

School Counselor Education: Shipping Water or Shaping up?

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Article:

The future of counseling as a profession is being fortified by the actions of recent AACD Boards. One such action—the adoption of the *Standards for Preparation of Counselor Education* (AKA, 1979) directly concerns counselor education, The AACD and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Boards have decided that no one else is better suited to promulgate these *Standards*, nor is anyone else more responsible for their support than school counselors themselves. Herr (1979) noted:

We may suggest then, that many school counselors are trained in institutions that do not abide by professional standards of any kind, that there are significant differences in the competencies that school counselors acquire from training, and that the degree of rigor applied to the evaluation of counselor education programs by state departments of education or other organizations differs widely: Given such conditions, *we* are not surprised to find that even among the strongest counselor education programs there are different views about how counselors should be prepared. (p. 94)

More recently, a list of newly accredited programs was published by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) under the sponsorship of the AACD and its founding divisions, including the ASCA ("Accredited Counselor Education Programs," 1982). Although it is too early to measure the impact of these efforts, there are signs that preparation programs increasingly will use the *Standards* for self-study as evidenced by inquiries to CACREP and the AACD.

If Herr's observations still basically apply today, then CACREP's work in the coming decade can have a profound effect on the nature and shape of school counselor' preparation in the 1980s. This effect will no doubt be seen in inservice training as well. School counselors should be asking how they can contribute to this process.

The leadership of ASCA has consistently demonstrated an interest in and concern for relevant preparation for school counselors. No one, least of all the practitioners themselves, likes to be told that they or their colleagues are inadequately or inappropriately prepared or credentialed.

The purpose of this article is to inform practicing school counselors about the need for their involvement in school counselor preparations. Because accreditation is itself an impetus for periodic self-study by a university or college staff, the school counselor is a welcome participant in this process.

PROACTIVE ROLE

School counselors should assume a proactive rather than reactive role in counselor education programming. A perusal of the *Standards* reveals, numerous areas in which the school counselor can assume a well-defined and legitimate role. Comments here, however, will be limited to statements found in (a) the "Introduction"; (b) "Section I: Objectives"; and (c) "Section II: Curriculum—Program of Studies and Supervised Experiences."

In the introductory statements, two trends in the profession in which school counselors should be involved are described: (a) further development of competency-based/performance-based counselor education programs and (b) the need for increased self-renewal and inservice education. In Section 1, it is stated that objectives should reflect recommendations from local, state, regional, and national lay and professional groups. These objectives should reflect current societal needs. The final statement in Section I is that program effectiveness should be determined from data provided by former students.

While school counselors are appropriate persons for providing feedback on the success of their graduate programs, they should also be involved in the development of program objectives. Because of their direct involvement with students, school counselors can provide the profession with information on the most prominent and pressing societal issues. Clearly, they are not hampered by the "Ivory Tower" environment.

Section II suggests that the school counselor should be closely involved in the development of courses of study. Numerous *Standards* suggest that staff in counselor work settings should be concerned with program design and implementation. Inservice education needs also constitute important areas in the curriculum standards. School counselors, because of their ongoing experiences at the local school levels, are certainly the most qualified persons to indicate what the basic inservice needs are. Indeed, because of their practical experiences, they well may be among the most qualified persons to provide the inservice.

The following specific areas are those in which the school counselor should become involved, either as a member of a counselor education program self-study or visiting team: (a) developing competency-based/performance-based programming, (b) providing inservice in dealing with the needs of special students, (c) drug and alcohol abuse, (d) consultation with parents and teachers, (e) leisure counseling, (f) aging, and (g) death and dying. Although the suggested topics dealing with inservice are clearly not comprehensive, they do represent many of the areas of prime concern for school counselors today.

COMPETENCY-BASED/ PERFORMANCE-BASED PROGRAMMING

The literature in counseling in the late 1970s contained a strong emphasis on mid support for competency-based educational programs. For example, Jones (1976) reported that 77.4% of 239 respondents who constituted a nation-wide sample of state supervisors of guidance, representatives of counselor education institutions, and staff from nontraditional institutions offering graduate degrees in guidance and counseling expected some improvements in their programs from developing competency-based curricula. In the same sample, 69% indicated that their institutions or agencies were in the process of changing to competency-based programs, and 7.1% stated that the transformation had been accomplished.

Jones and Dayton (1977), in a report of a competency-based staff development approach for improving counselor education, identified three obstacles to competency-based programming: (a) lack of evidence of its effectiveness, (b) difficulty in identifying desired competencies on which it should focus, and (c) limited sets of materials for developing competencies. The current dearth of information in the literature concerning competency-based programming suggests that although the *Standards* are written in terms of competencies, programs are not operating within this model. Even though the school counselor might not be prepared to develop sets of material or provide evidence of the effectiveness of competency-based programming, this individual would certainly be qualified to assist in identifying desired competencies.

NEEDS OF SPECIAL STUDENTS

Since the passage of PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, school counselors have become increasingly involved in its implementation. Lombana (1980), in a survey of randomly selected counselors in Florida, found that 36% of the respondents indicated they spent up to 10% of their work time with special students, 23% spent 11-25% with the special program, and 27% spent 25— 50% of their time with the special education program.

Lebsock and De Blassie (1975) and Lombana and Clawson (1978) indicated that although the school counselor has been expected to play major roles in providing services for special students, as well as for their parents and teachers, they have not had adequate preservice training to accomplish that task. In a discussion of the implications of PL 94-142 for counselors, Humes (1978) suggested that the following topics should be included in inservice efforts: IEP, least-restrictive environment, due-process procedures, vocational counseling, and confidentiality of information.

The school counselor, as a member of a counselor education program self-study team, can make recommendations regarding program improvement or change based on experiences with the special student. For example, regarding the IEP, the role of the counselor as team coordinator or as a provider of support to those involved in the process should be emphasized. If counselors are serving in a coordinator role, the training program should offer training in the management skills necessary to successfully accomplish this task. Likewise, training in providing a supportive role in terms of empathy and understanding should be emphasized. The school counselor is undoubtedly already functioning effectively in providing the least-restrictive environment for the special student. Skills in scheduling and matching student with teacher are generally developed early in one's work experience.

Although vocational counseling for the special student is sometimes different from the approach used with other students, school counselors can rely on the basic knowledge that they have acquired in the areas of career and vocational counseling and development. With some updating of information and the use of knowledge gained in working with the special student, recommendations can be made to the counselor education program for inclusion of these data.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

Beginning in the early 1960s, the literature in most human service fields was replete with information on substance abuse. While drugs were becoming much more common, alcohol abuse remained prominent among American youth. Today, even though the topics occur less frequently in the literature, it seems that the extent of the use of drugs and alcohol among adolescents is increasing.

In a study of marijuana use, Cohen (1979) reported that of all ages, the 12- to-25-year-old group has shown the greatest increase in frequency of use. Similarly, Johnston, Bachman, and O'Malley (1979) found that approximately 1 out of every 9 high school seniors in the United States smoked marijuana daily. The use of alcohol among teenagers seems to be increasing as well. The National Council on Alcoholism (1979) reported that approximately 90% of today's teenagers have tried alcohol, compared to an average of 53% in the 1950s and 1960s.

School counselors, in their experience with a wide range of adolescent behaviors, certainly are aware of the students who exhibit drug- and alcohol-dependent behaviors. Moreover, those counselors who have worked with drug education programs in schools realize that factual information by itself is insufficient (Shertzer & Stone, 1981). Counselors should take an instrumental role in recommending that programs be developed to deal with the adolescent's self-concept and coping skills. Through their experiences with youth, they can provide counselor education programs with direction in regard to this ever-present societal problem.

CONSULTATION WITH PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Although the role of the school counselor as a consultant has been discussed frequently in the literature (Dinkmeyer, 1968; Faust, 1968; Hill & Luckey, 1969), it seems that the importance of this role should be reinforced (Tolbert, 1978). If counselor education programs do not emphasize the consultant role, school counselors as self-study team members can assist in delineating competencies in this area. For example, in consulting with teachers, counselors can assist them in dealing with students having special problems. Together, the teacher and the counselor can develop strategies for working effectively with these students.

Regarding parent consultation, counselors can assist parents in improving their relationships with their children and help them to develop effective communication skills with their children. Clearly, the school counselor needs to be qualified to be of assistance to parents in these endeavors (Sweeney & Moses, 1979).

LEISURE COUNSELING

Concern with leisure and leisure counseling has only recently emerged as a professional interest in counseling. In general, needs in this area have achieved prominence based on increasing numbers of elderly individuals who, by virtue of lengthening life spans, have increasing amounts of leisure time available. As Loesch (1981a) pointed out:

People especially don't think about leisure among youth because youth don't often talk about it. More typically, youth talk of all the fun things they're going to do when they get older—which gets equated with lots of time, money and freedom. . . . (p. 55)

Even a cursory examination of social changes reveals that the psychological importance of leisure is increasing and that attitudes about work and leisure will undergo substantial change over the lifetime of persons alive today. It is increasingly being recognized, for example, that leisure activities facilitate developmental task accomplishment (Loesch, 1981a). Therefore, school counselors may expect to become involved in leisure counseling activities whenever leisure activities are not being effective aids in developmental task accomplishment for youth.

Leclair (1982) also stressed the importance of leisure counseling skills to enhance the growth of clients of all ages. He recommended that a vital role for the school counselor would be to conduct or coordinate leisure education programs in the schools. Counselors would function as consultants to teachers, parents, administrators, and program planners, as well as provide important leisure education services. In particular, the school counselor could use group procedures and peer relationships to maximize shared leisure activity and attitude exploration (Loesch, 1981b). Counselors can also conduct leisure education seminars for family members.

The importance of the school counselor's role in this area cannot be over-estimated. Lacking experience in the area, counselor education programs may derive substantial benefit from school counselor involvement in curriculum development relating to leisure needs and leisure counseling of youth. This input could be provided in a meaningful way through school counselor involvement as a member of a self-study team.

AGING

The need for school counselors to be aware of and sensitive to the aging process, older people, and children's attitudes toward and interactions with older persons was substantially demonstrated in the March 1982 special issue of *The School Counselor*. Titled "Aging Education: Perspectives and Techniques for School Counselors," this issue included numerous suggestions for school counselors in dealing with concerns related to aging. Obviously, these are concerns that no effective school counselor can afford to ignore (Ganikos & Benedict, 1982).

School counselors must begin by developing an awareness of their own attitudes, values, and beliefs in relation to aging. Armed with this knowledge, they can explore the attitudes toward older persons prevalent among the youth, teachers, and administrators in their local schools or school system. Positive intervention strategies might begin with consultation with administrators and inservice education for teachers and guidance staff (Murphey, Myers, & Drennan, 1982). The involvement of parents in aging awareness activities would have beneficial effects on families in general, as well as youth in particular. Feedback from these activities would be useful for university counselor education programs.

DEATH AND DYING

Death is an inescapable fact of life and one that all children, at some point, must confront. Prior preparation, in terms of death awareness, knowledge about death and dying, and explorations of death anxieties and fears can be critical means of preparing children to cope with death in their lives. The introduction of death education in the schools is potentially controversial and sensitive ethical issues may arise for the counselor (Mansfield, Privette, & Bilbrey, 1982). It is precisely because the sensitivity of this area that the school counselor may be the most effective staff member to introduce the topic and conduct relevant activities.

It is extremely important that school counselors consult with administrators, teachers, and parents when developing death education activities. Inservice education may be essential before support is obtained for activities with youth. Both individual and group counseling approaches may be indicated. School counselors can and should make counselor educators aware of any problems they experience, and they can suggest to the educators ways of developing skills in this area for school counselors in training. This is another vital area where the school counselor's involvement as a self-study team member offers a ready avenue to needed curriculum revision.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to encourage practicing counselors to learn about and become involved with counselor education for the 1980s. Copies of the AACD *Standards* for counselor preparation are available through AACD/ASCA Headquarters, Alexandria, Virginia. Attention has been brought to only a few of the areas to which counselors can bring expertise. Other areas such as internship and practica are equally important as shapers of the future. The major point is the need for practitioner input whenever curricula are designed.

Because all educators are aware of how Accreditation acts as a catalyst for action and change when standards are used, school counselors are urged to be involved in this process. Reading the *Standards*, reflecting on the demands of the school, and reviewing a graduate catalogue from a local college or university will help the reader determine whether the profession is preparing counselors adequately for the 1980s and beyond.

From time to time, some authors noted that school counselors continue to receive less than adequate preparation. Frequently, this is offered without documentation or opportunity for rebuttal. Who more than school counselors should be addressing such observations? Who more than school counselors should ensure that both pre- and inservice education are relevant, substantive, and available for their and others benefit?

School counselors can contact their closest counselor education faculty and inquire about the use of the *Standards for Preparation of Counselor Education*. Does the faculty intend using them for their next Self-study? Are they soliciting input from practitioners about their program offerings?

If school counseling is to be all of which it is capable, then we must work together in seeing that counselor preparation is shaped up. Otherwise, we may be "shipping water" and losing the opportunity to continue as an integral part of the total school program.

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