Family Counseling in the Schools: A Graduate Course

Linda L. Terry
San Diego State University

The literature describes a wide array of projects and approaches for applying family systems theory and practice in school settings. However, to date, no articles describe coursework to prepare students for this work. This article describes a one semester-unit course, entitled "Family Counseling in the Schools" to complement other training in family systems counseling for students interested in family-school intervention. The article links literature on changes in the cultures of the social institutions of schools, families, and family counseling with the systemic conceptual framework that underpins the course. The description of the course focuses on (a) objectives, (b) content and learning process activities, (c) homework assignments, and (d) student responses to the course.

Schools have moved toward full-service models of service as they have increasingly considered the effects of children's social experience, emotional well-being, and physical health on educational development. With this movement, schools have modified their presuppositions about the nature of children's difficulties and the role of schools in children's growth. School and educational responses reflect a shift from a view of children's problems as located within children as individuals to a view of their problems as at least partially located in social relationships, such as the family and other social institutions (Adelman, 1996; Friesen & Osher, 1996). Problems such as gang affiliation, violence, substance abuse, family fragmentation, depression, racism, poverty, cultural alienation, and gender identity marginalization have compelled schools to go beyond an academic focus and school resources to partner with community resources (Aguirre, 1995; Dryfoos, 1994).

One of the community resources that has gained greater acceptance over the past 15 years is family counseling. Numerous articles in the individual counseling, school psychology, social work, and family counseling literature have described projects, approaches, and interventions that recommend bringing families (including children and parents), school personnel, and community agency resources together with the goal of improving children's success in school and promoting better parent-school communication (Amatea & Sherrard, 1991; Aponte, 1976; Caffery, Erdman, & Cook, 2000; Christenson & Conoley, 1992; Cowie & Quinn, 1997; Evans & Carter, 1997; Fine & Carlson, 1992; King, Randolph, McKay, & Bartell, 1995; O'Callaghan, 1993; Sherman, Shumsky, & Rountree, (1994); Silvestri, Steinberger, & Scambio, 1996; Stone & Peeks, 1986). Family counseling advocates alternatively refer to these approaches as emergent from a "systemic" (Beal & Chertkov, 1992; Weiss & Edwards, 1992), "eco-structural" (Aponte, 1976), "interactional" (Durrant, 1995), "systemic-ecological" (Fine & Carlson, 1992), "ecosystemic" (Molnar & Lindquist, 1989), or "social discourse" (Berndt, Dickerson, & Zimmerman, 1997; Stacey, 1997) perspective. These approaches share recognition of children's school-based problems as a social interaction dilemma rather than as an individual child's failure.

A few innovative models for family-school collaboration facilitate change through the use of a community-based family counselor who brings family members, the identified child, and involved school personnel together for problem solving (Carlson, Hickman, & Horton, 1992; O'Callaghan, 1993; Silvestri et al., 1996). Sometimes systemic theory perspectives and interventions are applied in the classroom through the guidance of an external consultant or school counselor (Durrant, 1995; Winslade & Monk, 1999). Family counseling graduate programs have provided family counseling and other family services as part of training at school sites (Caffery et al., 2000; Carnevale & Terry, 1992; Evans & Carter, 1997). The Weiss and Edwards (1992) Family-School Collaboration Project, developed at the Ackerman Institute for Family Therapy, is one of the largest scale projects. It applies systemic ideas and practices to restructuring family-school relationships through existing school activities and

trains school personnel in systemic intervention. The literature identifies family-school interventions that apply strategic family therapy (Amatea & Sherrard, 1991; Cowie & Quinn, 1997; Stone & Peeks, 1986), structural family therapy (King et al., 1995; Weiss & Edwards, 1992), solution-focused therapy (Carlson et al., 1992; Kral, 1992; Selekman, 1997), Bowenian ideas (Silvestri et al., 1996), and narrative counseling (Berndt et al., 1997; Stacey, 1997; Winslade & Monk, 1999).

To date, the literature does not offer direction for how to prepare graduate students to work at the school-family interface. Evans and Carter (1997) identified this need and put out the call for training institutions to modify their programs to include this preparation. The purpose of this article is to describe a course, entitled "Family Counseling in the Schools" (FCS), that is offered as part of a master's-level program in marriage and family counseling (MFC). This course bridges between other academic preparation in systemically grounded work and applications of systemic theory and practice with school settings. This preparation is designed to be part of a total graduate program in family systems counseling.

VALUE OF AN FCS COURSE

An FCS course enhances and enriches MFC training in a number of ways. First, the work of family counselors and schools is increasingly intersecting. Many community mental health agencies contract with schools to provide family counseling services for children and their families. Many clinicians in private practice work with families whose children are identified by the schools as "having problems." Practitioners often are not familiar with the philosophies, policies, procedures, and practices that underpin public education and guide viewpoints and behavior of school personnel. This course can expand competencies increasingly in demand in the field.

Second, the strength of family therapy has been its introduction of a different and useful perspective on problem solving. In spite of the frequent references in the professional literature to systemic ideas as relevant to conceptualizing and changing human relationships beyond families, training for the application of family systems therapies to nonfamilial or larger social systems is limited. Most family therapy graduate programs concentrate on coursework and clinical training for working with the family unit (Hines, 1996). From the standpoint of discipline recognition within the broader mental health field, the future viability of the field may be contingent on clarifying to the public family therapy's distinct identity and skill base for working beyond families (Bower, 1998). Training in larger systems intervention (Imber-Black, 1988), such as family-school relationships, can also prepare the family therapist with skills to become a multisystems interventionist and potential agent of institutional reform.

Third, within academic settings, administration and faculty increasingly value interdisciplinary collaboration. The interdependence of professions in the community, the relevance of knowledge bases from different fields, and shared conceptual positions provide opportunities for shared coursework and broader student interaction. Students and practitioners from MFC, school counseling, and school psychology programs can all benefit from the FCS course. They can inform each other about the issues of performing their job functions and learn how to apply systemic-based intervention relevant to their specific professional roles.

A SYSTEMIC LENS ON FAMILY-SCHOOL-FAMILY COUNSELING RELATIONSHIPS

The premise for the FCS course is that helping children experience success in schools requires building respectful, no-blame, and cooperative relationships among families, schools, and family counselors. The course draws on the extensive literature about the changing sociocultural discourses about these three social institutions to ground the underlying assumptions of the course. In spite of the expanded responsibility that schools hold for social development and the increase in functions that they perform, the dominant public opinion is that education is failing as a social institution in both educational and socialization roles (Apter, 1982; Gatto, 1991). Overburdened and underappreciated, school personnel often believe children's problems stem from families being underinvolved in their children's education (California Teachers Association [CTA], 1998; Friesen & Osher, 1996; Power, 1985). They express frustration that very few parents respond to invitations to become involved in school activities, governance, and volunteer work. They view parents, particularly parents of color and lower-income parents, as lacking the skills to parent well or to support children's educational and social growth. This position has spawned the federal and state funding of many parent education and parent involvement programs, the focus of which are to modify parent behavior (Leler, 1983). Although the evidence for significant impact through parent education and parent involvement is inconclusive (Baker & Sodon, 1998; White, Taylor, & Moss, 1992), school staff believe that the solution to many children's failures is for parents to comply with the school requests and to be more actively involved in their children's education and school-sponsored activities. Family counseling is for "problem families" with "problem children."

In the same span of time, families' roles and responsibilities have also changed. For many families, aspirations for their children to be successful in school are mediated by economic and employment demands on time and energy and family relationship stressors. The overburdened parents often

feel disrespected and criticized by school personnel. They often feel that if problems are happening in school and not at home, then the teachers are incompetent. Families believe schools do not sufficiently attend to the individual needs of children (CTA, 1998; Friesen & Osher, 1996; Power, 1985) and discriminate against their children based on race and ethnic identity (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000; Huang & Gibbs, 1992). Experiences of racial, ethnic, and class differences and discrimination leave many parents feeling intimidated and convinced that the school is more interested in eliminating classroom disruption than in helping the child. Parents see the school as undermining family cohesion rather than enhancing it (Huang & Gibbs, 1992). Parents also hear the school's plea for them to be more involved in their schooling without the school's serious consideration of what type of involvement would be helpful (Evans & Carter, 1997; Friesen & Osher, 1996; Huang & Gibbs, 1992). The outcome is that families withdraw even further from involvement with schools. In some cases, their sense of helplessness about how to help their children or a school referral may lead them to family counseling.

One effect of this expansion of expectations and responsibilities for both schools and families is role-relationship conflict, in which each institution is critical of the other. Each wants the other to assume more responsibility. The role relationships are characterized by diffuse and unclear boundaries, creating an adversarial rather than cooperative and collaborative working relationship.

Frequently, family counselors encounter this mutually critical description when invited to work with children's school-based problems (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000). Although family counseling is becoming an accepted cultural institution, it does not have general community, school, and cross-cultural acceptance. School agents or family members may view a counselor's involvement with great hopefulness or as unwelcome intrusion. Therefore, how family counselors position themselves in facilitating family-school relationships is critical (Caffery et al., 2000; Foster, 1987).

Facilitating these relationships requires facility with multisystems conceptualization and intervention (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000; Henggeler, Schoenwald, Borduin, Rowland, & Cunningham, 1998; Imber-Black, 1988). The counselor needs to incorporate the larger social context as well as the unique system meanings and behaviors embraced by and enacted by schools, families, and family counselors to support improvement in these relationships. The FCS course addresses these systemic issues.

This systemic perspective of family-school-family counselor relationships leads to the following assumptions that underpin the FCS course:

- Conflicts between families, schools, and children are less a consequence of individual deficits than of descriptions and experiences of historical, cultural, familial patterns, and

meanings shaping education-family relationships. Thus, conversation should not be about "problem children" or "problem families" but rather problem relationship descriptions.

- Family counselors are part of and participate in this family-school-community multisystem. They contribute only one perspective, not the truth or final expertise. Thus, the university course must prepare students to hear, respect, include, and interweave all perspectives.

- Change is not about "fixing families" but rather about constructing new life descriptions, possibilities, and actions with the children and with family-school relationships. The course needs to teach students to address the presented school-based problem, treat those in the counseling sessions fairly, and build relationships with those affected by the situation but not in the counseling room.

- Although messages exchanged in family-school conflicts are often hurtful and problem maintaining, people usually strive to solve a problem rather than exacerbate a problem through their efforts. Therefore, blame and attributions of individual, ill-willed motivation and cause distract from generating solutions. The course focuses on no-blame descriptions that facilitate personal responsibility, accountability, and competent action.

- Family-school relationships and the social histories and discourses that shape these relationships are complex. Family counselors need to help set goals for change that are small, progressive, and realistic. The course supports pacing in counseling that encourages participants to maintain a positive spirit and acknowledge gains.

- Children, family members, and school personnel often feel disempowered in these relationship conflicts. Family counselors work to use the strengths of all and build support networks. The course prepares family counselors to move mindfully through roles of systems interventionist, advocate, educator, support resource, and liaison to empower families and support school personnel.

Although the course content addresses different systemic approaches to counseling, this overarching set of assumptions guides course objectives, selected content, and learning process activities. These assumptions reflect the evolution of systemic thinking as constructivist and social constructionist ideas (Gergen, 1991), multisystemic thinking (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000; Falicov, 1998), and multicultural and cross-cultural factors (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Falicov, 1998; McGoldrick, 1998) have become central to current family counseling theory and practice.

THE FCS COURSE

Purpose and Structure

This course provides one unit of elective credit and meets for a total of 16 hours. It is open to students in the marriage and family counseling, school counseling, and school psychology programs. Students must have completed a minimum of one course in systemic ideas or family counseling

prior to enrollment. The course purposes, as stated in the syllabus, are to prepare (a) family counselors to provide family counseling with school-related problems for practice at school sites, in a community agency, or in a private practice; and (b) school personnel, such as school counselors and school psychologists, to use systemic ideas and practices in the schools and use family counseling services effectively. These purposes fit with the learning level appropriate for entry-level professional counselors. Given their level of experience and professional status, they are most ready to function as peers of and in collaboration with school personnel rather than in positions of leadership with schools or school personnel.

The course objectives are

- to develop awareness of the issues in family-school relationships;
- to gain an understanding of the different role relationships in which the therapist can engage with families and schools;
- to be able to apply systemic thinking to the larger family-school relationship system;
- to understand the "cultures" and related social mandates of schools, families, and family counselors and the possible effects of their "cross-cultural" communication;
- to be able to apply structural-strategic, solution-focused, and narrative counseling approaches to family-school intervention;
- to apply family counseling approaches to clinical cases involving common school-based problems, such as ADHD, conduct disorders, or abuse in the family; and
- to examine ethical and professional issues of providing family counseling in the schools.

The organization and sequencing of content and learning process activities proceed from use of personal experience to the building of general larger systems theory. From general theory, instruction moves to specific systemic approaches, practice applications, and ethical issues. Class content and learning process are enhanced by readings addressing larger systems conceptualization, diverse systemic perspectives on family-school intervention, case applications, relevant research, and cultural factors in family-school-family counseling relationships. Although readings are modified for each course offering, selected chapters from the following books and the two articles are regularly incorporated.

- Boyd-Franklin, N., & Bry, B. H. (2000). *Reaching out in family therapy: Home-based, school, and community interventions.* New York: Guilford.
- Fine, M. J., & Carlson, C. (Eds.). (1992). *The handbook of family-school intervention.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Imber-Black, E. (1988). *Families and larger systems.* New York: Guilford.
- Power, T. (1985). Perceptions of competence: How parents and teachers view each other. *Psychology in the Schools*, *22*, 68-78.

- Sherman, R., Shumsky, A., & Rountree, Y. (1994). *Enlarging the therapeutic circle: The therapist's guide to collaborative therapy with families and schools.* New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Silvestri, K., Steinberger, C., & Scambio, E. (1996). Collaboration and reform: A model for MFT in the schools. *Family Therapy News*, *27*(6), 22-23, 27.
- White, M. (1995). Schools as communities of acknowledgment. *Dulwiche Centre Newsletter*, (2 & 3), 51-66.

Objective 1: To develop awareness of the issues in family-school relationships. All students bring their own experiences and emotional valuing of their experiences with schools to the course. Whether their stories focus on their experiences as "problem" or "favored" children in schools or as parents addressing their own children's successes or failures in school, they all have strong opinions about how schools treat children and families. The course begins by inviting students to share these stories. Eliciting these stories informs the instructor of what students bring to the course and dramatizes the issues that can arise. These stories often reveal students' hopes and expectations for what they would like to accomplish through the role of family counselor in the school. Posing some systemic questions about their experiences begins to move the students to an interactive perspective. Some examples of these questions include the following:

- Who was involved in situation X?
- Who was most helpful and who was least helpful in situation X? Why?
- What did your mother (father, teacher, grandmother) do when your teacher (mother, father, grandmother) did Y? What happened next? What did you do when your teacher (mother, father, grandmother) did Y?
- Who was most upset/least upset about the situation? Who did you feel most close to/most distant from during this time?
- What solutions were applied to try to solve this problem? How well did they work? What were your hunches about why they worked or did not work?
- What would you have liked to have happen instead?

Students frequently appreciate being heard on these stories and begin to join with each other around important personal experiences.

Objective 2: To gain an understanding of the different role relationships and positions in which the family counselor can engage with families and schools. The purpose of this unit of instruction is to identify a variety of roles and functions that schools, families, and communities may invite family counselors to assume. Students need to be able to distinguish between these roles and functions and to consider how they affect the schools' and families' expectations of them. They also need to be able to assess whether the role that a family or school wants them to assume is compatible with their power status, their competency, and their own expectations. Students are introduced, through a brief lecture, to the roles of

family counselor within the schools (Stone & Peeks, 1986; Winslade & Monk, 1999), family counselor for the schools (Evans & Carter, 1997; King et al., 1995), and family counselor as consultant (O'Callaghan, 1993; Weiss & Edwards, 1992). In the first role, the schools select a school staff member, such as a school counselor, to provide services at the school site. In this position, the school may set the agenda for counseling and may expect the family counselor to be accountable to the school before the child and family. In the second role, the family usually initiates the contact with the family counselor. The counselor is primarily the family's agent or advocate. In the third role, the school may contract with a family counselor to take leadership in planning the services for the child and invite the counselor-consultant to guide the school in that planning. The family counselor-consultant may or may not meet with the family for direct counseling. In this role, the family counselor is designated with the greatest expert power and must maintain balanced partiality with all participants in the larger family-school system. The roles are discussed in terms of how they influence the family counselor's setting of objectives, alliance formation, perceived power and authority among family and school personnel, and necessary expertise.

Objective 3: To learn to expand the application of systemic thinking to the larger family-school relationship system. The purpose of this unit is to expand students' ability for larger systems conceptualization (Aponte, 1976; Fine & Carlson, 1992; Imber-Black, 1988). When students enroll in the course, they are still grappling with observing and conceptualizing interactional patterns of behaviors and meanings with families. They see families and schools as separate entities that are good or bad, cooperative or uncooperative. Defining oneself as a participant in a larger system or multisystem relationship is still difficult. This segment expands understandings of significant systems to include all social units, members, meanings, and behaviors that shape and are shaped by the problem and problem-solving conversations. Integrating the complexities of working in culturally diverse and gendered environments is also central to building larger systems thinking. Content and process address cross-cultural communication difficulties; personal, familial, and institutional biases; and the effects of power relations in cross-cultural helping relationships.

The learning process is forwarded through a role-play exercise. The role-play constructs a school consultation team meeting. Many schools have an equivalent structure. The consultation team is composed of the personnel with expertise and experience with the child's identified problem situation plus the child and at least one parent. The purpose of the meeting is to develop a plan to help the child. Unless the school has a contracted arrangement for the family counselor to provide leadership for the team as a whole (O'Callaghan, 1993), the family counselor, if invited to attend, more often is a partici-

pant in the meeting and not the chair or convener of the meeting.

The role-play involves 8 to 10 people. The instructor assigns roles that specify each participant's professional role status as well as a racial, ethnic, and gender identity. For example, one scenario involves a 14-year-old Mexican American daughter as the identified patient, her two Mexican American parents, a Black male social studies teacher, a White male vice principal, a White female school counselor, a Latina school nurse, a White male resource room teacher, a Black female school social worker, and a White male family counselor. The problem scenario assigned to the role-play group was that the social studies teacher found "pot" in the child's locker at school. The school counselor called the meeting. The role-play continues for about 20 minutes to allow time to generate sufficient emotional intensity and clarity about the experience of the meeting.

During the debriefing conversation, students observe patterns of blame and protection, competition and ambiguity of leadership, power and powerlessness, and alliances and coalitions. Students become aware of several recurrent experiences.

- The best intended approaches to helping often leave parents and child feeling excluded, misunderstood, blamed, hurt, and angry.
- Role descriptions and mandates often guide one's belief system about how to approach a problem.
- Gender and cultural alliances are fragile, with expectations of commonality and loyalty often shattered by the influence of unanticipated differences.
- Interdisciplinary cooperation is hard work.
- The person who convenes the meeting is not necessarily the person in charge.

The post–role-play debriefing often results in the type of mutual inquiry and listening to each other's experience that gets shortchanged during the actual role-play. Students provide feedback on moments of successful relationship building and problem solving during the role-play and begin to build their larger systems theory understanding.

Objective 4: To understand the "cultures" and related social mandates of schools, families, and family counselors and the possible effects of their "cross-cultural" communication. Students need to become familiar with each institution's social identity and mandate that provides the rationale for action and interaction. This segment begins with the students brainstorming the perceptions they hold about the societal mandates for each of these institutions and how these institutions view each other. The responses stir awareness of the extensive and weighty expectations for institutional performance. The discussion also draws attention to the boundary ambiguity and blurred distinctions in responsibility.

For schools, discussion of "cultural identity" elucidates the mission of education as the normative development of

academic and social skills of children (Foster, 1987). The discourse of education holds that children come to school with an age- and grade-specific readiness to learn and that other aspects of the child's life will be put aside for school-determined academic development tasks. Processes of education are based on assumptions of thinking as rational, communication as literal, and meanings as apparent.

Current controversies of gender, race, ethnicity, and bias in problem identification are introduced through data on special education referrals and symptom prevalence (Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Brosnan, 1983). Students read articles on changing definitions of normal male and female behavior. They read about what is happening to boys (D'Antonio, 1994) as well as what is happening to girls (Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991).

To further enhance understanding of the complexity of school functioning, students are assigned the task of drawing a formal organizational chart of a school with the roles and relationships delineated. The students become aware of their own confusion about the hierarchy and reporting relationships. Their appreciation of parents' discouragement with contacting school personnel increases. Discussion is followed up with examples of actual school organizational charts and illustrations of gaps between the formal hierarchy and roles and actual operating patterns of communication and influence.

For families, discussion of "cultural identity" reflects a primary mandate to raise good and productive children. Students also need to be able to put the family culture in historical context. Their discussions elicits the perspective that the contemporary discourse of family and child rearing places the heaviest responsibility on parents for the child's failures and successes until the child is 18 years old. If the child fails, the parent fails. Single-parent families, dual-working parents, cohabiting parents, blended families, and same-sex parents experience additional blame for their children's failures. This view contrasts with earlier views of child development as more driven by biology and inherent abilities. It also contrasts with other cultural descriptions that a child's failure is a community's failure.

Parents' feelings and perspectives on having a child defined as a failure by the school are addressed in ethnic, racial, and class context. This learning unit addresses family-school conflicts in the definitions of children's success and the parents' expressions of respect, shame, embarrassment, anger, or helplessness (Huang & Gibbs, 1992; Quirk, Fine, & Roberts, 1992).

Managing the family-school relationship also requires understanding the "culture of counseling and therapy" and, in particular, family counseling. In contrast to education as a developmental and normative process, counseling (as therapy) is reparative. Although newer counseling approaches take a strength-building approach and minimize the problem focus of counseling, the reality is that a family counselor is called on when something is wrong. In contrast to education, counseling is usually voluntary, short term, and defined as working best when the client is self-motivated. Education is involuntary, long term, and demands participation even if imposed. Long-term schooling defines someone as competent. Long-term counseling defines someone as incompetent. Students preparing as family counselors in the schools need to be mindful of these contrasting mandates as they work to promote competence and find an accepted position within these multisystem relationships.

The effects of the interaction of the three "cultures" are experienced through a second brief role-play. The role-play generates experience with blame versus no-blame dialogues, particularly in relation to ethnic and gendered interactions. Students break down into groups of four. Each group selects two parents, one teacher, and one observer. Students enact the role-play twice. In the first round, a White male math teacher and female parent of nonmajority ethnic status are meeting to discuss the daughter's poor attendance, tardiness, and failing grades in math. The teacher has requested the conference. The mother is assigned the position of believing that the teacher does not like her child. The math teacher is assigned the position that the child is lazy and needs to follow the rules. Participants reciprocally report feeling accused, distrusted, and prejudged. In addition, the mother identifies mother-blaming and an imbalance of power based on gender and ethnicity. The role-play is reenacted with the father present. Students become aware of changes in the assignment of blame, responsibility, use of personal influence, and conversational respect when both parents are present. Sometimes, the anger and hurt that the nonmajority father shows generates fear in the teacher and protection from the mother. The group becomes aware of the many factors that influence the way the parent-teacher meeting is experienced.

Objective 5: To apply structural-strategic, solution-focused, and narrative counseling approaches to family-school intervention. The purposes of this unit of learning are to link theory to practice and provide students with approaches through which to assess and intervene with family-school relationships. Three distinct approaches are introduced: an integrated structural-strategic approach (Fish & Jain, 1992; Imber-Black, 1988; King et al., 1995), a solution-focused approach (Kral, 1992; Selekman, 1997), and a narrative counseling approach (Stacey, 1997; White, 1995). Students have had prior introductory exposure to these approaches. These three approaches are selected because they reflect different and key stages of family systems counseling development, offer a number of illustrations of the application of systems thinking beyond traditional family counseling, and provide documentation of implementation with schools. General assessment questions that can be incorporated with all three approaches are introduced.

- Is the problem most usefully defined as a child, family, or larger systems problem?
- Who comprises the meaningful and workable system?
- What realistic and focused goals fit this situation?
- For whom is the problem a problem, and how disruptive is it?
- What are the systemic constraints against and supports for change?
- What is the therapist's leverage in the significant system?

Students also learn about change and intervention methods that follow from the three frames for problem conceptualization. A few unique issues about intervening in family-school relationships are also addressed. For example, schools contract with a family counselor partially to reduce the demands on school personnel, particularly teachers. Therefore, the family counselor needs to insure that interventions minimally impact the classroom routine and the teacher's workload.

Students also need to be aware that interventions should remain conservative in the reframing and or altering of problem descriptions. The process of the counseling may be more visible than in private practice. In counseling that does not involve schools, counselors may be able to incorporate humor, absurdity, and respectful paradoxes with families in private. In larger systems intervention, they cannot monitor, predict, or respond to the meaning that participants—far removed from the actual counseling session—glean from interventions. Students learn examples of respectful strategies in the form of messages that shape new identities for a child, interventions that realign boundaries, and school reports that highlight children's accomplishments rather than failures (Imber-Black, 1988). They also receive illustrations of how these strategies may be implemented differently with each of the three approaches.

To apply their beginning assessment and intervention design skills, students view a videotape of a family counselor interviewing a family with a child identified as having school-based problems. Although school personnel are not present in the session, the discussion reveals school-family-family counselor conflict. The tape provides an opportunity to develop systemic hypotheses about the relationships and consider treatment directions.

Objective 6: To apply family counseling approaches to clinical cases involving common school-based problems such as ADHD or conduct disorders. The purpose of this unit is to provide further application of the ideas and methods presented in the course and bring learnings into the "real world" of students' training. Two students who are working with relevant case situations volunteer to present their cases to the class and allow the class to provide consultation. Because students easily fall back on linear, individual descriptions of behavior at this stage of learning, the cases provide an opportunity to directly and meaningfully demonstrate the effects of shifting to systemic perspectives.

Objective 7: To examine ethical and professional issues of providing family counseling in the schools. The purpose of this final section is to identify professional and ethical issues unique to the family-school-family counselor relationship and link them to clinical practice. Principles of the professional code of ethics become even more complicated to apply when responsibility and accountability are negotiated among three social institutions rather than two. The issues selected for discussion are not all-inclusive but are frequently encountered. Four issues receive attention in the course: confidentiality, qualifications of the provider, time constraints, and defining one's professional purpose.

First, the critical feature of applying the ethical principle of confidentiality derives from the ambiguity about whose agent the family counselor is. The family counselor must clarify what information is private to the family and what information is relevant to management of the child's situation in school. Family counselors need to clarify their accountability to schools or other agencies for the progress of counseling.

Second, although articles on family counseling in the schools consistently specify a complete and systemic-focused training to qualify for this work, the school personnel hiring family counselors usually do not have the background to evaluate the preparation of applicants for this position. Administrative policies for risk management and cost containment may determine criteria for selection. University graduate training programs that provide school site-based services may need to advocate for appropriately prepared supervisors. Students are guided about how to insure that they receive qualifying supervision.

Third, students need to be prepared that providing family counseling in the schools is not necessarily time efficient for counselors (Quirk et al., 1992). Family counselors may need to meet with individuals or groups of school personnel in addition to regularly scheduled family sessions. They may spend more time on case management tasks than with traditional clinical cases. Balancing between maximizing the opportunities for effectiveness and other professional and personal time commitments requires ongoing evaluation of the situation and self.

The final professional issue addresses the counselor's professional mission as a social change agent versus relationship problem-solving agent. Many counselors interested in working with the larger system of family-school intervention are interested in contributing to educational and school reform as well as to family growth. Others are interested in the success of children in school and in supporting strong family relationships. Students are invited to explore how they see their professional mission and to consider the implications of that mission for the types of working relationships that they will develop. This closing conversation both leaves the students with another level of awareness about the responsibilities of

this work and encourages them to make a contribution in a personally meaningful way.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

Homework assignments continue the learning process between class sessions and integrate content areas. Two assignments provide the basis for follow-up class discussion, and one serves as a final exam. Because the course is one semester unit, only three assignments are required.

The first assignment, as noted under Objective 4, requires students to draw an organizational chart of a school. Students are not expected to research organizational structures of schools. The assignment is used to stimulate discussion about how schools function and understandings of how the complexities of schools, especially large urban schools, can be confusing to families and outsiders. The assignment is also used to demystify school organization.

The second assignment integrates Objectives 1 through 5. The purposes of the assignment are to promote systemic conceptualization and consideration of the possible systemic effects of behavior in the family-school-family counselor relationship. Students are given written descriptions of different power structures and lines of communication in two different schools. They write a brief paper responding to the following two questions:

- How might each of these school power structures affect relationships with parents and their children? Consider if and how relationships might be affected by factors of economic class and cultural identity.
- If you were invited to provide family counseling with a family from the two schools, either on-site or off-site, how might you want to coordinate the family counseling-school relationship?

The third assignment requires that students apply building systemic clinical skills and consider one of three systemic approaches offered in the course that appeals to them. Students select a relevant case from their current training setting. They develop a written assessment, treatment direction, and beginning intervention. Students who are not working with a relevant case situation are offered a written case study as an alternative. This assignment demonstrates whether students have adequately acquired the course content and application skills.

EVALUATION

Student evaluations of the FCS course have been very strong, averaging 4.8 on a 5-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*). To date, the course has been offered three times. Students were consistently enthusiastic about the eye into the world of schools, the increased skill in their systemic thinking and practice, and the range of mean-

ingful experiential exercises. Their main recommendation for change was more time for case consultation.

CONCLUSION

Marriage and family counseling education is continually incorporating changes to meet current mental health care trends, including preparation to be able to work across an expanded range of human development and mental health settings. The FCS course offers another opportunity to prepare students to apply their skills beyond traditional counseling formats and mental health environments. However, documentation of the effectiveness and satisfaction with family counseling in the schools projects is scant (Christenson & Conoley, 1992). Pursuit of empirical evidence for the impact of training as well as the impact of the family counseling in the schools services is essential.

One anticipated benefit of the FCS course was cross-disciplinary communication by including students from marriage and family counseling, school counseling, and school psychology disciplines. To date, only a few school counseling students and practitioners have elected to take the course. Because there were only a few school counseling students, marriage and family counseling students received the balance of attention. Cross-disciplinary dialogue was limited. In addition, the marriage and family counseling students had a stronger foundation in systemic ideas and practices, and the school counseling participants were confused. Over the past few years, the departmental programs in MFC, school counseling, and school psychology have all shifted to a more shared conceptual base in systemic thinking. The plan for the future is to offer two sections concurrently, one for the schools programs and one for MFC, to support focus on specific discipline needs. The instructors will bring the two sections together for mutual education about each other's professional roles, work experiences, and a dialogue about how their roles and functions could be reciprocally supportive and collaborative.

Finally, a one-unit course does not allow for a breadth of topics and great depth in the content areas offered. Although students reported the length of the course was satisfactory and the time was fully used, a number of areas were not covered. Ethical and professional issues needed fuller attention. The specific symptoms that children present in schools and labeling issues need more attention; however, these issues may need to be included in other coursework on children's development and counseling of children with families.

Many family-school intervention projects are in operation. Most involve seasoned MFT practitioners, but increasingly, opportunities for graduate students to pursue this experience through practicum or traineeship courses are evolving. Evans and Carter (1997) outlined essential components of preparation to work as a family counselor with the schools. This course offers a contribution to training that bridges between

university training and public schools' needs, between family intervention and larger multisystems intervention, and between academic and social development goals of schools.

REFERENCES

Adelman, H. S. (1996). *Restructuring support services: Toward the concept of an enabling component*. Kent, OH: American School Health Association.

Aguirre, L. M. (1995). California's efforts toward school-linked, integrated comprehensive services. *Social Work in Education*, *17*, 217-225.

Amatea, E., & Sherrard, P. (1991). When students cannot or will not change their behavior: Using brief strategic intervention in the school. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *69*, 341-369.

Aponte, H. (1976). The family-school interview: An eco-structural approach. *Family Process*, *15*, 303-312.

Apter, S. J. (1982). *Troubled children: Troubled systems*. New York: Pergamon.

Baca, L. M., & Cervantes, H. T. (1989). *The bilingual special education interface*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Baker, A., & Sodon, L. (1998, April). The challenges of parent involvement. *The Digest*, No. 134. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Columbia University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EDO-UD-98-4)

Beal, E., & Chertkov, L. (1992). Family-school intervention: A family systems perspective. In M. Fine & C. Carlson (Eds.), *The handbook of family-school intervention: A systems perspective* (pp. 288-301). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Berndt, L., Dickerson, V., & Zimmerman, J. (1997). Tales told out of school. In C. Smith & D. Nylund (Eds.), *Narrative therapies with children and adolescents* (pp. 423-454). New York: Guilford.

Bower, M. (1998, April/May). More than showing up: From the executive director. *Family Therapy News*, *29*, 6.

Boyd-Franklin, N. (1989). *Black families in therapy*. New York: Guilford.

Boyd-Franklin, N., & Bry, B. H. (2000). *Reaching out in family therapy*. New York: Guilford.

Brosnan, F. (1983). Overrepresentation of low socioeconomic minority students in special education programs in California. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, *6*, 517-525.

Caffery, T., Erdman, P., & Cook, D. (2000). Two systems/One client: Bringing families and schools together. *The Family Journal*, *8*, 154-160.

California Teachers Association. (1998). Report on survey results. *California Educator*, *2*, 20-21.

Carlson, C. I., Hickman, J., & Horton, C. B. (1992). From blame to solutions: Solution-oriented family-school consultation. In S. L. Christenson & J. C. Conoley (Eds.), *Home-school collaboration*. Silver Spring, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Carnevale, M., & Terry, L. (1992). *Parent and child satisfaction with family counseling in the schools*. Unpublished manuscript, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA.

Christenson, S. L., & Conoley, J. C. (1992). *Home-school collaboration*. Silver Spring, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Cowie, K., & Quinn, K. (1997). Brief family therapy in the schools: A new perspective on the role of the rural school counseling professional. *The Family Journal*, *5*, 57-69.

D'Antonio, M. (1994, December 4). The fragile sex. *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, pp. 18-22, 70.

Durrant, M. (1995). *Creative strategies for school problems*. New York: Norton.

Dryfoos, J. (1994). *Full-service schools: A revolution in health and social services for children, youth, and families*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Evans, W., & Carter, M. (1997). Urban school-based family counseling: Role definition, practice applications, and training implications. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *75*, 366-374.

Falicov, C. (1998). *Latino families in therapy*. New York: Guilford.

Fine, M., & Carlson, C. (Eds.). (1992). *The handbook of family-school intervention*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Fish, M. C., & Jain, S. (1992). Family-school intervention using a structural model. In M. Fine & C. Carlson (Eds.), *The handbook of family-school intervention* (pp. 302-314). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Foster, M. (1987). Schools. In M. Berger & G. Jurkovic (Eds.), *Practicing family therapy in diverse settings* (pp. 110-141). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Friesen, B. J., & Osher, T. W. (1996). Involving families in change: Challenges and opportunities. *Special Services in the Schools*, *11*, 187-201.

Gatto, J. (1991, September/October). Why schools don't educate. *Family Therapy Networker*, *22*, 55-59.

Gergen, K. (1991). *The saturated self*. New York: Basic Books.

Gilligan, C., Rogers, A., & Tolman, D. (1991). *Women, girls, and psychotherapy: Reframing resistance*. New York: Harrington.

Henggeler, S. W., Schoenwald, S. K., Borduin, C. M., Rowland, M. D., & Cunningham, P. B. (1998). *Multisystemic treatment of antisocial behavior in children and adolescents*. New York: Guilford.

Hines, P., & Boyd-Franklin, N. (1996). African American families. In M. McGoldrick, J. Giordano, & J. K. Pearce (Eds.), *Ethnicity and family therapy* (2nd ed., pp. 66-84). New York: Guilford.

Huang, L. N., & Gibbs, J. T. (1992). Partners or adversaries? Home-school collaboration across culture, race, and ethnicity. In S. L. Christenson & J. C. Conoley (Eds.), *Home-school collaboration* (pp. 81-110). Silver Spring, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Imber-Black, E. (1988). *Families and larger systems*. New York: Guilford.

King, B., Randolph, L., McKay, W. A., & Bartell, M. (1995). Working with families in the schools. In L. Combrinck-Graham (Ed.), *Children in families at risk* (pp. 393-413). New York: Guilford.

Kral, R. (1992). Solution-focused brief therapy: Applications in the schools. In M. Fine & C. Carlson (Eds.), *The handbook of family-school intervention* (pp. 330-346). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Leler, H. (1983). Parent education and involvement in relation to the schools and to parents of school-aged children. In R. Haskins & D. Adams (Eds.), *Parent education and public policy* (pp. 114-180). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

McGoldrick, M. (Ed.). (1998). *Revisioning family therapy*. New York: Guilford.

Molnar, A., & Lindquist, B. (1989). *Changing problem behavior in schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

O'Callaghan, B. (1993). School-based collaboration with families: An effective model for a society in crisis. *The Family Therapy Journal*, *2*, 286-300.

Power, T. (1985). Perceptions of competence: How parents and teachers view each other. *Psychology in the Schools*, *22*, 68-78.

Quirk, J. P., Fine, M. J., & Roberts, L. (1992). Professional and ethical issues and problems in family-school systems interventions. In M. Fine & C. Carlson (Eds.), *The handbook of family-school intervention* (pp. 414-427). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Selekman, M. D. (1997). *Solution-focused therapy with children*. New York: Guilford.

Sherman, R., Shumsky, A., & Rountree, Y. (1994). *Enlarging the therapeutic circle: The therapist's guide to collaborative therapy with families and schools*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Silvestri, K., Steinberger, C., & Scambio, E. (1996, December). Collaboration and reform: A model for MFT in the schools. *Family Therapy News*, *27*, 22-27.

Stacey, K. (1997). From imposition to collaboration: Generating stories of competence. In C. Smith & D. Nylund (Eds.), *Narrative therapies with children and adolescents* (pp. 221-254). New York: Guilford.

Stone, G., & Peeks, B. (1986). The use of strategic family therapy in the school setting: A case study. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *65*, 200-203.

Weiss, H., & Edwards, M. (1992). The family-school collaboration project: Systemic interventions for school improvement. In S. L. Christenson & J. C. Conoley (Eds.), *Home-school collaboration* (pp. 215-243). Silver Spring, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

White, K., Taylor, M., & Moss, V. (1992). Does research support claims about the benefits of involving parents in early intervention programs? *Review of Education Quarterly*, *62*, 91-125.

White, M. (1995). Schools as communities of acknowledgement. *Dulwiche Centre Newsletter* (2/3), 51-66.

Winslade, J., & Monk, G. (1999). *Narrative counseling in the schools: Powerful and brief*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Linda Terry, Ed.D., is an associate professor and program director of marriage and family therapy and interim director of the Center for Community Counseling at San Diego State University, San Diego, CA. She is a licensed marriage and family therapist and American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy clinical member and approved supervisor. She has focused on the family-school relationship, gender, developing cultural competence, and supervision in MFT teaching, program development, scholarship, and practice. She has been active in AAMFT leadership roles at the state and national levels.

Family Therapy

Reprinted with the permission of Rapid Psychler Press.