

Professional Reflection Paper

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Attending the Indiana School Counselor Association (ISCA) Fall Conference affirmed my belief that the profession of school counseling is a good fit for me. It was so inspiring to hear from school counselors who have been practicing for longer than I've been alive, and still LOVE being school counselors. I am so excited to be a part of the next generation of transformed school counselors who improve upon the profession by working together with these experienced veterans to promote positive change for all students. Although the conference was a bit overwhelming as a first-year graduate student, it was great to just soak everything in.

Throughout my undergraduate career I knew I wanted to work with kids. I started off wanting to be a child psychiatrist, but then I realized how little therapeutic contact they actual have with their clients. Then I centered in on school counseling. I thought it would be a nice fit for me because I have always been a good listener and someone that people come to for support. But I had never actually practiced counseling, and I wasn't quite sure what being a school counselor would be like. I shadowed and interviewed a couple school counselors, and I had experience with classroom lessons through my internship, but there was still so much I didn't know about school counseling when I started this first semester of the graduate program.

In class we've talked about how this program is somewhat like "baptism by fire", in that we are thrown into counseling students during our first few weeks in the program. I have to say that at the beginning, I was absolutely terrified. I was absolutely sure I was going to say the wrong thing at the wrong time and do irreparable damage to a poor innocent child. But we were told we wouldn't "break" them, and that was right. I am so grateful for the way we've started this learning process, because as a first-semester student I already know that school counseling is right for me. I didn't have to wait through a year of classes before I entered a school, then

possibly realized I wasn't a good fit for school counseling and ultimately wound up wasting an entire year of valuable time and money. It was hard feeling like I was starting with nothing, but I have already added so many tools to my "school counseling tool belt" and started developing my skills as a school counselor. I realize there are parts of the job that are less than glamorous, but that is why I know this profession is for me: I look forward to those challenging experiences because they will help me grow. And most of all, I already see how rewarding the great parts of school counseling are. The look of pride in a student you've been working with for weeks on building confidence and the smiles on the faces of 20 second graders after a classroom lesson are worth all the tears and troubles in the world.

As I mentioned previously, a significant strength that I believe I bring to the school counseling profession is my desire to listen, learn, and grow. During supervision we talked about the concept of genuineness, and I think I have a great ability to show this through my interest in my students and showing them that I want to hear what they have to say. I also love crafting and creating activities for my students such as the Feelings Are Fantastic board game or the Emotions Thumball. I think one of the most vital parts of being a school counselor, especially at the elementary level, is maintaining that positive energy and staying inspired. I also love planning and scheduling, so creating classroom and group counseling lesson plans are actually fun for me! I think my genuine passion for all of these things will prove to be my biggest strength as a school counselor.

One weakness that I would like to improve upon is my nerves. During my first session with my first student, as well as during my first classroom lesson, I was worried about doing something wrong and making a fool of myself in front of the students. I think a part of this nervous feeling came from the idea of being taped. I was nervous that if I made a mistake, I

would feel even worse having to watch this mistake again on tape. However, watching my counseling tapes has been much more rewarding than embarrassing. I have learned so much from being able to go back and watch myself in counseling sessions and being able to reflect on things I could improve upon in future sessions. I am already becoming more comfortable interacting with students in individual counseling, and I think my comfort with classroom lessons and group counseling will improve over time with experience. Another skill I would like to work on is my ability to communicate with and build a relationship with the adults in my school, including teachers, administrators, other staff, and parents. I feel like right now most people at my school still see me as a student, not a professional to be taken seriously. I would like to improve upon my confidence and ability to approach these stakeholders in conversation and in turn improve their trust and confidence in me.

One area that I know I need to improve upon is my confidence in working with students with disabilities. I believe my lack of confidence comes from lack of knowledge about how to properly assist this population. Our class lectures have been helpful, but I feel like there is still so much more to know about the relationship between the school counselor and students with disabilities than can be covered in just one or two lectures. Maybe this is another “baptism by fire” issue, and if I could increase my exposure to and experience with students from this population, I could strengthen my skills and feel better qualified to serve this important group.

I would also like to learn more about the state and federal laws that affect school counselors. We discussed these briefly in lecture, and I attended a session at ISCA, but I am still left with a cloudy perception of what all of these laws mean and how they will affect me as future professional school counselor. However, I feel like I am very prepared on the side of ethics and following our codes as school counselors. Our class activities in which we walked

step-by-step through the ethical decision-making process were very helpful and left me feeling confident in my ability to deal with a problem in an ethical way. Still, I'm just not sure how this ethical decision-making plays into legal decision-making. I think I will feel more equipped to handle legal issues once I get the chance to explore the policies of my own school when I begin working as a professional school counselor.

Something I am definitely excited about in my future career as a school counselor is running a group on my own. In our pre-practicum class we developed a brief plan for a group and detailed the first session, while in my final project for our introduction to school counseling class I created a very detailed plan of every session for another group. Creating these plans has left me feeling enthusiastic and inspired about running a group of my own and using my time more efficiently to create positive, meaningful impacts on more students.

Another aspect of the profession that I am thrilled to experience is counseling in the high school setting. I hope to do my internship at a high school, and I am so excited to see how different this setting is from the elementary setting in which I will have had almost all of my experience. I have always been drawn to working with adolescents and young adults, but I have yet to pursue any opportunities to work with this population. I am eager and nervous about the difference in developmental level between elementary students and high school students. All of my counseling skills thus far have been built around the developmental understanding of young children, so I think it will be interesting and possibly difficult to adjust myself to talking with high school students in a more developmentally appropriate way. It will also be a challenge to develop activities during sessions that require more critical and abstract thinking. In addition, high school counseling will be a completely different dynamic in regards to how my time is spent with students. I know scheduling is a controversial topic, but I think this is an important

area in which I can promote positive change. During multiple class sessions I have talked about how my high school was on the track system and how I think that is limiting to students. As a high school counselor working on students' schedules, I can act as an advocate to break down systemic barriers and give all of my students equitable access to all classes. This will also be an area where I can work on my relationships with teachers and administrators. By building positive relationships with these stakeholders, I will be able to have honest conversations with them about their procedures for allowing students to take their classes.

In the distant future, I am excited about being able to be on the other end of the ISCA conference as a presenter. I look forward to being able to share my work and passion with other school counselors, just like others have shared theirs with me. I can already see how hard it is to keep from becoming burnt-out with the day-to-day struggles of being a school counselor, and I truly believe that it is this sharing of passion and inspiration that keeps our fires burning. Just like Julia Cook taught me in her session at this year's ISCA conference, we want to be thriving as school counselors, not just surviving. We can't effectively help our students if we are unable to effectively help ourselves. So I think this is one area in which I am both excited and I could use more information about it. I am a worrier, and I can see how this weakness may lead to me bringing some negativity and burdens home with me. We see some difficult things as school counselors, and it will be a battle for me to be able to separate myself from those dark days and not bring them home with me. I know it will be hard, but I also know that every challenging experience is worth going through to get to the rewarding ones. That's why I believe I am a perfect fit for the profession of school counseling: not because I am a perfect school counselor, but because I am happy fighting the good fight every day and finding balance in it all.