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The Implementation of Spirituality in School Counseling

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The Implementation of Spirituality in School Counseling

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requirements for the Master of Science Degree in

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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CAPSTONE PROJECT

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The Implementation of Spirituality in School Counseling

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Molly Attoe

Has been approved by the faculty advisor of the CE 695 – Capstone Project

Course Instructor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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Signature

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Abstract

Spirituality has been identified in empirical literature as a developmental asset for adolescence and a protective factor for areas including mental health, life satisfaction, purpose and behavior. These benefits emphasize the importance of spirituality exploration and development in this stage of life. School counselors, given their professional duties to support academics and social-emotional development, are in a prime position to achieve positive impact. Hesitations and limitations do exist for this practice, however. Lack of consensus and understanding surrounding the difference between religion and spirituality, as well as laws and policies complicating the incorporation of these areas in school have caused hesitation and confusion among counselors. This uncertainty of the counselor's role and appropriate boundaries, as well as insufficient knowledge regarding the need for spiritual support, has caused a gap in support for the adolescent population. This literature review is an analysis of the impact that spirituality has on development, counselor obligations, challenges for implementation, as well as ethical applications for utilization in the school counseling profession.

Contents

The Implementation of Spirituality in School Counseling

When laws put in place by the government complicate a professional's ethical duty, discussions, despite the discomfort they may bring, are essential. For school counselors, one topic of importance is spirituality. Spirituality is often used interchangeably with religion; however, this is inaccurate. As stated by Sink and Devlin (2011), "spirituality is simply an ongoing developmental process of positive meaning making and growth-inducing activities." Given this definition, religion is an avenue by which one can express their spirituality. Religious practices are organized and denominational, including that of worship, prayer and belief systems (Smith-Augustine, 2011). Although this is only one way in which spirituality can be practiced, it is the most widely researched. For this reason, much of the research reported throughout this analysis surrounds religiosity.

The differentiation between these terms is important for the discussion of school-based support for youth regarding spiritual development. While the notable benefits of spirituality are documented, the need for communication and understanding surrounding the ethical implementation of spirituality development is evident (Lambie et al., 2008). This reality is one of concern when considering the student need and counselor role in supporting holistic development. A wholesome sense of spirituality is seen to be a developmental asset (Sink & Devlin, 2011), and school personnel have gained a great responsibility in developing values and morals. This implies a more holistic education in the public-school setting with spiritual well-being as an inseparable portion of the whole child (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). Counselors are given the difficult task of determining how to appease both the legal and professional ethical requirements. As a result of this 'gray area,' school counselors may work to avoid the controversy by disregarding or ignoring the topic of spirituality (Lambie et al., 2008). In an aim

to reduce this response, this literature review will discuss the benefits of a spiritual connection and need for emphasis, counselor duties, challenges associated with utilizing spirituality in school counseling and actions that can be taken ethically by school counselors within their field of discipline to support spiritual development in their students.

Review of Literature

Lambie et al. (2008) stated that spirituality is an important component for constructive change in the counseling process. Beliefs in this realm can support students' academic, social and career development, the core developmental areas supported by school counselors (Lambie et al., 2008). Further, studies also show it to be a protective factor in the areas of mental health, life satisfaction, purpose, as well as behavior, as discussed below. Despite these benefits, spirituality remains a topic of concern for counselors as a result of law, policy and ethical considerations (Lambie et al., 2008; Sink, 2004).

Spirituality as a Protective Factor

Knowledge regarding the positive implications of spirituality on student well-being and development is critical for movement toward a more holistic school counseling practice (Sink, 2004). Counselors must first appreciate its importance and comprehend the need for their practices to be meaningful (Sink, 2004). Further, this understanding is essential in preparation for conversations advocating for spirituality use with administration and others that may provide pushback. In fact, ASCA's standards and competencies (2019) states that school counselors have the task of collaborating with staff, including that of administrators and teachers, to ensure culturally responsive practice. Of discussion are the areas of mental health, life satisfaction, purpose, and behavior.

Mental Health

Spirituality has been shown to be both a protective factor for mental health and an asset for positive development. Pizzigoni et al.-(2019) utilized a pilot outcome study to explore the associations between body esteem in adolescent girls and psychospiritual variables. In the study, "body-image" refers to one's perception and attitudes towards their own body. In adolescence, complications with well-being, depression, weight, lack of physical activity and diet have found to be results of negative body-image (Pizzigoni et al., 2019). Four domains of spirituality and religion were explored, including that of God image, prayer fulfillment, religiosity and religious crisis. "God image" refers to one's internal image of a divine figure and the way in which a relationship with that image looks (Pizzigoni et al., 2019, p.74). The concept of "prayer fulfillment" relates to one's ability to, through a wider perspective, connect with something greater than oneself positively (Pizzigoni et al., 2019, p. 75). How one engages with and participates in their religion portrays their religiosity, while religious crisis refers to the conflict one may feel in their faith (Pizzigoni et al., 2019). The relationship between these domains and body-esteem were explored through a five-week program termed The Imago Dei Experience or TIDE on fourteen and fifteen-year-old girls (Pizzigoni et al., 2019). There were no significant changes in appearance and weight over the five weeks, which suggests that the program itself was ineffective (Pizzigoni et al., 2019). However, researchers did find that body-esteem about weight and appearance correlated in the predicted positive direction with religiosity, prayer fulfillment, God-image acceptance, and God-image presence (Pizzigoni et al., 2019). This suggests that assessing the spirituality and religiosity of adolescent girls in treatment of body-image issues may be beneficial. Gathering who God is for the adolescent with emphasis on the figure's presence and acceptance level may influence their thoughts (Pizzigoni et al., 2019).

Religiosity did not show the impact that spirituality produced for girls in terms of body-esteem, however (Pizzigoni et al., 2019). For this reason, counselors may wish to determine how loving students consider their God rather than the level of importance that religion holds in their life (Pizzigoni et al., 2019).

Good and Willoughby (2014) looked more broadly at the impact that institutional and personal spirituality and religiosity have on psychosocial adjustment in adolescence, specifically high school, Canadian youth. The mental health factors of psychosocial adjustment focused on included that of intrapersonal well-being, quality of parent-child relationship, and academic orientation (Good & Willoughby, 2014). This study was part of a larger, longitudinal project examining lifestyle choices in youth. Higher personal spirituality/religiosity consistently predicted more positive adjustment in terms of well-being, parental relationship, and academic orientation (Good & Willoughby, 2014). Academic orientation was measured by reports of grades, perceived importance, and plans for schooling. Notably, personal spirituality/religiosity was associated with intrapersonal well-being (Good & Willoughby, 2014). This result sheds light on the possibility that personal, not institutional, spirituality/religiosity is linked with well-being. The same was seen in the academic realm, as personal spirituality was associated with more positive orientations (Good & Willoughby, 2014). The personal realm of this factor is one that school counselors have the opportunity to support (Good & Willoughby, 2014).

Similar findings resulted from a study produced by Dyke et al. (2009). Within this study, sixth, seventh and eighth grade adolescents completed a set of self-report measures to assess religious coping, daily spiritual experiences, positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, and psychological distress in relation to spiritual and religious coping (Dyke et al., 2009). Religious coping can include reframing negative events, seeking spiritual guidance, viewing events as an

opportunity to get closer to God, and finding purpose in life, to name only a few (Dyke et al., 2009). Positive religious coping and daily spiritual experiences were associated with positive affect and life satisfaction (Dyke et al., 2009). The higher levels of daily experiences resulted in higher scores of adjustment and lower distress (Dyke et al., 2009). Minority ethnic and racial groups of low socioeconomic status were found to vary from the general population (Dyke et al., 2009). This population was more likely to experience greater levels of distress but also more likely to utilize religiosity and spirituality for coping (Dyke et al., 2009). This population may benefit from guidance in better understanding the use of spiritual coping (Dyke et al., 2009).

It has been found that depression can also be positively impacted by religiosity/spirituality. Pearce et al. (2003) examined the relations between depressive symptoms and religiousness in adolescents found that attendance, self-ranking, and positive interpersonal religious experience are associated with lower levels of symptoms. Interpersonal religiousness had a stronger relation with depressive symptoms than did the standard dimensions of religiousness (Pearce et al., 2003). Positive Interpersonal religious experience (positive congregational support or congregational interactions) was associated with lower depressive symptoms and negative interpersonal religious experience was associated with greater depressive symptoms (Pearce et al., 2003). These were stronger correlates of depressive symptoms than that of attendance (Pearce et al., 2003).

Religious involvement's impact on psychosocial maturity in adolescents was challenged in Markstrom's study (1999). Attendance at religious services, participation in Bible study group, and youth group involvement were examined in relation to the areas of ego strengths (hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and wisdom), ideological and ethnic forms of identity, general self-esteem and school self-esteem (Markstrom, 1999). With religious

involvement, ego strengths of hope, will, purpose, fidelity, love and care were associated (Markstrom, 1999). School self-esteem was higher for each form of religious involvement as well (Markstrom, 1999).

Life Satisfaction & Purpose

In addition to benefits on mental health, spirituality has shown impact on life satisfaction and a sense of purpose in adolescence (Marques et al., 2013; Quinn, 2017; Tirri & Quinn, 2010). Life satisfaction is a key aspect of quality of life and well-being. It has been linked to adaptive outcomes for human development and can contribute to the development of other behaviors and attitudes (Marques et al., 2013).

The relation between hope, spirituality, religious practice and life satisfaction was examined by Marques et al. (2013). Questionnaires were administered at three different times over the span of a year to youth ages fifteen to nineteen. These surveys included that of a Children's Hope Scale, Students' Life Satisfaction Scale, as well as single items for each spirituality and religious practice variables (Marques et al., 2013). Within this study, hope was considered a goal-oriented mindset with internalized beliefs regarding one's ability to discover paths to achieve goals and drive to utilize them. Life satisfaction was defined as a global evaluation by the person of his or her life (Marques et al., 2013). This study found that hope, spirituality, and religious practice were all significantly correlated with life satisfaction across the three time periods (Marques et al., 2013). Hope significantly predicted life satisfaction at all three time periods, and spirituality scores significantly added variance beyond that of hope scores (Marques et al., 2013). These findings suggest that adolescence is a period of significant maturation in areas such as cognitive growth, self-concept, moral development and identity. Life

satisfaction could be enhanced by helping students explore the role of spirituality in their own

life. This search for spirituality may help produce a sense of meaning (Marques et al., 2013).

Quinn (2017) has also studied purpose in life for youth. Drawing from positive youth

development, his study examined the links between school climate and spirituality in relation to

purpose. They share that adolescence offers a unique window for studying these phenomena

(Quinn, 2017). It is shared that most adolescents believe in God and indicate that spirituality is a

part of how they make meaning out of their lives (Quinn, 2017). This period of their lives also

includes a great deal of identity development and growth in perspective-taking skills (Quinn,

2017). Moderate support was found for links between the construction of purpose and generosity

among students and spirituality (Quinn, 2017). These results offer support for these factors as

possible contributors of purpose during adolescence (Quinn, 2017).

Case studies have been completed to investigate this role of spirituality and religion in

development of purpose. Tirri and Quinn (2010) first interviewed participants utilizing semi-

structured processes examining questions such as "Who am I?" Upon this exploration of

developing identities, researchers identified two adolescents illustrating integration of spirituality

to further pursue (Tirri & Quinn, 2010). These individuals differed in their values and beliefs.

One was of traditional Christian background that was created and maintained as a result of

parental guidance and desire for guidance in life (Tirri & Quinn, 2010). The other was less

traditional but held a strong connection between her practice and personal spirituality. She

demonstrated high levels of awareness, experience of deeper level consciousness, community

and utilizing her imagination (Tirri & Quinn, 2010). Both individuals displayed purpose despite

their differences (Tirri & Quinn, 2010). This goes to show that purpose can be fostered both with

and without religiosity present. Awareness of these spiritual sensitivities can assist in helping adolescents foster purpose (Tirri & Quinn, 2010).

Behavior

The responsibilities of a school counselor reach further than just mental health. This role requires attention to student behavior as well, including that of risky behavior, academic behavior to name a few (Malinakova et al., 2018). Behavior is yet another factor that spirituality has been shown to influence. Malinakova et al. (2018) explored the association between leisure-time choices and religious attendance and spirituality in adolescents. Measured was that of religious attendance, spirituality, excessive television, computer games, internet use, as well as participation in organized leisure-time activities (Malinakova et al., 2018). Excessive screen-based activities have been related to physical and mental health risk in children, including, but not limited to, headache, irritability, and being overweight (Malinakova et al., 2018). Organized leisure-time activities have been discussed as alternatives for this behavior due to their associations with positive outcomes, including that of better school performance and attachment to school, lower substance use, parental support, friends, and self-efficacy (Marques et al., 2018). Findings showed that respondents that were both attending and spiritual were less likely to watch television or play video games excessively (Marques et al., 2018). Those that were either attending or spiritual were more likely to use in excess (Marques et al., 2018). However, the combination of the two proved to be a protective factor with respect to excessive internet use, as well as guide youth to be more involved in organized activities, participate in a larger variety of activities, and be more likely to regularly read books and play an instrument (Malinakova et al., 2018). Spirituality alone was also associated with higher chances of having sufficient physical activity (Malinakova et al., 2018).

.	The relation between substance abuse and religiousness and spirituality was examined in adolescents in El Salvador among those high-risk and gang involved by Salas-Wright et al. (2013). A survey instrument was created to measure the thoughts, beliefs, experiences, and behaviors of these youth across a variety of domains, including that of family, education, employment, and substance use (Salas-Wright et al., 2013). Within this study, religious coping relates to the use of religious engagement as a means of managing stressful life events, whereas, spirituality refers to the relationship one has with God and may or may not be linked with an institution (Salas-Wright et al., 2013). Overall, results suggest that spirituality, and to a far lesser degree, religious coping, protect against substance use and abuse among this high-risk population (Salas-Wright et al., 2013). Good and Willoughby's study (2014) mentioned previously further found that higher institutional spirituality/religiosity predicted lower substance use, especially when personal spirituality/religiosity was also high.

Early sexually activity and risky sexual behavior in adolescents has been another factor examined by experimental studies. Laflin et al. (2008) found that religiosity and spirituality served as a protective factor against these behaviors in adolescent boys that prayed at least once a day. These males were 2.3 times more likely to remain virgins (Laflin et al., 2008). Doss et al. (2007) found similar findings in their study that suggested having positive peer role models and being involved in religious activities delayed sexual intercourse.

Special Populations

Spirituality has proven to be an effective tool for a variety of special populations as well. Differing populations can hold unique experiences and needs to consider in the counseling setting (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018; Grabbe et al., & Bert, 2011). Research has shown that

spirituality is one intervention to consider, specifically for African American girls, homeless

youth and teenage mothers (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018; Grabbe et al., 2012; Bert, 2011).

African American adolescent girls face the challenges of racial stigma, which includes

negative outcomes such as low academic performance and poor psychosocial adjustment (Butler-

Barnes et al., 2018). To gain insight on the use of spirituality as a coping strategy for these youth,

Butler-Barnes et al. (2018) produced a study utilizing assessments of psychological

development, subjective stigmatization and well-being. Subjective stigmatization measures the

degree to which an individual internalizes such negative attitudes and stereotypes about their

racial group (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018). Positive racial beliefs and having a relationship with

God were associated with a healthier psychological well-being (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018).

Further, higher reports of a relationship with God served as a protective factor for African

American girls when internalizing moderate levels of racial stigma (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018).

This connection bolsters racial de-stigmatization beliefs (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018). These

results suggest that a relationship with God can serve as a coping mechanism, as well as promote

a healthier psychological well-being (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018).

Another population to consider is that of homeless youth. Mental health symptoms,

specifically depression, anxiety, psychotic symptoms, self-harm and trauma are common

experiences for these individuals, as stated by Grabbe et al. (2012). Homeless youth show

lifetime rates much higher than that of the national average for housed adolescents in depression,

conduct disorders, PTSD, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse (Grabbe et al., 2012). In addition, the

emotions of isolation, rejection and betrayal, lack of control and low self-wroth have been related

to suicide attempts in this population (Grabbe et al., 2012). For these reasons, promotion of

resilience is needed (Grabbe et al., 2012).

To meet this need, Gabbe et al. (2012) examined the feasibility of delivering a spirituality development class to homeless youth in a shelter in an urban center in the United States. This program utilized a quasi-experimental, one group, pre-and post-intervention design implementing mindfulness meditation (Grabbe et al., 2012). The program, called Youth Education in Spiritual Self-Schema (YESS) aimed to enhance participant strengths by drawing them away from negative self-beliefs and working to develop one's spiritual or personal sense of calm and purpose (Grabbe et al., 2012). Self-report measures of impulsiveness, resilience, spirituality, mental wellness and psychological symptoms were obtained (Grabbe et al., 2012). Due to concern for high turn-over, the program was condensed from once a week for eight weeks to twice a week for four weeks (Grabbe et al., 2012). Significant changes between pre- and posttest scores were found for psychological distress, spirituality (meaning and peace), mental well-being, and resilience (Grabbe et al., 2012). There were no significant changes in impulsiveness, however (Grabbe et al., 2012).

Yet another population in which spirituality has been proven useful is that of adolescent mothers. Early childbearing has shown to produce challenging experiences, including that of delayed education and lack of financial security (Bert, 2011). These experiences can produce enhanced stress and maladaptive adjustment for the mother, as well as socioemotional and behavioral development problems in the child (Bert, 2011).

Bert (2011) assessed the influence of religiosity and spirituality on the socioemotional and behavioral adjustment of adolescent mothers and their offspring at age fourteen. This longitudinal study utilized self-reports asking about religious contact, dependence and church involvement (Bert, 2011). Maternal religiosity was measured prenatally and at ages three, five and eight and included one's involvement in the church as well as the contact with fellow

members (Bert, 2011). Level of spirituality was assessed in both mothers and their children at 14 years postpartum (Bert, 2011). Further, mothers were assessed for socioemotional and behavioral outcomes such as self-esteem, depression and child abuse potential (Bert, 2011). As for children, self-esteem, depression and externalizing behaviors were reviewed (Bert, 2011).

Results showed that maternal religiosity was a strong predictor of maternal and child adjustment, however, children's own spirituality served as a predictor of their socioemotional adjustment (Bert, 2011). For mothers, participating in religiosity was positively associated with maternal self-esteem and negatively associated with abuse tendencies (Bert, 2011). Bert (2011) states that this participation may reduce the stressors caused by adolescent parenthood, which allows them to reach higher education and financial security.

Student Perception Implications

James et al. (2012) produced a study that examined whether a young individual's perceived conceptions of spirituality is an internal development asset. An internal development asset refers to the qualities, characteristics, and skills that youth have that contribute to healthy development (James et al., 2012). Within this study, open-ended questions were utilized to gain each youth's definition of spirituality, as well as closed-ended items that gauged the extent to which their definition reflected their own spirituality (James et al., 2012). Upon these procedures, analyses were done to code the information into categories (James et al., 2012). The categories found include the following: possessing keen consciousness, extraordinary self-confidence, high religious involvement, being connected, belief in a higher power or force, having purpose, to exude radiance, being virtuous, unarticulated spirituality, and same as religious youth (James et al., 2012). These characteristics were then compared with the positive youth development domains (PYD), which, when nurtured, allow youth to thrive despite

adversity and grow to be helpful assets to society as they age (James et al., 2012). PYD includes

a series of indicators called the six C's, including confidence, connection, character, compassion

and caring, and contribution (James et al., 2012). This comparison showed that spirituality did

account for a significant amount of variance in all C's examined in the study (James et al., 2012).

James et al. (2012) discovered that the extent to which youth viewed themselves as spiritual is

concurrently and longitudinally positively correlated with the indicators of positive youth

development.

This study provided needed insight into spirituality as a positive asset toward youth

development; however, it did not consider the ways in which youth may conceptualize being

spiritual. To fill this gap in knowledge, James and Fine (2015) utilized the data from the previous

study to test what qualitative differences in conception of spirituality may impact PYD. Students

were asked what it means to be a spiritual young person and utilized analyses to code

respondents into one of three categories, including that of Established Meaning; Being a Good

Person, and Ambiguous Spirituality (James & Fine, 2015). The dependent variables were the six

C's as previously discussed (James & Fine, 2015). Differences in competence were seen at all

three levels with the "Established Meaning" group scoring significantly higher than the other

two. Confidence, character, connection, caring and contribution were highest in the established

"Established Meaning" group and "Being a Good Person" group when compared to the

"Ambiguous Spirituality" group (James & Fine, 2015). These results found that positive youth

development differs based on the spiritual group that youth reside in (James & Fine, 2015). The

way in which youth conceptualize spirituality is related to variations in PYD patterns. Youth

perceiving their spirituality as an asset to their lives results in a more positive impact on

development (James & Fine, 2015).

Professional Call to Action

As a school counselor, one holds professional responsibilities established to best support students in their social-emotional, academic and career development. The American School Counselor Association (2019) has created behaviors and mindsets for these professionals to adhere to for enhancing effectiveness. Of these behaviors are skills essential for solid groundwork in the profession, outlined by the American School Counseling Association, including the ability to "demonstrate understanding of the impact of cultural, social and environmental influences on student success and opportunities" (2019, p. 3) If counselors choose to ignore these concerns or steer the conversation elsewhere, not only can a student's well-being be negatively affected, but the counselor's actions contradict their professional responsibility as well (Sink & Devlin, 2011). The *ACA Code of Ethics* produced by the American Counseling Association includes religion as a component of human diversity, a realm that counselors require a well-rounded, yet growing, knowledge base (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). One cannot overlook the significance that spirituality can play in student development in intersecting domains, including that of academics, social-emotional well-being and career, just as gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation do (Lambie et al., 2008).

The importance of spirituality support in the school setting is more important than ever with the population reaching its highest point of diversity (Lambie et al., 2008). Continually increasing is the number of students with strong spiritual and religious heritages (Smith-Augustine, 2011). As a result, professional school counselors will increasingly be working with students and families holding differing worldviews, values and traditions (Lambie et al., 2008).

Counselors have shared that spirituality does, in fact, influence ethical considerations, mental health assessment, prevention and intervention (Lambie et al., 2008). If counselors are

not mindful of this factor of a student's identity, misinterpretation and categorization of behaviors and thoughts can occur, as spiritual beliefs influence one's reaction to difficult experiences (Lambie et al., 2008). If lacking knowledge regarding a student's identified identities, counselors should consult experts, read professional literature and genuinely ask their students to educate them (Lambie et al., 2008). Referring to the fourteen competencies frame by the Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (2020), may be beneficial. This division of the American Counseling Association (ACA) provides guidance to professionals in integrating these values into work with clients (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). One of these tasks, according to Stloukal and Wickman (2011), is to create spiritual and religious safe zones that allow students to "investigate, openly and without fear, their beliefs related to meaning and truth within school counseling programs." These zones offer students the ability to voice without fear of judgement, disclose personal beliefs and grow from interactions with others without being silenced, overlooked or reprimanded (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

Challenges for Implementation

The thought of implementing spirituality into school counseling curriculum brings many a sense of discomfort and concern, often as a result of the notion of separation of church and state (Smith-Augustine, 2011). It is known that the government cannot sponsor a specific faith tradition as a state religion (Smith-Augustine, 2011). For schools, this means that public schools cannot formally uphold a particular religion (Smith-Augustine, 2011). For this reason, some counselors believe that dialogue on faith issues is inappropriate for a 'value-free' public school setting (Lambie et al., 2008). While religions cannot be forcibly practiced in a public school, students still have the right to practice their personal faith through the Free Speech and Free Exercise clauses of the First Amendment (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

The distinction between religion and spirituality is also important. Spirituality can entail religion but does not have to (Sink & Richmond, 2004). For instance, spiritual acts for students may involve outdoor recreation, listening to inspiring music, singing, attending a service or reading a meaningful passage (Sink & Richmond, 2004). Overall, activities that involve connection, communication and human interaction can be considered spiritual in nature (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

Another challenge for educators in implementing spirituality support is that of personal factors. Similar to the expectations for counselors to be objective during a counseling session regarding other sensitive topics, remaining free from bias is imperative when discussing spirituality (Lambie et al., 2008). This requires counselors to be mindful of their personal spiritual development and continually place personal spirituality aside while working with a student (Lambie et al., 2008). Counselors are to assist students in discovering and developing their spirituality, not force a spiritual identity upon them (Stoukal & Wickman, 2011). Falling into this would not only be a constitutional issue, but an ethical issue as well (Lambie et al., 2008). While this may seem like common sense, ensuring this detachment in implementation takes practice and mindfulness (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). Many counselors feel as though they have not been adequately informed regarding ways in which we can follow-through with this (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

Ethical and Practical Application

Introspection

As is known, counselors cannot advocate for their personal spiritual beliefs with a student (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). While counselors know not to intentionally encourage their beliefs, the impact of their subconscious mind is not as quickly understood and requires effort

(Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). This introspection includes reviewing one's personal and professional beliefs, stereotypes, assumptions, values and biases that can influence counseling practice (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). The American School Counselor Association (2019) further emphasizes this practice in their professional standards and competencies, stating that one must "understand personal limitations and biases, and articulate how they may affect the school counselors work."

A counselor's spiritual development assessment should be cyclical with continuous incoming knowledge and experience (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). Questions to consider incorporate topics of the following: parental spirituality, lessons taught as a child, influences on, both individuals and experiences, spiritual beliefs and changes in beliefs throughout life thus far (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). Further, reviewing one's current spiritual health and status is imperative. (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

By utilizing introspection, one can prepare for issues that may cause personal dissonance (Sink, 2004). Personal experiences and beliefs can create challenges for working through specific topics with students in the counseling setting (Sink, 2004). Not only are students on a spiritual journey, but the counselor is as well (Sink, 2004). By checking in with these personal factors, counselors can better control emotional reactions and manage countertransference (Sink, 2004). Countertransference, or projecting personal feelings onto the student, can have detrimental effects on the counseling relationship and progress (Sink, 2004).

Inaccurate assessment of the involvement of spiritual concerns in a student's situation, treating by avoidance or being too focused on spirituality as the source of concern, as well as making inappropriate disclosure can occur (Sink, 2004). To prevent this issue, counselors may also look to supervision for guidance and accountability (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

Best Practices

With the benefits of spirituality on development notable, discussion regarding practical

uses of this component in school counseling appears to be a useful next step. This discussion can

assist in developing counselor confidence and knowledge, an area of needed growth self-reported

by counselors themselves (Smith-Augustine, 2011). A wide variety of practices have been

discussed in literature, but for the purposes of this review, only those provided by a few studies

already presented will be analyzed.

Wolf (2004) mentioned that counselors must only focus on student beliefs. Counselors

can help facilitate that discussion; however, students should be the ones reflecting (Wolf, 2004).

If the counselor begins talking more about themselves that the student, it should be taken as a

sign for them to redirect the conversation back to the student (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

Counselors should also redirect back to the student if they seek out counselor disclosure

(Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). This redirection protects counselors from inadvertently imposing

their own beliefs and values (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). It is also important counselors

recognize that these conversations can emerge in many different contexts. For instance, spiritual

topics may arise in group counseling situations. If this occurs, counselors should focus on

modeling a position of curiosity (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). This allows for facilitation of

group discussion, promotes empathy, and allows for movement away from dichotomous

thinking, such as right or wrong (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). No matter the context, counselors

should create a safe environment for all students. This requires not only a non-judgmental

atmosphere, but also careful thought behind that which is represented physically (Stloukal &

Wickman, 2011). For example, office and school décor such as posters and decorations can send

messages regarding that which is accepted. Yet another example is that of which holidays are

celebrated, as differing spiritual beliefs may lead to differences in celebratory beliefs (Stloukal &

Wickman, 2011).

There may be times when students require more in-depth counseling services than school

counselors are able to provide. Counselors in the school setting need to be able to recognize

when it is appropriate to outsource, whether that be to a counselor in the community or a school-

based mental health counselor within the school (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). If the student's

concerns or questions are out of a counselor's competency or skill, it is their duty to find

alternative resources to meet this need with consent and collaboration of the parental figures

(Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). Another reason that one may outsource is when personal factors

are present that may negatively impact the counseling relationship (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

For this reason, it is recommended that counselors keep a toolbox specific to spirituality and

religiosity containing names and agencies available for referral within the community (Stloukal

& Wickman, 2011).

According to Stloukal and Wickman (2011), to effectively maneuver and build the

counseling relationship, counselors should embody their professional and personal identities.

When counselors inward and outward self are congruent, or authentic, trust and rapport is more

firmly established (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011). Rather than abandoning or imposing personal

beliefs, counselors can remain a positive example of genuineness (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

While one cannot promote their spiritual or religious beliefs, they can foster values of hope,

respect, joy, kindness, patience, love, self-control, honesty and so forth (Stloukal & Wickman,

2011). While spiritual in nature, these values are aligned to one's professional identity and duties

(Stloukal & Wickman, 2011!) When assessing spirituality in students as a wellness component in

one's practice, consultation with fellow counselors is also beneficial (Stloukal & Wickman,

2011). This allows for collaboration and guidance in prevention of potential harm as a result of personal bias, as well as misinterpretation of symptoms leading to ineffective intervention (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

Counseling Theory

A variety of counseling theories and approaches can be applied when supporting students in their spiritual development. A holistic framework, such as that of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model, is useful (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This approach emphasizes the impact that layers systems have on one's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Each system incorporates interactions that are increasingly more intricate comprised of the individual and other people, objects or symbols in their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The collection of these components influences one's worldview, including that of their spiritual beliefs (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). A systematic perspective can provide meaningful insight into influences on one's beliefs, such as parental expectations or community involvement. Recognizing this impact can provide direction in conversation (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

One theory that may be useful in this discussion is that of Reality Theory. This theory, according to Bradley (2014), focuses on helping students identify their core needs. These can include love and belonging, power, freedom, fun and survival, many of which are spiritual values. Discussions surrounding these needs and whether they are being met can lead to growth-inducing realizations (Bradley, 2014). Throughout this process, Roger's Person-Centered approach can be of assistance. This not only emphasizes clients worth and dignity, but it also encourages autonomy (Bradley, 2014). Students can be encouraged to make their own decisions, including which values and beliefs they hold (Bradley, 2014).

Discussion

Spirituality has a lengthy list of benefits when it comes to adolescent development and life experience. These benefits lie in the areas of mental health, life satisfaction, purpose, and behavior. The historical constraints of the separation between church and state have created hesitancy in the incorporation of spirituality in school counseling. Further concerns such as insufficient knowledge and conversation boundaries are also evident (Smith-Augustine, 2011). Though these concerns exist, it is a school counselor's professional duty to support students in this area. One's spiritual identity is just as important to consider as other identities such as race or gender. With understanding of the differences between religion and spirituality, as well as of related laws and policies, counselors can gain more confidence in their use of spirituality. Remaining self-aware and assessing one's personal beliefs and values is a primary focus in this process. Further actions to be taken for ethical practice is to focus solely on student beliefs, continually seek understanding of the various spiritual practices, consult with fellow professionals, and take on the role of learner rather than expert in spiritual conversations with students. This information is not to suggest that the focus of a school counseling practice should solely be spirituality. Instead, counselors should consider this powerful socializing force and allow students to explore this piece of their lives to the extent that they choose (Lambie et al., 2008). It is the counselor's job to be ready for this conversation!

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