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Fostering Resilience: Preparing School Counselors-in-Training to Support English Language Learners

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Abstract

During practicum and internship experiences, school counselors-in-training may engage in counseling activities with diverse populations, including English language learners. High levels of need and limited training with this student population may result in low levels of resilience and self-efficacy for school counselors-in-training. Strategic and intentional support by counselor educators may bolster resilience in school counselors-in-training and yield needed counseling services for English language learners.

Keywords: English language learners, school counselors-in-training, resilience

English language learners (ELLs) represent one of the fastest growing populations in U.S. schools. These students face stressors that include English language mastery, academic success, social interaction, and cultural awareness among peers. This insight aids in identifying the beneficial reasons for assistance from school counselors. School counselors may provide group counseling, individual counseling, and various interventions (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012) to enhance progress and promote strengths in ELLs. Some school counselors, however, may not provide the same types of services to ELLs (Clemente & Collison, 2000; Cook, Pérusse, & Rojas, 2012; Vela-Gude et al., 2009). Therefore, counselor educators should prepare school counselors-in-training to be diligent in their efforts with ELLs; however, support may be needed to help counselors-in-training persist in their efforts. This manuscript proposes that support, knowledge, self-care, reflection, and skills may help bolster resilience for school counselors-in-training.

English Language Learners

Definition

The U.S. Department of Education (2015) defines ELLs as "a national-origin-minority student who is limited English proficient." The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reported that the number of ELLs in U.S. schools has gradually increased since 2002 and these students represent approximately nine percent of the student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Therefore it is evident ELLs have unique needs in which school counselors are qualified to provide support and services for these students (ASCA, 2012).

Needs

ELLs have unique academic and social-emotional needs. Additionally, ELLs are expected to acquire academic levels of English and master content in various subject areas for school success (Nieto, 2002). As a result, factors such as large academic load, test anxiety, limited educational resources, and differences in academic expectations lead to stress for ELLs (Villalba, Lewis, & Wachter, 2007). Social-emotional concerns from family changes, immigration concerns, and discrimination can also contribute to pressure and trauma for English Language Learners (Villalba et al., 2007). Therefore, school counselors-in-training who recognize these social justice implications and understand the role of the school counselor will be well equipped to provide counseling services to ELLs (ASCA, 2012).

School Counselors and English Language Learners

School counselors have been identified as fundamental to the success of ELLs by providing direct and indirect counseling services to meet their academic, social-emotional, and career needs through programs such as individual counseling, group counseling, academic tutoring, mentoring, and college access workshops (ASCA, 2012; Cook et al., 2012; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba & Indelicato, 2006). School counselors-in-training who are aware of the needs of ELLs and the types of services that benefit students and families may feel an increased sense of resilience.

Service at Different Rates

The rates of success with counseling services for ELLs have varied. Some ELLs reported that school counselors were unavailable to support their needs (Vela-Gude et al., 2009), whereas other school counselors effectively met the needs of ELLs, specifically after receiving training (McCall-Perez, 2000; Smith-Adcock et al., 2006). Some school counselors have reported challenges, such as differences in language, limited availability, and understanding culture, when working with ELLs (Clemente & Collison, 2000; Vela-Gude et al., 2009). Cook et al. (2012) found that Latino school counselors facilitated college-going interventions more frequently than their White counterparts. Therefore, school counselors-in-training who are aware of these needs, services, and interventions can leverage this knowledge by proactively implementing similar services within their practicum and internship sites to best serve students. Additionally, counselor educators may partner with site supervisors to suggest such opportunities for school counselors-intraining to experience during practicum and internship.

Resilience

Resilience is defined as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress" (American Psychological Association, 2016, para. 4). Additionally, resilience is described as the ability to "bounce" back" from difficult experiences (American Psychological Association, 2016). Researchers have utilized terms such as burnout, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatization, and compassion fatigue to describe the negative impact the helping process may have on counselors (Gilliland & James, 2001; Merriman, 2015; Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001). Gilliland and James (2001) defined counselor burnout as "a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations" (p. 610). Thompson, Frick, and Trice-Black (2011) explained that counselors may undergo mental, physical, and emotional demands in their work due to complex client stories, unrealistic counselor expectations, and small changes in the counseling process. School counselors may face additional demands due to language needs and limited educational resources for ELLs and their families (Clemente & Collison, 2000). These experiences may result in exhaustion, depersonalization with clients and/or avoidance of topics that involve emotional pain by counselors (Gilliland & James, 2001; Merriman, 2015; Skovholt et al., 2001). It is imperative that school counselors-in-training identify actions that will help them "bounce back" from any mental, physical, or emotional demands of school counseling.

Osborn (2004) described counselor stamina as "endurance" or the ability to "withstand, resist or hold up under pressure" (p. 319). Stamina and resilience are fostered via knowledge, support networks, and self-care (Merriman, 2015; Osborn, 2004; Skovholt et al., 2001). Thompson et al.(2011) described counselor self-care as "purposeful efforts to set time aside to engage in activities outside of work that replenish energy and confidence" (p. 156). Counselors are more at risk of burnout and harm to clients when they do not engage in self-care. Therefore, it is imperative for school counselors-in-training to learn how to provide services and support to ELLs and partake in resilience building activities in order to provide appropriate, ethical practices (ASCA, 2016).

Counselor Resilience Factors

Factors such as support, knowledge, self-care (Merriman, 2015; Osborn, 2004; Skovholt et al., 2001), reflection, and skills may bolster resiliency for school counselors-in-training when they encounter stressors in their work with ELLs. School counselors-in-training who are aware of these factors and implement them into their practice may gain an increased sense of self-efficacy and resilience when providing counseling services to ELLs. Additionally, it is assumed that school counselors-in-training may experience job satisfaction based on their ability to provide services for ELLs.

Support

Counselor educators provide support to school counselors-in-training by guiding and building self-efficacy through teaching and supervision (Thompson et al., 2011). Researchers noted that counselors benefitted from regular consultation with at least one trusted colleague (Osborn, 2004), and counselors-in-training reported that support from faculty supervisors helped them gain resilience (Thompson et al., 2011). Additionally, faculty supervisors who created opportunities for school counselors-in-training to explore their experiences with clients contributed to counselor resilience. Merriman (2015) explained that through appropriate, structured supervision activities, interns can see, discuss, and practice the importance of consultation, debriefing, peer support, and appropriate boundaries. Therefore, counselor educators may help school counselors-in-training increase resilience by providing supervision that allows school counselors-in-training to discuss their field work with ELLs and consider ways to consult or find additional networks of support.

Knowledge

Counselor educators who prepare school counselors-in-training are in the position to provide support by focusing on the question, *What do school counselors-in-training need to know in order to increase their resilience while working with ELLs?* School counselors-in-training may benefit from learning about the experiences, policies, and learning strategies needed for ELLs' school success (Jimenez-Silva, Olson, & Hernandez, 2012). Jimenez-Silva et al. (2012) found that pre-service teachers had increased self-efficacy with ELLs when they learned about the relevant theories and policies influencing these students.

School counselors-in-training may also gain confidence and increase their levels of resilience by examining the experiences, policies, and needs of ELLs. Hipolito-Delgado, Cook, Avrus, and Bonham (2011) suggested that counselors-in-training study the multicultural population they would work with prior to engaging in the counseling process. The authors argued that it was critical for counselors-in-training to identify their own biases and assumptions and investigate discrimination faced by a population before starting an immersion experience. Additionally, a thorough understanding of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies may assist school counselors-in-training to fully conceptualize ELLs and their families based on the intersectionalities of race, oppression, and the impact on "mental health and well-being" (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016, p. 30). Bruhn, Irby, Luo, and Thweatt (2004) highlighted the need to infuse English Language Learner concerns and strategies

throughout the curriculum and, specifically, factors such as the "environmental, cultural and linguistic influences on learner's development" (p. 151). School counselors-intraining may grow in confidence when they understand the specific needs of ELLs.

School counselors-in-training may also benefit from explicit teaching about work-related stressors, symptoms of stress, and preventative factors. Skovholt et al. (2001) explained that identifying specific stressors that can occur in counseling work inoculates counselors from burnout. Furthermore, school counselors-in-training may increase resilience when they learn about topics such as burnout or compassion fatigue. Merriman (2015) proposed explicitly teaching counselor interns about compassion fatigue and its symptoms during supervision. The author also proposed that students be educated about protective factors, such as self-care plans, in order to bolster their resilience. School counselors-in-training who acquire knowledge about compassion fatigue and its symptoms may reduce the risk of burnout while working with ELLs.

Self-Care

The American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) *Ethical Standards for School Counselors* calls for school counselors to "monitor their emotional and physical health and practice wellness to ensure optimal professional effectiveness. School counselors seek physical or mental health support when needed to ensure professional competence" (ASCA, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative for counselor educators to encourage and promote the importance of developing self-care plans as well as the implications of self-care deficits (ASCA, 2016; Thompson et al., 2011).

Counselors-in-training defined self-care as "purposeful and proactive" (Thompson et al., 2011, p. 156). When counselors engage in self-care, they intentionally disconnect from counseling activities to rejuvenate and re-energize. Counselor educators can promote self-care by discussing the importance of wellness, ethical implications, and implementation (ASCA, 2016; Thompson et al., 2011). For example, counselors-intraining reported increased resilience when faculty supervisors directly prompted them about their levels of self-care and discussed the importance of avoiding burnout (Thompson et al., 2011). Counselors-in-training can also engage in actions that promote self-care. Osborn (2004) suggested that counselors may increase stamina when they are selective in their activities, ways of practice, and client issues. Further, counselors may increase stamina when they utilize time effectively (Osborn, 2004). Bradley, Whisenhunt, Adamson, and Kress (2013) reported that creative approaches can be used to help counselors become aware of their professional and personal needs.

Reflection

Self-reflection allows counselors to consider their personal well-being (Bradley et al., 2013). School counselors-in-training are able to focus on different aspects of their experiences while reflecting on areas such as the counseling, its impact on students, and themselves. Skovholt et al. (2001) encouraged counselors to reflect on the dimensions of counseling they can control, content knowledge, and relationship building. Bradley et al. (2013) explained that in order to promote self-care, counselors should reflect on what is working well within their scope of practice and what adjustments might be needed in their counseling work. School counselors-in-training may consider reflecting and monitoring their well-being and success through journaling (Pope-Davis, Breaux, & Liu,

1997) or recording their personal and/or client accomplishments on small pieces of paper to store in a container to view as a reminder (Bradley et al., 2013). Journals can take different forms, such as pictures, poems or lyrics, to help school counselors-in-training examine their counseling insights.

Reflection can also help school counselors-in-training consider their own biases and assumptions. DeRicco and Sciarra (2005) reported that meaningful engagement coupled with regular journaling helped counselors-in-training become more aware of personal biases. School counselors-in-training may also consider journaling regularly throughout their field or multicultural immersion experiences to elicit self-reflection (Pope-Davis et al., 1997). These reflections would allow school counselors-in-training to ponder encounters with diverse groups and measure their own personal changes over time (Pope-Davis, Breaux & Liu, 1997). Ishii, Gilbride, and Stensrud (2009) noted that daily reflections during immersion experiences yielded cognitive, affective, and perceptive reactions for students. Regular reflections may yield expressions of empathy and cognitive dissonance toward diverse groups and help school counselors-in-training consider areas of strength and growth with ELLs.

Skills

School counselors-in-training must not only acquire knowledge about themselves, students, families, and stress-related factors within their work, but also practice using that information for their own wellness and growth. Counselors-in-training reported that developing wellness plans and utilizing those plans during supervision promoted resiliency over time (Thompson et al., 2011). Other researchers have suggested activities that may promote counselor resilience such as encouraging counselors to create professional development plans to increase professional vitality (Skovholt et al., 2001). These plans might help school counselors-in-training identify their strengths and augment areas for growth. Merriman (2015) encouraged counselors-in-training to focus on the positive aspects of counseling to foster resilience, whereas Bradley et al., (2013) recommended that counselors note small changes made to interventions for the benefit of clients during counseling. Implementing wellness plans (Thompson et al., 2011) and acknowledging small changes made to counseling (Bradley et al., 2013) based on the needs of ELLs may support and promote school counselor-in-training resilience.

Factors such as support, knowledge, self-care (Merriman, 2015; Osborn, 2004; Skovholt et al., 2001), reflection, and skills may bolster resiliency for school counselors-in-training when they encounter stressors in their work with ELLs. The use of these factors to increase school counselor-in-training resilience is described in the following case illustration.

Case Illustration

David, a school counselor-in-training, reaches out to his university supervisor to seek assistance. He is currently in his internship and his placement site is composed of a high percentage of ELLs. During David's meeting with his university supervisor, he states that he is having difficulty feeling comfortable in his counseling sessions with ELL students. Additionally, he would like to reach out to some of the students' parents to collaborate and discuss particular interventions to support the students, but he

experiences anxiety when attempting to make contact. The university supervisor recognizes David's desire to build a partnership with the students and parents; however, he notices David is lacking confidence in his ability to facilitate collaboration due to the language barriers.

Illustration of Counselor Resilience Factors With School Counselors-in-Training

Support

David may establish a time for regular one-on-one consultation with his university supervisor to discuss the counseling sessions he has conducted with ELLs and collaboration with their parents (Osborn, 2004). During this time, the university supervisor may provide a safe space for David to discuss his experiences with ELLs and provide structured activities to help him learn and reflect. This will also allow David to feel heard and validated while receiving support, guidance, and strategies to build resilience (Thompson et al., 2011). David's university supervisor may also help David identify other networks of support at his internship site or beyond that may assist him as he works with ELLs and other students.

Knowledge

The university supervisor could begin by assessing David's knowledge about himself, ELLs, and resources. Furthermore, the university supervisor could assist David to identify explicit stressors (Merriman, 2015) that arise for him in his work with ELLs, specifically address what makes David feel uncomfortable when working in counseling sessions, and explore his anxiety. David could discuss challenges he encountered with ELLs along with any biases and assumptions that may arise from his work. Further, the university supervisor could talk to David about the impact of the stress on his counseling performance and the risks for burnout (Merriman, 2015).

After hearing from David, the university supervisor could help him examine pertinent background knowledge about the ELLs at his site and their needs (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011). Further, if David is unaware of specific techniques, theories, or activities that are most beneficial to the students and families, the university supervisor would help David identify resources to learn about and develop strategies (Skovholt et al., 2001). David might also consider people at the site who may have pertinent knowledge or ideas that he might consult with during his internship experience. Finally, the university supervisor could help David develop a plan outlining his next steps in his counseling and collaboration with ELLs and their families (Thompson et al., 2011; Skovholt et al., 2001).

Self-Care

Discussing appropriate self-care should be an integral component of the meetings David has with his university supervisor and/or site supervisor. The university supervisor should emphasize the importance of David taking care of himself and provide an opportunity to explore purposeful self-care strategies that work for David (Thompson et al., 2011). The university supervisor could share his/her own self-care activities in order to model the importance of self-care for David. Further, the university supervisor could

help David examine how he uses his time. Using these ideas, David should create a self-care plan to rejuvenate and re-energize (Thompson et al., 2011). Additionally, during consultation, the importance of self-care as an integral component of ethical practices should be addressed by the university site supervisor for the purpose of informing David to adhere to the ASCA ethical standards (2016).

Reflection

David should be encouraged to journal regarding his experiences working with ELLs and their parents (Pope-Davis et al., 1997). His university supervisor could assist by providing a list of questions and/or prompts about the internship experience and his cognitive, affective, and perceptive changes based on his interactions with ELLs. David could also use this opportunity to write about ways he has been successful with ELLs and their families and what adjustments might be needed (Bradley et al., 2013). In addition, David can reflect and monitor both his personal and student accomplishments by putting them on small pieces of paper to store in a container to view as a reminder of what is going well (Bradley, Whisenhunt, Adamson, & Kress, 2013).

Skills

David needs to put each of the resilience factors into action in order to be successful with ELLs. This could be done by encouraging him to create a professional development plan that identifies his strengths, acknowledges areas needed for growth, and proposes necessary action (Skovholt et al., 2001). David might also continue to engage in activities that have worked well as he recognizes the positive outcomes resulting from accomplishment and adjustments made through the counseling process (Bradley et al., 2013; Merriman, 2015). Finally, his university supervisor would hold David accountable for this growth by asking about the steps he takes in his professional development, self-care, and other plans developed for his work with ELLs. A professional development plan would allow David to tangibly grasp his accomplishments and recognize his strengths (Skovholt et al., 2001).

Implications for Practice

School counselors-in-training are urged to seek knowledge and support from counselor educators as well as others in the school counseling profession. Additionally, they are behooved to conduct research encompassing the cultural, historical, and political backgrounds about their students' countries of origins for the purpose of gaining awareness of and understanding of the historical and political backgrounds of their clients (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011). This practice would allow school counselors-in-training to build positive connections, increase their sense of self-efficacy, and demonstrate empathy (Ishii et al., 2009).

School counselors-in-training who effectively seek support and assistance through local networks and resources gain further insight into the student's worldview and are able to access support. Further, supports such as supervision or collaboration with faculty may help school counselors-in-training bolster their professional resilience (Thompson et al., 2011). These experiences may allow school counselors-in-training to reflect on the ways they have supported ELLs and hear how others address the needs of this student

population. School counselors-in-training may also benefit from developing wellness or self-care plans (Thompson et al., 2011) and using networks to hold one another accountable for the implementation. School counselors-in-training may further explore multiculturalism and diversity by enrolling in a study abroad program to expose themselves to other cultures.

Implications for Future Research

Future research on the topic of counselor educator support and preparation of school counselors-in-training for working with ELLs and families would be beneficial for the training process. Research focusing on the self-efficacy and resilience factors impacting school counselors-in-training during their preparation would provide counselor educators with further understanding as to how to support school counselors-in-training to work with ELLs and families. Additionally, the voices of school counselors-in-training working with ELLs and families would provide insight on these experiences and recommendations to the school counseling specialty. Furthermore, studies that examine the impact of educational activities on school counselor-in-training levels of resilience or self-efficacy may be beneficial. Studies exploring the supervision experiences of school counselors-in-training working with linguistically diverse students may also provide insights. Finally, research that examines the knowledge, confidence, and experiences of counselor educators in their work with ELLs may be helpful.

Conclusion

School counselors-in-training may conceivably experience physical, emotional, and cognitive strains during their practicum and internship experiences due to multifaceted client stories, unrealistic expectations, and minor fluctuations in the counseling process. These experiences may result in lack of confidence and possible burnout. Consequently, school counselors-in-training may not provide ELLs with the support needed due to their own lack of resilience. In order to increase their resilience, school counselors-in-training should acquire appropriate knowledge about English Language Learner needs (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011; Jimenez-Silva et al., 2012) along with the symptoms of burnout (Merriman, 2015; Skovholt et al., 2001). Subsequently, school counselors-in-training should also develop a support network through supervision and consultation with counselor educators and colleagues (Osborn, 2004; Thompson et al., 2011). Supervision and reflection may allow school counselors-in-training to reflect on their experiences with ELLs and identify and acknowledge changes or gains as a result of their counseling efforts (Pope-Davis et al., 1997). Further, school counselors-intraining might develop and utilize self-care and professional development plans in order to continue gaining skills to help them work with this student population (Skovholt et al., 2001; Thompson et al., 2011). As school counselors-in-training grow in resilience, ELLs will benefit from the services they provide.

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