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### Abstract

The Delphi Study was conducted to determine recommended curriculum components to be used in training school counselors to be effective classroom managers when conducting (large-group counseling) classroom guidance. Thirty-five participants, including nationally certified school counselor practitioners and prominent school counselor educators, were the two expert groups in the study. Eighty-nine initial curriculum items were identified, both knowledge and skill items included. After three rounds of the survey, the 40 items that remained were the final recommendations of the expert panel. In further analyses, no statistically significant differences were found when examining responses by expert group, gender, years of experience, or educational level. Specific recommendations are made to incorporate the findings into school counselor preparation programs.

### Keywords

Delphi, school counselor, curriculum, classroom management, classroom guidance, schools, training

# Identifying Curriculum Components for Classroom Management Training for School Counselors: A Delphi Study

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Jill A. Geltner, Teddi J. Cunningham, and Charmaine D. Caldwell

The Delphi Study was conducted to determine recommended curriculum components to be used in training school counselors to be effective classroom managers when conducting (large-group counseling) classroom guidance. Thirty-five participants, including nationally certified school counselor practitioners and prominent school counselor educators, were the two expert groups in the study. Eighty-nine initial curriculum items were identified, both knowledge and skill items included. After three rounds of the survey, the 40 items that remained were the final recommendations of the expert panel. In further analyses, no statistically significant differences were found when examining responses by expert group, gender, years of experience, or educational level. Specific recommendations are made to incorporate the findings into school counselor preparation programs.

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Continuing, is a trend that began in the United States, during the 1970s; an ever-increasing number of education professionals, not previously credentialed or experienced as classroom teachers, are achieving state-level certification as school counselors (Goodnough, Perusse & Erford, 2011). In concert with this trend, most states have eliminated or are now eliminating policies that require prospective school counselors to have teaching experience before they enter school counseling preparation programs (ASCA, 2010; Sweeney, 1995). In supporting of this trend, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has accredited approximately 205 school counselor preparation programs in the United States

and/or its territorial possessions (CACREP, 2010). Among the CACREP (2009) specialty standards for the preparation for school counseling programs is the requirement that program graduates be able to provide effective delivery of the guidance curriculum, specifically including the use of classroom (i.e., large-group) guidance activities.

A similar mandate for effective and frequent classroom guidance activities by school counselors comes from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). The ASCA requirements for effective school counseling programs are delineated in *The ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs* (2005). In particular, it is recommended that classroom guidance be a central component of the

school counselor's duties and activities and be allocated as much as 45% of school counselors' professional work time (ASCA, 2005). In addition, classroom guidance is seen as the primary and most efficient means through which school counselors provide developmental and preventative services to all students in schools (Dahir, 2004; Goodnough et. al., 2011; Myrick, 2003; Wittmer, 2000); that is, to help students acquire skills to cope with life problems and issues *before* they encounter them.

Yet while school counselor classroom guidance activities are widely and strongly advocated, neither applicable school counselor preparation program standards (e.g., the CACREP *Standards of Preparation*) nor professionally endorsed models of school counselor functioning (e.g., the ASCA *National Model*) delineate specific skills, abilities, or associated preparation experiences that school counselors should have in order to deliver classroom guidance activities effectively and successfully. Credentialed and/or experienced teachers have specific, focused preparation in working with entire classrooms of children (Manning & Bucher, 2007). Given that most school counselors now achieve state certification without having a teaching credential and/or experience, how should school counselors be prepared to deliver classroom guidance activities?

Additionally, professional credentialing practices have done little to clarify the specific nature of effective school counselor preparation (ASCA, 2005; CACREP, 2009). The most common and necessary credential for professional school counselors is state-level certification and all states have academic and process requirements for school counselor certification. However, "there is still wide variability across all [school counselor

preparation] programs" in regard to program foci, content, and methods (Perusse, Goodnough, & Noel, 2001, p.261). Although there are numerous resources available for classroom guidance activities, there is little information available to assist school counselors in "managing" classroom size groups (i.e., regulate student behavior to maximize learning effectiveness) (Goodnough, et. al, 2011). Baker (2000) asserted that "it is important to train [school counselors] as competent *instructors*, as well as competent counselors" (p.153). Similarly, The ASCA *National Model* (2005) indicates that, "It is important for school counselors to receive training in student learning styles, classroom behavior management [and] curriculum and instruction" (p. 16). Thus, as important components of general teaching expertise, extensive knowledge of and skills in classroom management are needed in combination with counseling and group facilitation skills to impact large groups positively (Henington & Doggett, 2004). Unfortunately, the specific classroom management knowledge and skills needed remain undetermined (CACREP, 2009; Goodnough et. al, 2011; Perusse et. al, 2001).

The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What are school counseling professionals' respective endorsement levels of various counselor preparation curriculum components for classroom management during large-group guidance activities?
2. What is the order of endorsement priorities among school counselor preparation program curriculum components for classroom management during large-group guidance activities?
3. What are the differences in endorsements of school counselor

preparation program curriculum components for classroom management during large-group guidance activities based upon selected characteristics of the responding school counseling professionals?

### **The Knowledge and Skill Sets for Large-Group Counseling**

ASCA identifies large-group counseling as an integral part of both school counselor training and professional responsibilities (ASCA, 2005; Baker & Gerler, 2007; Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Dahir, Sheldon & Valiga, 1998; Erford, 2011). "Group counseling is one of the professional school counselor's most highly specialized skills" (Goodnough & Lee, 2004, p.173). Classroom guidance, sometimes known as large-group guidance, is the most efficient intervention because it provides direct services to the largest numbers of students at one time (Baker, 2000; Baker & Gerler, 2007; Myrick, 2003; Snyder, 2000; Wittmer, 2000). A large group is generally a classroom-size group of 25 to 30 students (Cuthbert, 2000).

Classroom guidance as a school counseling intervention is becoming increasingly important as professional school counselors struggle to find time to address all students' needs. The recommended counselor-to-student ratio appropriate to implementing a comprehensive developmental program is one school counselor to every 250 students (ASCA, 2005). However, most school counselors operate under a much higher ratio (ASCA, 2010). As indicated by the American School Counselor Association, the National Center for Education Statistics reported an average ratio of 1:457 for the 2008-2009 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

However, a school counselor must have adequate knowledge and skills in effective classroom (large-group) management in order to provide classroom guidance services successfully. Classroom guidance activities are mostly instructional in nature and approximate regular classroom teaching. Good instruction requires good classroom management. The instructor must be able to maintain students' attention, interest, and appropriate behavior during the classroom activity in order for the students to achieve intended gains from the activity (Geltner & Clark, 2005, Wong & Wong, 2009).

Small-group counseling training for school counselors typically includes: (a) exposure to principles of group dynamics, (b) group process, (c) group stage theories, (d) group member roles and behaviors, (e) therapeutic factors of group work, (f) group leadership styles and approaches, (g) theories and methods of group counseling, (h) ethical and legal considerations for group work, and (i) evaluation of group processes (CACREP, 2009). Presumably, some small-group knowledge and skills transfer to large-group guidance activities such as linking member comments or facilitating group member interactions. Group leadership skills are used to guide and direct interactions between school counselors and classroom groups. The school counselor typically relies upon a self-created combination of counseling skills, classroom management strategies, and instructional methods to impart important developmental information.

For the purposes of this study, a thorough review of the counseling literature was conducted to identify both group and classroom knowledge and skills pertinent to the large-group counseling process. The comprehensive list was used to create a comprehensive beginning list of possible knowledge and skill items to be rated by the

expert panel. There were 55 knowledge items and 34 specific skills identified as potentially appropriate for effective classroom management in the context of large-group guidance. A complete list of the original 89 skill and knowledge items with references is available from the author.

## **Method**

The Delphi Technique is a research method in which a panel of experts is polled in an iterative process designed to bring about the highest level group consensus possible about ideas and/or opinions deemed important to a relatively specific purpose and/or activity topic (Dimitt, Carey, McGannon, & Henningson, 2005; Linstone & Turtoff, 1975; Moore, 1986). The collective expertise allows collective decision making that would not otherwise be possible because of geography or interpersonal issues and “attempts to overcome the weaknesses implicit in relying on a single expert, a one-shot group average, or round table discussion” (Clayton, 1997, p. 375).

## **Participants**

The participants for this Delphi study included two groups of professionals, both associated with the school counseling profession: school counselors working in public and/or private K-12 schools and school counselor educators working in university or college settings.

The counselor educators included in this study had an earned doctoral degree, were employed at a college or university with a CACREP-accredited program in school counseling, and had instructional and/or supervisory assignment for school counselors-in-training. They also were members of the American Counseling Association (ACA), the American School

Counselor Association (ASCA), and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), had published at least two articles pertinent to the preparation of school counselors in a professional journal within the last five years, and had made at least two professional presentations pertinent to school counselor preparation at a state, regional, or national conference for school counselors and/or counselor educators within the last five years. In addition, a few individuals were invited to participate who held national leadership positions in school counseling or were known for their school counseling research. In general, every attempt was made to include panelists who were as representative as possible of their respective primary professional affiliations. Effort was made to include individuals from each of the five regions of ACES. A list of school counselor educators was designed specifically for this study and acquired from the ACA because “expertise...is the desired goal for panel [member] selection” (Clayton, 1997, p. 377). Forty-five school counselor educators were invited to participate in the study, 22 agreed to participate. The number of school counselor educators who participated as panelists through all three rounds of ratings was 18, a 40% response rate.

Practicing school counselors invited to participate were identified from among those who held the National Certified School Counselor (NCSC) credential, had completed a CACREP accredited school counseling program, and had a minimum of three years of professional (i.e., employed) experience as a school counselor. Upon request, a randomized list was generated by the National Board for Certified Counselors and given to the researcher. There were 120 school counselors invited to participate in the study, 29 agreed to participate. The number of school counselors who participated as panelists through all three

rounds was 15, a 12.5% response rate. With respect to the school counselors who agreed initially to participate there was a 69% response/completion rate for all three survey rounds.

In addition, two individuals identified themselves in both the school counselor group and the school counselor educator group. One was originally identified from the school counselor (NCSC) list and one from the school counselor educator (ACES) list. Ultimately, the procedures yielded a group of 15 school counselors and 18 school counselor educators as well as two who identified in both groups, for a total of 35 participants (panelists). The final group consisted of a majority of females (n=27; males=8) and the majority of the participants (87%) were Caucasian. Only two panelists identified themselves as Hispanic, one panelist identified as Native American and one panelist identified Multiracial. No panelists identified themselves as African American or Asian American.

The guideline for a Delphi is described as the following: “general rule-of-thumb [is] 15 to 30 people for a homogeneous population – that is, experts coming from the same discipline and 5 to 10 people for a heterogeneous population” (Clayton, 1997, p. 378). The final group of 35 participants who completed all three rounds of the survey was thus considered sufficient and satisfactory.

## Procedure

There were three total rounds including three Likert-type surveys for the Delphi. The initial survey used for this study had two subsections. The first subsection of the initial survey included demographic information. The second subsection for round one included the initial items to be rated. Included within each item was the definition of the item. For the purposes of this study, they are grouped as either knowledge or skill items determined by whether the item was a knowledge component (i.e. heterogeneous or homogeneous groups (Corey, 2008) or a group leadership skill used to guide and direct interactions between school counselors and classroom groups (i.e. drawing out or linking (Morran, Stockton & Whittingham, 2004). As mentioned above, through a thorough review of the counseling literature, 89 items, 55 knowledge items and 34 specific skills items, were identified to include in the initial survey. These items were identified as potentially appropriate for effective classroom management in the context of large-group guidance. All knowledge and skill items were listed in random order simply by word and definition (see below).

|  | Not Important         |                       |                       |                       |                       | Extremely Important   |                       |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Self-help groups<br>(a supportive group for individuals with common problems)           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. Enthusiasm<br>(the expression of positive reaction to what is happening in a group)     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. Group cohesion<br>(the level of group members' feeling of acceptance among one another) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

The survey was web-based and the rating scale for each item had a range of 1 (not at all important) to 7 (extremely important). Each response scale was presented in “radio button” format to disallow more than one rating per item. Participants were notified and reminded to complete the surveys within the timeframe allotted. After panelists completed ratings for the first round, the individual item means were calculated. The survey item means were then ordered from highest to lowest item response mean. Linstone and Turoff (1975) noted that generally there is a “gap” in the ordered item means for a Delphi study. The gap is the appropriate point below which to eliminate items from subsequent consideration (Stone Fish & Busby, 2005). A gap was evident for the round one item response means in this study and items having means below the “gap” were discarded from subsequent item presentations. Therefore the second round included 56 items. The respective item wordings were not changed and remained the same across rounds.

Feedback is an important element of the Delphi process because it allows respondents to examine and possibly reevaluate their item ratings from the previous round (Dalkey, 1972; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Stone Fish & Busby, 2005). Therefore in the second round panelists were provided with the respective item means from the first round for the 56 items that had been retained. They were not given the item means for the discarded items. The second round of the survey had 56 items to be rated and the third round had 43 items to be rated. For the second and third rounds, the immediately previous round item mean scores were presented along with each item to be rated. A list of the items from these rounds and specific definitions for each item included is available from the author.

## Results

The third round ratings resulted in a final list of 40 classroom management curriculum items. These are school counseling professionals’ respective endorsement levels of various counselor preparation curriculum components for classroom management for large-group guidance activities. These elements are presented in mean item score order from lowest to highest (see Table 1) illustrating ranked order of endorsement priorities among the components. Items having means below 5.80 in the final survey were not considered further in regard to data analyses and therefore data from 40 items were entered into the data analyses.

A series of quantitative data analyses were conducted to allow evaluation of possible differences in endorsements of school counselor preparation program curriculum components for classroom management training based on selected characteristics of the responding school counseling professionals. An alpha level of  $p = .05$  was used as the criterion for statistical significance for all quantitative analyses.

Upon examination by respondent group, respective item means were highly similar across groups, however, no statistically significant differences in item means between respondent groups were found. There was no difference based upon panelists’ gender, professional position, race/ethnicity, highest degree achieved, or years of experience in current professional position.

It can be noted that there was substantial consensus among the panelists throughout the Delphi process conducted. While a wide range of endorsements levels for the possible curriculum components was evident initially, movement toward consensus was rapid across rounds. In



particular, fewer items were eliminated across the second and third rounds. The initial item set included 89 items, the second included 56 items (33 items eliminated), and the final one 43 items (13 items eliminated). Further, most final item means were high relative to the top of the rating scale; panelists apparently held relatively strong opinions about the (final) items they

### **Limitations of the Study**

Certainly, a study involving repeated survey implementation has drawbacks. The need for participating experts to complete the questionnaire for all three rounds may have created a situation in which all those requested to participate could not commit. In addition, school counselors with previously occupied schedules may not have had an opportunity to participate due to work obligations. As a result, the perspectives of these individuals who did not choose to accept the participation invitation are not available. However, it can be assumed, with such consensus, these potential respondents' responses might have been similar to those who did participate.

The necessity for panelists to make three sets of ratings raises the issue: "To what extent is sustained motivation a limitation?" To counteract this potential limitation, strategies proven to maximize participation for internet surveys (e.g., continued communications with panelists) were used (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2008). In addition, panelists knew the nature and extent of requested participation prior to agreeing to serve as panelists. Presumably the panelists had appropriate and sufficient motivation throughout the study because there was not any indication that they did not (e.g., all responded in a timely manner during each round).

Finally, the panelists were provided with a list of possible curriculum

endorsed. For example, the lowest item mean among those in round three was 5.51. In addition, the panelists' item endorsement priorities had a very small difference in ratings. The difference between the largest and smallest item means for the final round was .48. With such a small difference in ratings, the importance of the order of the item mean rankings is negligible.

components for classroom management training for school counselors and were not allowed to add their personal suggestions. It is possible that some panelists may have reacted to the list not containing components they believe to be important. However, the initial list was extensive and was a broad-scale representation of suggestions extant in the professional literature. Additionally, there was not feedback from the panelists as to insufficient content in the lists provided. Therefore personal reactions to the list of items apparently were not a limitation for this study.

### **Implications for School Counselor Training Programs**

Knowledge of the requisite and desirable components of school counselor preparation to engage in classroom guidance activities effectively and efficiently has implications for school counselor professional preparation and practice and also for associated future research and theory development. Furthermore, knowing what school counselors should know and be capable of in regard to classroom management for large-group guidance activities allows for determination of what should and should not be included in school counselor training programs.

The final list of curriculum component items is significant because it suggests what school counselors should know and be able to do in order to manage

classroom groups effectively and successfully. In addition, the relatively high degree of consensus achieved for the items recommended for inclusion in classroom management preparation for school counselors is noteworthy. In particular, the general absence of differences based on respondent characteristics points to substantive agreement about the components endorsed. Thus, the final list of curriculum components for classroom management training endorsed by the panelists could serve as a preparation paradigm for use in school counselor training programs and consequently for future school counseling practice.

The original list of 89 items included both knowledge and skill component items; of the 89 original items, 55 were (pre-classified as) *knowledge* items and 34 as *skill* items, a knowledge-to-skill items ratio of approximately 1.62:1. The final list of 40 items included a much smaller number of knowledge items (13) and a somewhat smaller number of skill items (27), a ratio of approximately .48:1. Thus it became evident across rounds that both school counselors' and school counselor educators' emphasis was on skills for actual practice of classroom management rather than on the knowledge underlying large-group or classroom management.

There are two groupings among the 40 items recommended: (a) *knowledge* items and (b) *skill* items. All the knowledge items appear to be related to group (counseling) work. Therefore, these items could be best covered in the basic group counseling course required for school counselor trainees in CACREP-accredited programs. It would be advisable and necessary, however, to point out specifically the items' significance to classroom guidance and classroom management for school counselors. However, few programs are sufficient in student numbers for such a course.

Therefore, integrating these items into a general group workcourse and also addressing their specific importance to school counselors would accomplish the same goal. For example, a discussion about how to facilitate a therapeutic counseling group versus a middle school classroom could clarify these distinctions for clinical and school counseling students. Further, these items could be reconsidered and stressed in school counseling program students' practica and internship experiences. Here, school counselors-in-training will have the opportunity to practice the skills deemed necessary for successful classroom management with large-classroom groups.

The 27 *skill* items are focused upon specific classroom management actions and/or behaviors that a school counselor should utilize in delivering classroom guidance. Thus, these items can be viewed as classroom management techniques and would be more appropriately placed in a school counseling course. For example, these techniques might be inserted into a core school counseling course such as a class on counseling children. Because the composition of such courses differs across universities, the specific course would have to be determined by the particular counselor education department. However, the integrity of the items could and should be maintained as a curricular grouping of *skill* items to train school counselors in classroom management for the purposes of classroom guidance. As above, these items should again be reviewed as the student proceeds through practica and internship experiences to allow evaluation of the skills in actual practice.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Recommendations for future research include conducting a larger study

that encompasses a greater number of school counselor practitioners. For example, such a study could examine the opinions of the school counselor practitioners in regard to the items recommended in this study. Basically, it would allow determination of whether larger numbers of school counselors concur with the recommendations of the expert panel. It also would be appropriate to investigate the extent to which practicing school counselors already possess the knowledge and skill items presented in the final list of items. It would be important to determine if school counselors believe they already have the knowledge and skills but are not using them or if they believe that they have not been provided such knowledge and skills in their school counselor preparation programs.

Because school counselor preparation programs nationwide are removing the prior teaching experience requirement for program admission, determination of school counselors' effectiveness in classroom guidance activities is warranted to ascertain need for further or additional training. It is especially important to determine whether school counselors who have the knowledge and exhibit the skills identified herein are actually more effective in the classroom than those who do not.

Another important area to study is the difference between practicing school counselors' and school counselor educators' perceptions specifically related to evaluation. The emphasis on evaluation items by school counselor educators was much stronger than it was for school counselors. Both groups rated the evaluation items as important, but school counselor educators rated them much higher. It is important to determine if this issue is problematic. Through examination of these

differences of opinion between school counselor educators and school counselors, ways to bridge the divide could be suggested.

Finally, it would be important to examine the perceptions of others in the school system in regard to school counselors' effectiveness in classroom guidance activities. Determining if school administrators and teachers agree with the knowledge and skill items recommended could affect how the school counselors actually conduct classroom guidance activities as well as how their activities are perceived. Both teachers and administrators may be more supportive of school counselors being in classrooms if they concur with the recommendations derived from this study.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine school counselor and school counselor educators' endorsement levels of school counselor preparation curriculum components for classroom management for large-group guidance activities. Because school counselors often spend a great deal of time in classroom settings, and in most states are no longer required to have teaching experience prior to school counselor certification, prioritization of these training components is more important than ever before.

The classroom setting is the most efficient delivery method for school counselors to impart important career, academic and personal/social information to students. It is crucial that school counseling graduates are prepared for the task of managing and effectively utilizing the large-group counseling setting.

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Table 1

*Rankings of (40) Knowledge and Skill Items*

| <u>Knowledge or Skill Item</u>                         | <u>Mean score</u> |
|--|-------------------|
| nonverbal communication (skill item)                   | 5.80              |
| group final stage (knowledge item)                     | 5.80              |
| group conflict (knowledge item)                        | 5.83              |
| group cohesion (knowledge item)                        | 5.89              |
| group initial stage (knowledge item)                   | 5.89              |
| reflecting feelings (skill item)                       | 5.89              |
| group process (knowledge item)                         | 5.91              |
| goal setting (skill item)                              | 5.91              |
| wait time (skill item)                                 | 5.91              |
| evaluating (skill item)                                | 5.91              |
| group cohesiveness (knowledge item)                    | 5.94              |
| restating (skill item)                                 | 5.94              |
| drawing out (skill item)                               | 5.94              |
| group leadership style (knowledge item)                | 5.97              |
| clarifying (skill item)                                | 5.97              |
| cooperative learning (skill item)                      | 6.00              |
| acknowledging (skill item)                             | 6.00              |
| multicultural diversity (knowledge item)               | 6.03              |
| summarizing (skill item)                               | 6.03              |
| initiating (skill item)                                | 6.03              |
| supporting via reassurance (skill item)                | 6.06              |
| reinforcing (skill item)                               | 6.06              |
| blocking (skill item)                                  | 6.06              |
| linking (skill item)                                   | 6.09              |
| legal considerations for group work (knowledge item)   | 6.09              |
| supporting an individual member (skill item)           | 6.09              |
| giving feedback (skill item)                           | 6.09              |
| processing (skill item)                                | 6.11              |
| group dynamics (knowledge item)                        | 6.14              |
| open-ended questioning (skill item)                    | 6.20              |
| showing empathy (skill item)                           | 6.20              |
| terminating (skill item)                               | 6.23              |
| protecting (skill item)                                | 6.29              |
| modeling (skill item)                                  | 6.29              |
| facilitating group interactions (skill item)           | 6.31              |
| guidance / psychoeducational group (knowledge item)    | 6.34              |
| evaluation of group (knowledge item)                   | 6.37              |
| active listening (skill item)                          | 6.40              |
| ethical considerations for group work (knowledge item) | 6.43              |
| rule setting (skill item)                              | 6.54              |

### Author Note

Jill A. Geltner is an Assistant Professor at Valdosta State University. She previously worked as a school counselor in both elementary and middle schools and enjoyed getting to know her students in the classroom setting.

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