012)” (p. 117).

The author concludes:

Several previous researchers have illustrated novice counselors’ lack of understanding of school counseling leadership (Dollarhide et al., 2008; Mason & McMahon, 2009) and perhaps lack of leadership practice (Mullen et al., 2018). As illustrated throughout the findings, incorporating a leadership emphasis into a school counseling curriculum does not appear to come with a sacrifice to other aspects of school counseling identity... Finding of this study may offer school counselor educators ideas for adopting a leadership-focused framework within their own introductory school counseling courses. (p. 131).