12-2022

Facilitating Role Understanding and Collaboration Between Aspiring School Counselors and Principals

Shelby K. Gonzales
Boise State University

Dodie Limberg
University of South Carolina

Kathleen M. W. Cunningham
University of South Carolina

Facilitating Role Understanding and Collaboration Between Aspiring School Counselors and Principals

Shelby K. Gonzales*
Boise State University
shelbygonzales@boisestate.edu

Dodie Limberg
University of South Carolina

Kathleen M. W. Cunningham
University of South Carolina

Shelby K. Gonzales, Ph.D. (ORCID: 0000-0002-9867-4112), is an assistant professor at Boise State University in Boise, ID. Email: shelbygonzales@boisestate.edu Dodie Limberg, Ph.D. (ORCID: 0000-0001-7323-0200), is an associate professor at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC. Kathleen M. W. Cunningham, Ph.D. (ORCID: 0000-0002-3291-3336), is an assistant professor, also at the University of South Carolina.

Abstract

Using a convergent mixed-methods design, we investigated role understanding and collaboration between school counselors and principals. Specifically, this study situated aspiring school counselors and principals in a curriculum intervention on the role of their counterpart and then brought the two professions together in a collaborative powerful learning experience. The results of our pilot study demonstrate that both school counselor and educational leadership graduate students benefit from and value a presentation on roles of their opposite counterpart and the opportunity to practice collaboration in their graduate preparation programs.

Keywords: collaboration, education leadership, role understanding, school counseling, social capital

The need for school counselors to address P–12 students' social/emotional well-being and mental health has been emphasized in literature and continues to inform the American School Counselor Association's ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019; Bowers et al., 2018; Collins, 2014). Repeatedly, researchers have provided insight into the effectiveness of school counselors (e.g., Whiston & Quinby, 2009; Whiston et al., 2011) when they work in the role they are trained to do. Unfortunately, as is well documented, school counselors are often assigned duties and roles that do not align with their training and role as outlined by the ASCA National Model (Dollarhide et al., 2007; Havlik et al., 2019).

Furthermore, in spring 2020, the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) forced nationwide school closures, which not only disrupted P–12 students' learning, but also school counselors' ability to deliver comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2021; Limberg et al., in press). Throughout the pandemic, school counselors struggled to serve students, finding difficulty in accessing students in virtual environments and providing virtual counseling lessons on a day-to-day basis, while continuing to manage high caseloads, working to close opportunity and achievement gaps, and being assigned inappropriate duties (ASCA, 2021). Considering that school counselors have continued to advocate for their position and appropriate duties (e.g., Blake, 2020; Collins, 2014), many of the existing concerns of the profession were accentuated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the need for P–12 school administrators to better understand the role of school counselors.

Educational leaders (i.e., principals) have myriad well-established responsibilities (e.g., fostering a positive building culture, supporting teaching and equitable learning, helping acquire resources, driving school improvement). Effective administrators collaborate and work alongside professionals such as teachers, social workers, and school counselors (Robinson et al., 2008). Collaborative school environments can build social capital levels because they value group contributions as more influential than individual efforts (Jones & Harris, 2014). Thus, if the collaborative efforts exist between a school principal and a school counselor, social capital accompanying collaboration may increase.

We argue that solid understanding of the professional roles of different educational stakeholders who work in schools is necessary to build agency and capacity to support students in their education. Therefore, the purpose of our study is to pilot a curriculum intervention to increase role understanding between aspiring school counselors and principals, assess their readiness for interprofessional learning based on the Readiness for Interprofessional Learning Scale (RIPLS; McFayden et al., 2005), and foster collaboration between the two professions through a collaborative powerful learning experience (PLE; Young, 2015) at the graduate level.

Literature Review

Until recently, little research has examined collaboration practice opportunities between preservice school principals and preservice school counselors. Geesa et al. (2020) outlined a framework consisting of six elements for collaboration between preservice and in-service school counselor and principal training programs to meet the diverse student needs within the P–12 education system. The initial element of the framework is effective preservice preparation; therefore, Gessa et al. (2020) emphasized the need for both graduate-level preparation programs to understand comprehensive school counseling models and programs to promote P–12 students' academic, career, and social/emotional growth. Preservice preparation is a natural partnership between these two professions to build social capital within the P–12 education system.

Roles and Responsibilities

For school counselors and their respective programs to be successful, a positive and supportive relationship is necessary between the school counselor and their principal (ASCA, 2019; Leuwerke et al., 2009). The ASCA National Model (2019) provides a framework for school counselors to define, deliver, manage, and assess their comprehensive school counseling program. These four areas are designed to work together to prepare P–12 students for life after graduation, striving for all students to be able to apply their academic achievement strategies, manage emotions, apply interpersonal skills, and plan for postsecondary options to find success upon graduation. To be delivered effectively, a comprehensive school counseling program must be efficiently and effectively managed (ASCA, 2019).

School principals serve as educational leaders who focus on teacher practice and evidence that students are prepared for life beyond the P–12 system (e.g., college and careers; National Policy Board for Education Administration [NPBEA], 2018). Further, school principals are often tasked with supporting teachers in improving student outcomes, hiring staff for their building, delegating roles and responsibilities, the formal evaluation of staff, budget management, engaging with community stakeholders, and continuous school improvement (NPBEA, 2018). Guided by professional and ethical standards, school principals are encouraged to embrace a collaborative effort with various school personnel (e.g., school psychologists, librarians, teachers); however, often absent from their collaborative list is the school counselor. Due to the nature of their roles and working within the same building, school counselors and principals inevitably will need to work together to support the needs of students. If school principals and school counselors do not recognize or understand the other's role, the needs of the students they aim to serve may not be met (Collins, 2014; Dollarhide et al., 2007).

Training to Build Social Capital

Researchers have aimed to inform and educate school principals on the role of school counselors (Blake, 2020; Bringman et al., 2010; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). However, principals report relatively little exposure to comprehensive school counseling programs and school counselor training either in their preparation programs or in their professional world (Leuwerke et al., 2009; Lowery et al., 2018). This lack of exposure and role understanding is concerning because principals oversee and evaluate the work of school counselors and often assign duties that are not aligned with the actual role of the school counselor (i.e., addressing students' social/emotional, career, and academic development). For school counselors and their comprehensive programs to succeed for students, a positive and supportive relationship with their principal is imperative (ASCA, 2019).

Within each respective program, standards regarding training or acknowledgement of the role of a counterpart school counselor or principal are noticeably absent (ASCA, 2019; Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016; NPBEA, 2018). Thus, principals and school counselors may not have a clear understanding of each other's roles. According to Dekker and Uslaner (2001), social capital is where value is placed on social networks, working to bond similar people, and bridging between diverse individuals with reciprocity. School counselors and principals are trained differently, but are often working toward the same goal (Geesa et al., 2020),

situating these two types of professionals to collaborate and gain social capital within the school system to meet their students' diverse needs. Preservice school principals and school counselors need learning experiences to better understand one another's roles and responsibilities to build and foster this social capital.

Powerful Learning Experiences

Powerful leaning experiences (PLEs) are rooted in nine tenets that aim to situate adult learners in activities that are authentic, meaningful, relevant, and problem finding like the real-life situations that will likely appear when they enter the workforce (Young, 2015). PLEs have nine aspects: (a) they are authentic, meaningful, relevant, problem-finding activities; (b) they involve sense making around critical problems of practice; (c) they involve exploration, critique, and deconstruction from an equity perspective (e.g., race, culture, language); (d) they require collaboration and interdependence; (e) they develop confidence in leadership; (f) they place both the professor and the student in a learning situation; (g) they empower learning and make individuals responsible for their own learning; (h) they shift the perspective from classroom to school, district, or state level; and (i) they have a reflective component (Young, 2015, p. 401). These nine characteristics not only support the learner, but also invite the instructor to learn alongside their students.

The PLE framework of instructional design characteristics was introduced by the educational leadership preparation field and focuses on the development of collaborative skills and translating research-based knowledge to practice that adult learners can specifically apply to their learning experience (Young, 2015). Evidence of how PLEs are used in leadership preparation programs is captured in prior research (Cunningham et al., 2019). Reflecting the research on adult learning, PLEs enhance the learning process, specifically of adult learners who have backgrounds filled with experiences (Kolb, 1984), making the use of PLEs appropriate for preservice principals and school counselors.

Theoretical Framework

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT) and communities of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) with considerations of the adult learner (e.g., preservice school principals and school counselors) provide the theoretical framework for this study. Typically, graduate preparation programs encourage their budding professionals to collaborate with other P–12 professionals, but understanding one another's role or the actual practice of collaboration is not required or guaranteed. In our pilot study, we presented preservice principals and school counselors with an opportunity to live out concrete experiences of collaboration in their graduate-level learning. To complete the learning cycle of ELT (Kolb, 1984), graduate-level students engage in active experimentation and the concrete experience of collaboration through solving school-wide issues within a pseudo-school case vignette. Further, communities of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) engage classroom peers as resources for student learning; in this study, classroom peers came from within and outside students' program of study to enhance their learning and the learning of others.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided our study:

1. How does an instructional module on the role of a school counselor (ASCA, 2019) impact educational leadership graduate students' understanding of the role of the school counselor and their readiness for interprofessional learning?
2. How does an instructional module on the role of the school principal (NPBEA, 2018) impact school counseling graduate students' understanding of the role of a school principal and their readiness for interprofessional learning? and
3. How do aspiring school counselors and principals experience a collaborative PLE?

To assess feasibility, we first evaluated undertaking a study that evaluates aspiring school counselors' and principals' knowledge of the role of their professional counterpart as based on the ASCA (2019) and NPBEA (2018) standards and their readiness for interprofessional learning as based on the RIPLS (McFayden et al., 2005; Parsell & Bligh, 1999), and facilitates collaboration between aspiring school counselors and principals through a collaborative PLE. Second, we investigated aspiring school counselors' and principals' perceptions of receiving an intervention on the role of the school counselor or principal and a collaborative PLE during their first or second year in their graduate degree program.

Methods

To answer our research questions, we utilized a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). We used a quasi-experimental, within-groups design and paired samples *t* tests to assess role understanding and readiness for interprofessional learning as based on the RIPLS (McFayden et al., 2005), and thematic analysis to analyze patterns in open-ended survey responses and focus group themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006), we followed the six steps of thematic analysis.

Participants

The sample consisted of 58 graduate students (school counseling *n* = 20, educational leadership *n* = 38) who were enrolled at that time in either a school counseling program (CACREP accredited) or educational leadership (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP] accredited) program at one university in the southeastern region of the United States. Descriptive data and measures of central tendency are presented for all participants in the study (*N* = 58) in Tables 1 and 2.

School Counseling Participants

Most of the school counseling sample identified as female (*n* = 18, 90%) compared to those who identified as male (*n* = 2, 10%). The mean age of the participants (*n* = 20) was 26.55 years (*SD* = 6.23). Ethnicity and race of school counseling participants was 14 (70%) White, four (20%) Black/African American, and two (10%) other/multiracial. All participants reported living in South Carolina. Seventeen school counseling participants indicated completing their bachelor's degree (85%) and three had completed their master's degree (15%). Participants had worked a mean of 2 years (*SD* = 3.69) in education.

Educational Leadership Participants

Most of the educational leadership sample identified as female (*n* = 31, 81.6%) compared to those who identified as male (*n* = 7, 18.4%). The mean age of the participants (*n* = 38) was 35 years (*SD* = 9.68). Ethnicity and race of educational leadership participants was 29 (76.3%) White, eight (21.1%) Black/African American, and one (2.6%) other/multiracial. Thirty-five participants reported living in South Carolina (92%), one lives outside the United States (2.6%), one in Virginia (2.6%), and one in West Virginia (2.6%). Twenty-one participants reported completing their bachelor's degree (55.3%), 16 completed their master's (42.1%), and one completed their doctoral degree (2.6%). Educational leadership participants have worked a mean of 10.28 years (*SD* = 7) in education.

Instrumentation

We used multiple instruments in our study: (a) a pre- and post-test on role understanding of the school counselor based on appropriate and inappropriate duties of the school counselor (ASCA, 2019); (b) a pre- and post-test on role understanding of the principal's role outlined in *21 Responsibilities of the School Leader* (i.e., culture, flexibility, relationships, visibility; Marzano et al., 2005); (c) the RIPLS questionnaire; and (d) pseudo-school case vignettes. The RIPLS, developed by Parsell and Bligh (1999; McFayden et al., 2005), assesses the attitudes and perceptions of students and professionals surrounding their readiness for interprofessional learning and change. The updated version, refined by McFayden et al. (2005), is a self-report survey with 19 Likert-style questions. The scale measures subscales of Teamwork and Collaboration, Negative and Positive Professional Identity, and Roles and Responsibilities, and the questions can be applied to a variety of settings with students. The factor analysis of Chronbach's alpha for all scales was reported at .90. We also developed a semistructured interview protocol to guide the focus group portion of the data collection.

Pseudo-School Case Vignettes

The case vignettes were created based on a school's actual state report card (connecting PLEs 1 and 2); we then created pseudo-schools following the statistics regarding student demographics, attendance rates, student progress, school financial data, classroom environment, and other data that is included in the data summaries provided by various states across the country. School counseling and educational leadership participants worked together in mixed small groups

to address the needs of the students and school presented to them, using their newly acquired knowledge and respective professional lenses. Participants actively engaged in collaboration (PLE 4) and utilized collaboration and advocacy skills within this portion of the study.

Research Team and Trustworthiness

This research study was completed with the assistance of faculty and doctoral candidates at different phases of the study. Four members of the research team were doctoral candidates in the counselor education program and were involved in the qualitative portions of this research (e.g., gathering focus group data, coding). To ensure trustworthiness across the team, the research team members documented their biases before coding the data and acknowledged them throughout the process (Creswell, 2009). The team members also proposed that study participants (i.e., preservice school principals and school counselors) would want to collaborate and learn more about their counterpart's role to improve the work that they do with the students and the professionals they will work with in P–12 schools.

Data Collection and Procedures

In the following sections, we describe quantitative and qualitative data collection and procedures for the mixed-methods study.

Quantitative Data Collection and Procedures

To recruit participants, we visited four graduate courses in one university: two in the educational leadership preparation program and two in the school counseling preparation program. Once invitees consented to participate, we provided them with links to the demographics form, pre-test assessing role understanding of their opposite counterpart, and the RIPLS (McFayden et al., 2005), approximately one week before they received the curriculum implementation in their courses.

Within the instructional module, participants attended a presentation by their instructor of record on the role of their opposite counterpart. This included a PowerPoint presentation covering their preexisting knowledge; education requirements; their role as outlined by each respective profession's curriculum standards (ASCA, 2019; NPBEA, 2018); the importance of collaboration, social justice, and advocacy partnership; professional standards overlap; and the main differences/similarities between the two roles. At the conclusion of the instructional module, we collected both quantitative and qualitative data when participants completed the post-test regarding their opposite counterpart's role, the RIPLS (McFayden et al., 2005), and responded to open-ended questions soliciting feedback on their experience to inform the feasibility component of the study.

Qualitative Data Collection and Procedures

One week after the role information presentations in the separate classes, all participants engaged in the collaborative PLE over a virtual platform. The educational leadership graduate program is a virtual program; therefore, the collaborative PLE portion of the intervention was hosted over Zoom for both the educational leadership and school counseling students. After receiving a brief introduction of their task, students were assigned into small groups to solve one of the three pseudo-school case vignettes in a collaborative PLE. At the conclusion of the collaborative PLE, students rejoined the main Zoom room to share strategies and/or solutions they came up with to solve the pseudo-school case study they were assigned. Once the group discussion was complete, participants were asked to complete the exit questionnaire with open-ended questions regarding their experience. Following the collaborative PLE, we conducted two focus groups consisting of six school counseling participants and two educational leadership participants to get feedback on their experiences with the entire intervention. These data were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

In our data analysis, we evaluated the instructional presentation materials, intervention, and feasibility, while also gaining insight into participants' role understanding regarding their counterpart's role and an assessment of their readiness for interprofessional learning as based on the RIPLS.

Quantitative Analysis

To assess role understanding and to evaluate course and material effectiveness, we analyzed pre- and post-test means using paired samples *t* tests to investigate aspiring school counselors' role understanding of principals' roles, aspiring principals' role understanding of appropriate and inappropriate school counselor duties, and participants' readiness for interdisciplinary learning, based on the RIPLS. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 28) using a 95% confidence interval and alpha of .05.

Qualitative Analysis

We followed the six stages of thematic analysis to analyze the data through multiple rounds of coding (Braun & Clark, 2006). We first familiarized ourselves with the data by reading the post-test exit survey responses. We developed 236 initial codes, then collapsed the initial list to a second version with a total of 60 codes. Next, to develop themes, we grouped the initial codes. To finish, we created 10 themes related to the research questions and then consolidated that list into four themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). Throughout the process, we revisited the raw data to ensure the data were represented accurately. We then developed descriptions of each theme. We report our findings in the following section.

Findings

Quantitative and qualitative findings are presented in school counseling and educational leadership categories in the following subsections.

Quantitative Findings

Quantitative findings for school counseling and educational leadership participants are described below.

School Counseling Participants

School counseling participants ($n = 20$) were asked to rate 19 principal responsibilities on a 5-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = *less important* to 5 = *most important*) in pre- and post-tests. A paired samples *t* test between pre- and post-test scores across participants' role understanding of the principal indicated an improvement where participant's pre-test scores ($M = 122.4$, $SD = 10.85$) were improved at post-test ($M = 136.1$, $SD = 8.54$), $t(19) = 5.99$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed). The mean increase in pre- and post-test scores was 13.7 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 8.91 to 18.49. The effect size was 1.33 (post-hoc), which is a large effect size. Participants also completed RIPLS during the pre- and post-test. A paired samples *t* test between pre- and post-test scores across participants' readiness for interprofessional learning indicated a significant improvement where participant's pre-test scores ($M = 68.65$, $SD = 4.64$) were improved at post-test ($M = 72.35$, $SD = 4.77$), $t(19) = 3.21$, $p = .005$ (two-tailed). The mean increase in pre- and post-test scores was 3.7 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.29 to 6.11. The effect size was .72 (post-hoc), which indicates a medium effect size.

Educational Leadership Participants

Educational leadership participants ($n = 38$) were asked to rate 30 responsibilities of a school counselor (13 items are labeled by ASCA [2019] as inappropriate and 17 are labeled as appropriate) on a 5-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = *inappropriate* to 5 = *appropriate*) in pre- and post-tests. Participants responded to a random assortment of the responsibilities for both the pre- and post-test. A paired samples *t* test to evaluate the impact of the intervention on participants' role understanding of school counselors indicated an improvement where participant's pre-test scores ($M = 66.53$, $SD = 8.48$) improved at post-test ($M = 69.97$, $SD = 8.66$), $t(37) = 2.38$, $p = .023$ (two-tailed). The mean increase in pre- and post-test scores was 3.45 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .514 to 6.38. The effect size was .386 (post-hoc), which indicates a small effect size and is less than the .61 (a priori) that was calculated by G*Power (version 3.1). The results indicated that the participants' pre-test scores of identifying inappropriate roles of the school counselor as appropriate ($M = 31.29$, $SD = 8.68$) decreased to post-test ($M = 18.82$, $SD = 8.66$), $t(37) = -7.17$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed). The mean decrease in pre- and post-test scores was -12.47 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -16.00 to -8.94. The effect size was -1.16 (post-hoc), indicating a large effect size.

Educational leadership participants also completed the RIPLS during the pre- and post-test. A paired samples t test to evaluate the impact of the intervention on educational leadership participants' readiness for interprofessional learning indicated no statistically significant increase in readiness for interprofessional learning from pre-test scores ($M = 69.55$, $SD = 7.05$) to post-test ($M = 69.97$, $SD = 5.60$), $t(37) = .474$, $p = .638$ (two-tailed). The mean increase in pre- and post-test scores was .421 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -1.38 to 2.22. The effect size was .08 (post-hoc), which indicates no effect size.

School Counseling and Educational Leadership Participants

A paired samples t test to evaluate the impact of the intervention on the readiness of all participants (i.e., school counselors and principals; $N = 58$) for interprofessional learning indicated a statistically significant increase in readiness from pre-test scores ($M = 69.24$, $SD = 6.29$) to post-test ($M = 70.79$, $SD = 5.41$), $t(57) = 2.13$, $p = .037$ (two-tailed). The mean increase in pre- and post-test scores was 1.55 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .094 to 3.00. The effect size was .28 (post-hoc), which is a small effect size.

Qualitative Findings

Quantitative and qualitative findings are discussed in school counseling and educational leadership categories in the following subsections.

Improved Understanding of Each Other's Roles and Responsibilities

The qualitative data from participants ($N = 58$) suggest that school counseling and educational leadership participants acquired a clearer understanding of one another's roles throughout the intervention. Specifically, a school counseling participant referenced how the intervention benefitted their understanding and how they can apply that information to future situations:

> I did not have much information on the roles and responsibilities of principals in schools before doing this collaboration training, and I feel a lot more comfortable now moving forward in my ability to collaborate with the principal. . . . I also recognize now that our goals overlap, and therefore, there is no reason at all why we shouldn't!

Findings indicate the instructional intervention better positions participants to engage in effective collaboration and thus provides an opportunity to build social capital between the school principal and school counselors.

An educational leadership participant mentioned their lack of training regarding the role of the school counselor: "I thought it [the intervention] gave me a lot of information that I was never taught about the roles of school counselors." A different aspiring principal spoke to the total takeaway from the intervention and their new perspective on how the two roles can work together and remove the hierarchical nature of the relationship: "It was good to realize that the principal and counselor work side by side" while the principal typically is the evaluator. Findings reiterate that collaboration and reduction of power dynamics can also build social capital across these roles (Geesa et al., 2020).

Challenged Prior Knowledge of Professional Roles and Responsibilities

Participants realized they were operating under assumed knowledge about the other's role, rather than an accurate understanding of their counterpart's role within the P–12 system. One school counseling participant acknowledged: "This was the first time I learned anything about principals in a structured fashion. Anything else has been in passing, personal experience, or quick Google searches." An educational leadership participant had a similar realization: "It made me realize more as a future administrator that the roles are often misused, and school counselors were often misused and given responsibilities that take them away from what they're actually there for."

Application of Collaboration and Advocacy Skills

Participants reported that the opportunity to practice collaboration and engage in advocacy with their professional counterparts made them feel more prepared to enter their profession. A school counseling participant stated,

> I feel more comfortable being able to collaborate with a principal, as my role as a school counselor. Beforehand, I feel like maybe I wouldn't know exactly how to, but now I feel more comfortable being able to do so.

An educational leadership participant stated, "I am more prepared to work alongside the counselors that may be in my school when I move into administration."

Intervention as a Valuable Experience

Participants expressed the value they found in the instructional intervention (e.g., information sharing, grappling with the case vignettes) and its application to their future careers. Participants learned about their professional counterpart's roles in an interactive way, having small-group and large-group discussion about their initial assumed knowledge of the roles, then learning about each profession including education requirements, roles and responsibilities, importance of collaboration, partnership in social justice and advocacy, professional standards overlap, and profession differences. Following the curriculum implementation, participants from both tracks came together in an online Zoom meeting to collaborate on one of three pseudo-school case vignettes. At the conclusion of the full intervention, participants articulated that they found the experience to be positive, beneficial, and valuable, and they enjoyed the intervention. An educational leadership participant elaborated on the experience: "This was a valuable experience, it sort of opened my thought process a little bit; we were talking to a counselor and she was coming from a different perspective." Similarly, a school counseling participant expressed, "This should be something that all school counselors and principals undergo, and I strongly believe in the value!"

Feasibility

When addressing acceptability of participant's role understanding and their readiness for interprofessional learning, participants and instructors, who are also authors of this article, reported that the information provided was beneficial to student learning. One student participant stated, "This was a very informative module, and the important content was supported by research. I feel as though this module could benefit all stakeholders within the school setting." Regarding the implementation of the collaborative PLE within existing educational leadership and school counselor preparation courses, participants reported that the collaboration and problem-solving skills they used integrated into their preexisting course and translated well to what they will be doing in their future career. They did suggest that some edits be made to the content of one of the case vignettes. Student participants stated that they felt the vignette included too many issues to address in the allotted time, which resulted in a feeling of being overwhelmed. Further, both instructor and student participants requested that more structure be provided during the small-group breakout activity. Last, in regard to participants' engaging in the intervention during their first and second year of their program, participants mentioned that they gained a newfound comfortability with collaboration and what that should look like if they become school counselors and principals in PK-12 schools.

Discussion

In this study, we explored how instructional modules impacted school counseling and education leadership graduate students' role understanding and readiness for interprofessional learning, and how they experienced a collaborative PLE.

Role Understanding

Participants displayed significant growth in role understanding. Findings suggest that continuing to educate principals and school counselors on the roles of their counterpart is mutually beneficial. The qualitative evidence participants provided supported the quantitative results that illustrated increased role understanding. Participants articulated that the intervention provided them with clarification on the roles and responsibilities for each profession by challenging their prior understanding of what a principal or school counselor did and/or what they are trained to do within P–12 schools. Consistent with findings by Bringman and colleagues (2010), current practicing principals have a misunderstanding of the role of the school counselor as outlined by the ASCA National Model (2019). After a presentation on the role of the school counselor, educational leadership participants' perspectives changed and deepened to better understand inappropriate and appropriate approaches to school counselors' work. For instance, throughout the curriculum intervention, aspiring principals found clarification on ways school counselors should not be spending their time and efforts (e.g., creating the master schedule, handing discipline, coordinating testing). Participants in both fields mentioned that they better understood the approach of individuals in each profession when working to address the needs of the school and students; recognizing that principals, as the school building leaders, are looking at issues from a broader, systems perspective, whereas school counselors are looking at situations through the lens of social/emotional, academic, and career development.

Interprofessional Learning

The intervention led to a significant increase in participants' readiness for interprofessional learning. This indicates that providing aspiring school counselors and principals the opportunity for collaborative learning using an interdisciplinary approach impacts their readiness for further learning outside of their specific graduate preparation program. Although the pre-test scores for both participant groups were relatively similar, school counseling participants' data indicated a significant increase in their readiness for interprofessional learning after completion of the curriculum implementation, a result not found with the educational leadership participants. Further investigation of the lack of impact of this experience for educational leadership students seems warranted.

Collaboration

Participants in both fields expressed positive reactions to the opportunity to participate in a concrete application of collaboration, application, and advocacy skills while in their respective training programs. The active participation in the collaborative PLE gave participants an opportunity to put collaboration into action, share their perception and professional perspective about a situation in a P–12 school, and, in the case of the school counseling students, advocate for their profession when working to address the presented student needs.

Findings suggest that principals have the ability to recognize and understand the unique skill sets that school counselors possess and use those skills to meet the diverse needs of students, while school counselors should continue to collaborate with principals and educate them on the areas where school counselors hold expertise (Geesa et al., 2020). Participants reported that this part of the study resonated most because the interactions invited the application of theory to practice; they also indicated that the knowledge gathered in their programs and within the intervention applied to real-life situations, including conversations they will likely need to have with either a school counselor or principal. By engaging in collaborative efforts, principals and school counselors can foster positive student outcomes by meeting students' needs, just as participants did in the collaborative PLE to address school-wide concerns that will likely need to be considered in their future roles.

Implications

We identified various implications when connecting this study to social capital within P–12 schools. After the intervention, participants believed they were better positioned to leverage their counterpart's training and expertise in new ways.

School Counseling Programs

Our intervention shows that principals and school counselors need to learn about one another's roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, situating graduate student learners in experiential activities, where they can practice applying the skills they are working to develop, provides them with confidence and comfort in engaging with individuals who may be their professional colleagues and/or supervisors in the future (Cunningham et al., 2019; Young, 2015).

School Counselor Educators

School counselor educators can model graduate program collaboration with educational leadership educators. Further, if school counseling faculty coordinate with educational leadership faculty to have their students participate in a collaborative PLE, they provide an opportunity for students to practice their collaboration and advocacy skills in a learning environment designed to foster professional growth.

Educational Leadership Programs

Findings of our study indicate that a gap does exist in aspiring principals' understanding of school counselor roles. Efforts to bridge this gap continue through work done by Boyland and colleagues (2019) and Lowery and colleagues (2019) by aligning professional standards and competencies from both professions and even developing a multi-unit curriculum that can be implemented by education leadership and school counseling programs. Indeed, this intervention reiterates that when educated on the role of the school counselor, principals can identify appropriate and inappropriate roles of the school counselor with better accuracy.

Educational Leadership Educators

Educational leadership educators can model collaboration and role understanding of a profession that their aspiring principals will work with once they obtain a position in P–12 schools. Our intervention is one practical way for educational leadership educators to enhance their graduate students' learning and leadership abilities without taking a large amount of the dedicated class time. Presenting an intervention based in PLE characteristics provides educational leadership graduate students with concrete experiences of collaborating with a school counselor and gaining insights on their perspectives while also using their lens as a leader of their building to address school-wide and student concerns.

Interdisciplinary Learning

This intervention, supporting school counselors and principals in effectively gaining understanding of each other's roles and collaborating during their graduate programs, has implications for the other student support professionals in the school system (e.g., social workers, school psychologists) who are also not fully understood by the professionals with whom they are destined to collaborate. Furthermore, when meeting student needs, all professionals in the school building must work together.

Adjustments to the Instructional Intervention

Throughout the study, we collected multiple forms of data from the participating school counseling and educational leadership graduate students and from the additional graduate instructors regarding the feasibility of the intervention, but more specifically about integrating the instructional implementation and collaborative PLE into preexisting graduate programs. A need for an adjustment to the time allotted for aspects of the study and the accompanying materials was revealed. Beginning with the curriculum implementation, participants and instructors requested to have more time with the study materials before the presentation of the content; this adjustment to the intervention is feasible. At the end of the collaborative PLE, participants discussed the pseudo-school case vignettes and what they came up with to address the varying needs presented to them. Participants shared that they would have liked the debrief to continue longer than the allotted 10–15 minutes. Again, making that design adjustment is feasible.

Limitations

A pilot study should not be used to generalize the findings due to the small sample size. Although we found large effect sizes for some of the statistical analyses, a larger sample would give greater insight into the effectiveness of this intervention. Further, although we collected both pre- and post-test data for each group and can compare them by tracks, the study did not have a control group to demonstrate singular effectiveness of the intervention in participant's quantitative responses. Other limitations are conducting the study at one university and the lack of standardized measures for role understanding of each profession.

The qualitative data collected were limited to insights from a small group of participants from two programs in one university. As noted by Glesne (2011), focus groups may result in participants not sharing as much in-depth information nor formulating new ideas and perspectives as they participate, but may also silence others during group sharing.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should continue to explore role understanding between school counselors and administrators and work to foster collaboration between the professions. Although our study focused on graduate student preparation, practicing school counselors and principals who may not have a full understanding of each other's role nor know how to collaborate effectively with one another may benefit from this intervention.

When considering the other professionals within P–12 schools, similar misunderstandings of roles and responsibilities and coinciding collaboration challenges are likely present. Thus, expanding this intervention into programs at the undergraduate and graduate level for various P–12 school professionals could be beneficial. Moreover, researchers could adapt this intervention to fit the needs of practicing professionals and evaluate its effectiveness in a P–12 setting. This pilot study of the curriculum, along with the input and feedback from the instructors and participants, will aid and inform the next iteration (or follow-up study) for a larger scale mixed-methods study.

Conclusion

Participants described this as a valuable experience, specifically noting the opportunity to practice collaborating with one another and to receive clarification of roles. A unique aspect of this curriculum intervention is that it includes knowledge acquisition of both roles, and all participants found value in this experience. Therefore, school counselor education and educational leadership program instructors may evaluate current curricula to provide students with experiential learning opportunities related to role understanding and collaboration.

References

American School Counselor Association. (2019). *ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs* (4th ed.).

American School Counselor Association. (2021). *ASCA research report: State of the profession 2020*. https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/bb23299b678d-4bce-8863-cfcb55f7df87/2020-State-of-theProfession.pdf

Blake, M. K. (2020). Other duties as assigned: The ambiguous role of the high school counselor. *Sociology of Education*, *93*(4), 315–330. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040720932563

Bowers, H., Lemberger-Truelove, M. E., & Brigman, G. (2018). A social-emotional leadership framework for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, *21*(1b). https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X18773004

Boyland, L. G., Geesa, R. L., Lowery, K. P., Quick, M. M., Mayes, R. D., Kim, J., Elam, N. P., & McDonald, K. M. (2019). Collaborative principal-school counselor preparation: National standards alignment to improve training between principals and school counselors. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, *14*(1), 188–205. https://www.icpel.org/uploads/1/5/6/2/15622000/ijelp_volume_14_number_1__spring_2019_.pdf

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bringman, N. M., Mueller, S. M., & Lee, S. M. (2010). Educating future school principals regarding the role of professional school counselors. *Journal of School Counseling*, *8*(3). http://jsc.montana.edu/articles/v8n3.pdf

Collins, T. P. (2014). Addressing mental health needs in our schools: Supporting the role of school counselors. *The Professional Counselor*, *4*(5), 413–416. https://doi.org/10.15241/tpc.4.5.413

Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2016). *2016 CACREP standards*. http://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2016-cacrep-standards/

Creswell, J. W. (2009). Mapping the field of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 3*(2), 95–108.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Mixed methods procedures. In *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* (5th ed., pp. 213–246). Sage.

Cunningham, K. M. W., VanGronigen, B. A., Tucker, P. D., & Young, M. D. (2019). Using powerful learning experiences to prepare school leaders. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *14*(1), 74–97. https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775118819672

Dekker, P., & Uslaner, E. M. (Eds.). (2001). *Social capital and participation in everyday life*. Routledge.

Dollarhide, C. T., Smith, A. T., & Lemberger, M. E. (2007). Critical incidents in the development of supportive principals: Facilitating school counselor-principal relationships. *Professional School Counseling*, *10*(4), 360–369. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X0701000409

Geesa, R. L., Mayes, R. D., Lowery, K. P., Quick, M. M., Boyland, L. G., Kim, J., Elam, N. P., & McDonald, K. M. (2020). Increasing partnerships in educational leadership and school counseling: A framework for collaborative school principal and school counselor preparation and support. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2020.1787525

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Havlik, S., Ciarletta, M., & Crawford, E. (2019). "If we don't define our roles, someone else will": Professional advocacy in school counseling. *Professional School Counseling*, *22*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X19848331

Jones, M., & Harris, A. (2014). Principals leading successful organizational change: Building social capital through disciplined professional collaboration. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 27*(3), 473–485. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-07-2013-0116

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.* Prentice-Hall.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University.

Leuwerke, W. C., Walker, J., & Shi, Q. (2009). Informing principals: The impact of different types of information on principals' perceptions of professional school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, *12*(4), 263–271. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X0901200404

Limberg, D., Villares, E., Gonzales, S., Starrett, A., & Rosen, N. (in press). An investigation of how school counselors adapted their delivery due to COVID-induced disparities. *Professional School Counseling*.

Lowery, K., Mayes, R. D., Quick, M. M., Boyland, L. G., Geesa, R. L., & Kim, J. (2019). Principal and counselor collaboration for social justice advocacy: A standards alignment. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*, *3*(2), 1–23. https://go.southernct.edu/jelps/files/2019-summer/Lowery.pdf

Lowery, K., Quick, M., Boyland, L., Geesa, R. L., & Mayes, R. D. (2018). "It wasn't mentioned and should have been": Principals' preparation to support comprehensive school counseling. *Journal of Organizational and Educational Leadership*, *3*(2), Article 3. https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/joel/vol3/iss2/3/

Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

McFayden, A. K., Webster, V., Strachan, K., Figgins, E., Brown, H., & McKechnie, J. (2005). The readiness for interprofessional learning scale: A possible more stable sub-scale model for the original version of RIPLS. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, *19*(6), 595–603. https://doi.org/10.1080/13561820500430157

National Policy Board for Education Administration. (2018). *National educational leadership preparation (NELP) program standards - Building level.* https://www.npbea.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NELP-Building-Standards.pdf

Parsell, G., & Bligh, J. (1999). The development of a questionnaire to assess the readiness of health care students for interprofessional learning (RIPLS). *Medical Education*, *33*(2), 95–100. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2923.1999.00298.x

Robinson, V. M. J., Lloyd, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44*(5), 635–674. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X08321509

Whiston, S. C., & Quinby, R. F. (2009). Review of school counseling outcome research. *Psychology in the Schools*, *46*(3), 267–72. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20372

Whiston, S., Tai, W., Rahardja, D., & Eder, K. (2011). School counseling outcome: A meta-analytic examination of interventions. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *89*(1), 37–55. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2011.tb00059.x

Young, M. D. (2015). The leadership challenge: Supporting the learning of all students. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *14*(4), 389–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2015.1073330

Zalaquett, C. P., & Chatters, S. J. (2012). Middle school principals' perceptions of middle school counselors' roles and functions. *American Secondary Education*, *40*(2), 89–103.

Table 1

*School Counseling Participants (*n = 20)

Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Age	21–25	13	65%
	26–30	2	10%
	31–35	3	15%
	36–40	1	5%
	41–45	1	5%
Gender	Female	18	90%
	Male	2	10%
Race/ethnicity	White	14	70%
	Black/African American	4	20%
	Other/multiracial	2	10%
Highest degree earned	Bachelor's	17	85%
	Master's	3	15%
Years in education	0–5	17	85%
	6–10	1	5%
	11–15	2	10%
Year in program	First year	16	80%
	Second year	4	20%
Current location	South Carolina	20	100%

Table 2

Educational Leadership Participants (n = 38)

Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Age	21–25	7	18.4%
	26–30	10	26.3%
	31–35	4	10.5%
	36–40	6	15.8%
	41–45	4	10.5%
	46–50	3	7.9%
	51–55	3	7.9%
	56–60	1	2.6%
Gender	Female	31	81.6%
	Male	7	18.4%
Race/ethnicity	White	29	76.3%
	Black/African American	8	21.1%
	Other/multiracial	1	2.6%
Highest degree earned	Bachelor's	21	55.3%
	Master's	16	42.1%
	Doctorate	1	2.6%
Years in education	0–5	13	34.2%
	6–10	12	31.6%
	11–15	4	10.5%
	16–20	3	7.9%
	21–25	5	13.1%
	26–30	1	2.6%
Year in program	First year	1	2.6%
	Second year	37	97.4%
Current location	South Carolina	35	92.1%
	The Bahamas	1	2.6%
	Virginia	1	2.6%
	West Virginia	1	2.6%