School Counselor Trainees' Experiences with Dilemma Discussions in Ethics Education

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Abstract

Student-led ethical dilemma discussions were incorporated into counseling ethics instruction for school counselor trainees (SCTs). Phenomenological content analysis was employed to gain insight into the experiences of SCTs who participated in this teaching and learning strategy. Fifteen (n = 15) master's level SCTs responded to open-ended questions about their experiences with the dilemma discussions. The following themes emerged from the data: (a) social learning, (b) self-awareness, (c) subjective learning experience, and (d) applied learning. A description of the teaching method is discussed as well as implications for counseling ethics instruction.

Keywords

Counselor education programs prepare graduate-level counselor trainees (CTs) to enter a helping profession governed by standards of practice as well as legal and ethical codes. Historically, counseling ethics education has involved the direct instruction of ethical codes that govern the profession followed by student engagement in opportunities to clarify values and feelings as they relate to ethical issues (Kitchener, 1986). Whereas direct instruction of counseling ethics may be insufficient with respect to equipping CTs with the thinking tools necessary to critically evaluate ethical codes, their personal feelings, and their values (Kitchener, 1986), more engaged ethics instruction moves students from conceptual knowledge of codes and principles to practical application of such knowledge (Corey et al., 2005). The present study focused on one such instructional method, the student-led ethical dilemma discussion, and explored the experiences of school counselor trainees (SCTs) who engaged in this activity.

Counseling Ethics Instruction

The value of teaching counseling ethics to CTs is assumed and confirmed by research demonstrating ethical and legal knowledge gains following the completion of a counseling ethics course (Burns, 2019; Lambie et al. 2010; Lambie & Ieva, 2012; McMahon & Good, 2016). Although ethics content is infused throughout accreditation standards (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2015, counselor education programs have considerable leeway in terms of content delivery. In many cases, ethics is taught as a stand-alone course (Hill, 2004; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004); however, Levitt et al. (2019) proposed curricular infusion of ethics content into counselor education curriculum, demonstrating its relevance to counseling techniques, lifespan development, multicultural counseling, and practicum/internship. Methods of teaching and learning vary across counselor education programs, including strategies such as lecture, fictional and non-fictional ethical case studies, legal case studies, small and large

group discussions, Socratic discussions, guest speakers, and class debates (Hill, 2004; Urofsky & Sowa, 2004).

Corey et al. (2005) described the use of role play wherein CTs apply their knowledge by assuming the role of a counselor or client in an ethical scenario, with the goal of transcending conceptual knowledge of ethical and legal codes to grasp the complexities involved in counseling ethics. Ametrano (2014) emphasized the teaching of ethical decision-making that guides CTs in reconciling their personal values with their professional ethics. Similarly, Corey et al. (2005) described reaction papers as a method of engaging CTs in the critical thinking necessary to make sound ethical decisions. Counselor educators have even incorporated creative instructional approaches into ethics education, such as case vignettes based on fairy tales (Henderson & Malone, 2012), and creative arts projects (e.g., bookmarks; Warren et al., 2012).

Considerations for Teaching School Counseling Ethics

The various teaching methods mentioned above have not been designated for use with CTs in particular counseling specializations (e.g., clinical mental health counseling, school counseling, etc.). Hence, all methods can have value for SCTs. Still, some considerations for teaching school counseling ethics remain given the inherent complexity of counseling minors in a school setting. Stone (2017) identified 13 factors that distinguish the work of school counselors from that of other helping professionals. Among these factors are the age and development of student-clients, obligations beyond the student-client (i.e., obligations to caregivers and families, as well as school personnel), privacy rights, community and instructional standards, and school counselor caseloads. "School counselors who consider the complications of their work with minors in schools appreciate the need to consider each ethical or legal dilemma *in context*" (emphasis added; Stone, 2017, p.1).

Ethical Dilemmas in Schools

Practicing school counselors face ethical concerns unique to the school setting, such as working with undocumented students, addressing bullying of LGBTQ students, navigating dual relationships, and reporting suspected abuse or neglect (Brown et al., 2017; Johnson & Purgason, 2021). For some school counselors, ethical dilemmas occur daily while others report encountering ethical issues biweekly (Johnson & Purgason, 2021). Among school counselors' primary ethical concerns is maintaining students' confidentiality while also working to ensure student and school safety (Brown et al., 2017; King-White et al., 2019; Trice-Black et al., 2013). Practicing school counselors interviewed by Trice-Black et al. (2013) described the challenge of balancing the interests of multiple stakeholders (e.g., parents/guardians, administrators, teachers, and other school personnel) with students' expectations of confidentiality. They recognized the need for trust in the counseling relationship while also acknowledging that the support of stakeholders can be critical to positive student outcomes. Whereas confidentiality is among the most prevalent ethical concerns for school counselors, other dilemmas exist and are equally complex given multiple contextual factors within the school settings (Stone, 2017). Hence, a method of resolving ethical dilemmas is critical to ethically sound school counselor practice.

Ethical Decision-Making in Schools

The ethical decision-making model endorsed by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2016) accounts for the complexities of school counseling and guides the resolution of ethical dilemmas with a consideration of the contextual factors relevant to the setting. The Solutions to Ethical Problems in Schools (STEPS; as cited in Stone, 2017) ethical decision-making model adapts existing models to include student age and development, expectations in the school setting, minors' rights, and parents' rights. The STEPS model also requires consideration

of moral principles and the engagement in consultation throughout the decision-making process. Both the consideration of moral principles and on-going consultation seem particularly relevant to school counselors who acknowledge the critical role of consultation and who report relying on the moral principles of beneficence (doing what is best for the student) and nonmaleficence (not doing harm to the student) (Johnson & Purgason, 2021).

Given the ethical and legal nuance inherent in school counseling, ethics instruction with SCTs requires multiple types of engagement that require cognitive complexity and moral reasoning to develop a solid understanding of ethical decision-making with minor clients in a school setting. Yet, counselors report a disconnect between what and how they learned about ethics as graduate students and their experiences resolving ethical dilemmas in practice (Johnson & Purgason, 2021; Levitt et al., 2015). Whereas the extant literature speaks to multiple ways of implementing ethics training in counseling programs (e.g., Ametrano, 2014; Corey et al., 2005; Pack-Brown et al., 2008) and the efficacy of this training (e.g., Burns, 2019; Lambie et al. 2010; Lambie & Ieva, 2012; McMahon & Good, 2016), the nature of CTs experiences with this training has received scant attention. Hence, there is a need to understand the CTs' experiences and perceptions of ethics training that uses real-world cases relevant to specific settings, and requires self-reflection and exploration of personal values (Johnson & Purgason, 2021; Levitt et al., 2015).

Rationale for Student-led Ethical Dilemma Discussions in Ethics Instruction

The increased vigor and intricacy found within the contemporary educational context and ensuing ethical dilemmas create a paradox. However, that same complexity encourages greater reliance on cognitive shortcuts to simplify the decision-making process, often leading less experienced counselors to process information automatically and hastily without consultation (Sheperis et al., 2016, as cited in Burkholder et al., 2020). Additionally, this level of depth creates

dilemmas that require more careful democratic deliberation on the part of the involved individuals engaged in the decision-making process (Mandler, 2014, as cited in McMahon & Good, 2016).

CTs often view an ethics course to be dull and uninteresting (Burns, 2019; Morganfield Parker et al., 2022), and seldom do they describe it as enjoyable or interactive. Yet, counselors regularly deal with challenging circumstances that call for a sound decision-making process and contemplative analytical reasoning (Burkholder et al., 2020). Young and Hundley (2013) posit, one way to circumvent such issues in ethics training is to not only provide socially interactive experiences for learners, but to also put them in situations where they must engage the content on an emotional level.

As a means of teaching counseling ethics to SCTs in a manner that provides the thinking tools discussed by Kitchener (1986) and reflective of components of moral development (Rest, 1984) while also considering the contextual complications of school counseling (Stone, 2017), student-led ethical dilemma discussions were incorporated into a counselor education course focused on legal and ethical issues in school counseling. Dilemma discussions can facilitate growth in the moral domain in both children and adults (Cummings et al., 2010; Rosenkoetter et al., 1982), and in this case, challenged SCTs to use moral reasoning to apply their ethical and legal knowledge, including decision-making processes, to relevant school counseling case vignettes. Aligning with Lind's (2006) conceptions of effective moral education, the student-led dilemmas occurred within an environment marked by mutual respect and free discourse. Additionally, allowing SCTs to lead the dilemma discussions made the teaching more egalitarian, in an effort to increase student interest in the learning process (Lind, 2006).

Constructivist and Experiential Learning Theories

Established with moral development theory in mind, the ethical dilemma discussions were also informed by constructivist and experiential learning theories. The constructivist paradigm posits that learning is an active, socially enhanced process where the learner constructs and reconstructs knowledge through their own subjective meaning of the objective reality (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). It recognizes numerous, socially created perspectives and truths versus a single truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hunter, 2008). Therefore, not all learning is singular and linear. Deeper knowledge happens when learning extends beyond the memorization of facts and learners reflect upon their interactions with the environment. CTs are complex individuals, who have varied modes of turning on the lightbulb. Constructivism highlights the need for counselor educators to have a sociocultural contextualization of student learning in a classroom that is becoming increasingly diversified (Hunter, 2008). Practical application of knowledge is key; thus, the focus for counselor educators should not lie with purely disseminating information, but in the creation of an environment that allows CTs to experience the process of learning. Through facilitation, observation, and recognition of CTs' prior knowledge, ideas, and experiences, counselor educators can better assist learners to construct new meanings of the world (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

Experiential learning theory (ELT) draws on the research of several constructivist theorists like Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Lewin, and Bruner (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). According to Kolb (2015), experiential education allows individuals to make discoveries and experiment with knowledge firsthand through their own experiences. This aligns with other theories regarding adult education that conceive of adult learners as ones who prefer learning through engagement and self-direction (Cross, 1992; Knowles et al., 2015). Kolb (2015) asserts, "knowledge is continuously derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner" (p. 38). Learners process through a

learning cycle, entering at any stage, but learning only occurs when they have all the skills presented in each cycle (Kolb, 2015; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Facilitating a classroom in the ways of ELT pushes CTs to interact with a raw real-life experience, reflect on this practice, conceptualize, and construct new understanding and meaning, and then employ this new knowledge in a new experience (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Young & Hundly, 2013).

Described in more detail below, the student-led ethical dilemma discussions were incorporated into ethics instruction to bring together the active, socially engaged learning of constructivism with the skill-building, real-world processes of ELT. As noted by Levitt et al. (2015), limited research focuses on the "actual effectiveness of counselor education training in ethics. Few studies examine instructional methodologies in ethics education in great detail" (p. 93-94). The present study aims to fill that gap by gaining insight into the experiences of SCTs who engaged in ethical dilemma discussions as a teaching and learning strategy in an ethics course.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to investigate SCTs' experiences as participants and facilitators of ethical dilemma discussions in their school counseling ethics course. We used phenomenological content analysis to answer the following research question: "What are the experiences of school counselor trainees who have participated in ethical dilemma discussions in a *Legal and Ethical Issues in School Counseling* course?" Phenomenology allowed us to explore the common meaning and lived experiences of SCTs who engaged in the ethical dilemma discussions (Creswell & Poth, 2017) and descriptive content analysis provided a systematic method of analyzing the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Student-led Ethical Dilemma Discussions

The first author has taught a course for SCTs titled *Legal and Ethical Issues in School Counseling* for multiple semesters and has incorporated the ethical dilemma discussions into the curriculum since her first semester teaching the course. The second author has co-taught the course with the first author and has observed and evaluated the dilemma discussions along with the first author. The course is required of all students in the school counseling track of a CACREP-accredited counseling program at a large university in the southeastern United States. The course includes relevant legal and ethical topics for SCTs, such as school counselor identity and scope of practice, using ethical decision-making models, cultural competence and social justice advocacy, informed consent and confidentiality with minors, ethics and technology, exceptional education legislation, suspected abuse and neglect, suicidal ideation and self-harm, school violence, and bullying. Multiple methods of evaluation exist for the course including reading assignments, quizzes, presentations, and class attendance and participation.

The course assignment that was the focus of this study is the student-led ethical dilemma discussion project completed by small groups of two or three SCTs. For this assignment, SCTs researched an ethical dilemma commonly confronting school counselors. Source material for the dilemmas was gathered from the course text, academic journal articles, personal experience as a school employee, and interviews with practicing school counselors. Each group presented a case example to the class wherein the group members identified the relevant ethical standards and legal codes that made the case a dilemma. Further, the groups generated between 7 and 10 questions that were used to facilitate a discussion of the dilemma. Prior to their presentations, the first author instructed all students on the use of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy to develop discussion questions that required higher-order thinking (e.g., apply, analyze, evaluate; Krathwohl, 2002).

During this time, she provided examples of questions and question stems that would generate deep discussion and facilitate cognitive complexity. After presenting their case example, the presenting group divided the class into smaller groups and each presenter facilitated a 15-minute discussion using the questions they generated. The aim of the facilitated dilemma discussion was not to come to a decision or resolution of the dilemma. Rather, the goal was to challenge SCTs to think about the dilemma from multiple perspectives, using critical thinking skills, to examine the complexities of ethical dilemmas in the school setting. Following these discussions, the class reconvened, and the presenting group applied the STEPS ethical decision-making model to the dilemma to demonstrate to the class how they resolved the ethical dilemma.

For this assignment, the first author provided detailed instructions and expectations for the SCTs and provided them with a grading rubric. Additionally, the first author presented at least two ethical dilemmas and facilitated at least one dilemma discussion so that all SCTs in the class understood the complexities that make for a true dilemma and to demonstrate the dilemma discussion technique. SCTs also received a presentation template to ensure that they included all required elements of the assignment. To explore their experiences with the assignment, following the completion of the course, SCTs were asked to participate in research about their experiences in the class and with the dilemma discussions, specifically.

Recruitment and Sample

Prior to recruitment and data collection, we received approval to conduct the study from a university Institutional Review Board. The target population for this study was SCTs who had completed *Legal and Ethical Issues in School Counseling* during one of the semesters when the ethical dilemma discussions were incorporated into the class. The first author recruited participants for this study by announcing the study during the last two class meetings of the course and by

sending emails to students once they had completed the course. Potential participants received a link to an online questionnaire where they could participate in the study. To reduce researcher bias and avoid participant coercion, official recruitment and SCT participation in the study began after the close of the academic term. Hence, the participants' involvement in the study was anonymous and was not tied to their grade for the course or the course itself.

The final sample for this study consisted of 15 master's level SCTs who completed *Legal and Ethical Issues in School Counseling* course between 2016-2018. The gender composition of this convenience sample was as follows: 87% of the participants identified as female (n = 13) and 13% identified as male (n = 2). Participants ranged in age from 23 to 42, with a mean age of 27.3. In terms of race and ethnicity, participants identified as white/not Hispanic (n = 6), white/Hispanic (n = 1), African American/Black (n = 1), Hispanic/Latinx/Spanish American (n = 3), and multiracial/multiethnic (n = 3). One person did not identify their race/ethnicity.

Data Collection and Analysis

The present study was a transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) that used descriptive content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) as the method of analysis to examine the data for relevant codes and themes. We employed a survey research design with an anonymous online questionnaire to gather narrative responses from participants regarding their experiences in the course and with the ethical dilemma discussions. By using this method, we sought to reduce the likelihood of bias by distancing ourselves from the participants whose responses might have been influenced had we interviewed them given that we were also instructors in the counseling program. When participants accessed the online questionnaire, they acknowledged informed consent and provided written responses to 13 open-ended questions (see Appendix) and 5 demographic questions. Once all data were collected, we analyzed the data set using conventional

content analysis procedures (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Through content analysis, researchers can glean manifest and latent meanings from multiple types of data (e.g., text, visual, and media; Saldaña, 2011). Previous research in counseling and counselor education (see Blancher et al., 2010; Evans, 2013; Helwig & Schmidt, 2011; Smith et al., 2008) has included content analysis as a data analysis method when exploring surface and subtextual information (Saldaña, 2011).

Both authors participated in the analysis of the data set using the same inductive procedures outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). First, we read all participant responses multiple times to gain a general sense of their content. Next, we conducted open coding of the data to identify and highlight key words and phrases that seemed to reflect significant concepts. Throughout the data analysis process, we wrote reflective memos (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) that included our initial thoughts and reactions to the data. These memos included possible interpretations of the data and potential codes and categories. After we had individually analyzed the data in this manner, we met multiple times to come to consensus on codes and categories and to identify subsequent themes. After multiple iterations of reading through the data and examining codes and themes, we agreed on and organized the data into themes and subthemes and identified quotes from the data to serve as exemplars for the themes. So as not to impose preconceived categories on the data, we avoided using constructivism and experiential learning theory to guide the data analysis process. Rather, we returned to those theories after the completion of the data analysis to ground the findings of this study within those theories and extant literature.

Trustworthiness and the Research Team

The research team for this study included two doctoral level counselor educators who both have extensive experience as professional school counselors. Additionally, we both have been instructors for the *Legal and Ethical Issues in School Counseling* course under study. Given that

trustworthiness is central to qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), including content analysis, we sought to ensure the credibility of the data analysis so that the results would accurately reflect the sentiments of the participants. We worked collaboratively to establish credibility by (a) discussing and agreeing upon the data analysis procedures prior to beginning the process, (b) maintaining and reviewing reflective memos throughout the data analysis process, and (c) consulting throughout the process to reach consensus and reduce bias.

Results

Four themes emerged from the data to provide an in-depth picture of the experiences of SCTs who participated in ethical dilemma discussions in a school counseling ethics course. These themes provide insight into both internal and external processes as experienced by the participants. The themes are as follows: (a) social learning, (b) self-awareness, (c) subjective learning experience, and (d) applied learning. Each theme will be discussed below and exemplars from the participants will be included.

Social Learning

A key theme expressed by the participants was the process of learning with their academic peers. This social learning included collaboration with peers within their presentation groups as well as through the process of discussing each dilemma. According to one participant:

> While group projects garner little enthusiasm, collaboration around topics like this
> allowed us to gather multiple perspectives on how a problem could arise and how
> it could be solved. I think we expected to have the help in learning to solve the
> problem, but the multiple perspectives on how a problem could arise in the first
> place was a hidden gem that I am glad to have experienced.

The dilemma discussions required the participants to engage in perspective-taking. One participant described the value of this aspect of the discussions by stating:

> It was a time for students to share different perspectives and experiences which
> allowed us to learn different ways to go about the dilemma. The discussions were
> a great learning tool because if I was stuck on something I was able to get insight
> and solutions from my peers.

Such perspective-taking allowed the participants to examine their own worldviews through the engagement with peers who viewed the dilemmas differently: "We were able to raise multiple points of contention around a topic and move through them in class. It also served as a way to check our biases as we acted and reacted to the scenarios." Through this social learning experience, the participants grew in their knowledge and understanding of the content: "Sharing the discussions with others made the ethical and legal implications of our interpretations and actions more apparent and make more sense."

Self-awareness

Closely associated with the social learning experience of the participants is the theme of self-awareness. The collaborative nature of the dilemma discussions challenged the participants resulting in their engagement with their own internal worlds. The participants reported becoming aware of their biases, learning to bracket their personal beliefs, addressing values conflicts, and recognizing countertransference. Participants made statements such as, "Sometimes I would have to be realistic with my own biases that might affect my first thoughts" and "I was forced to engage with my biases…and check myself about how strongly or subconsciously I entertain particular beliefs or ideals." One participant discussed how the process of self-awareness occurred: "I do remember sometimes having a strong immediate reaction and then slowly seeing the other side

after working through the decision-making model and talking it out with my peers." Through the engagement with others, the participants gained greater awareness of their conscious and unconscious biases as well as their values.

The dilemma discussions also allowed for clarification of their values and demonstrated the ethical challenges that values conflicts present. For example, one participant commented about the issue of abortion stating, "I had to be open to that choice even though it isn't something that fits my values." Another participant discussed a values conflict in a scenario involving a student who was not encouraged by their family to apply to college:

> It was hard because education is a value both my family and I hold dear and I was able to handle the dilemma by using STEPS, reviewing the ASCA principles and learning about other options for post-high school life that are not geared towards going to a 4-year university/college.

Through the dilemma discussion and application of a decision-making model, this participant was able to hold onto their personal values while honoring the perspective and values of the student and their family in the scenario.

Subjective Learning Experience

In addition to describing the interpersonal and intrapersonal processes of the dilemma discussions, the participants also described how they experienced this strategy for learning about ethical and legal issues in school counseling. They described the dilemma discussions as interactive, creative, and enjoyable methods of exploring the complex ethical issues within the school setting. They also described the dilemma discussions as challenging in multiple ways, including their thinking and their skills in facilitation. The grey areas of ethics posed a particular challenge to participants with one noting, "The most challenging part was not always knowing the

'right' answer." Another commented that, "It is intimidating to speak about your thoughts and assumptions. It is hard to get away from the mindset of a 'right' and 'wrong' answer to a question." Despite these challenges, participants found ways to engage in the discussions: "I am shy so initially speaking during class and discussions was difficult until I found my voice and pushed myself to contribute to discussions."

Moreover, SCTs in this sample described the ways in which the roles of discussion facilitator and participant contributed to their learning experiences and confidence as future school counselors. Reflecting on the role of facilitator, one participant stated:

> I am rather comfortable facilitating small group discussions, and I enjoyed the chance to invite others to discuss a topic with me and poke through their thoughts. I got a chance to practice timing and patience as I navigated between speakers trying to give everyone a chance to speak from their own thoughts as well as respond to others' points.

Another added, "As a facilitator, I was in a position to gently guide, listen, observe, and encourage exploration."

Participating in the discussions as a group member presented a different experience with mixed satisfaction for the participants. On the one hand, the experience was beneficial and enjoyable:

> I enjoyed the freedom. As a participant, I did not have the weight of facilitating connection and progression of the conversation. I could sit more comfortably in my own understanding and response to what was being said. I had the opportunity to focus on my thoughts in relation to others instead of managing everyone's thoughts and being mindful of conversation flow and development.

On the other hand, there were moments of frustration when varying perspectives were disregarded in the discussions: "It was a bit discouraging at times because I would describe my own opinions about the dilemma from experience in the education field and these opinions were ignored at some points." Despite such challenges, the participants reported feeling more confident after participating in the dilemma discussions: "I feel much more confident and also know where to access more information when I need to consult." This confidence extends to the application of an ethical decision-making model: "I am very confident in my ability to follow the model because I have gone through the process personally, with my group members and, vicariously, through other groups."

Applied Learning

Participants discussed the decision-making model and other applied learning experiences resulting from the dilemma discussions. They described engaging in critical thinking and collaborative problem solving that resulted in the generation of multiple courses of action in response to ethical dilemmas. One participant wrote, "The format of the project facilitated us getting experience with collaborative decision-making." Another commented,

> The most important thing I gathered from the discussions was that unique solutions
> to problems are appropriate. I should not strive to create template responses to
> problems, but I should endeavor to collect as much resource and reference material
> as I can.

Applying legal and ethical codes through the use of an ethical decisions-making model felt relevant to the participants: "I really enjoyed being a part of the discussions, it allowed me to consider how I might deal with multiple situations. I felt like it was a good way to apply what we had been learning about."

Additionally, the participants discussed the applicability of what they learned to the school context where they would be faced with a range of complex legal and ethical issues. Some participants identified the topics discussed in the dilemmas, including "topics that are common in school districts such as parent/child rights, FERPA, Section 504 of the ADA, abuse, suicide and self-harm, ACA, ASCA, and advocacy." Other issues discussed included

> …accepting gifts from a client, confidentiality and when to break it, homelessness, word of mouth from other students, negative school environment and how to help, work relationships, professionalism, children of divorce, ACA code of ethics, ASCA code of ethics, and how to deal with parents.

Two participants discussed the value of this realistic element of the dilemma discussions stating: "I really enjoyed being a part of the discussions, it allowed me to consider how I might deal with multiple situations. I felt like it was a good way to apply what we had been learning about." "The dilemma discussions in class were helpful with having a realistic understanding to situations that could happen with students and parents while receiving help from a counselor and addressing when action needs to be taken." The applicability of the knowledge learned through the dilemma discussions was apparent to the participants of this study.

Discussion

Ethics instruction in counselor education can take multiple forms including didactic and experiential teaching strategies. The present study focused on an experiential method of teaching and learning that required SCTs to both facilitate and participate in ethical dilemma discussions. The findings of this study point to the efficacy of the strategy in providing the space for SCTs to learn collaboratively, take multiple perspectives on complex issues, and engage in continuous reflection on their beliefs and values. Further, the data position student-led ethical dilemma

discussions as a response to Ametrano's (2014) call for a level of complexity in ethics instruction wherein CTs differentiate their personal values from their professional ethics through the employment of an ethical decision-making model. Additionally, the ethical dilemma discussion required the SCTs in this study to confront experiences that they are likely to encounter as future school counselors. Hence, their learning of ethical and legal issues in schools was contextually based and valuable for their future practice (Stone, 2017).

The participants' responses suggested that the dilemma discussions, as designed, provided learning opportunities in line with constructivist and experiential learning theories. The participants spoke of shared learning experiences where they contributed to and gained from collective construction of knowledge regarding ethical scenarios in the school setting. Perspective-taking was central to the learning experience, confirming that multiple truths and realities exist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hunter, 2008) even when discussing law and ethics. The dilemma discussions challenged the SCTs to confront realistic school counseling dilemmas through constant reflection and application of the law, ethical codes, professional values, and ethical principles. In so doing, the SCTs moved through the learning cycle espoused in ELT (Kolb, 2015; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011), with a key element of the experience being the relevance of the ethical scenarios to their future practice as school counselors (Johnson & Purgason, 2021; Levitt et al., 2015).

Implications for Counselor Education

The findings of this study provide curricular considerations for school counselor educators that might enhance and enrich SCTs learning and competence as they prepare to enter the professional domain. According to ASCA (2019) and CACREP (2015), a responsibility of school counselors is to consult and collaborate with families, students, school personnel, and community partners. Additionally, the ability to think critically and facilitate group discussions are essential

to school counselors' performance within a school. The participants in this study described the ways in which their engagement in the ethical dilemma discussions facilitated their collaboration, critical thinking, and group leadership skills. As school counselor educators contemplate course instruction, they may consider utilizing the ethical dilemma discussion given the themes from the present study that demonstrate how such an experiential activity promotes the advancement and practice of such essential skills.

It is important to note that although the sample for this study included only SCTs, student-led ethical dilemmas are not counseling track-specific; hence, counselor educators preparing clinical mental health and marriage/family counselor trainees can find value in this instructional strategy. Just as school counseling practice has unique contextual concerns with ethical and legal implications, so too do the employment environments of clinical mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists. Ethical dilemma discussions with CTs preparing to enter these roles should be tailored to relevant scenarios that they would likely encounter as practitioners.

Further curricular implications of this study include the course sequence within counselor education programs. The understanding and utilization of the skills noted above are critical to the success of CTs in their training program and once they enter the field. Thus, counselor educators might consider frontloading such experiences in their counselor education programs. Providing an early scaffolded experiential learning environment as described above orients CTs to professional roles, abilities, and responsibilities in a developmentally appropriate manner. As CTs progress through their counselor education programs, they can build upon the foundation set with this strategy to engage in other collaborative learning experiences in classes that require self-awareness and perspective-taking (e.g., multicultural counseling and practicum).

Limitations and Future Research

The results of this study provide insight into the learning experiences of SCTs who participated in ethical dilemma discussions in their ethics course. However, there are some limitations to this study. Scholarship of teaching and learning poses ethical concerns given the dual role of instructor and researcher worn by the first author. To mitigate these concerns, we used anonymous written responses rather than individual interviews. Although this method created distance between the researchers and the participants, it might have also limited the depth of the participants' responses. Additionally, despite all efforts to ensure anonymity and to disconnect the research from the course, participants still might have been influenced by the knowledge that the instructor would read their responses.

The small sample size and the homogeneity of the sample challenge the transferability of the results, with most participants identifying as white and female. While the participants are in a training program with clinical mental health and marriage and family therapy tracks, the present course was designed and intended for legal and ethical issues in a school setting. Additionally, the present study took place at a university in the southeastern United States. Thus, dilemmas, values, and perspectives may differ for non-SCT students or even those in another part of the country. Lastly, the retrospective nature of this investigation is a limitation. Due to the passage of time, all participants recounted a prior lived experience; as a result, their viewpoints may have faded or become less accessible.

These limitations notwithstanding, the present study has provided some insight into the experiences and value of SCTs engaging in student-led ethical dilemma discussions. Continuing to build upon these findings, future research might look at the use of this intervention with a more diverse population, at counselor education programs in different regions of the country, and with

CTs from other tracks (e.g., clinical mental health, marriage and family, rehabilitation counseling). Additionally, rather than relying on participant recollections, future researchers might include analyses of audio, visual, or written journal entries by CTs or employ other methods that would capture participants' experiences throughout their engagement in the dilemma discussions. Finally, future research might examine the outcome differences between groups using quantitative data to further inform counselor training and development.

Conclusion

Student-led ethical dilemma discussions reflect constructivist and experiential learning theories and provide SCTs with opportunities to examine their biases and values through collaborative learning with their peers. The findings from this study indicate the value of the instructional strategy as a means of supporting complexity within ethics instruction (Ametrano, 2014) while also providing opportunities for applied learning relevant to counseling practice within the school setting. As counselor educators consider their methods of ethics instruction and course sequencing, they might consider incorporating this instructional strategy early to facilitate professional and intellectual development of counselor trainees.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

1. Briefly describe your *Legal and Ethical Issues in School Counseling* course.

2. Briefly describe the dilemma discussions that occurred in the course.

3. Describe your experience as a group member developing the ethical dilemma and dilemma discussion questions.

4. What was it like for you to be the facilitator of a dilemma discussion?

5. What was it like for you to be a participant in the dilemma discussions (not the facilitator).

6. How, if at all, did the course help you better understand ethical and legal issues in school counseling?

7. How, if at all, did the dilemma discussions help you better understand ethical and legal issues in school counseling?

8. How, if at all, did the dilemma discussions change your thinking about ethical and legal issues in school counseling?

9. Describe your confidence in navigating ethical and legal issues as a future school counselor now that you have completed this course.

10. Describe your ability to use an ethical decision-making model and your confidence using it to make ethical decisions now that you have completed this course.

11. During the dilemma discussions, did you experience any values conflicts? If so, what were they, and how were they handled?

12. What was most helpful about the course and the dilemma discussions?

13. What was the most challenging aspect of the course and the dilemma discussions?