

A Comparison of Ethical Codes
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Career counseling is an interesting and important discipline of counseling. Many get this job confused with career coaches or career planning services. However, those in career planning are limited to information giving services. Examples include reviewing resumes, identifying networking, as well as many other informational provisions. However, career counseling is much more than just the giving of valuable career information. According to the National Career Development (NCDA) Code of Ethics (2015), career counseling “ provides an opportunity for a deeper level with a client, based on the establishment of a professional counseling relationship the potential for assisting clients with career and personal development concerns beyond those included in career planning (p. 3).”

Career counselors are responsible for many duties that school counselors and Mental Health counselors are responsible for (“National Career Development”, 2015). However, career’s come up frequently in both school and mental health counseling. Therefore, the use of career development/counseling in school and mental health counseling was researched for this paper by comparing and contrasting the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) Code of Ethics and the American Counselors Association (ACA) Code of Ethics.

School counselors have a duty to help students succeed in primary school. During a student’s time in school, the concept of a career comes up more frequently as they rise in grade level. In the textbook *Applying Career Development Theory to Counseling*, by Richard Sharf (2013) he writes that elementary school and middle school counselors have students that are at the beginning of the career information and exploration process. Sharf (2013) goes on to explain that high school counselors assist student in vocational choice, career development, and career placement. In the preamble of the ASCA Ethical Codes (2016), the authors write “School

counselors have unique qualifications and skills to address PreK–12 students’ academic, career and social/emotional development needs (p. 1).” Just from the preamble, school counselors are required to have some type of background in career counseling. School Counselors are necessary to assist students who need career help at various grade levels. As Sharf said before, this applies to all grade levels.

Additionally, in ASCA’s Code of Ethics section on academic, career, and social/emotional development is the only section in the code of ethics that explicitly references career development. The section lists four practices that should be demonstrated in accordance to career development. The first is being able to collaborate with school professionals to create an environment of postsecondary readiness. Second, school counselors should provide and advocate for students in the area of postsecondary college and career awareness, exploration, and postsecondary decision making in order to give the students a wide variety of ideas to choose from. Third, identify gaps in college and career readiness in the school and use that data to increase this readiness. Fourth, to provide opportunities for students to learn career mindset and skills that they might use to have a positive career after secondary education is completed (“ASCA Ethical Standards”, 2016). All of these practices are necessary to have in the code of ethics as they are all important for the student having a successful life after secondary school.

However, only one section relating to career development/ counseling in the school counselors code of ethics is surprising. For a professional to be focused on such an important topic in a student’s life, only four practices directly concerning career are mentioned. The lack of ethical career information is interesting because of the description of a school counselor in the ASCA preamble. As noted above, the school counselor is responsible for three important

domains of a student's development in school. Career then makes up a third of the school counselors' responsibility. The problem with having little ethical information on this subject is the possibility of an ethical dilemma involving career counseling. There is a chance that this ethical dilemma might not be discussed in the ASCA Ethical Codes. In this case, the counselor would have to look at the NCDA Ethical Codes and figure out the best practice. To avoid this problem, some codes from the NCDA Ethical Codes should be adapted into the ASCA Ethical Codes.

More specifically, the NCDA Code of Ethics contains a section in which career service plans are discussed. The career services plan section stresses the importance of creating a career plan with the client that will not only be successful but also make use of the client's skills and abilities ("National Career Development", 2015). In terms of school counselors, this section is important, especially for these counselors in high school. It is the job of school counselors to assure that students have a postsecondary plan that will be successful for that student. Creating a plan for this student is definitely an important step. However, this is not included in the ASCA's Ethical Codes. Another section that is only included in the NCDA Ethical codes is support network involvement. This section discusses the importance of a support network and the plan to enlist that support network in the client's life as a positive resource ("National Career Development", 2015). Family and other main support networks for students should always be involved in these plans to assure the success of the student after secondary school. These two sections in the NCDA are important in career development/ counseling for students. School counselors would benefit from having these sections in their ethical codes, as they develop plans with their students frequently and are also in contact with the students support network.

Mental Health Counselors can experience clients who need career development/ counseling. According to Sharf (2013), these clients may be experiencing problems at work, retirement issues, or even problems with physical or mental illness. Also, in the ACA Code of Ethics Preamble (2014), the authors define counseling as a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals. Interestingly enough, the ACA Code of Ethics is exactly like the NCDA Code of Ethics. The reason for this is because the NCDA Code of Ethics was constructed to resemble the ACA Code of Ethics. In the beginning of the NCDA (2015), the authors explain that the reason for following the ACA's Code of Ethics was for the two ethics to be compatible with each other. Therefore, both code of ethics follows the same structure and mostly the same sections, with some critique based on the needs of the NCDA and the ACA. In fact, in some sections, the wording is the exact same, besides for the use of either counselor or career counselor. Sharf (2013) writes that all of the information surrounding these theories fit within the ethical standards of both ACA and NCDA as well as the APA (American Psychological Association). Sharf goes on to say the differences that are seen in the different ethical codes tend to be quite minor and reflect the goals of the particular profession. It is also interesting to note in the ACA Code of Ethics, there is not one section that is dedicated to career counseling or development. The only reference to career development or counseling is in the assessment section. In this section, they discuss the purpose of assessments, including career assessments, is for client decision making, treatment planning, and forensic proceedings ("ASCA Ethical Standards", 2016). Although this similarity can be appreciated, the amount of career counseling ethics included in this book seems insufficient. Especially, if the term "career goals" is used in the definition they gave of counselors in the preamble. As read in Sharf's book and the NCDA Code

of Ethics, career development/ counseling includes more than just testing and assessments. More details should be included in the ACA Code of Ethics to better inform counselors who are aiding clients in the realm of career. However, the lack of career ethics could suggest a referral if the client is becoming too career focused.

The comparison of the NCDA Ethical codes with both the ASCA and the ACA Code of Ethics is interesting and revealing. It would appear that school counselors have a big role in the career decisions for the students in the school. The school counselor is present to supply the students with information of postsecondary life and inform them of the endless career possibilities that the students might step into. However, in the ASCA Code of Ethics, there is an insufficient amount of information guiding school counselors on the proper way to conduct ethical decision making in career development/counseling in schools. There are sections in the NCDA that should be included in the ASCA that are not. Conversely, the ACA and the NCDA are constructed and formatted in the same exact way, as the two counseling disciplines share the same ethics with a few minor differences.

Reference

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