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The Role of School Counselors in Promoting and Implementing Internationalized Comprehensive Programs in K–12 Schools

GoEun Na and Marte Ostvik-de Wilde

Na, GoEun, PhD, is an assistant professor at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Her research interests include multicultural counseling, supervision, and internationalization in school counseling.

Ostvik-de Wilde, Marte, PhD, is an assistant professor at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, Connecticut. Her research interests include school counselor supervision and development, and internationalization in counseling and K–12 education.

Abstract

Internationalization has become an inevitable trend in the U.S. educational system. Therefore, by examining internationalization in both K–12 education and the field of counseling, this article provides a rationale and a framework for how the role of the school counselor appropriately aligns with implementing globally focused comprehensive school counseling programs. Practical strategies for implementing themes of internationalization within both comprehensive K–12 school counseling programs and counselor education graduate programs are outlined.

The changing demographics across the United States necessitate the incorporation of an internationalized curriculum into our K–12 schools. According to the 2012 Census, international migration will be the principal factor in U.S. population growth over the next several decades (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Approximately 14% of the current U.S. population was born in another country (Kena et al., 2014). Furthermore, one in five students speaks a language at home other than English, which equates to an estimated 11 million multilingual elementary, middle, and high school students. In particular, 69% of Hispanic/Latino and 64% of Asian elementary and secondary school students speak another language at home (Kena et al., 2014).

With respect to cultural diversity in the U.S. educational system, professional counselors should possess multicultural counseling competencies in order to effectively provide services for all students and their families (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). As an extension of the multicultural counseling competencies, professional school counselors should develop awareness, knowledge, and skills that can be applicable across cultural and geopolitical boundaries in a global context. According to Ng and Noonan

(2012), internationalization promotes collaborations and mutual partnerships. These collaborative partnerships can be characterized by recognition of differences, cultural sensitivity, intercultural skills, and global competence (Kreber, 2009; Ng & Noonan, 2012). Though the concept of “internationalization” within the educational arena has multiple definitions and varied applications, typically, as well as for the purposes of this article, it refers to educational content and delivery that incorporates or emphasizes international, global, or intercultural features (Ng & Noonan, 2012).

The purpose of this article is to broadly examine the role of internationalized education in K–12 schools and within the counseling profession. Specifically, the authors will provide a rationale and a framework for how the unique qualities and functions of school counselors align with their ability and responsibility to implement globally focused programs and interventions. Furthermore, an additional focus will be to provide counselor educators with applicable means for encouraging and infusing these ideas into their school counseling masters programs.

Internationalization of the Counseling Profession

In response to the current trend of internationalization in education and counseling, professional organizations have facilitated the international development of counseling through collaborative work with various countries and through the leadership of the U.S. counseling profession. Professional counseling organizations such as the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC), the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), the American Counseling Association (ACA), the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD), and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) have already incorporated international themes and competencies in their missions, standards and various activities, including conferences, journals, and interest networks (Lorelle, Byrd, & Crockett, 2012; Paredes et al., 2008).

In 2003, the NBCC created NBCC-International (NBCC-I) to foster the growth of excellent counseling services through counselor credentialing and collaborations with counseling professionals in other countries, and to promote the strength of counseling profession on a global scale (Paredes et al., 2008). Counseling organizations in Argentina, Jamaica, Mexico, and Venezuela are collaboratively working with NBCC-I to create country-specific certifications, and 16 countries have formed partnerships focused on mental health facilitator programs (NBCC-I, 2014).

Professional counseling organizations, such as ACA, ACES, and AMCD have worked to increase awareness of global issues in counseling and to provide opportunities for professional counselors to expand their knowledge and skills to best serve their domestic and international clients more thoroughly. Through the International Committee and the International Counseling Interest Network, ACA and ACES have worked on building international relationships with other countries (Paredes et al., 2008). As the world’s largest professional counseling organization, ACA serves professional counselors in the United States and in 50 other countries to support internationalization in the counseling profession and to provide ethical guidelines for counseling practice (ACA, 2014). During the 2013 ACA conference in Hawaii, ACA provided 65 educational sessions related to multicultural and international issues. Furthermore, ACA offered an

international reception, international panel, and international roundtable to support cultural exchanges through interactions among their members and international scholars, students, and counselors, and to provide opportunities for sharing knowledge and experiences of counseling practices and preparation.

AMCD is another professional counseling organization that has focused on promoting quality counseling services for clients from culturally diverse backgrounds. Through the AMCD Multicultural Counseling Competencies (Arredondo et al., 1996), AMCD has provided guidelines for professional counselors to develop culturally-appropriate counseling strategies and techniques that best fit a client's cultural context, and to increase knowledge about local, state, national, and international policies that may influence counselors and their clients.

Furthermore, CACREP, as an accrediting body, demonstrates a commitment to the development of standards and procedures that foster the betterment of counseling preparation programs in diverse societies. The CACREP Standards provide eight core areas for developing a professional counselor identity and acquiring sufficient knowledge and skills to provide effective counseling for culturally diverse clients (CACREP, 2009). Among these eight core areas, Social and Cultural Diversity, in particular, highlights an understanding of the cultural context of internationalization. For instance, standard II.G.2 indicates that counselor education programs should emphasize “multicultural and pluralistic trends, including characteristics and concerns within and among diverse groups nationally and internationally” (CACREP, 2009, p. 10).

School Counseling and Internationalized Programs

Given the reality of internationalization, the counseling profession is providing information and resources that support counselor educators, professional counselors, and counseling students as they work to offer internationally competent counseling services in the United States. School counselors represent one group of key stakeholders in this process. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has established a position statement that encourages school counselors to address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and to take action to ensure the accessibility of appropriate services and opportunities for all students (ASCA, 2012, 2014). School counselors can provide K–12 students and their families with meaningful exposure to internationalized education by using an innovative and culturally competent approach. They can do this by ensuring that K–12 students are aware of their own cultural heritages and how they impact their interactions with others. Elementary and secondary school students need to be equipped with knowledge about other cultures and what is happening around the world, and they need to be able to apply this awareness and knowledge when interacting with those around them. School counselors can integrate international concepts into their programs through their mission and philosophy statements, goals and objectives, and delivery of indirect and direct services. Furthermore, counselors can also choose to strategically align their comprehensive programs with already established ones, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) program or Oxfam's Curriculum for Global Citizenship (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2014; Oxfam Development Education Programme, 2006).

Despite the numerous advantages to using a global lens when creating and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs, there are some substantial

barriers that might act as obstacles. In the age of educator accountability, a central focus for school counselors should be on creating data-driven programs that result in measurable student and school outcomes (ASCA, 2012; National Office for School Counselor Advocacy, 2011). Using data to recognize student needs, collaborating with key stakeholders, and aligning programming with the ASCA National Model and K–12 core educational standards are among the expected activities of a transformed school counselor (ASCA, 2014). Given that school counselors should deliver services across several levels of intervention (i.e., individual and group, classroom and grade level, school-wide, community and family) while also engaging in tracking and reporting critical data elements for accountability purposes, it can seem daunting to add another task to an already full plate (Carey & Carey, 2012; Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). However, despite these practical barriers, the benefits of incorporating international competencies within a school counseling program should exceed these challenges. As opposed to considering internationalized education as a valuable but optional endeavor, school counselors should recognize that the diverse and unique needs of the contemporary student population demand this type of focus.

Recommendations for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

An important starting point for school counselors who want to infuse themes of internationalization into their comprehensive programs is to create a mission statement that can align with these goals. This statement can integrate concepts such as being a global citizen or a part of a global community; empowering students to be open-minded and curious; encouraging critical thinking; and valuing diversity in people and perspectives. Once a school counseling program’s vision, philosophy, and/or mission statements include this language, it becomes easier to naturally align programming goals and interventions that demonstrate a vested interest in internationalized education and counseling. School counselors who implement internationalized comprehensive counseling programs are essentially choosing to focus on student competencies related to both recognizing differences among cultures and countries, and promoting respect for these “differences and traditions” (Ng & Noonan, 2012).

Utilizing a systemic perspective when creating these interventions at various levels is critically important. School counselors can infuse international themes and concepts into counseling interventions at all levels: individual and group counseling, classroom and grade levels, school-wide, community and family, and district-level (Erford, 2015). The following section will offer practical suggestions and ideas for ways that school counselors can implement these into their counseling and curriculum in all of the abovementioned levels of intervention.

Individual and Group Counseling

School counselors are uniquely equipped to handle the complex developmental needs of K–12 students. Individual and group sessions can focus on themes of respecting differences, resolving conflicts through open-minded dialogue, and engaging in thoughtful reflection about culture and its impact on the self and others. School counselors can:

- place special emphasis on respecting and appreciating diversity within the self and others.
- develop counseling groups that address international students' special needs and promote their strengths and assets.
- advise a social justice or equity group that can sponsor a variety of activities or programming, such as supplementing typical homeroom curriculum with focused equity lessons once a week.
- create and distribute informed consent documents, pamphlets, and brochures in multiple languages for individual and group counseling.

School Counseling Core Curriculum

School counselors can internationalize their counseling core curriculum in the classroom by creating new curriculum units and adapting preexisting topic areas. They can:

- use social media and technology, such as YouTube clips, in the classroom as a means to show the increasingly interconnected world and the access that students can have to the experiences of youth in other countries
- incorporate books written in other countries (many offer both English and native-language translations) and books that demonstrate unique cultural experiences around the world when using bibliotherapy in the classroom. *Where Children Sleep* by James Mollison (2010), for example, offers insight into experiences around the world by showcasing photographs of children's bedrooms in various countries.
- introduce international current events to the curriculum to serve as a focal point for psychoeducation about respecting alternative points of view, appreciating ethnic and cultural diversity, or nontraditional career opportunities.

Grade-Level and School-Wide Programming

In order to ensure that themes of internationalization are infused into the culture of the school building, it is essential that school counselors use both written and unwritten messages that promote exploration and acceptance of global concepts and issues. They can:

- facilitate learning through monthly story-telling and lectures by inviting families and others from the community. School counselors can rotate the topic each month and focus on something relevant for school, such as sharing stories of being Third Culture Kids or first generation U.S. citizens.
- develop and mentor a Model UN club that not only helps students to learn about the UN system, but also promotes and enhances communication and conflict resolution skills.
- share historical or current events, statistics or interesting facts from various places around the world during morning and afternoon announcements, on bulletin boards, and through web sites and social media outlets.
- empower students and families to showcase their knowledge and expertise of their own culture at grade-level or school-wide cultural days or "international days." School counselors can follow up these events or days with specific activities and discussions that facilitate deeper awareness and knowledge of cultural diversity.

District

School counselors can cultivate a truly internationalized educational experience for K–12 students by creating seamless programming starting in elementary school, continuing through middle school, and culminating in high schools. School counselors can:

- advocate for the addition of immersion programs for students. They can make efforts to seek support from local businesses and fundraise so that students are able to travel to other countries and engage in service-learning projects.
- seek supervision from schools and districts that may already have successfully aligned their school counseling programs or school-wide mission statements with international themes and concepts.
- advocate for the importance of this type of focus at school counseling supervision meetings, and when meeting with administrators and colleagues across the district. They can offer and take opportunities to collaborate and consult with school counselors and educators from other schools throughout the district whenever possible.

Family and Community

When creating and implementing this programming, school counselors can consider the strengths and assets of families and communities. A true partnership with families and communities can empower them to share knowledge and expertise by engaging in dialogue and implementing programs and services. School counselors can:

- connect by partnering with international families that are already part of the school community. This can be done informally by involving these families in the process, or formally through the formation of an advisory council. Furthermore, the survival of this type of school counseling program depends on the investment of the families, so school counselors should continuously seek to gain knowledge and improve services through the use of needs assessments, focus groups, interviews, and evaluative methods such as surveys and other measures.
- make meaningful connections with community partners who are already engaged in working with students, families, and other key stakeholders, and who can be assets to the work that school counselors are doing.

There are clearly a multitude of opportunities for counselors to create and implement internationalized concepts and issues in comprehensive school counseling programs. When implementing this “world” perspective, however, school counselors and counselor educators need to be cautious not to employ a Western-centric perspective. A program mission statement focusing on global and international competencies carries great responsibility in terms of ethical and appropriate implementation. School counselors who develop or implement programs and curriculum with an internationalized focus must be cognizant of this responsibility. Fortunately, integral to the counselor identity is the role of the counselor as a multiculturally competent social justice advocate (Arredondo et al., 1996; ACA, 2014). Thus, utilizing an internationally themed vision and mission can enhance and strengthen a school counseling program (Bradley & Jarchow, 1998). Once this is in place, school counselors are in an ideal position to create program goals and interventions focused on crucial student outcomes.

Recommendations for Counselor Education Programs

Counselor educators have a great deal of responsibility to help school counseling students to develop the awareness, knowledge and skills that prepare them to effectively assist both U.S. and international students and families according to an internationalized curriculum. The following section will suggest practical strategies for counselor educators to infuse internationalization themes and competencies into their school counseling curriculum.

Program Mission

According to CACREP Standards, counselor education programs have a comprehensive mission statement that describes the program objectives, opportunities for professional involvement, and appropriate activities for students (CACREP, 2009). To promote an internationalized curriculum, counselor educators can provide a framework for serving and advocating for clients in the globalized world. For example, a mission statement might include wording such as *The counselor education program is committed to preparing counselors who are able to serve diverse populations and to promote the advancement of global well-being*. A statement such as this clearly addresses the program's intention of upholding an internationalized focus when training school counselors.

School Counseling Curriculum

To infuse internationalization themes into counselor education programs, counselor educators should design their curriculum so that they become an integral part of students' development and training processes. In order to implement culturally responsive school counseling programs, school counseling students should learn the competencies needed to develop and promote inclusive environments in their schools (Park-Taylor, Walsh, & Ventura, 2007).

Introduction to School Counseling Foundations course. This course typically provides an overview of the counseling profession, including its history, the characteristics of effective counselors, and the roles and responsibilities of counselors. Through this course, students begin to develop their identity as professional school counselors. The course instructor:

- introduces the different types of helping professionals in different countries. The instructor should use the Internet and scholarly literature to expand knowledge about roles and responsibilities of these helping professionals, including school counselors, in other countries.
- invites professionals who have directly worked with international students and families in schools or community settings to gain systemic support and to increase knowledge of the unique needs and experiences of international students and families in the United States.
- encourages students to be active members in professional organizations which focus on internationalization in education and counseling.

Career Counseling course. The theoretical and practical tradition of career counseling predominately represents unique aspects of Western culture. Some of these

cultural characteristics of counseling include the individual-centered nature of decision-making, openness, and long-term goal setting (Sue & Sue, 1981). Given the cultural realities of career counseling, counselor educators should emphasize the importance of career counseling practices based on the cultural context of each client. They should:

- conduct an analysis of a career development process to better understand how various cultural factors and international issues impact students and their well-being.
- examine the decision-making process related to career choices in different cultures.
- explore different types of careers around the world, and how they are similar and different across geographic boundaries.

Multicultural Counseling course. Even though it is important to infuse internationalization themes throughout a school counseling curriculum, the Multicultural Counseling course is a cornerstone of building international competencies for school counseling students. Culturally competent counselors are engaged in the process of becoming aware of their values, biases, and limitations, respecting the different worldviews of diverse clients and students, and developing culturally appropriate strategies and skills (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Therefore, it is important to provide experiential learning opportunities to develop these competencies in order to be effective school counselors in a globally interconnected world. Course instructors should:

- use social media and technology to explore various cultural practices and customs and to discuss current events around the world.
- build a network of counseling students in other countries and share their experiences during graduate training programs.
- encourage students to make contact with people from different cultural backgrounds to increase their levels of confidence and tolerance when they encounter different cultures in the U.S. and other countries.

Field Experience

Throughout school counseling programs, students learn various theories and practices to serve the needs of schools and to promote their students' academic, personal/social, and career development (ASCA, 2012). Practicum and internship experiences provide students with opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in the program, while under supervision. Therefore, field experiences should reflect the comprehensive experience of school counseling students. Supervisors should:

- encourage students to broaden their perspectives by working with students in K–12 schools that already have an international focus. When they work in these schools, school counseling students are naturally exposed to internationalized education in K–12 and can learn how school counselors are implementing internationally focused programs and interventions.
- establish and facilitate international cultural immersion field experiences to develop awareness and knowledge of other countries, and create meaningful assignments such as counseling portfolios, process journals, and/or case conceptualizations.

- utilize triadic and group supervision as a way to provide effective supervision related to the roles and responsibilities of school counseling students in internationally focused school counseling programs.

Community Outreach and Partnerships

According to the school counseling themes in the ASCA National Model, school counselors should be able to collaborate with teachers, administrators, community stakeholders, and parents to promote educational equity and to provide appropriate services and support for students from diverse cultural backgrounds (ASCA, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial for counselor educators to think of creative ways to incorporate collaborative work into the curriculum. Counselor educators should encourage school counseling students to reach out to school districts and to implement staff workshops about the impact of internationalization on education, the needs of international students and families, and the role of school counselors in internationally focused counseling programs.

As the process of internationalization has impacted K–12 education and the counseling profession, counselor educators should take responsibility for helping school counseling students develop international competencies for effectively implementing globally focused school counseling programs. CACREP requires counselor educators to engage in professional development, scholarly activities, and services (CACREP, 2009); therefore, counselor educators should be role models for school counseling students to promote internationalization in the counseling profession through teaching, research, and services. They can collaborate on research with faculty members in other countries and present the research at international conferences. Being actively involved with professional organizations and being aware of ongoing international work promotes professional involvement among school counseling students. Furthermore, counselor educators can collaboratively work with school counseling students to conduct research related to themes in internationalization in counseling and the role of school counselors in K–12 schools. By introducing internationalization themes into counselor education programs, counselor educators are making a commitment that ensures school counseling students are developing the competencies necessary for providing culturally competent counseling services and for implementing internationally focused school counseling curriculum.

Final Considerations

In order to adapt curriculum and programming that encourages school counseling students to gain awareness, knowledge, and skills associated with this internationalized material, counselor educators must invest the time it takes to make it a developmentally appropriate process. In turn, school counselors can also begin to slowly consider ways they can shift and adapt the internationalization themes into their current program. Recommending an international focus in school counseling programs is not intended to burden school counselors or to create an unnecessary workload. Even though this type of programming requires thoughtful reflection, systematic implementation, and new forms of evaluation, the benefits are considerable. As previously indicated, both the counseling profession and K–12 education are moving toward this internationalized focus because

students need to understand their roles and futures as they relate to the global economy, changing demographic characteristics, and expanding technological access to other parts of the world. It is essential that school counselors, who must straddle both worlds (i.e., counseling and education), become critical about the ways they deliver services to increasingly complex and diverse student populations so that they remain relevant in a changing world.

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