A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: THE ROLE OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

COUNSELOR AS PERCEIVED BY THE MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER

by

LaNekia Shondel Pruitt

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the role of the middle school counselor as perceived by ten middle school teachers in the Henry County School District. The theories guiding this study are the trait & factor theory and directive approach theory. Both theories were both created by the counseling philosopher, E.G. Williams. The trait & factory theory proposes a formal assessment of an individual and their job performance. This is synonymous to the study's focus of the perception of the middle school counselors' job performance. The direct approach theory identifies the process of identifying a problem, determining a solution, and encouraging the implementation. This theory aligns to the methods utilized by middle school counselors in providing comprehensive counseling programs for middle school students. Three research questions guided the study: (1) How do middle school teachers perceive the role of middle school counselors; (2) What do middle school teachers identify as the specific roles and responsibilities of the middle school counselor; and (3) What do middle school teachers feel are the primary counseling needs in middle school? Data collection took place from ten middle school teachers from varying middle schools within a suburban school district. Data was utilizing questionnaires and interviews. Data collected through the study was analyzed through the means of theme development and structural descriptions. The analysis methods identified relevant information and descriptions based on the experiences of the study participants. The results of this study will hopefully aid in the clarification of the school counselor role and improve the collaboration amongst middle school counselors and middle school teachers in the educational realm.

Keywords: comprehensive counseling programs, guidance and counseling, middle school counselors, middle school transition, professional school counselor, teacher perception

Dedication

This research is dedicated to every past, present, and future student that I have ever encountered or will encounter. My sole purpose as an educator has always been to positively impact the lives of young people. Whether I served as your teacher, counselor, or mentor; I hope that in some way I have left a favorable impression on your lives. I have learned more from you than you could have ever learned from me.

Acknowledgements

Both my professional and educational journeys serve as a true testament to the purpose that was placed on my life. I thank God for keeping me mentally, emotionally, and continuously supplying my needs.

I'd like to thank my family and circle of friends for their support and patience. Thank you for the times that I had to decline events, trips, and gatherings. Thank you for accepting my isolation even when you didn't understand the reasons.

To my significant other, there are no words to describe what you have provided during this process. Thank you for celebrating with me during my successes and encouraging me through my setbacks. Your ability to be my peace during the storm is indescribable and your patience and love for me does not go unnoticed.

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List of Abbreviations

American Counseling Association (ACA)

American School Counselors Association (ASCA)

American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA)

Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP)

Middle School Teacher (MST)

National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

A primary topic of concern in the 21st century is the need to improve the quality of

education. Throughout the past three decades, attempts for substantial educational reform have

been documented (Meadows & Clark, 2011). Thus, both the United States and its educational

system continue to become increasingly diverse (Gysbers, 2001). Many federal, state, and local

districts have seen a shift in the educational roles and expectations (DeBoer, 2012). The 20th

century proved to experience structural developments in education (DeBoer, 2012). This rapidly

changing environment continues to influence the personal, social, career, and academic

development of students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000).

In the educational realm, school counselors continue to be the driving force in aiding

students to adjust to these challenges. However, in a time where there is such great emphasis in

doing a better job of educating students, little attention has been devoted to the need of the

school counselor, a crucial link in education reform (Beale, 2003). The role of the school

counselor has continuously changed through the 1900s in response to the economic, social, and

political issues of the times (Beesley, 2004; Lamie & Williamson, 2004; Murray, 1995). These

constant changes created confusion as to the specific roles and responsibilities of the school

counselor (ASCA, 2001; Herr, 2002; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The school counselor

profession continues to be the forefront of groundbreaking advancements (Sink, 2015).

The focus of this qualitative study will be to concentrate on the perception of middle

school teachers concerning the role and responsibilities of the middle school counselor. The

research stands to provide clarification as to what middle school teachers feel school counselors

do as opposed to their actual duties and responsibilities set forth by district, state, and federal

guidelines. Chapter 1 identifies the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the significance of the study. This chapter also contains the research objectives, definition, as well as the overall nature of the study.

Background

As education in the 21st century evolves, there is an increase in educational accountability and student achievement. All stakeholders including counselors, teachers, administrators, students, parents, as well as other personnel all hold considerable stake in the evaluation of school and student services (Skutley, 2006). The role of the school counselor has changed dramatically during this evolutional period (Kuhn, 2004). Historically it was the responsibility of teachers to provide counseling duties (Gysbers, 2001). During the 20th century, school counselors did not exist (Bowers & Hatch, 2002). Instead, it was teachers who provided students with guidance (Bowers & Hatch, 2002). As time progressed and teachers gained more demanding responsibilities, it was evident the school guidance programs needed to be adjusted (Skutley, 2006). In response to this change, the Education Trust Inc. and the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) worked to reform the profession of school counseling (ASCA, 2003; Beesley, 2004; Dollarhide, 2003; Perusse & Goodnough, 2001).

Historical

The onset of school counseling can be traced back to the Middle Ages based on the concept of confidentiality within the confessional utilized by Catholic priests (Krumboltz, 2011). Although the foundations of counseling and guidance principles can be traced to ancient Greece and Rome, formal documentation of counseling history began at the turn of the twentieth century (Krumboltz, 2011). The development of guidance counseling began in the United States in the

1800s (Krumboltz, 2011). However, by the early 1900s, Uruguay and China recognized counseling strategy influence (Krumboltz, 2011).

The development of guidance and counseling aspects originated in the 1890s, in the United States (Krumboltz, 2011). However, school counselors specifically did not exist at the start of the 20th century (ASCA, 2003). With the onset of the social reform movement and World War I, there was dyer need to properly guide people into the workforce in hopes of them becoming productive citizens (Krumboltz, 2011). The turns of the twentieth century brought on the inception of the school counseling profession.

Jesse B. Davis was known as the first to develop a systematic school guidance program in the early 1900s (Dreamer, 2010). As a high school principal, Jesse B. Davis encouraged his teachers to incorporate lessons that would develop character and guide students towards career interests. During its initial inception, vocational guidance was the term known to describe the role. The term, vocational guidance, was the result of the profession focusing on the transition from school to work with a concentration on occupational placement (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

This began the official movement of vocational guidance. Frank Parsons became known as the "Father of Guidance" when he established the Bureau of Vocational Guidance (Krumboltz, 2011). The movement was the onset of the guidance reform by pushing the focus of vocational guidance with an emphasis on vocational placement matched by a young person's aptitudes and abilities (Schmidt, 2003). As the popularity of vocational guidance grew, professionals in the fields of education, community service, psychology, and the government joined forces and created organizations as alliances (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

These organizations included groups such as National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA), the American College Personnel Association, the National Association of Guidance Supervisors and Counselor Trainers, and the Student Personnel Association for Teacher Education. These organizations merged becoming the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA), today known as the American Counseling Association (ACA) (Krumboltz, 2011).

The economic hardships of the Great Depression caused a decline in counseling and guidance; however, in the 1940s, Carl Rogers became known as the "Father of Counseling" after publishing the book "Counseling and Psychotherapy: New Concepts in Practice" (Rogers, 1942). Because of Roger's work and theory explanations, the term "guidance" began to be substituted for the word "counseling" which ultimately led to the accurate term of "professional school counselor (PSC)" (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The onset of the 80s exposed the nation's crisis of the educational sector (Schwallie-Giddis, Maat, & Pak, 2003). As educators, communities, and businesses began to discuss the conception of educational reform, A Nation at Risk (Gardner 1983) became the most notable documented source (Schwallie-Giddis, Maat, & Pak, 2003).

A survey of post-secondary students indicated that there are still students who go a full academic year without meeting with their school counselor (Johnson, Rochkind, & Ott, 2010). Students felt that their counseling programs offered a basic support and advise system (Johnson, Rochkind, & Ott, 2010). In an era where there are more options and obstacles faced by students, the availability of appropriate support must to be available (Bardwsell, 2010). Financial cuts in modern day education has caused school counselors to take on more duties (Bidwell, 2013).

Still today in the 21st century, school counselors are a vital part of the educational team more so than in previous years (Rosales, 2015). If school counselors were utilized in more effective ways, the aspects of 21st century education demands could possibly improve (Bardwell, 2010). Research indicates that schools with comprehensive school counseling programs display a positive effect on student achievement (Bardwell, 2010). However, with the many demands of current education requirements and mandates, it is important that school counselors prioritize and balance their responsibilities (Rosales, 2015).

Social

Today's school counselors serve as leaders and an integral part of a student's educational program (Kuhn, 2004). School counselors are employed in all levels of the educational setting: elementary, middle, and high school. School counselors on the middle school level assist students with both the physical and psychological adjustments during this developmental period (Kuhn, 2004). School counselors help students in working to connect school with home life and they emphasize the importance of peer and adult relationships (ASCA, 2008).

In recent years, the American School Counselors Association has provided revisions in the role of the professional school counselor. Revisions have been done to ensure that all school counseling programs are a representation of the ASCA National Model and Standards of school counseling. The ASCA model places emphasis on the counselor's ability to deliver comprehensive counseling programs that supports students in the areas of academics, career planning, as well as, personal and social development (ASCA, 2008). The ASCA model ensures that school counselors do so by upholding proper service management and accountability. The ASCA National Model goes on to state that the school counseling program is an integral component of students' educational environment and student achievement (ASCA, 2008). The

role of the school counselor requires a great deal of collaborative relationships among parents, administrators, and teachers.

Although there has been some research regarding principal perceptions of school counselors, research is limited as it relates to teachers' perceptions of school counselors (Reiner, Colbert, & Perusse, 2009). Teacher support plays a vital role in the implementation of successful counseling programs (ASCA, 2005). Studies done by Clark and Amatea (2004) suggested teachers' expectations and knowledge of school counselor responsibilities impact the overall counseling program as the perception of teachers strongly influences those of students, parents, and principals. The proposed qualitative study will set out to define the role of the school counselor as perceived by the teacher, particularly in the middle school setting.

Education in the 21st century has shown an increase in the accountability of student and school successes. The increase of accountability is evident in the many standards and guidelines set forth by the various governing bodies and organizations that enforce educational laws (Gysbers & Norman, 2001). In addition to the many academic modifications, today's educators find themselves defying students' personal, social, and economical obstacles (Clark & Amatea, 2004).

Educators working in the middle school setting constantly interact with middle school age students who are experiencing an array of physical, mental, and emotional changes. The role of the middle school counselor is becoming more prevalent in the educational realm. Educators have become more cognizant of the importance of collaboration (Cooper & Sheffield, 1994).

The collaboration among educators include parents and students working with all school staff members to achieve a common goal. An integral part of this working relationship includes that of the middle school counselor and the middle school teacher. As the counseling profession

advances, other educational concerns have become a part of the school counselor's agenda (Krumboltz, 2011).

A great deal of attention has been given to state and national educational reform regarding the improvement and quality of schools (Ellis, 1990). Reformed studies prove that academic achievement can only be successful in supportive environments (Ellis, 1990). The theory that school counselors and teachers collectively play a major role in student achievement is new to the 21st century (Ellis, 1990). The development of a student's solid relationship with teachers and counselors is important to student influence (Shaevitz, 2014).

For years prior to the 21st century, teachers served in the capacity of school counselors. Aside from family and friends, students spend more time with school staff members (Shaevitz, 2014). However, in current day education, middle and high school teachers are often overwhelmed with responsibilities (Ellis, 1990). Students spend most of their time with teachers, yet teachers are often limited in the ability to help students with personal challenges (Ferlazzo, 2014). Teachers reluctantly take on additional duties in fear of taking on the school counselors' role (Ellis, 1990).

Until recent years, little attention has been given to the improvement of counseling programs (Ellis, 1990). When teachers and counselors develop solid partnerships, they can collaborate and address the whole child (Ferlazzo, 2014). Counselors serve in unique positions because they must manage multiple relationships (Koch, 2008). These relationships are diverse and vary among students, parents, and faculty (Koch, 2008).

As the role of school counselors evolves, this evolution includes the needs of the teachers (Warren & Baker, 2013). Changes in school and family dynamic relationships are now requiring school counselors to find innovative ways of collaborating with staff members and stakeholders

(Schmidt, 2014). The services provided by counselors are based on the general needs of the school (Warren & Baker, 2013). Providing services that focus on achievement and behavior, school counselors can influence promoting positive classroom environments (ASCA, 2012).

Theoretical

Any comprehensive counseling program's conceptual framework should be based on a theory centered belief of the positive development of students (Seattle Pacific University, 2011). Implemented theories are utilized on the basis of educational, career, social, and personal development. Two theories that operate as such are the trait and factor theory and the directive approach theory. Although two separate theories, each concentrates on the differentiated needs and disposition of the involved student. The theories however, differ in the implementation aspects of school counseling.

Various theories suggest that school counselors serve in a capacity that provides them the opportunity to collectively address social-emotional obstacles of students and teachers (Warren, 2010a). Teachers may generalize negative student behaviors to represent the child (Warren & Baker, 2016). This means that teachers see the child as being "bad" and not the behavior itself. Many behavior therapy explanations theorize that counselors are equipped with training and strategies to identify and target said behaviors instead of the individual (Warren & Baker, 2013).

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Situation to Self

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I have served as an educator for sixteen years. I spent seven years as a middle school teacher and 10 years as a middle school counselor. While in the position of an eighth-grade teacher, I only knew what the role of the school counselor entailed simply based on my interaction with the school counselor at my school. However, upon becoming a middle school

counselor, I quickly realized that the primary role of the school counselor somewhat varied from that in which I assumed as a teacher.

I soon realized as a middle school counselor having been fully aware of the counselor's role during my tenure as a teacher, I could have better serviced my students by knowing how to properly utilize my team counselor. This has led me to the aspirations of wanting to research the perception of the middle school teachers on the roles and responsibilities of the middle school counselors. I believe that by identifying the teachers' perceptions, school counselors and school leaders can do a better job of making teachers aware of how to properly collaborate with their school counselor.

The philosophical assumption of this research study is epistemological. Epistemology investigates the nature of human knowledge (Stroll, 2015). Constructivism is the paradigm that will guide the research. Constructivism is defined as a theory in which people gain their knowledge and ideas from their individual experiences (Learning Theories, 2015). The theory of constructivism is highly influenced in the field of education, psychology, and sociology (Learning Theories, 2015).

Problem Statement

The emergence of middle school counselors during the 21st century as active student advocates resulted from their revised and expanded roles (Beale, 2003). Teachers' attitudes towards counselors and counseling programs are developed early in their education (Joy, Harris, & Hesson, 2011). Classroom teachers play a vital part in collaborating with school counselors (Powers & Boes, 2013). It is essential that teachers review their perceptions and the roles of the school counselor (Powers & Boes, 2013). However, there have been previous studies that

suggest that teachers are sometimes unclear of school counselor duties and the role it plays in teacher collaboration (Marchetta, 2011).

Research suggests that school counselors have important roles in helping middle schools to establish and sustain effective programs (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). However, this process can only begin when school faculty and staff have a clear understanding of the middle school counselor role (Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999). Limited research exists concerning teachers' perceptions of school counselors and their contribution to student success; therefore, teachers may have some misconceptions of school counselors and their direct contributions to education (Marchetta, 2011). Guidance and counseling programs continuously undergo change; therefore, it is beneficial that counselors consistently assess their programs to provide clarity of their roles and functions (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the proposed qualitative phenomenological study was to enable middle school teachers to share their perceptions of the role of the middle school counselor. The selection of the qualitative method is appropriate because the research data was collected in a descriptive, non-statistical method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A phenomenological study describes and interprets an experience by determining the meaning of the experience as perceived by the people who have participated in it (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen, 2006). It foreshadows the research questions: how do middle school teachers perceive the role of middle school counselors; what do middle school teachers identify as the specific roles and responsibilities of the middle school counselor; and what do middle school teachers feel are the primary counseling needs in middle school?

The researcher served as the primary data collection instrument by conducting interviews of the participants. The participants included a purposive sample of tern middle school teachers whom teach a variety of subjects among 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. The participants in a phenomenological study are chosen due to their experience with the phenomenon being investigated and can share their thoughts and feelings about it (Ary et al., 2006). The teachers shared their thoughts based on their individual experiences in working with their middle school counselors. The goal was to review the perceptions in relation to the counselor responsibilities set forth by the American School Counselor Association, Georgia School Counselor Association, and the local school district. Examining teachers' perceptions of the school counselor's role may clarify teachers' support of the counseling program (Powers & Boes, 2013). The perceptions were collected via interviews conducted with middle school teachers who teach 6th, 7th, or 8th grade in the traditional middle school setting.

Significance of Study`

Current educational reform is encouraging counselors to expand their roles. There are many common myths regarding the role of school counselors (Ratliff, 2013). Students face many challenges outside of school and teachers are limited in training and time in how to help them (Ferlazzao, 2014). Middle school counselors are trained with perspectives to respond to the challenges of middle school students (ASCA, 2016).

The role of the middle school counselor needs to be transformed to align with state and national education standards (Beale, 2003). Hobbs and Collison (1995) and Keys (2000) urged counselors to reach out to other professionals within the school system and community to develop collaboration connections. The evolution of the school counselor role over the past

several decades is defined through the National Model of the American School Counselor

Association (Ratliff, 2013).

The data results of this study are significant in providing clarification in the role of the

middle school counselor. The research study is especially significant for the middle school level,

as the study will concentrate on such. Unlike elementary and high school, middle school

counselors face two transitional matriculation periods. Middle school counselors should assist

students in transitioning both from elementary to middle and middle to high. Among the many

transitions students face during the school years, the entry into middle school is one of the most

difficult (Elias, Patrikakkou, & Weissberg, 2007). Therefore, this study is significant in

obtaining the opinions of middle school teachers as to what they perceive is the role of the

middle school counselor.

The 21st century students are living in a time of increasing diversity (ASCA, 2016).

Many aspects that go into a school counselor's job description and the affect that a quality

counselor has on a school (Kerr, 2013). To be effective, middle school counselors must develop

programs designed for specific student needs and collaborate with school administration and

staff to implement these programs (Beale, 2003).

This research is also needed to assist other decision-making educators such as

administrators and district level staff in better providing opportunities for middle school teachers

and middle school counselors to support each other other's programs and services in a cohesive

manner. Serving on school leadership teams and working individually with classroom teachers

are vital parts of counselors' collaborative responsibilities (Beale, 2003).   This allows for more

support, comfort, and direction that will create a mutual respect between counselors and teachers

(Beale, 2003). Because of this collaboration, school counselors are in the best position to assess

educational barriers to academic success (Sears, 1999). It allows counselors opportunities to identify and remove obstacles to student success (Kaplan & Evans, 1999). A quality-counseling program is essential to the educational process committed to empowering students to realize their full academic potential (Beale, 2003).

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:

Research Question 1: How do middle school teachers perceive the role of the middle school counselor?

For quite some time, research has shown that the role and effectiveness of school counselors has been questioned (Clark & Ametea, 2004). The implementation of educational prevention and intervention programs can aid students with success and positive outcomes (Marchetta, 2011). With limited research on the duties of school counselors, the specific roles are often misconstrued (Marchetta, 2011).

Research Question 2: What do middle school teachers identify as the specific roles and responsibilities of middle school counselors in their schools?

School counselors sometimes do not receive the support they require from teachers and administrators (Yuksel-Sahin, 2012). This is a result of insufficient information and expectations that teachers and administrators have for the counselor's role and services (Yuksel-Sahin, 2012). Previous research has shown that there is a substantial difference between how counselors expect to spend their time and how they actual spend it within a school day (Korkut-Owen & Owen, 2008).

Research Question 3: What do middle school teachers perceive to be the primary guidance and counseling needs of their schools?

Recent research demonstrated that students with unique learning abilities could benefit from specific support provided by counselors (Reis & Colbert, 2004). The research indicates that school counselors are suited to serve a pivotal role in providing information and overseeing collaborative methods of supporting these students (Reis & Colbert, 2004).

Definitions

For clarity of this study, there were four terms needing to be defined. These terms were:

1. *Counseling* - A process where some students receive assistance from professionals who assist them to overcome emotional and social problems or concerns which may interfere with learning (Georgia Department of Education, 2005).

2. *Guidance* - A process of regular assistance that all students receive from parents, teachers, school counselors, and others to assist them in making appropriate educational and career choices (Georgia Department of Education, 2005).

3. *Professional School Counselor Role* - Address academic, career, and personal/social needs through a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2005).

4. *Perception* - The opinions of beliefs held by another person (Skutley, 2006).

5. *Role* - The primary duties or job responsibilities taken on by an individual (Skutley, 2006).

Summary

The role of the school counselor has continuously changed through the 1900s in response to the economic, social, and political issues of the times (Beesley, 2004, Lamie & Williamson, 2004; Murray, 1995). These constant changes created confusion as to the specific roles and responsibilities of the school counselor (ASCA, 2001; Herr, 2002; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). This qualitative study explores the roles of middle school counselors as perceived by middle

school teachers.

Counselors know which teachers work best with various students and can implement specific programs to improve student learning (House & Hayes, 2002). Schmidt (2003) encouraged counselors to consult with teachers and other staff members to increase student progress. The reconceptualization of the middle school counselor's role is crucial as schools move through the 21st century (Beale, 2003). Today's middle school counselors are positioned within schools to make a difference in all students' academic achievement (Beale, 2003).

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and background specifics of perceptions of the middle school counselor as perceived by the middle school teacher. In addition, chapter 1 identifies both the problem statement, as well as the purpose of the study. The chapter also discusses research objectives, definition of terms, and study limitations. Chapter 2 will contain the review of literature. This will include current literature and related studies that further expound on the theoretical framework and literary foundation of the proposed study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study will be to explore the role of the middle school counselor as perceived by the middle school teacher. The specific problem associated with the proposed qualitative study is middle school teachers do not understand the role of middle school counselors to encourage collaboration. It is expected that the research will contribute to properly identifying the role and responsibilities of school counselors within middle school settings. It is the expectation of the researcher that the study will be significant in providing clarification in what middle school counselors do as opposed to what middle school teachers perceive that counselors should be doing in their respective schools.

The literature review examines factors related to the role of the middle school counselor as perceived by the middle school teacher. Chapter 2 encompasses documented research and aspects that support the purpose of the study as an overview of the topic. Chapter 2 will include a historical overview of the evolution and reform of the school counseling profession. In addition, it will address topics related to the theoretical framework, as well as, other research studies that identify the roles and responsibilities of the middle school counselor. The literature review will define the role of the counselor as identified by the American School Counselor Association. Furthermore, the Chapter 2 literature review will include past studied perceptions of the role of the counselor as observed by other educational personnel.

The emergence of middle school counselors as active student advocates is a clear understanding of the revised counseling roles of the 21st century (Beale, 2003). The role of the middle school counselor began to transform to align with state and national standards to improve student achievement (Beale, 2003). The transformation included collaboration among

counselors and other staff members to implement appropriate programs. The collaboration process can only be successful when counselors and staff members have a mutual understanding of the role and function of the middle school counselor (Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999). Associations created guidelines encouraging counselors to collaborate with other student service workers to provide transition activities between elementary and middle school and middle and high school (ASCA, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

Dewey, in 1938, expressed one of the primary obstacles in childhood development is the ability to provide children with thought-provoking experiences that promote decision-making skills.   Dewey (1938) suggested that it was the school's responsibility to promote students' social, moral, personal, and cognitive development. In addition, the whole child development is encouraged through the collaboration of guidance strategies and student development into school counseling curriculums (Dewey, 1938).

A report entitled *The Counselor in a Changing World*; written by Wrenn (1962) suggested that multiple strategies be incorporated to address student needs. This cognitive developmental movement led to the onset of guidance and counseling theories. Rogers, a psychologist, had the greatest effect on the counseling profession with the publishing of his book *Counseling and Psychotherapy: New Concepts in Practice* (Schmidt, 2003). Per Rogers, the person/student-centered approach should be utilized in the field of personal counseling (McLeod, 2008). The expansion of the counseling profession led to the term *guidance* being used in collaboration with the term *counseling* (McLeod, 2008).

As identified in the School Counseling Program of Seattle Pacific University (2011), the conceptual framework of a counseling program should be based on "a theory that supports a developmental, systemic approach to facilitating the healthy educational, career, multi-cultural,

personal-social, and spiritual development of students" (p.7). For the current qualitative study, two theories help to explain the development of the role of the middle school counselor. These theories are the trait and factor theory as well as the directive approach theory. While both theories vary in aspects and foundation, they all contributed to the overall framework in the development of the school counseling profession.

Trait and Factor Theory

In a *Narrative Approach to Career Counseling,* Herbert (2008) defines the term as a characteristic of an individual that can be measured through assessment. He identifies the term factor as a characteristic required for successful job performance. Together, the terms *trait* and *factor* characterize the formal assessment of an individual and their job performance (Herbert, 2008). It was in the 1930s that psychologist, Williamson, created the trait and factory theory as the first practicing theory for the field of guidance and counseling (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). This theory served as an expansion of Parson's vocational guidance movement to vocationally place individuals based on their personal abilities (Schmidt, 2003). Unlike other personality theories, the trait and factor theory emphasize the importance of disposition traits that differentiate individuals (Cherry, 2012).

Directive Approach Theory

The Integrated Publishing Company (2013) defined directive counseling as the process of (a) listening to a problem, (b) deciding what should be done, and (c) encouraging and motivating the person to do it. School counselors play a major role in the directive approach counseling. This form of counseling is referred to as the counselor-centered approach (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Roy, 2011). Williamson introduced the directive approach in 1939 in his book *How to Counsel Students.* It was then Williamson proposed that school counselors were to

gather information and motivate students as they provided them with guidance services (Schmidt, 2003). The directive theory suggests that school counselor's plan the counseling process by (a) analyzing the problem, (b) identify & the exact nature and triggers of the problem, and (c) provide options to solutions (Roy, 2011).

Related Literature

The review of related literature examines various aspects of the middle school counselor's role and its association to the collaboration with middle school teachers. The literature provides background to understanding the role of middle school counseling by exploring the middle school concept, school counselors' guiding practices, and implementation in the middle school setting. It further provides a synaposis of comprehensive counseling programs and the basis in which they are created.

Middle School Conception

During the 20th century, middle grades educational reform argued that junior high school models overlooked the social and emotional pressures of adolescence (Beane, 2001; Lounsbury, 1992). Although school psychologists contributed to the design of the junior high school model, the developmental needs of students were neglected (SREB, 2003). The criticism of this neglect led to the middle school concept which came to replace the junior high school concept (SREB, 2003).

The National Middle School Association (1995) recognized an essential feature of middle schools should include an adult advocate to student, family, and community partnerships. These documents also recognized the need to provide response interventions to the social and emotional needs of adolescents (SREB, 2003). The SREB, along with other reformers, set out to

improve opportunities for middle school students by providing support services that students

need to be successful (SREB, 2003).

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (2003) speaks specifically to the goal of

closing the achievement gaps of middle school students. This is necessary to prepare students

for postsecondary education. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act required schools to increase

student achievement by using research-based strategies (Southern Regional Education Board,

2003). Two of these strategies included creating a supportive encouraging climate and linking

them to a caring adult within the build who can help parents in retrieving school information

(SREB, 2003). In many cases, the school counselor provides the services.

Middle School Transition

Today's generation of young people face a more diverse society, which gives more

diverse challenges (ASCA, 2011). Amongst the many transitions that adolescents face, the entry

into middle school is often the most difficult (Elias, Patrikakou, & Weissberg, 2007).

Adolescents in general deal with various challenges on the middle school level (Gerler, 1991).

These challenges include social, physical, and emotional growth, family relationships,

peer pressure, sexual maturation, and academic advancement (Gerler, 1991). The transition to

middle school also shows an increase in discipline infractions (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007). Middle

school students are on a path of searching for their own unique identity all while seeking more

approval from their peers rather than their parents (ASCA, 2011).

The services teachers think a school counseling program should offer varies depending

on the grade level (O'Grady, 2015). Students experience a great deal of difficulty when

transitioning from elementary to middle school (Crockett, Peterson, Graber, Schulenberg, &

Ebata, 1989). This transition period leads to a sense of excitement and anxiety all at the same

time (Gerler, 1991). Students who struggle with transition and social adjustment have a harder time adapting during social maturity development (Hough, 1995). The successful transitional decline is the result of the younger students' inability to prioritize and manage their time (Mayberry, 2005).

Many current day middle school students lack parental supervision and assistance in adjusting to the middle school level (Mayberry, 2005). It is imperative that students began early in their academic matriculation developing positive work habits. The academic pattern during early adolescent years is a strong indicator of what the academic patterns will be by the 12th grade year (Peterson, Ebata, & Graber, 1987). Students who lack a smooth adjustment and transition to middle school often lack immaturity throughout their continued development (Hough, 1995).

In 2005, Mayberry conducted a study to identify the counselor's role in assisting incoming middle school students with developing solid work habits and management skills. The study also measured homework discrepancies perceptions among middle school students and teachers (Mayberry, 2005). Mayberry expected that the outcome would increase student self-esteem, increase student achievement, and provide an overall more positive student perception of middle school (Mayberry, 2005). School counselors provide input on various factors that affect students (All Psychology Careers, 2015).

Mayberry's (2005) study was conducted at a public urban middle school that serviced students representing a variety of academic abilities as well as, socioeconomic status. The study participants included 200 sixth graders and all sixth-grade teachers at the school (Mayberry, 2005). Both the students and teachers received surveys that asked questions about the transition and homework expectation differences between fifth and sixth grade (Mayberry, 2005).

The varying results of the study among students and teachers provided a variation of implications for school counselors to aid with the academic achievement of students (Mayberry, 2005). These implications included task such as teaching incoming middle school students (a) time management, (b) note taking skills, and (c) prioritizing tasks (Mayberry, 2005). School counselors also aid students in dealing with conflict resolution, self-esteem, and goal setting (All Psychology Careers, 2015).

While not all the suggestions provided were the sole responsibility of the counselor, it proved that counselors play a vital role in the implementation process of student transition (Mayberry, 2005). The diversity and demographics of schools and students are ever changing (Owens, Bodenhorn, & Bryant, 2010). These changes affect the development and delivery of effective school counseling programs (ASCA, 2005; Owens, Bodenhorn, & Bryant, 2010). It is expected that school counselors adjust their skills and services to meet the needs of the students and community (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Limberg & Lambie, 2011). It is imperative that schools and principals are aware of the opportunities and services that school counselors can provide to meet the emotional and social needs of their students (Moore-Thomas, 2009).

American School Counselors Association

Advocacy is essential to the school counseling profession (Clemens, Shipp, & Kimbel, 2011). Advisory councils serve as the driving force for school counseling and counselors (O'Grady, 2015). In recent history, few attempts to measure school counselors' advocacy and skills have been made (Clemens et al., 2011). There have been documented discrepancies regarding school counselors' roles (Clemens et al., 2011).

The American School Counselor Association has taken on the leading objective of beginning the process of defining guidance and counseling guidelines (Johnson, 2003).

Chartered in 1953, credentials, standards, and guidelines were provided for school counselors through the formation of the American School Counselor Association (Sink & Thompson as cited by Heacock, 2008). The American School Counselor Association, known primarily as ASCA, promotes professional school counselors in developing students in the areas of personal, educational, and career aspects (American Counseling Association, 2013).

School counselor advisory councils serve as advocates that channel the concerns of school counselors to the appropriate organizations (O'Grady, 2015). The creation of the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) National Standards and the ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs has set the standard (Clark & Amatea, 2004). ASCA provides the impetus and rationale for establishing the school counseling program as an integral component of the mission of each school" (Clark & Amatea, 2004, p.132). Bob Myrick credits ASCA for aiding school counselors in becoming more effective and efficient in providing services to students (Myrick, 2003).

ASCA provides the overall vision, mission, goals, and objectives for all school counselors across America (ASCA, 2011). The American School Counselor Association provides support for almost 30,000 professional school counselors (ASCA, 2011). ASCA enhances the profession of school counselors by providing professional development, as well as, effective strategies for implementing comprehensive guidance programs (ASCA, 2011). The form of support that ASCA provides is done through advocacy, leadership, empowerment, and collaboration (ASCA, 2011).

The National Model

ASCA has created a national model for professional school counselors to follow known as "A Framework for School Counseling Programs". ASCA began developing the national

model in 1997, setting standards to make school counselor's more recognizable (Schwallie-Giddis, Maat, & Pak, 2003).   In 2002, a draft of the model was officially introduced (Schwallie-Giddis, Maat, & Pak, 2003). The ASCA National Standards model are based on data driven results (ASCA, 2011).

This worldwide model derives from three successful models: a) the Norm Gysbers and Pat Henderson model, b) the Sharon Johnson and Curly Johnson model, and c) the Bob Myrick model (Johnson, 2003). All three models focus on successful research and school implementation (Johnson, 2003). The primary authors were Judy Bowers and Trish Hatch. The executive director and the ASCA Governing Board assisted them (Myrick, 2003).

The ASCA Governing Board took a great deal of time in reviewing successful models, identifying common elements, and collectively combining those elements to create one standard model (ASCA, 2003). Because of the detailed synthesis of various states, districts, and site model counseling programs and concepts, the model was developed (ASCA, 2003). The primary purpose of ASCA's National Model is to provide A Framework for School Counseling Programs (ASCA, 2003). It provides school counseling programs to operate under "one vision and one voice". The model works as a mechanism that school counselors utilize to "design, coordinate, implement, manage, and evaluate their programs for student success" (ASCA, 2003, p. 9).

Professional counselors created the National Model of ASCA (2003) as a means of collaboration through committees, groups, and conferences. The dynamics of the ASCA National Model "suggests that school counselors can be more accountable when they follow a universal plan…" (ASCA, 2003, p.7). This model lies to provide the fundamental components needed to provide an effective and comprehensive guidance program. The ASCA National

Model: A Framework for School Counseling specifically addresses current educational reform and increases the accountability (ASCA, 2003).

The ASCA National Model promotes school counseling programs based on foundation, delivery, management, and accountability (West Virginia Department of Education, 2011). The model provides school counselors with five key concepts of implementation (ASCA, 2008). The five concepts are: ensure that the primary purpose is school counseling; keep it simple; enforce more with larger caseloads; removes non-counseling responsibilities from the equation; & taking advantage of counseling experts (ASCA, 2008). Although ASCA has provided a national comprehensive school counseling model, there is still great debate of the perception of school counselors' responsibilities (Lepak, 2008).

School Counselors' Qualifications

The American School Counselors Association identifies professional school counselors (PSC) as licensed & certified educators trained to address the personal, social, academic, and career needs of students (ASCA, 2013). PSCs must hold a minimum of a master's degree and meet their local state certification and licensure standards (ASCA, 2011). School counselors are liable for abiding by state laws (ASCA, 2011). This includes upholding professional and ethical standards of the American School Counselors Association as well as other professional counseling associations (ASCA, 2011). School counselors maintain their certification by participating in ongoing trainings and professional developments that keep them current on student challenges and effective strategies (ASCA, 2011).

Professional school counselors are employed in varying levels of educational settings to include, but not limited to: elementary, middle, high schools, and post-secondary settings (West Virginia Department of Education, 2011). Their work load varied based on the developmental

stages and needs of the students within the educational levels (West Virginia Department of Education, 2011). They often serve in direct counselor education positions and implement comprehensive school counseling programs to enhance student achievement (West Virginia Department of Education, 2011). Middle school counselors must hold a master's degree and certification in the state in which they are employed (ASCA, 2011).

School Counselor's Roles

Various studies have proved that students, administrators, school staff, and even counselors themselves are often unclear about the school counselor's daily obligations (Amatea & Clark, 200; Lieberman, 2004). The challenge of identifying school counselor roles is evident in that in addition to the national model, school districts may adhere to their own school counseling model (Lepak, 2008). The success of school counseling programs is largely attributed to the overall opinion of others towards counseling programs (Agi, 2014).

Research suggests that school counselors have important roles to play in helping elementary, middle, and high schools establish and sustain effective programs of family and community involvement that contribute to student success in school (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010, pg. 2). The sole purpose of professional school counselors is to provide an atmosphere that safeguards the human rights of those in the school community (Sandhu, 2000). School counselors serve as the immediate advocate for students (Mayberry, 2005). Personal relationships must be developed between school counselors and their students (All Psychology Careers, 2015). This aids in the building of trust and respect among counselors and students (All Psychology Careers, 2015).

Professional school counselors also have a responsibility to provide intervention and prevention programs that meet the needs of all students customarily (Lee, 2001). School

counselors are required to provide support services to students and parents at a minimum of eighty percent of each school day (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). It is required that school counselors directly counsel students and parents five of six segments of the school day (GA Dept. of Education, 2005).

The school counselor is an integral component of providing support in the school, family, community relationship (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Building relationships with individuals outside of the school is a valuable component (O'Grady, 2015). Counseling services are provided based on state and federal laws (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). School counselors collaborate with other educators and stakeholders to promote equality learning experiences for all students (West Virginia Department of Education, 2011).

ASCA (2011) specified that school counselors are important components of the educational leadership team. School counselors are expected to implement comprehensive school counseling programs that meet the needs of all students. The implementation done through services provided in individual, small group and classroom settings. These comprehensive counseling programs are aligned with the educational philosophies of the individual schools and school districts (American Counseling Association, American School Counselors Association, & National Academy of Education, 2008).

School counselors play a key role in educational reform mandates to close the achievement gap among minority and low-income students (Bryan, 2005). A 2004 research study of 5th through 9th graders showed that students performed significantly better on standardized reading and math test if they attended schools with a comprehensive guidance program (Center for School Counseling Outcome Research, 2004). A separate research study

performed the same year, but in Baltimore displayed that school counselors were paramount in increasing academic achievement, self- efficacy, and career awareness (Legum & Hoare, 2004).

Research evidence demonstrates that professional school counselors have experienced discrepancies between their advocated duties and the actual duties that they often perform (Lambie, 2002). Lambie explained that the role of the school counselor changes with every decade. The change in school counseling has gone from vocational guidance, to assessment, and academic placement all while providing personal and social development counseling (Clark & Stone, 2000). In addition, school counselors, daily, are involved with providing character education, career planning, as well as, violence and drug prevention (ASCA, 2011).

School counselor organizations often have several goals; however, state organizations typically focus on a primary goal (Paterson, 2015). For example, the Georgia School Counselor Association (GSCA) focuses on reducing caseload size and ensuring appropriate duties assigned duties (Paterson, 2015). Research proves it is apparent that the actual duties of most PSCs and advocating are incongruent (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Per Glen Lambie, role uncertainty occurs for one of three reasons: (a) lack of clarity on responsibility and expectation, (b) lack of information regarding the work role, or (c) lack of clarity with objectives related to the work role (Lambie, 2002; Sears & Navin, 1983).

This is largely the result of various stakeholders (to include teachers, administrators, parents, community organizations, etc.) having differentiated opinions on the role of school counselors (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Burnham and Jackson (2000) suggested that school counselors frequently perform tasks unrelated to their counseling duties. In schools that lack full time counselors, the present counselors are assigned duties outside of their primary

responsibilities (Agi, 2014). This affects the school counselors' ability to provide their required services (Agi, 2014).

The discrepancy of duty responsibility has created a role of conflict among school counselors, administrators, teachers, and parents (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Role confusion has created such ambiguity, that many professional school counselors have varying perceptions of their own roles within different environments (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Research concluded that PSCs spend an extended amount of time on non-counseling duties which in turn pull them away from "more appropriate counseling activities" (Burnham & Jackson, 2000, p.47). The decision that the roles and responsibilities of school counselors be identifiable as a means of ensuring that they properly service the needs of the students has become a priority (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

ASCA, in collaboration with school counselor preparation programs, advocate for the roles, responsibilities, and practices of professional school counselors (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The development of education and student services is often influenced by economic and political circumstances (ASCA, 2003). Therefore, the demands and roles of school counselors consistently vary and change.

History has proven the role of school counselors needs to be clearly established to avoid the extinction of school counselor positions (ASCA, 2003). Over are the days of school counselors sitting in their office doing completing paperwork (ASCA, 2011). In a society where the diversity and goals of school districts vary, many have their own expectations as to the role of the school counselor.

ASCA (2003, p.6) expresses that "It has taken a great number of personal and professional actions to advance school counseling to where it is today. Professional school

counselors (PSC) have longed experienced some discrepancy between their duties that are advocated and the actual duties that they often perform (Lambie, 2002). Lambie explained that the roles of school counselors changed with every decade.

The school counselors' role went from vocational guidance, to assessment, academic placement all while still providing personal and social development counseling. The most recent perspective emphasized the professional school counselor as a student advocate and educational leader (Clark & Stone, 2000). Per Glen Lambie, role uncertainty occurs for one of three reasons: (a) lack of clarity on responsibility and expectation, (b) lack of information regarding the work role, or (c) lack of clarity with objectives related to the work role.

School counselor roles have varied for if the position has been viable (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Burnham and Jackson suggested that school counselors are subjected to performing tasks that outside of their counseling duties. These duties include non-related tasks such as scheduling, clerical duties, lunch duties, amongst other unrelated tasks.

With the conception of educational reform in the 1980s, educators were referring to Gardner's *A Nation at Risk* (1983). While this document suggested many solutions to educational problems, it failed to include the role of the school counselor in as part of the solution (Schwallie-Giddis, Maat, & Pak, 2003). The urgency of the message of reform in Gardner's work, the counseling profession recognized a need for change; during the next decade, several major initiatives emerged (Schwallie-Giddis, Maat, Pak, 2003). The American School Counselors Association's National Model provided the answers to the many questions as to what school counselors are expected to do*: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (Schwallie-Giddis, Maat, & Pak, 2003).

ASCA's National Model address questions and aids school counselors in knowing how they fit into the overall school program (Schwallie-Giddis, Maat, & Pak, 2003). While ASCA provides set standards for the school counseling profession, counselors continue to face obstacles regarding their defined job responsibilities (Paisley & Mcahon, 2001). Currently, school counselors still concentrate on the counseling domains of academic, personal/social, and career guidance (Reiner, Colbert, & Perusse, 2009).

Middle School Counselors

School counselors are imperative as leaders on all educational levels. However, school counselors are especially advantageous in middle schools (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). School counselors possess one of the most important jobs in middle school (School-Counselor.org, 2015). School counselors are to middle school what project managers are to a corporate company (School-Counselor.org, 2015). Middle school counselors' ability to focus their attention on students and families allows teachers the opportunity to put their attention towards their specific subject areas (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010).

There are significant differences between students transitioning to middle school and students transitioning to high school (Gerler, 1991). Adolescents face many challenges when attempting to determine their own identity (Gerler, Hogan, & O'Rourke, 1990). "Early adolescence is a time of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development" in which young people question who they are (Gerler, 1991, p. 1). Adolescents at this stage, question their individual worth (Cherry, 2010). School counselors are responsible for making middle school inviting for middle school students (Gerler, 1991).

Defining the school counselors' role is still a major concern for counseling programs (Kirchner, & Setchfield, 2005). This is particularly true in the case of middle school counselors.

Middle school counselors must develop accountability programs that address the developmental needs of middle school adolescents (Gerler, 1991). With the middle school concept being new, the role of the middle school counselor remains unclear (Huffman, Faskko, Weikel, & Owen, 1993).

Students in middle school need effective guidance that leads to a sense of clear identity (Marcia, 1980). The primary goal of middle school counselors is to provide an atmosphere of encouragement that promotes "identity development" in middle school students (Gerler, 1991). School counselors help students to learn social development skills and cope with social concerns (Helper, 2009; Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009). Middle school counselors utilize their comprehensive counseling programs to implement self-understanding strategies for students (Gerler, 1991).

Elementary and high school counselor duties are well defined; however, the duties of middle school counselors are often unclear (Huffman et al., 1993). Middle school counselors must endure several challenges when working with middle school students. These challenges include (a) family dynamics, (b) diverse demographics, (c) conflict among students, and (d) student sexual maturation (Gerler, 1991). Middle school counselors are educators trained to respond to the many challenges of the middle school student (ASCA, 2011).

Accountability

Effective counseling programs are a crucial component of student achievement and school climate (ASCA, 2011). The use of data to implement school counseling accountability can lead to increased student achievement (Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). A school counseling program steered by data improves the counselors' perception of their program (Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). Monitoring students' personal and academic growth and providing

opportunities for this growth is a major aspect in supporting student academic achievement

(Mayer, 2008). However, access to school counselors and student support services is limited in

many school districts (ASCA, 2011).

       In the past year, the school counseling profession has been represented twice at the White

House. As recent as 2014, First Lady Michelle Obama, spoke on the importance of the school

counseling profession during the Annual American School Counselor Association conference

(Eakin, 2015). First Lady Michelle Obama emphasized key aspects such as student counselor

ratio, duty specific professional developments, and service geared duties and responsibilities

(Eakin, 2015).

       Previous research has shown that effective counseling services lack in some schools,

particularly schools that service low-income students (Mayer 2008). In response, many

educational college preparation programs are investing more in improving counseling services

(Hugo, 2003).   It is the responsibility of the school counselor to ensure that their colleagues,

parents, and students are aware of the services they provide. There are several questions a

counselor should ask themselves to determine the effectiveness of their counseling program: (a)

What is that they are trying to accomplish? (b) What is their plan to make that happen? (c) What

are the best ways to achieve that goal? (d) Are they considered as a part of the complete school

program?

       A study performed by Barnett (2010) proved that most counselors are not spending their

time on accountability task as outlined by ASCA's National Model. School counselors

implementing comprehensive guidance programs are asked to account for their work and how it

contributes to student success and achievement (Gysbers, 2004). Previous research conducted by

Gysbers (2004) shared that school counselors are now asked to demonstrate how and what they

do to make a difference in the lives of students.

Accountability means being responsible for one's actions and contributions, especially in

terms of objectives, procedures, and results (Myrick, 2003, p. 174). Some counselors are

unfamiliar with the guidelines identified in the National Model (Barnett, 2010). Accountability

allows school counselors to justify their roles and their importance to the educational school

setting (Myrick, 2003). Programs have begun to provide counseling specific professional

developments to better train school counselors how to address student needs (Gandara & Bial,

2001).

The increase in educational accountability has transformed the focus on school

counselors and school counseling programs (Beesley, 2004). Despite the increase in school

counseling accountability, many educators are still unaware that counseling program standards

exist (Whiston, 2002). This forced schools to reexamine the priorities of their school counselors.

John Krumboltz (1974) was one of the first educational theorists to advocate for the

accountability of school counselors (Myrick, 2003). Krumboltz's accountability theory is based

on seven criteria aspects. The aspects focused on the interventions that school counselors

provided, the outcomes of the interventions, and the means of measuring those outcomes.

Accountability hit the forefront of education when students in the United States began to

be compared to students in other countries. Unfavorable results led to educational reform that

included school "report cards" which later led to evidence that American students were poorly

prepared to compete in the work force (Peak, 1997). When school counselors failed to be

mention in educational reform, they felt the need to be more visible and accountable for the role

that they played in the success of education (Otwell & Mullis, 1997; Poppen, 1995; Schafer, 1995; Scuggs, Wasielewski & Ash, 1999).

School counselors ensure accountability by forming measurable goals and using data to assess student needs (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). Data results are analyzed and used to determine students' strengths and weakness. In return, school counseling programs are modified to meet the needs of the students. Reviewed data determines if an intervention is effective (Myrick, 2003). Data sources often used include, but are not limited to: standardized tests, enrollment in specific courses, participation in student support activities, and discipline referrals (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

Accountability is an ongoing responsibility (Gysbers, 2004). Gysbers (2004) suggested identifying the anticipated results prior to applying counseling guidance activities. Each school counselor's school year, semester, & month should begin with defined objectives and goals (Gysbers, 2004). The overall comprehensive guidance program is guided by identified objectives and goals.

Collaboration with Others

C. D. Johnson (2003), Counselor Education Professor of Walden University, describes student support systems as a series of communities. Counselors define these communities and their constitution (Johnson, 2003). School counselors are an integral part of the complete educational program (ASCA, 2003). Collaboration among school staff, family, and communities provides educators with insight they need to fully engage with students (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010).

Collaboration can look different for different people (Schumacher, Worsowicz, Shook, & Stone, 2015). Research suggests that a protective factor in the support of education elasticity is

the collaboration of school, family, and community (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). Every individual in the school environment can influence the development and aspirations of college and career guided students (College Board, 2012). It is crucial that schools and families work together to establish a positive educational environment for students (Elias, et al., 2007). The American School Counselor Association supports the leadership of school counselors' in school partnerships (ASCA, 2009).

The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2010 contributed student success to a balanced partnership between schools, families, and community stakeholds (Bryan & Griffin, 2010). School counselors played a vital role in initiating these partnerships (Bryan & Griffin, 2010). A 2010 multidimensional study on school counselors' partnership involvement identified factors that affected counselors' ability to implement counseling programs (Bryan & Griffin, 2010).

It is important that the roles that school counselors play in building good partnerships are defined (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). A 1990 study of teacher and school counselor collaboration identified a general lack of communication among both teachers and counselors (Alaniz, 1990). The same study concluded that teacher perception and counselor cognition of their role created incongruence among the two (Alaniz, 1990). ASCA defines counselors as leaders, advocates, and collaborators in schools (Taylor & Davis, 2009). Now more than ever, middle school counselors are committed to assisting administrators, teachers, and staff help today's adolescents during this difficult stage of life (Mayberry, 2005).

Students often face personal problems that spill over into the classroom; these problems are commonly outside of the realm of training for individual teachers (Ferlazzo, 2014). A study performed in 2004 identified counselor and teacher collaboration as the most frequent topic among teacher perception of school counselors' roles (Clark & Amatea, 2004). Teacher

participants strongly felt that teachers and counselors should work together as a team. The work "teamwork" was often used to describe the type of relationship needed among counselors and teachers to have an effective school program (Clark & Amatea, 2004).

Research has shown that school systems that require teachers to collaborate in what is known as "learning communities" demonstrate better success (Burns, 2011). This collaboration takes place among communication, academic planning, behavior management plans, resource referrals, crisis intervention, just to name a few (ASCA, 2011). In collaborating with others, it is imperative that counselors and educators mutually agree upon a shared vision and decision making in the implementation of school wide strategies; there must be an opportunity for sharing ideas and providing input (Finkelstein, 2009).

A 2010 study challenged school counselors to spend a percentage of their time strengthening partnerships with parents, other educators, and the community (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). Epstein and Voorhis (2010) believed that doing so would improve the quality of outreach involvement. The study proved that educational relationships doubled in strength when school counselors partnered with other stakeholders (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). Many school system comprehensive counseling programs contain a collaboration piece within and outside of the school community to address student needs (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008).

Promoting partnerships prevents school counselors from having to resolve school issues alone (Epstein &o Voorhis, 2010). Particularly in middle and high schools, collaboration creates a balance that allows teachers to focus on teaching subject specific content (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). It allows school counselors to seek the help of other stakeholders as a means of reducing school problems.

The goal of collaboration is to develop positive interactions of home, school, and community to produce the best results for students (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010, pg. 3). The educational program is greatly benefited when collaboration occurs among school counselors, administrators, parents, students, and the overall community (ASCA, 2003). In a previous study, Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) referred to school counselors as "institutional change agents".

In 1996, Griffith found that students' sense of satisfaction was directly related to the quality of interpersonal relationships created with counselors and other staff members. When knowledge of role responsibility and mutual communication has taken place, each has a better chance of being effective in serving students (NACAC, 1990). Successful student growth and academic achievement requires the cooperative efforts of school counselors, administrators, teachers, parents, students, and the community (NACAC, 1990).

As the role of the school counselor takes on a more leadership approach, those who interact with students (Cooper & Sheffield, 1994) expect more collaboration. Positive educational interpersonal relationships play an important role in the development of students (Griffith, 1996). Educators and school counselors to create a thriving environment for students (Griffith, 1996) can create these positive relationships.

School counselors encourage a sense of unity among students and parents by collaborating with teachers and staff members to make decisions in the best interest of the students (Kuhn, 2004). School counselors are trained in areas of mediation, problem solving, and interpersonal communication. This places school counselors able to conquer the challenges of promoting collaboration among school staff, families, and communities (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010).

A great deal of information is known about the needs of middle school students. It requires a great deal of collaboration and positive relationships between parents, educators, and the community to address these needs (Elias et al., 2007). Effective collaboration cannot take place among school staff when school personnel do not understand the varying roles that each play (Stelzer, 2003). For that reason, it is paramount that expectations and roles are clearly defined (Stelzer, 2003). This is particularly true for teachers, as they spend most of the school day with the students (Stelzer, 2003).

Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

The overall foundation of a comprehensive school counseling programs is to characterize what students in kindergarten-12 grades will accomplish because of participating in a counseling program (as noted by Struder, 2005). School counseling programs are responsible for promoting students in personal growth, career goals, and social skills in hopes of becoming contributing members of society (ASCA, 2011). When comprehensive counseling programs help, students balance academic and personal obstacles, students demonstrate a better level of educational success (Trusty, Mellin, & Herbeert, 2008).

School counseling programs have undergone various transformations (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). 21st century school counselors focus on the impact of student goals and their given results (GA Department of Education, 2005). Many counseling training platforms vary in theoretical perspectives (ASCA, 2003). Subsequently this has led to school counselors being trained in a variation of theories. (ASCA, 2003). The evolution of school counseling programs has created differing philosophical perceptions as it relates to the school counselor's purpose, functions, and roles (ASCA, 2003). In the 1970s and 1980s,

comprehensive guidance counseling programs were developed to unify the school counseling profession (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Myrick, 2003).

School counseling programs play a major role in contributing to the educational outcomes of students (Carey & Harrington, 2010). More effective comprehensive counseling programs produce better student outcomes; these positive student educational outcomes can be expected when the school counselor job descriptions match their actual job duties (Carey & Harrington, 2010). School counselors must also spend much of their time directly providing services that benefit students.

School counseling programs are more successful when they address the concerns of students (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). Middle school counselors provided programs that groom middle school students to handle the social pressures and independency of middle school (Gerler, 1991). Most middle school counselors provide their services through individual counseling, group counseling, and classroom guidance (Gerler, 1991).

School counseling programs are sometimes viewed as auxiliary programs and not as integral components of the overall educational environment (ASCA, 2003). The sole purpose of a comprehensive guidance and counseling curriculum is to aid school systems in developing and implementing comprehensive programs for students in grades K-12 (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). While all school counseling programs should cover, the primary standards covered by ASCA, they may also include additional standards that address specific needs of the student population being served (Myrick, 2003). Perceived school counselor roles are critical in the effectiveness of a well-developed guidance program (Cuskey, 1996).

School counselors measure student progress based on the impact of their individual objectives and goals (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). Middle school counselors

implement comprehensive counseling programs that concentrate on four primary aspects. These

four primary aspects are (a) school guidance curriculum, (b) individual student planning, (c)

responsive services, and (d) system support (ASCA, 2011).

Comprehensive school counseling programs are implemented by middle school

counselors through (a) school guidance curriculum, (b) individual student planning, (c)

responsive services, and (d) system support (ASCA, 2011). The school guidance curriculum sets

the precedence for the counseling program by addressing the students' needs in a curriculum

format (ASCA, 2003; Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009). Guidance curriculum is administered in the

form of classroom guidance to facilitate things such as study skills, social skills, and positive

peer relationships. Individual student planning is facilitated through individual conferences to

promote transitional and academic plans (ASCA, 2003; Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009).

Responsive services provide immediate support to personal concerns that affect the students.

School counselors provide responsive services in the event of school crisis, family crisis, or

individual crisis (ASCA, 2003; Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009). System support involves simply

maintaining the school counseling program through collaboration and enhancement (ASCA,

2003; Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009).

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) says that a well

written guidance and counseling program outlines student needs and provides a comprehensive

plan of action with goals and objectives for meeting those needs (NACAC, 1990). It is

imperative that school counselors reflect to determine what works, what does not, and what

needs to be modified (Miller, 2015).   This is done through collaboration with students, parents,

teachers, administrators, and community leaders (ASCA, 2011).

The varying perspectives of the school counselors' role caused confusion among school counselors, administrators, teachers, and parents" as to the purpose of school counselors (ASCA, 2003, p.9). Comprehensive guidance counseling programs emerged in the 1970s and 1980s to provide unification among the profession (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Myrick, 2003). All schools should have a comprehensive program that specifies an individual plan of action for implementing counseling services in the context of education, academic achievement, self-knowledge, and career planning (Georgia Department of Education, 2005).

When school counselors have a comprehensive school guidance program to implement, they contribute to academic success and positive development of students (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001; Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997). Comprehensive counseling programs create more support and effectively serve students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community (ASCA, 2003). A study performed in Utah found that students attending schools with fully implemented guidance programs scored higher on scale tests, took more advanced courses, and rated their overall educational experience as better (Nelson & Gardner, 1998).

The primary goal of any school counseling and guidance program is to assist students in being academically successful students (Stelzer, 2003). This is done by providing programs and services to improve the educational experience of students (Stelzer, 2003). Teacher input is influential in developing a successful guidance counseling program (Skutley, 2006). Teachers are often the first exposed to student concerns; therefore, it is pivotal that teachers and counselors have a great working collaborative relationship (Skutley, 2006). A successful comprehensive guidance program is one in which all school staff, including teachers, understand and respect the role of the school counselor (Wittmer, 1993).

Teacher Perception

While not many, there have been some studies conducted that examine the perceived role of school counselors (Stelzer, 2003). These studies viewed school counselors in the roles of "helpers" and "consultants" (Ginter, Scalise, & Presse, 1990). In these cases, counselors were viewed as always being pro-student and always taking the side of the students (Stelzer, 2003). There has been limited research on teacher perception of the school counselors' role and student success (Marchetta, 2011).

A 20th century study researched teacher attitudes toward counselors functioning during two different time periods. The study conducted in both 1972 and 1980 showed that teachers felt that counselors' job was easier than that of a teacher (Valine, Higgins, & Hatcher, 1982). This perception of 12% in 1972 rose to 37% in 1980 (Valine, et al., 1982). In both studies, teachers expressed that they felt school counselors were ineffective and that they did not understand the role of the school counselor (Valine, et al., 1982).

Teacher preparation educational programs do not require students to enroll in school counseling courses; hence, the teachers' understanding of guidance and counseling is not specifically understood (Stelzer, 2003). Therefore, school counselors should not assume that teachers share their views and expectations (Murro & Kottman, 1995). Conflict becomes the outcome when the goals of the teacher and school counselor vary (Stelzer, 2003).

For a counseling program to be successful, school counselors must have the support of teachers (Wilgus & Shelley, 1988). It can no longer be the assumption of teachers that school counselors are responsible for managing students' disruptive behavior (Nugent, 1990). School counselors cannot be expected to schedule courses, teach classes, are perform stationary duties (Muro & Kottman, 1995).

The role of the school counselor has always been conflicting and varied among, parents, students, administrators, and teachers within the educational system (Huffman, Fasko, Weikel, & Owen, 1993). Even with more distinct guidelines, some school personnel still see counselors as administrators, record keepers, or administrative assistants (Lieberman, 2004). Teachers also believe that school counselors perform staff and parent consultation, as well as, serve as public relations activity liaisons for the staff and community (Hughey, Gysbers, & Starr, 1993). When school counselors serve in a dual role, it creates a thin line between job and ethical responsibility (Lepak, 2008).

The challenges of today's youth are more complex and cause for direct involvement of the school counselor in the educational process (Lepak, 2008). Outlining appropriate school counselors' role continues to be an obstacle for the counseling profession (ASCA, 2003). The school counselors' perceived role is often strongly impacted by the school principal and administration (ASCA, 2003).

In a 2004 study conducted by Rachelle Perusse and other researchers, it was determined that duties endorsed by the school principal were the ones most frequently performed by counselors. However, these duties usually included inappropriate tasks (Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009). The principal's perception is not always aligned with ASCA (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005).

School principals and administrators determine what duties are priorities in their individual schools. Therefore, the school counselor's primary responsibilities can be easily predisposed by the demands of their principals. Often the principal's perception of the counselor's role influences the teachers' perception of the counselor's role (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005).

Students take their guidance from those in charge. In most cases when there is no congruence between teacher perception and student performance, blame is placed with the student (Mayberry, 2005). A study conducted in 2013 showed a significant correlation between student attitudes towards the perception of school counseling (Agi, 2014). The students' attitudes towards counseling programs were dependent upon the connotation affixed to the programs (Agi, 2014). Historical views show that the school counselor role has always had direct ties to the teacher role (Gysbers, 2001; Myrick, 2003). Only a few studies have been conducted on teachers' perceptions of school counselors' roles (Clark & Amatea, 2004; Reiner, Colbert, & Perusse, 2009).

Teachers' perception of the school counselor and their role serve as obstacles that prevent school counselors from adequately providing services for students (Davis & Garrett, 1998). However, because teachers spend the more direct time and interaction with students, they are usually the first to notice any emotional or social concerns that affect student achievement (Clark & Amatea, 2004). Open dialogue must take place among school counselors and teachers to understand the role of each (Stelzer, 2003).

A study conducted by Reiner, Colbert, and Perusse (2009) suggested that while teachers supported school counselors' roles, they also agreed with counselors being responsible for non-counselor tasks. These tasks include clerical work, maintaining student records, and administering tests; just to name a few. It is believed that teachers support these tasks simply because they are often a directive of the local school principal (Reiner, Colbert, & Perusee, 2009). It was also perceived by teachers that counselors should provide counseling in a more therapeutic mental health role (Reiner, Colbert, & Perusse, 2009).

A study that surveyed secondary teachers found that teachers perceived school counselors to spend most their time interpreting test scores and advising students academically on college and career preparation (Lepak, 2008). In addition, it was determined that school counselors spent the bulk of their school day providing individual counseling, group counseling, and crisis intervention / prevention (Lepak, 2008). Although these teachers felt that counselors performed duties within the role most of the time, they were often utilized for jobs outside of their roles such as supervising students and substituting for other staff personnel (Lepak, 2008).

An earlier study demonstrated that teachers saw counselors as alternative administrative personnel (Huffman et al., 1993). Middle school counselors are sometimes performing duties that conflict with their actual duties; this is the result of the many non-counseling duties that are often bestowed upon counselors. This causes confusion amongst those unsure of the direct duties and responsibilities of middle school counselors.

For years teachers, administrators, and parents have had their own perceptions of the school counselor's role (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). However, in recent years there has been a greater emphasis placed on this perception as the role of the counselor as taken on a more educational leadership dynamic (Clark & Stone, 2000; House & Martin, 1998; Stone & Clark, 2001). Therefore, it is vital that counselors and all educators take responsibility for the practices executed in schools (Mayberry, 2005).

Clark and Amatea (2004) conducted a qualitative study that examined the perception of teachers on the expectations of counselors that served in elementary, middle, and high schools. The participants of the study varied by school level, years of experience, and student populations served. The study performed by Clark and Amatea (2004) established that teachers perceive counselors as being responsible for providing preventative and developmental services.

However, the teachers' perceptions of the school counselors' role demonstrated a common theme.

Clark and Amatea's study (2004) concluded that many teachers interviewed agreed on the importance of (a) teacher-counselor collaboration, (b) the value of direct services provided to students, and (c) counselor visibility and total school involvement. These concepts are supported by the ASCA National Standards of 1997, ASCA's National Model of 2003, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. According to Clark and Amatea, teachers felt that it was the counselors' job to provide intervention services based on student issues identified by the teacher.

Teachers expressed the need for counselor support in various areas (Clark & Amatea, 2004). These areas included life skills, social relationships, peer mediation, and family issues (Clark & Amatea, 2004). Most teachers participating in the study felt that this could be done through small group counseling and classroom guidance.

Clark and Amatea's (2004) also exposed a very interesting fact; teachers by their own admittance felt that it was important for school counselors to educate teachers of their specific roles. They felt that teachers needed to know more about the services and interventions that counselors provide to students. Teachers felt that by school counselors informing staff members of their specific responsibilities, educators would have a better understanding of how school counselors could service the students and the schools' demographical population (Clark & Amatea, 2004).

School counselor perceptions of their own roles vary from those of teacher perceptions. Studies have shown that school counselors feel that they spend a great deal of their time providing mental health services and helping in non-counselor related areas (Barnett, 2010).

Many professional school counselors are not even aware of the accountability tasks set forth by the American School Counselor's Association National Model (Barnett, 2010).

Teachers as School Counselors

An interesting aspect that was discovered in previous research determined that a school counselor's prior work experience has an effect on the teachers' perception of the counselor role (Stelzer, 2003). Teachers perceived school counselors with prior teaching experience as being more effective than counselors with no teaching experience (Quarto, 1999). Teachers perceived school counselors with prior teaching experience as being more effective in handling the educational emotional and behavioral needs of students (Quarto, 1999). Teachers reported having challenges with non-teacher school counselors who were unfamiliar with educational procedures and school cultures (Peterson, Goodman, Keller, & McCauley, 2004).

School counselors who were not former teachers have expressed having more difficulty adjusting to school and teacher cultures (Peterson et al., 2004). Currently only a few states require school counselors to have prior teaching experience before obtaining school counselor licensure (American Counseling Association, 2003). The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP, 2001) only requires that school counselors have "knowledge of the school setting, environment, and pre-K-12 curriculum" (p. 92).

While school counselors themselves do not feel that prior teaching experience is necessary (Baker, 1994; Smith, Crutchfield, & Culbreth, 2001), teachers and administrators still prefer to work with school counselors who do have teaching experience (Beale, 1995; Quarto, 1999). Teachers do not feel that the lack of experience affects the counselors' ability to do their jobs (Peterson et al., 2004). However, teachers do feel that the lack of teaching experience may

hinder the school counselors' understanding of teachers concern and building relationship

rapport among both the teachers and students (Peterson et al., 2004).

Summary

The literature review presented above discussed the distinct role of the 21st century

middle school counselor. The review provides a historical overview and evolution evidence of

school counselors' duties and responsibilities in modern day education. Evidence in the literature

review outlines the guidelines and aspects of school counseling in the educational realm.

Previous studies demonstrate the perceptions of school counselors in relation to their actual job

responsibilities in comparison to what other staff members perceive as their job responsibilities.

School counselors did not exist prior to the 20th century (Kuhn, 2004). The onset of the

Industrial Revolution led to diverse populations within public schools. This led to the need of

specialized professionals to address the concerns of students in the educational environment;

hence, this need created the role of the school counselor.

The role of the professional school counselor emerged in the 21st century (Beale, 2003).

The role itself transformed continuously to determine how the school counselor would fit into the

educational reform (Beale, 2003). The middle school counselor had a primary objective to help

students successfully transition between elementary and high school (ASCA, 1990).

In general, school counselors are trained to address the needs of students in the areas of

academics, personal, and social needs (ASCA, 2013). It is expected that school counselors

implement comprehensive counseling programs that provide activities to improve student

success (West Virginia Department of Education, 2011). School counselors are primarily

accountable for safeguarding the rights of students and serving as their advocates (Mayberry,

2005).

Middle school counselors face a different dilemma than elementary and high school counselors in that they assist students with two transitional adjustments. Middle school counselors aid students in moving from elementary school to middle school, as well as, middle school to high school. The transition of the middle school student is usually the more problematic adjustment (Elias, Patrikakkou, & Weissberg, 2007)

The school counselors' role changed drastically over time as counselors adjusted to their new roles (Kuhn, 2004). There are several professional organizations that support the position of head counselors (Skutley, 2006). Organizations such as the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) have been responsible for governing guidelines in which school counselors abide (ASCA, 2011). ASCA works to provide specific job guidelines and objectives for the school counseling profession (ASCA, 2003; Beesley, 2004; Dollarhide, 2003; Perusse & Goodnough, 2001).

It is evident that the teacher's perception of the school counselors' role exists. However, this perception may vary depending on the educational level and type of school (Stelzer, 2003). It is recommended that the responsibilities and duties of the school counselor remain consistent despite the level or format of the school (Stelzer, 2003).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of the current qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the role of the middle school counselor as perceived by the middle school teacher. The study aimed to identify the perceptions of middle school teachers' thoughts of what the duties and responsibilities are of middle school counselors. Its intended that the study provides an understanding of what middle school teachers think school counselors do as opposed to the tasks that school counselors actually are responsible for carrying out. The collaboration among middle school teachers and middle school counselors has become an integral part of the educational advancement process (Krumboltz, 2011).

The qualitative phenomenological research study investigated the role of the middle school counselor as perceived by the middle school teacher offers potential professional and educational significance. The findings of the study provide the middle school teachers' perspectives of what they believe middle school counselors do and the services they provide. By gaining this perspective, the researcher has attempted to see if middle school teachers' perspectives are aligned to the actual job responsibilities of the middle school counselor set by the school district and/or state.

The analyzed data received from this study could be utilized to improve the education and understanding of the middle school counselor role knowledge of middle school teachers. This understanding could improve the collaboration efforts among middle school counselors and middle school teachers in hopes of helping students to become successful. The findings could also decrease the number of unrelated concerns submitted to counselors by teachers allowing more time for counselors to appropriately service students.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed explanation of how the research study design, method, and implementation took place. The chapter entails specifics in sampling, data collection, and data analysis methods. Chapter 3 also explains the possible role and influence of the researcher, as well as, any trustworthiness and validity issues.

Design

Qualitative Research Methodology

The purpose of qualitative phenomenological research design is to interpret human phenomenon and perspective of a situation within its natural setting (Heath, 1997). Qualitative research seeks understanding by focusing on the total picture rather than breaking down phenomenon into variables (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). The goal within qualitative research is to gain a depth of understanding as opposed to a numeric analysis of data (Ary et al., 2006). Qualitative methods lead to understanding any circumstances in which there is limited information (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Qualitative research seeks to understand behaviors as experienced by participants in a specified setting (Roy et al., 2006). Qualitative research is a personal form of research that allows subjective perceptions of both participants and researcher (Goetz & LeCompte, 1993). Qualitative research provides a different perspective than quantitative research in that it allows more comprehensive details and understandings of data collected in natural settings (Key, 1997).

Qualitative research is descriptive, and the collected data is usually presented in the form of words or pictures (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative researchers focus on the overall process and understanding as opposed to research outcomes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The qualitative emphasis on process can be specifically beneficial in educational research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

This takes place when the research can control the variables included in the research design (Ary et al., 2006). However, qualitative research takes place within actual settings in which the direct source of the data is collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative phenomenological research uses descriptive non-statistical research to answer questions about phenomena based on the actual experiences of the participants (Byrne, 2001). Phenomenological research itself is designed to describe and interpret experiences by determining the meaning of the experience as perceived by the subjects who have participated in it (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative phenomenological research is appropriate when researching the perception of middle school teachers on the role of middle school counselors.

Phenomenological Research Design

Phenomenology is defined as a type of qualitative research designed to gain understanding of how participants experience and give meaning to a phenomenon (Ary et al., 2006). Phenomenological research is designed to describe a natural phenomenon of lived experiences (Burne, 2001; Waters, 2015). A phenomenological study provides an outlook on what lived experiences means to the participants and its meaning to their situation (Ary et al., 2006).

The phenomenon of educators' roles and responsibilities related to student success has been researched and there have been various theories as to the role that teachers play. While the predicament of student success is highlighted in many studies (Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Ludlow, Keramidas, & Kosser, 2008; DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007) a phenomenological research study is needed to understand the role of the middle school counselor and how it contributes to the success of students. This phenomenon may be understood clearer after first determining what others perceive that role to be.

All research methods have varying characteristics specific to their methods. Bracketing is a key element of phenomenological research. Bracketing is the act of suspending judgment about natural world prior to conducting phenomenological analysis (Husserl, 2001). The perceived state of the phenomenon should be removed until the study is conducted, and data is analyzed in its true form (Husserl, 2001). There have been generalizations made about what school counselors in middle schools are expected to do. These generalizations were put aside to ensure an accurate study. The presented qualitative phenomenological study will focus on collecting data that will allow educators to know how middle school teachers perceive the roles of middle school counselors.

Descriptive phenomenology. There are two primary versions of phenomenology, descriptive and interpretive (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The qualitative research design known as descriptive phenomenology was developed by Husserl (Connelly, 2010). Husserl's idea of phenomenology was based on the thought that true meaning of reality was based on experiences and human consciousness (Spinelli, 2005). The findings of this form of qualitative phenomenological descriptive study consists of a collection of descriptions of individual lived experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The conducted qualitative phenomenological descriptive study reports on findings of middle school teachers and their experiences of working with middle school counselors. The researcher uses the outcomes to gather the teachers' perceptions of the middle school counselors' roles.

Hermeneutic phenomenology. Phenomenology is a methodology dealing with human experience (Adams, 2014). Hermeneutic is a form of phenomenology that suggests experiences are a result of people, cultures, and events (Goble, 2011). Hermeneutics is a reflective interpretation to gain meaningful understanding from historical aspects (Moustakas, 1994).

There is a basic belief that hermeneutic phenomenology is evidence that world experiences are full of meaning (Van Manen, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology's purpose is to reflect upon the meaning of basic life experiences (Globe, 2011).

Transcendental Phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology is a qualitative methodology seeking to understand human experience (Moustakas, 1994). Its concept is based from the notion natural identity and not preconceived ideas (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology is used to describe phenomenon by using participants' perceptions and experiences (Cordes, 2014). This type of phenomenology focuses on both textural and structural descriptions of the study (Creswell, 2013). The textural descriptions examine the participants' experiences while the structural descriptions form through how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

The qualitative phenomenological research study sought to answer three research questions. The data collection and data analysis aimed to provide incisive answers to the following questions with vivid detail:

RQ1: How do middle school teachers perceive the role of the middle school counselor?

RQ2: What do middle school teachers identify as the specific roles and responsibilities of middle school counselors in their schools?

RQ3: What do middle school teachers perceive to be the primary guidance and counseling needs of their schools?

Setting

The research was conducted at suburban middle schools located in central Georgia. The school district is in metropolitan Atlanta and is the 8th largest school district in Georgia. The

school district serves over 42,000 students. The school system has 54 schools and centers: 29 elementary, 14 middle schools, 11 high schools, and 3 specialized alternative educational centers. All the schools have at least one full time school counselor with the middle schoolshaving 2-4 school counselors depending on the size of their student population.

The population of the chosen school district is culturally and economically diverse. 52% of the population is economically disadvantaged and 48% are considered middle and upper class. The district educates 48% African-Americans, 37% Caucasian, 8% Hispanic, 4% Multi-racial, and 3% Asian students. Within the school district's educational setting, 14% of the student population receive gifted services and 13% receive special education services. The overall student population of the specified school district has a student academic success rate that falls between 81% through 97% depending on the content area.

The middle schools where the research was conducted houses approximately 700-1000 students in grades 6th, 7th, and 8th. Many the students take general education courses; however, about 8% of the students are in gifted classes and roughly 13% are in special education. The schools staff approximately of 50-65 teachers. There is one school principal and two or three assistant principals. In addition, the school provides support staff with school counselors, a student support specialist, psychologist, social worker, a speech pathologist, and paraprofessionals.

In the middle school setting, the school counselors are assigned designated grade levels or academic teams to service. The school counselors may also serve as part of the school's leadership team, school safety team, response to intervention, and other committees. The middle school setting is idea for the implied research because their school counselors have a great deal of interaction and collaboration with the teachers throughout the building. The middle

school setting is the one educational level that involves some collaboration on elementary, middle, and high school transition.

Participants

The participants were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, also known as judgment sampling, is a sample that is typical representative of the chosen population (Ary et al., 2006). Purposive sampling is intended to achieve an in-depth understanding of the chosen participants (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The criteria for participation are predetermined and are not intended for validity (Gall et al., 2007). Within purposive sampling, there are several variations of sampling used in qualitative research (Ary et al., 2006). For this qualitative research, the specific purposive sampling utilized was homogenous. Homogenous sampling is utilized when the chosen participants are similar in characteristics and experiences. (Ary et al., 2006). This qualitative research included the perception of teachers who all teach within the middle school setting there by making their interaction with middle school counselors parallel in aspect and setting.

Due to the extent of information requested, the participants selected for a qualitative research study should consist of a small and purposive group (Ary et al., 2006). Ten teachers were selected to participate in this qualitative study. According to researchers Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), saturation often occurs once data is collected within the first twelve study participants. Saturation is defined as the point in the data collection process in which information becomes repetitive (Bogden & Biklen, 2007).

Ten teachers were chosen from traditional public middle schools, six female teachers and five male teachers. The experience of the middle school teachers ranged from three to twenty years. Five of the teachers from grade levels, 6th, 7th, and 8th who teach a specific academic

core course were selected. The academic core course will be that of math, language arts, science, or social studies. Three of the ten teachers taught middle school elective courses for grades 6th, 7th, and 8th. The elective courses included health, physical education, business computer technology, and reading. Three of the ten teachers taught special education students. While four of the ten selected middle school teachers were general education teachers who taught a co-taught course alongside a special education teacher. By selecting participants from all educational and academic aspects, the researcher had the opportunity to gain informational experiences from teachers whose collaboration and interaction with middle school counselors varied in diversity.

The purposive selection of participants was dependent on a voluntary basis. With permission of the targeted middle schools, the researcher provided a letter of participation interest of the study. Study participation was open to teachers who had taught a minimum of three years on the middle school level. Three years of experience demonstrated a level of consistency on the middle school level and provided more opportunity in collaborating with the middle school counselor.

All study participants were provided with a consent form (see Appendix A). The consent form outlined the purpose and expectations of the research study. The consent forms and all data collection were stored in a secured storage cabinet within the home office of the researcher. To protect the identity of the research participants, only the researcher has access to the office. Any identifying information or demographics of the study participants remained concealed throughout the entire study. Pseudonyms were used as a means of safeguarding the identification of the voluntary research participants.

During data collection, each individual participant was acknowledged using an assigned code denoted to as Middle School Teacher (MST) and a number (1-10) based on when they were interviewed. Pseudonyms were used upon analyzing the data collected. The study participants had the right to review any data collected during the study. The study participants had the discretion to voluntarily dismiss themselves without explanation at any time during the study.

Procedures

Upon IRB approval, the researcher proceeded to get permission to conduct research through the district office of the school system of the teachers that were interviewed as part of the study. This process included the researcher providing the documentation that the school district requires regarding study details. The research will begin once the school district provided written approval.

Data was collected through three means of gathering: focus group, teacher questionnaires, and teacher interviews. Focus groups allowed group participants to make personal phenomena connections that may not have otherwise occurred during individual interviews (Nagle & Williams, 2016). Group interaction and non-verbal communication allowed for additional data that may have been incorporated into the study design (Nagle & Williams, 2016). Questionnaires and interviews gathered specific information and produced data that demonstrated patterns (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008).

 Interviews were done individually and lasted approximately twenty to thirty minutes per participant. The first three to five minutes allowed the participant time to complete the questionnaire. However, the timeframe varied depending on the question responses of the interviewee. The interviews were digitally recorded, and the interviewer took short hand notes to document expressions, tone, and body language.

Prior to the start of the interviews, interview procedures were discussed, and the participants' confidentiality was reaffirmed. Each participant was asked to review their prior signed Informed Consent form and to provide a verbal consent before the start of the interview session (see Appendix A). The participants were asked a series of interview questions (see Appendix B). Some questions consisted of background data related to their teaching demographics and experiences. The remaining questions were related to the middle school counselors' role as perceived by the middle school teacher. The interview questions were designed to address precise topics of the research study.

The researcher conducted all interviews. The researcher designated an appropriate time with each individual participant to conduct the interviews. The researcher conducted an interview based on preconceived interview questions. The interviews took place at the designated school in the classroom of each individual research participant or at the local community library.

Each middle school teacher participant had the opportunity to approve and corroborate the content of their individual interview. The study participants answered the interview questions as freely as they chose. At that time, the study participant had the autonomy to recommend any changes or clarification to the interview notes (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006).

Each interview middle school teacher participant was allowed a member check. A member check is a method in which the subject of a research study can verify, agree, or disagree with the information that was recorded (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Member checking is a means of establishing validity (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Although the technique of member checking is sometimes controversial, it is utilized to establish credibility (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). All

interview notes and recordings were stored in a locked file cabinet in the home office of the researcher. Only the researcher has access to the locked file cabinet.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher's goal of this qualitative research study was to provide an understanding of what middle school teachers feel the primary responsibilities of middle school counselors are in relation to the actual services that middle school counselors provide based on their job descriptions. This goal was achieved through the subjects' participation in interviews. The researcher served as the primary instrument. It was anticipated that the participants' interview responses provided data that would answer the study's three primary research questions. The data results were presented in a descriptive manner based on subjective experiences. Qualitative research looks to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviors and the motives behind such behaviors and utilizing this approach would allow the researcher to permit the phenomena to explain and answer the questions directly (Bryne, 2001; Creswell, 2007).

As the study's researcher, I currently serve in the role of a middle school head counselor. I have served in the role of middle school head counselor for three and a half years. Prior to becoming a middle school head counselor, I was a middle school counselor for four years and a middle school teacher for seven years. While serving in the role of middle school teacher, I taught seventh and eighth grade math. However, as a middle school counselor I service students in grades sixth, seventh, and eighth.

As head counselor, I am responsible for overseeing the implementation of all student guidance services and programs that are facilitated through the counseling department. In addition, I supervise all parties of the counseling department who report to me directly. This includes one or two other school counselors, student support specialist, registrar, and counseling

administrative assistant. I serve on the school leadership, school improvement committee, school safety committee, and the district's crisis team. Serving on these committees has given me experience in consistent collaboration with teachers, administrators, stakeholders, and other school staff members to ensure that all parties of the counseling department have input on the school's objectives and goals.

I will conduct all interviews throughout the study. I will make every effort not to include any participants with whom I have shared a previous professional relationship. I will use bracketing as a means of creating a non-judgmental and non-bias perceptions or beliefs of the participants (Ary et al., 2006).   The bracketing process suggests that the researcher refrain from sharing personal beliefs and opinions during the interviews (Clark, 2005). I intend to create an environment in which the study participants feel comfortable and will answer the interview questions honestly.   It is my goal to provide clarification to the educational field the identifiable roles of the middle school counselor and to ensure that teachers understand the school counselors' roles duties and contributions to the field of education. In doing so, I hope to strengthen the collaboration and support of teacher counselor working relationships in helping them to work collectively in the best interest of students.

Data Collection

Data collected in a qualitative study is analyzed to ultimately answer the proposed research questions (Chenail, 1995). The data is used to explain the findings of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The qualitative phenomenological research study to explore the role of the middle school counselor as perceived by the middle school teacher utilized three methods of data collection. The three data collection methods included focus group, questionnaires, and interviews.

Qualitative research uses many different methods of data collection (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Unlike quantitative research that uses experiments, statistical studies, and surveys as the instrumentation to collect data, the interview and focus group method is the most common means of utilized in qualitative research (Gill et al., 2008). Data collected through these methods are retrieved by verbal communication and narratives (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). It is believed that people who actively experience circumstances, communicate their insights verbally (Ritchie et. al, 2014).

Data triangulation was used during the collection of data. Triangulation is a means of using multiple sources to gain understanding of a phenomenon (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The triangulation during this study gathered the perceptions of middle school teachers. Triangulation allows the researcher to gain possible varying viewpoints (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Environmental triangulation was implemented in validating the data collection of the study. Environmental triangulation involves interviewing participants of different environments (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2013). The teachers who were interviewed for this study did not work at the same schools or centers. This provided different viewpoints because the teachers would have collaborated with different school counselors within their respective schools.

Focus Group

A focus group consists of gathering a group of people to share concepts and perceptions regarding a common topic (Leung & Savithiri, 2009). The focus group is based off a defined topic with efforts to collect information and candid opinions from the group members (Leung & Savithiri, 2009). Focus groups in qualitative research promotes interaction among participants that allows them to share feelings that may not be exposed during individual interviews (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

Study participants were invited via email to participate in the focus group. The focus group meeting will take place in a location in which the participants are comfortable and agree. The focus group format consisted of open-ended questions that allowed the participants a chance to openly express their feelings regarding the topic. The focus group participants were asked a small set of open-ended questions (see Appendix B). The purpose of questions one through five were to provide generic perceptions of how middle school teachers perceive a typical operational day of a middle school counselor.

Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

1. Do you feel the position of school counselors is important in the middle school setting?

2. What is your understanding about the role of the middle school counselor?

3. What do you think a typical day of a middle school counselor looks like?

4. What reasons do you send your students to see their school counselor?

5. What are some reasons in which your students request to see their school counselor?

Questionnaires

Qualitative interview research methods are regarded as providing valuable data about people and real-life situations (Vaus, 2014). Research protocol might sometimes encompass other means of retrieving information when depending on interviews as the primary means of collecting data (Yin, 2010). One such means may be the utilization of questionnaires to accompany structured interviews (Yin, 2010). Questions were framed based on the aim of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants were provided a questionnaire (Appendix C) to complete prior to being interviewed. The questionnaire included questions regarding characteristics and opinions related

to their job position and circumstances. Questions one through three asked about background information on the teachers' status and position that qualified them to participate in the study. Questions four and five demonstrated their familiarity with the counseling position. The purpose of questions six through eight was to determine the training that teachers received regarding the school counselor job description.

Open-Ended Questionnaire Questions:

1. What grade level(s) do you currently teach?

2. What content subject area(s) do you currently teach?

3. How many years of experience do you have in the middle school setting?

4. In what aspects are your students familiar with the school counselor?

5. How often would you say you collaborate with your school counselor?

6. Upon getting certified to teach, were you required to take any courses about collaborating with school staff?

7. As a teacher, do you currently receive professional development about how to utilize your school counselor?

8. How often during the school year is the role of the school counselor discussed during staff or faculty meetings?

Interviews

The interview method explores the experiences, opinions, and beliefs of individual participants (Gill et al., 2008). The primary purpose of interviewing is to understand the participants' real life meaning of the topic (Kvale, 1996). This allows the researcher themselves to reflect on his or her own thoughts and beliefs regarding the topic being researched (Creswell, 2005).

Qualitative interviews use three primary forms: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Gill et al., 2008). In structured interviews, participants are asked the same questions and are provided limited response categories. This format allows for fewer variations in answer responses. Gill et al. noted that unstructured interview formats are very informal and consists of general dialogue equivalent to generic conversation.

The research method in this study implemented semi-structured interview questions. Semi-structured interview questions provided specific key questions, but also allow the participant to provide detail in their response (Gill et al., 2008). This format gives the interviewee guidance on what to discuss but allows them the flexibility to discuss what aspects of the questions they would like to answer based on their personal experiences and beliefs (Gill et al., 2008).

The qualitative phenomenological study regarding the role of the middle school counselor as perceived by the middle school teacher will implement key participant interviews. The interviews will seek to collect data from teachers that have perceptions based on their interactions and past collaborations with school counselors within the middle school environment. These interviews should be useful in obtaining in-depth opinions of the participants' personal experiences (McNamara, 1999).

The interview questions that will be used in this phenomenological research study will be semi-structured open-ended questions. Open-ended semi-structured interview questions are efficient and suitable for the qualitative interviewing technique in that they are useful for reducing bias (Sewell, 1999). Qualitative researchers should construct self-designed formats to collect data (Creswell, 2005). The set of questions will be pre-constructed and the same set of questions will be asked of each participant. The interview participants will not have restricted

answer choices and will be able to answer the questions in their own words. This technique will increase the consistency of the interviews and eliminate varying from the interview process (Sewell, 1999).

The interviews will take place in a conference room at the respective schools of each participant. Each interview session will last approximately twenty minutes. All participants will be asked the same interview questions (see Appendix D). The participants' responses will be recorded via technical note taking (i.e. – laptop / iPad). The interview questions will be intended to address the research questions of the proposed study. Question one allows the participant to talk about themselves in hopes of becoming comfortable. Questions two through six allows the participant to discuss their relationship collaboration with their school counselor. Followed by questions seven through ten which allows the teacher to share how the feel the counseling needs of the students and school are addressed.

Open-Ended Interview Questions.

1. Tell me a little about yourself and your background teaching experience (Demographical)

2. Tell me about your working relationship with your school counselor. (RQ1)

3. How do you collaborate or directly work with your school counselor in a typical school day? (RQ1)

4. How often and in what capacity do you meet with your school counselor? RQ1)

5. What type of concerns warrant your students being sent to see the counselor? (RQ3)

6. What programs, if any, are school counselors responsible for implementing at your school? (RQ2)

7. As a middle school teacher, what do you identify to be the primary counseling and guidance needs of your middle school students? (RQ3)

8. How are the needs of your middle school students met at your school? (RQ2)

9. As a middle school teacher, what do you perceive to be the specific roles and responsibilities of the middle school counselor? (RQ2)

10. What discrepancies, if any, do you have with the role of your school counselor? (RQ1)

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a means of explaining the findings of the study. Failure to analyze the data properly data could discredit the results of the study. Qualitative research data analysis is the process of organizing and transferring data into a form of understanding or interpretation of the phenomenon (Learning Qualitative Data Analysis, 2010). The role of the researcher is to construct patterns to explain the phenomena of those participants (Creswell, 2005). The qualitative data analysis procedures consist of processing the data collected into some form of explanation (Nigata, 2009). This process includes (a) organizing the data, (b) identifying the framework, (c) sorting the data into framework, and (d) preparing the descriptive analysis (Nigata, 2009).

One of the biggest challenges in data analysis is identifying patterns through a large amount of raw data (Patton, 2002). This is easier to do when the data is coded, categorized, and displayed via tables and figures (Creswell, 2013). Coding and categorizing the data makes it easier for the researcher to decipher. Often qualitative data analysis is presented in conceptual narrative form. Conceptualizing data provides general descriptions of the obtained data to help explain the researched phenomenon (De Hoyos & Barnes, 2012). The data analysis of

qualitative aims to use describe a phenomenon and understand the big picture (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) identifies a 7-step method to analyze qualitative data collected through interviews.

All predetermined judgements and beliefs of a phenomenon must be suspended. This process is known as epoche (Moustakas, 1994). This process is necessary due to the researcher's current position as a middle school counselor. Doing so allows the researcher to embrace and accept new ideas and perceptions (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher can do so by bracketing the topic by means of reflective acknowledgement prior to the research.

The beginning stages includes what Moustakas (1994) identifies as horizonalizing. This stage of data analysis examines the data collected because of the study. During this process, the researcher identifies the information that is relevant to the study. This leads to the phase of reduction and elimination of transcripts that are repetitive. The researcher will review information provided by each participant to determine the primary themes of the phenomenon being researched. Finally, an integration of textural and structural descriptions is created to produce an overall general meaning of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The textural descriptions will measure what the participants experienced while the structural descriptions will show how the experience made the participants feel.

Trustworthiness

Validity and quality are two standards of trustworthiness in the parameters of qualitative research (Morrow, 2005). It is the responsibility of the researcher to safeguard the study results and provide evidence that the study is documented appropriately. It is the responsibility of the researcher to communicate properly with the audience, reader, or reviewer (Morrow, 2005). The researcher should expose the validity of the study in a method that is easily understood by those

not familiar with qualitative research (Morrow, 2005). The concern of trustworthiness in a qualitative study cannot be avoided (Gibbs, 2002).

Trustworthiness issues in qualitative studies cannot be escaped and must be handled (Gibbs, 2002). This means providing both adequacy of data and adequacy of data interpretation (Morrow, 2005). The researcher of a qualitative study must ensure that the study is conducted in a way the research methods can be consistently replicated. Trustworthiness during qualitative research is established based on four primary principles (Shenton, 2004).

Pilot Interview Study

A pilot study will be utilized to provide validity of the study. A pilot study is summarized as a small-scale study of that in which the researcher plans to use for their primary research (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The pilot study allows the researcher to test the procedures and logistics of the main study (Gall, et al., 2007). By conducting pilot interviews, the research can make any necessary adjustments to eliminate flaws prior to conducting the real study.

The pilot interviews will be conducted just as the real interviews will take place. Three middle school teachers, who will not be subjects in the main study, will participate in the pilot interviews. The researcher will ask them the same interview questions that are expected to be asked in the primary study. The same intended procedures will be followed. This includes location, time frame, procedures, wording, methods, and confidentiality.

Credibility

The term credibility refers to the validity and truthfulness of qualitative research findings (Ary et al., 2006). Accuracy of data results is inevitable in qualitative research (Ary et al., 2006). The confidence of credibility is based on the research participants, design, and context in which

the study is implemented. The researcher has an obligation to accurately represent the realities, experiences, and interpretations of the study subjects (Ary et al., 2006).

Credibility demonstrates the findings of a phenomenon to be accurate or true (Trochim, 2006). As to ensure research validity, credibility checks for integrity by making sure the researcher accurately reports the participants' point of view (Schwandt, 2013). The research will establish credibility with the use of triangulated data. Triangulation is the use of several data sources as data collection (Creswell, 2013). The research will obtain data through school counselor focus group, teacher questionnaire, and teacher interviews.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability addresses the fact that content is open to change and variation (Given, 2008). Dependability demonstrates that the research findings are consistent and could be replicated (Trochim, 2006). In qualitative research, dependability recognizes that research is evolving (Given, 2008). The more relevant and transparent a study is according to given, the more dependable the research.

Quantitative research speaks of reliability; however, qualitative research speaks of dependability (Ary et al., 2006). Dependability shows that research is consistent and can reproduced (Ary et al., 2006). This simply means that the study procedures can be documented and the conclusions proved. Various strategies can be used to test the dependability of a study.

Conformability deals with showing that the study procedures and result interpretations are free of bias (Ary et al., 2006). It is suggested in qualitative research that the goal is the value in which other people believe in the findings of the study (Mischler, 1990). Qualitative researchers are sometimes worried that conclusions from their studies would be confirmed by other researchers (Ary et al., 2006).

Transferability

Transferability allows the findings of a study to be applied in context. A qualitative researcher is responsible for providing descriptive adequacy (Ary et al., 2006). Descriptive adequacy is the ability to provide enough descriptive detail that allows for comparisons of similarities (Ary et al., 2006). It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide specific and complete descriptions of the study participants' experiences.

Transferability is the ability to provide evidence that the findings are applicable in other context or settings (Trochim, 2006). This is done by providing descriptive details taken during data collection. Descriptive details would include specifics of circumstances, meanings, and perceptions (Schwandt, 2007). To achieve transferability during this study, the participants will have the opportunity to provide their perceptions through written questionnaires and interviews.

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Ethical Consideration

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No ethical dilemmas or risks are present in the qualitative phenomenological study of middle school teachers. The study participants were not subjected to any dangerous nor unethical actions or circumstances. The identity of the participants were concealed. They were not asked to identify themselves by name, yet a number system was used to identify their responses. The participants were assigned realistic pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of all participants. The finalized results of the study will be shared with the research, evaluation, and assessment department of the researched school district.

All collected data remains secure in a locked cabinet at the home of the researcher. Only the researcher has access to the data. The data was only removed for data analysis. After data collection, all data and files were returned to the locked cabinet in the home office of the

researcher. After a period of four years, all documents and files will be destroyed. The files and documents will be destroyed through the process of shredding.

Summary

The purpose of the current qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of middle school teachers concerning the role of the middles school counselor. The purpose of qualitative research was to interpret human phenomenon and perspective of a situation within its natural setting (Heath, 1997). This was done by collecting data through a means of interviewing middle school teachers.

Prior to the start of completing any research, approval was received from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). After receiving IRB approval, permission was then acquired from the assessment and evaluation department of the Georgia school district in which the study was conducted. Approval was received and documented from both parties prior to data collection.

The participants of the study consisted of ten middle school teachers who teach varying subjects for grades 6th, 7th, and/or 8th. The selection of teachers occurred through purposeful homogenous sampling. Participation in the study was done on a voluntary basis. All chosen participants were provided written consent. Participants also had the authority to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants had the right to question any details or specifics as it pertained to the study.

The data collection procedures will take place through individual participant interviews. All participants will work at the same suburban middle school in Georgia.   Once data is collected, the data analysis will occur using the grounded theory constant comparative method which will help code and categorize the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Chapter 4 will contain information pertaining to the results of the data analysis. The data will be coded and organized into commonality themes. It is expected that the data analysis will explain the perceptions and thoughts of middle school teachers on the role of the middle school counselor.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of the current qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of middle school teachers concerning the role of the middle school counselor. The data collection method used for this study consisted of semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire, which included open-ended questions as a guide to elicit middle school teachers' perceptions. These results revealed the perceived phenomenon experiences of ten middle school teachers who participated in the phenomenological study. As a means to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were used.

Chapter Four includes a description of the ten study participants through both a demographical table, as well as, a brief narrative. The study results are presented through identified developed themes and participant summaries. The results focused on three primary research questions:

RQ1: How do middle school teachers perceive the role of the middle school counselor?

RQ2: What do middle school teachers identify as the specific roles and responsibilities of middle school counselors?

RQ3: What do middle school teachers perceive to be the primary guidance and counseling needs of their schools?

Participants

The participant group consisted of ten middle school teachers, six females and four males. All ten of the participants were currently working in the middle school setting. Although all current middle school teachers, the participant group was diverse in many ways. The middle school years of experience of the participants ranged from three years to twenty-five years. Four

of the ten participants also had previous teaching experience on both the elementary and high school levels. The teachers taught various subjects of the middle school curriculum. While the subjects expressed their preference in teaching a specific grade level, the majority of the participants had taught all three grades; 6th, 7th, and 8th, of the middle school level. In addition, the participants also shared the many extra-curricular sports, clubs, and organizations in which they coached or sponsored that allowed them to interact with the middle school child. To protect the anonymity of each participant, a pseudonym was assigned.

Table 1. Participant Biographical Data

Participant (Pseudonyms)	Middle School Experience	Subject Area(s)	Grade Level(s)
Teacher 1 (Amy)	5 years	Social Studies	8th Grade
Teacher 2 (Brian)	12 years	Special Education	6th / 7th / 8th Grades
Teacher 3 (Carol)	3 years	Math	8th Grade
Teacher 4 (Debra)	6 years	Reading	6th / 7th / 8th Grades
Teacher 5 (Edward)	25 years	P.E / Health	6th / 7th / 8th Grades
Teacher 6 (Felicia)	3 years	Language Arts	7th Grade
Teacher 7 (Gail)	3 years	Science/ Language Arts	6th / 7th Grades
Teacher 8 (Henry)	20 years	Business / Computer Technology	6th / 7th / 8th Grades
Teacher 19 (Irene)	7 years	Math	6th / 8th Grades
Teacher 10 (John)	3 years	Special Education	8th Grade

Amy

Amy has taught middle school for five years. Although she certified in Social Sciences for both middle and high school, she has only taught middle school. Amy has only had

experience as an 8ᵗʰ grade teacher as she was hired immediately following her 8ᵗʰ grade student teaching internship. In addition to teaching, Amy serves as the Student Government Sponsor and Homecoming Chairperson at her school.

Amy shared that she works with her middle school counselor to understand a student when there are "red flags". She described these red flags as behavioral issues and grades Amy felt that the primary counseling needs of middle school students was helping them with the major transitions of life. She explained that this entailed the transition of transferring from elementary school, puberty, and preparing for high school.   She identified that she perceives the role of the middle school counselor is to serve as a student advocate. For Amy, this meant helping students in need academically, socially, and emotionally (Data collected from participant interview, 2018).

Brian

Brian has served in various middle school teacher capacities over the course of 12 years. All 12 of Brian's educational years of experiences have been in the middle school setting. Brian started out as the in school suspension teacher, but is currently a special education teacher for the severely impaired. This includes a small self-contained class of 6ᵗʰ, 7ᵗʰ, and 8ᵗʰ graders. In addition to his role as a teacher, Brian is a football coach, student mentor, and the gym manager.

Brian stated that he feels the primary counseling needs of middle school students is support in a very demanding and hectic environment. Brian shared that in the capacity in which he teaches, students are referred to the school counselor for concerns regarding their attire, health, or physical well-being. He also went on to personally share that he often voluntarily speaks to the school counselor when he himself feels overwhelmed or needs a listening ear (Data collected from participant interview, 2018).

Carol

Carol has 22 years teaching experience. She served 19 of those years as a high school math teacher. Wanting to try something different, Carol transferred to middle school where she has been for the past three years. Being that she also has high school teaching certification and experience, Carol teaches middle school courses that allow high school credit.

Carol expressed that she felt the primary counseling needs of middle school students were student conflict and personal needs. She shared that students are sent to see the counselor with issues dealing with fighting, personal hygiene, attendance, and emotional needs. Carol she only needed to work with the counselor to inform them about student concerns (Data collected from participant interview, 2018).

Debra

Debra is a reading teacher who has taught middle school for six years. As a reading teacher, she teaches all middle school grades 6th, 7th, and 8th. Debra only has experience on the middle school level and at one school. The school where she currently teaches hired her as a new teacher and she has been there ever since. She started out teaching special education. After which she was asked to head the reading program due to her success rate. While teaching special education, Debra also served as the department chair.

Debra felt the primary counseling need of middle school students is addressing bullying and developing positive peer interactions. Debra shared that she works with the middle school counselor on a daily basis in providing services to special education students with an I.E.P (Individualized Educational Plan). She explained that these services came in the form of mediations in reference to student behavior (Data collected from participant interview, 2018).

Edward

Edward has been a physical education and health teacher for over 25 years. He has had

experience on the elementary, middle, and the high school levels. During his 25 years of

educator experience, Edward has also served as football coach, track coach, and school mentor.

Edward has served on the middle school level for 15 years. As a middle school coach, Edward

services students in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.

Although Edward felt that he does not work with his middle school counselors on a

consistent basis, he expressed that they always assist him when he needs support as a student.

As the physical education teacher, Edward solicits the help of the counselor when attempting to

confirm whether his students have any medical issues that he needs to know about. He also

refers students that appear to have hygiene concerns to the counselor. Edward shared that his

counselor is very instrumental in mediating students involved in bullying instances in the gym

(Data collected from participant interview, 2018).

Felicia

Felicia has been a teacher for six years. She taught three years on the elementary level.

She transferred from a private elementary/middle school to a public middle school. She is

currently in her third year of middle school where she teaches gifted language arts. As a middle

school teacher, she has taught 6th and 7th grade. In addition to teaching, Felicia serves as the

head cheerleading coach.

Felicia feels the primary needs of the students are the emotional needs. She credits her

middle school counselor for supporting her with students who have behavior challenges. She felt

that middle school counselors were responsible for redirecting misbehavior in students. She also

felt that the middle school counselor were responsible for knowing county / state policies and

helping to ensure they were properly carried out (Data collected from participant interview, 2018).

Gail

Gail is a teacher who has been teaching for three years. Her current school was her first teaching assignment. She taught 7th grade language arts for the first year and currently teaches 6th grade science, for the past the next two years. Gail started teaching right after college. She had no prior experience in education outside of her student teaching practicum.

Gail felt that the primary counseling need of middle school students was resolving conflict and receiving proper care. Gail identified her reasons for collaborating with the school counselor was to resolve conflict among students. She also shared that she felt the middle school counselor serves as the medium between the parent and the child (Data collected from participant interview, 2018).

Henry

Henry is a 20-year veteran teacher. In those 20 years, Henry has taught middle school and high school business education and computer technology. Henry is currently in the middle school setting and has been at the same middle school for 15 years. Henry serves as the career and technical elective courses department chairperson. He also serves as the Title 1 parent liaison, school web master, and technology trainer for the teachers.

Henry expressed continuously working with his middle school counselors when it comes to scheduling and exposing students to career pathways. Henry felt that because his course is one that is an option for students, as opposed to a requirement, he has to collaborate with the middle school counselor to ensure that those students get the course on their schedule. He also shared that he brainstorms with the middle school counselor on field trips, career fairs, and

occupational inventories to provide for his career tech students. In addition, he sends any

students having conflict with their schedule or other students to see the school counselor (Data

collected from participant interview, 2018).

Irene

Irene has served in the middle capacity for seven years where she has taught 6th and 8th

grade math. Irene recently relocated to teaching in a Georgia middle school after several years

of teaching in Florida. In addition to teaching throughout the school day, Irene is a part of the

after-school tutorial staff, summer school teacher, and 8th grade activities committee.

Irene feels that the primary counseling needs of the middle school student are time and

behavior management. She expresses her collaboration with the middle school counselor to

involve strategies of improving student behavior and grades. Irene feels the primary role of the

middle school counselor is to be the "students' protection and peace from home and school

issues" (Data collected from participant interview, 2018).

John

John is an 8th grade special education teacher who started his career as a teacher assistant.

He teaches all 8th grade subjects in the special education department. John has been teaching on

the middle school level for three years. John explained that although he teaches middle school,

he has experience across all educational levels as a football coach, basketball coach, mentor, and

youth ministry leader.

John credits himself as having great rapport with his students. As a result, he emphasized

that he rarely solicits the assistance of the middle school counselor when redirecting student

behavior. John notated that most of his collaboration with the middle school counselor is with

the mentoring program when discussing the students that he mentors. John strongly feels that the

counselors' primarily assist students who are dealing with physical or mental abuse in their personal homes (Data collected from participant interview, 2018).

Results

More than one method was used to collect data for this study to ensure data triangulation (Creswell, 2013). The results of this phenomenological study were developed through the analysis of focus group interview, questionnaires, and individual participant interviews. Each participant was asked to answer 10 open-ended interview questions within individual sessions. The questions were based off of the three research questions and inquired about the middle school teachers' experiences, collaboration, and perceptions of the middle school counselors' role. Each participant also completed an eight question questionnaire regarding their background knowledge and experience in the middle school setting and knowledge of the middle school counselors' role. Interviews and questionnaires were reviewed for accuracy, after which they were analyzed for commonalities and similarities. After which, the participants' individual responses were analyzed in a means of associating them with the three research questions that guided the aspects of the study.

The researcher took descriptive field notes during each interview. At the conclusion of each interview, study participants were allowed to review the notes of their individual session. This ensured accuracy in the researcher capturing the phenomenon and experiences of the teacher being interviewed. All research field notes and tangible questionnaires were maintained in a password encrypted file on the researcher's personal computer. Upon completion of all ten participant interviews, questionnaires and notes were manually transcribed and hand coded by the researcher. The researcher used various colored highlighters to identify consistencies and

differences throughout the transcription. The data results of the study produced three themes and answered the three research questions that guided this research study.

Table 2. Participant Contribution

Participant (Pseudonyms)	Focus Group	Questionnaire	Interview
Teacher 1 (Amy)	X	X	X
Teacher 2 (Brian)	X	X	X
Teacher 3 (Carol)		X	X
Teacher 4 (Debra)	X	X	X
Teacher 5 (Edward)		X	X
Teacher 6 (Felicia)	X	X	X
Teacher 7 (Gail)		X	X
Teacher 8 (Henry)		X	X
Teacher 9 (Irene)		X	X
Teacher 10 (John)	X	X	X

Theme Development

Qualitative analysis methods known for identifying common themes among participants' phenomenon experiences were conducted (Moustakas, 1994). Theme development is a primary means of presenting data in qualitative studies. This process allowed the generation of themes that summarized the meaning of the perceptions of the teachers interviewed. The research analysis identified themes that described the middle school counselors' role as perceived by middle school teachers. The data analysis highlighted three significant perceived themes: support, record keeping, and behavior redirection.

Theme One Support. Each teacher participant in the study reported viewing the middle school counselor in a role of support. The areas and methods in which the teachers felt the school counselor provided support varied. However, every participant described the middle school counselors' role as one that aided support where needed. This included support of students, their families, teachers, administrators, and community agencies.

Among the participants, 9 out of 10 felt that the middle school counselor primarily provided support to the direct needs of the students. Amy, Carol, Felicia, Gail, Henry, and Irene all expressed their process of sending students to the counseling center whenever they "need something" that the teacher cannot provide. Interestingly enough, Edward was the only teacher who did not mention support as a perceived counselor role. Edward who has been a teacher for a total of 25 years expressed that "… in 25 years, I've worked with many counselors who did different things from schedules to programs to mediations. I've also seen the counselor's job change a lot depending on the students," (Edward, interview, December 2018).

Teachers expressed their thoughts of school counselors supporting students in the area of academic struggles, peer conflict, behavioral obstacles, attire, personal hygiene, and family problems. Fifty percent of the teachers shared experiences of the middle school counselor serving as an "advocate or "liaison" for the student and their family in the educational environment and meetings. Brian, Debra, and John, all who worked primarily with special education students all used the term "advocate" when describing the middle school counselor. Brian shared his thoughts on the school counselor's ability to always advocate for his students who suffer from extreme mental and physical impairments. "Whether it's an IEP meeting or service meeting, our school counselor always supports the parents of our students in struggle in finding resources," (Brian, Interview, December 2018). Two of the teacher participants shared

that they use their middle school counselor in times of personal support when they themselves feel overwhelmed or need someone to confide in about their individual needs. Brian stated with laughter "it's to the point where I often confide in the counselor myself in the midst of a stressful day. She's always helpful and supportive whether it's a student, teacher, or parent that needs her help," (Brian, Interview, December 2018).

      Theme Two: Records. Another theme that was common among the middle school teacher participants was that of student records. Although their schools have programs that allow teachers electronic and physical access to student records, the teachers shared varying experiences of seeking the assistance of their middle school counselor in understanding the student records. Amy, Carol, Debra, Irene, and John all mentioned that as 8th grade teachers they rely on their school counselor to produce and interpret records such as test scores and previous course placements. Gail, a 6th grade teacher indicated "When 6th grade students roll up to the middle school from elementary, their files transition to the counseling center. So the 6th grade teachers usually depend on the counselor to share any important information from the students' records such as interventions and ability level," (Gail, Interview, December 2018).   One teacher used the term "red flags" when explaining speaking with the counselor regarding school records. Carol shared "Whenever I receive a new group of students and I notice any red flags academically or behavior wise, I immediately notify my 8th grade counselor to review their permanent records regarding any information I should know," (Carol, Interview, December 2018).

The middle school teachers shared similar responses of collaborating with the school counselor regarding student test scores, previous academic progress, discipline records, and attendance.   Upon clarification of reviewing student records, teacher participants also relied on

the middle school counselor to make the appropriate schedule changes in ensuring that students were in their correct courses or settings based on data in student records. Edward and Henry both indicated that at their schools the middle school counselor maintains the records and make student schedules. According to Edward, a health and physical education teacher stated "I usually check with the counselor first to look in student records to confirm if students have sport specific physicals or health content permission slips in their permanent records," (Edward, Interview, December 2018). Henry a business technology teacher shared "My upper level courses require pre-requisites. As a result, I submit a list of interested students to my team counselor who in returns reviews their previous records and grades to see if they meet the requirements. The counselor then updates the students' schedules to ensure they are in the correct level computer technology course,' (Henry, Interview, December 2018).

Of the participants interviewed, 70% shared that they seek the assistance of their middle school counselors when they do not understand how to read these records and/or if they are researching to see if specific aspects are in the student files. They also expressed consulting the middle school counselor to verify if these records are accurate. All ten teacher participants were consistent in relying on the school counselor to confirm accurate parent contact information. Irene shared "Its common practice at my school that teachers document and do a counselor referral if we are unsuccessful in contacting parents, or if we are missing any specific information regarding a student. The counselor does follow ups with parents and outside services," (Irene, Interview, December 2018).

During the interviews, 100% of the participants spoke of relying on the middle school counselors to retrieve personal individualized information in student permanent files such as special education documents, medical records, and mental health services.

Theme Three: Behavior Redirection. The theme of student behavior redirection was also common among every middle school teacher participant. Each teacher identified behavior problems as a primary reason for referring their students to the middle school counselor. Much of this behavior redirection centered among peer conflict among students. Whether the conflict occurred at school, outside of school or via social media, the teachers all shared that they direct the conflict to the school counselor. Amy, Edward, Felicia, Gail, Irene, and John equally shared how students are referred to the school counselor for peer conflicts and repetitive disruptive behaviors. According to Edward "…Even when students come to school talking about arguments or fights they had with other students in the neighborhood or on Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat, we try to send them to the counselor before the students have negative interactions at school." (Edward, Interview, December 2018). Amy stated "Even when 8th graders get into a physical fight at school, our 8th grade administrator will call in the counselor for mediation purposes," (Amy, Interview, December 2018).

The teachers that have a procedure of notifying an administrator when students display inappropriate behavior, admitted to contacting the school counselor if the administrator is unavailable. However, 80% of the study participants specified that they utilize the school counselor to redirect the behavior of students that displayed continuous behavior obstacles. Amy, Carol, Debra, Felicia, Gail, Henry, Irene, and John all identified counselor referrals as being a step in their school wide discipline plan. Henry stated "…. counseling referral is step three of our school discipline plan once parents have been contacted. Students must be referred to the school counselor prior to referral to the discipline administrator," (Henry, Interview 2018). Examples the middle school teachers provided were behaviors such as classroom disturbances, disrespect to authority, and failure to follow teacher directives. In addition, 5 out of 10 of the

middle school teacher participants also spoke about seeking the middle school counselors' assistance in implementing positive strategies to curtail the behavior of the students.

Research Questions:

This phenomenological study was guided by three research questions. In securing the phenomenon experiences of the participants, the researcher asked 10 open-ended interview questions. Questions 1 and 2 inquired about the background knowledge and experience of the middle school teachers. However, questions3 through 10 were specific in correlation with achieving data based on the study's research questions. The results below not only include a descriptive narrative of the research question data, but all includes tables of highlighted condensed topic responses to the interview questions.

Research Question One. Research question one states "What do middle school teachers perceive as the specific roles and responsibilities of the middle school counselor?" Although the participants' perception of the middle school counselor's responsibilities varied, the majority expressed that the counselor serves in a role as support or advocate for students. This role of support looked different depending on the area of need in which the teacher felt the student(s) needed support. This perception went beyond the support of students at school. Many of the participants perceived the middle school counselor as being a means of support for students also dealing with obstacles in their home environments as well.

Amy, Edward, John, and Gail all expressed the counselor's primary role as a student advocate. The role of student advocate took on various meanings depending on the middle school teachers' collaboration with the middle school counselor. For example, John, who teaches special education, shared how his school counselor advocates for his students and their academic accommodations during individualized educational plan review meetings. Amy and

John, who both teach 8th grade, shared experiences of the middle school counselor advocating for students who are unsuccessful in transitioning to the high school level. They both individual spoke of instances in which it was the middle school counselor who provides students and parents with outside resources and optional academic success plans when the students demonstrate academic failure required for grade promotion. Edward, who teaches physical education and health, shared that at his local school the counselors continuously advocate for the elective and physical education course offerings available to students in an effort to provide them with more educational options.

Debra, Brian, and Allen, all who teach special education, felt that the middle school counselors' role was to attend Individualized Educational Program (I.E.P) meetings and 504 medical impairment meeting. They felt that in attending these meetings, middle school counselors provide strategies of how to support students who are a part of the special education program. Carol, in particular, labeled the middle school counselors as serving the role as liaison between student and parents. She felt that it was the role of the middle school counselor to keep the teachers abreast of obstacles in the home that may be affecting the students' academic progress at school.

Carol, Edward, and Henry all expressed thoughts of the role of the middle school counselor advocating for programs that would assist students in college and career readiness. This was interesting in that all three middle school teachers had previous teaching experience in working with students on the high school level. Debra and Brian perceived the role of the middle school counselor as one that provides students with the skills to prepare them in successfully matriculating to high school and beyond. Examples provided were those of study habits, course selections, and career and college options. All 10 of the participants also included examples of

scheduling conflicts. Among of the participants 8 or 80% perceived the middle school counselor as being responsible for adjusting schedule corrections, verifying course requirements, and advising students of appropriate course selections. In addition, Brian felt that it is the counselors' responsibility to provide the additional support needed for students and their families for specific home circumstances.

Table 3. Interview Question 3

How do you collaborate or directly work with your school counselor in a typical school day?	
PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
Amy	Understand students with red flags, such as behavioral issues or grades
Brian	Update of student services records / Check-in with outside therapists
Carol	Student advisement / Peer Conflict / Schedule Updates
Debra	Peer Conflict Mediation / Student Behavior
Edward	Peer Conflict Mediation
Felicia	Student Behavior Issues / Students not doing work / Parent Updates
Gail	Student Behaviors / Peer Conflict
Henry	Parent Updates / Course Advisements / Student Behavior & Work
Irene	Peer Conflict / Student Behaviors
John	Student Meetings / Understanding records

Table 4. Interview Question 4

How often and in what capacity do you meet with your school counselor?	
PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
Amy	As often as needed, sometimes daily depending on student activities
Brian	Weekly or monthly, depending on scheduled IEP meetings
Carol	Daily, regarding 8th grade transition activities and advisement
Debra	During schedule changes for updates on new students
Edward	Monthly during classroom guidance activities
Felicia	Weekly, during guidance activities, SST meetings, parent meetings
Gail	Weekly during, parent conferences, SST meetings, & guidance
Henry	Monthly, regarding course and student updates
Irene	Daily, depending on needs of students
John	Weekly, during IEP meetings & student transition advisement

Table 5. Interview Question 5

What discrepancies, if any, do you have with the role of your school counselor?	
PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
Amy	Our counselors do it all
Brian	None. My counselors do so much for the students and teachers
Carol	None. Our 8th grade counselor does everything.
Debra	My school counselor is the go to person for everything
Edward	None. My school counselor is the best
Felicia	None
Gail	Our counselors knows how to do everything, if not they find out
Henry	I don't know.
Irene	None. She knows has all the answers
John	I don't know because our counselors do so much.

Research Question Two. Research question two states "What do middle school teachers identify as the specific roles and responsibilities of the middle school counselor?" The responses of the participants prove that there are discrepancies in what teachers perceive to be the role of the middle school counselor as opposed to what they actually identify as the role of the middle school counselor. The demographics of the middle school students being served also demonstrate that the responsibility identification of the middle school counselor varies depending on the teachers' grade level and/or course content in which their teaching experience lies. Because the needs of the students vary, so did the duties identified by the teachers. However, the majority of the participants agreed that middle school counselors are responsible for a multitude of "unwritten responsibilities" when it comes to their roles in the middle school setting.

Brian, who teaches special education, and Edward, who teaches physical education and health, both admitted to sending students to the school counselor for health and personal hygiene concerns. Despite having a school nurse and having positive rapport with their students' parents, both teachers stated that they refer those occurrences to the middle school counselor. They admitted that as male teachers, this is particularly the case when these occurrences are with

female students and they are not as comfortable in addressing the concern. Gail also expressed that she identifies the primary role of the middle school counselor is to serve as the "medium" between the parents and the students. She relies on the school counselor to keep her informed of any home circumstances that would affect the child's educational outcome.

All 10 of the middle school teacher participants also identified program facilitation as a primary responsibility of their middle school counselor. In responding to one of the interview questions, each teacher named specific programs that their school counselors were responsible for implementing throughout the school year. Some of the more common programs among all of the teachers were mentoring programs, bullying programs, and student transitional programs.

Some of the teachers went into detail of how their middle school counseling departments spearhead mentoring programs in which students are matched with adult staff members that serve as additional support. They provided examples of mentoring program activities such as luncheons, socials, and field trips. In most cases, students and their mentors gathered anywhere from twice a semester to once a month. The mentoring activities were created and monitored by the schools' counseling department. The middle school counselor also keep records and data on how often the mentors and mentees meet. Based on the teachers' responses, the mentoring programs were geared towards students who were recommended due to behavioral issues and middle school adjustment difficulties. In some cases, the mentoring programs were utilized as an additional avenue of response to intervention in providing support and redirecting negative student behavior.

Each teacher participant expressed being aware of the middle school counselors' role as facilitators of anti-bullying programs. The teachers all identified an anti-bullying campaign mandated by the school and/or district as an ongoing program implemented by school

counselors. They shared moments of classroom guidance lessons in which middle school counselors visited their classrooms during specific times lead whole group discussions and do anti-bullying activities with students. The teachers spoke of school wide programs and assemblies that entailed school counselors bringing in guest speakers and groups to teach students about positive peer interaction. Among the participants, 60% of the middle school teacher participants district wide initiatives such as character education and kindness month in which they applauded school counselors for encouraging acceptance and diversity among students.

Of the teachers interviewed, 90% identified transitional activities as a middle school counselors' responsibility. Examples provided were articulation meetings, student tours, and parent informational workshops. Amy, Carol, Debra, Edward, Brian, Henry, John, and Irene, all who had middle school experience teaching 8th grade, shared times in which their middle school counselor facilitated classroom guidance preparing students for high school transition. They provided instances in which the school counselor conducted sessions on course advisement, career pathways, and high school program options. In a similar fashion, the teacher participants with 6th grade experience; Debra, Edward, Brian, Henry, and Irene also spoke on collaboration meetings and programs in which they too visited the feeder elementary schools with the middle school counselors with hopes of planning for the rising 6th graders.

In addition to facilitating programs, almost each teacher involved in the study identified the middle school counselor as being their primary source for schedule changes and implementation for new students. The procedures for new students were very consistent for each participant at their individual schools. The teachers spoke of the process and how parents of new students register and enroll the students through the counseling department. Among the

participants, 8 out of 10, making up 80% of the teachers studied could clearly not differentiate the role of the middle school counselor, registrar, counseling administrative assistant, nor assistant principal of instruction. They only expressed that when needing information in students' records or correcting courses on a student's schedule, they initially bring it to the attention of the school counselor who addresses the concern.

In the same consensus as schedules, the majority of the participants identified the middle school counselor as their primary resource when students display consistent negative behaviors. It was shared that when students' behavior needs redirecting, the student is referred to their school counselor to address the concern if the behavior is ongoing. Some teachers stated that they refer the student to both the counselor and administrator; while other teachers shared that they refer to the counselor first to avoid the student being disciplined by the administrator. Edward, Debra, Carol, and Henry each expressed the details of their discipline log procedure at their respective schools that include school counselor referrals regarding behavior as a required step in the process prior to referring the student to an administrator for discipline actions or consequences.

Table 6. Interview Question 6

What programs, if any are school counselors responsible for implementing at your school?	
PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
Amy	Bullying / No Place for Hate / Peer Mediators
Brian	Awards Ceremonies / Mentoring / Peer Groups
Carol	Bullying / 8th Grade Activities / Character Education
Debra	Mentoring Program / Honor Awards /
Edward	Bullying / Peer Mediators / Student of the Month
Felicia	Colle & Career Exposure / Student Activities / Awards Programs
Gail	Bullying Program / Student of the Month / Character Education
Henry	College & Career Awareness / Transition Activities
Irene	Bullying / Mentoring Program / All Student Activities
John	Character Education / No Place for Hate / College & Career Activities

Table 7. Interview Question 7

As a middle school teacher, what do you perceive to be the specific roles and responsibilities of the middle school counselor?	
PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
Amy	Advocate / Social Emotional concerns / Keep student files up to date
Brian	Peer Conflict / Emotional Needs / Advocate for outside resources
Carol	Help with transition to high school / Accurate schedules / College
Debra	Schedules / Behavior Strategies / Help with testing & meetings
Edward	Family problems / Peer Conflict / Support
Felicia	Advocate / Maintain accuracy of student files
Gail	Advocate / Prepare for high school / Expose to college
Henry	Family concerns that affect school / Keep student files / Testing
Irene	Adjustment to middle school / Scheduling / Peer Conflict
John	Schedules / Advocate in meetings / Adjust to transition.

Table 8. Interview Question 8

How are the counseling needs of the middle school students at your school met?	
PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
Amy	Counselor Referrals / Student Activities
Brian	Counselor Referrals / Open Door Policy
Carol	Individual Guidance / Small Groups / Activities
Debra	Student Assemblies / Classroom Guidance Activities
Edward	Counselor Referrals / Pull Out Small Groups
Felicia	Open Door Policy / Student Programs
Gail	Class room activities / assemblies / counselor referrals
Henry	Counseling referrals / Pull Out Groups
Irene	Small group sessions / Classroom Guidance
John	Individual Sessions / 8th Grade Guidance Activities

Research Question Three. Research question three states "What do middle school teachers feel are the primary counseling needs in middle school?" The perception of the primary counseling needs of middle school students varied among the middle school teacher participants. This variation of perception was dependent on the capacity and grade level in which the teachers serviced students and collaborated with school counselors. The middle school teachers felt middle school counselors needed to service students in the areas of academic obstacles, as well as personal and home situational problems.

The teacher participants' response to research question one, is evident that there is a need to sometimes clearly define the role of the middle school counselor, as 80%-100% of the teachers felt that middle school counselors were responsible for addressing discipline concerns, scheduling and student records. All of which are not identified by the American School Counselors Association as part of direct counselor duties.

Based on the middle school teachers' responses to research questions two, there is a strong need counseling need for student-based programs. All or 100% of the teacher participants identified school, district, and state level programs that were facilitated by middle school counselors. Furthermore, 90% of the participants' mention of transitional activities demonstrates that there is a counseling need of middle school students being provided opportunities to model matriculation from one educational level to another.

Irene, Amy, Carol, Gail, John, and Felicia all felt the primary counseling needs of their students are the development of positive peer interactions and peer bullying mediation. These middle school teachers described peer conflict as being a major distraction in their classrooms in which they solicit the assistance of the middle school counselor to intervene. They all had different procedures of referring students to their counselor for peer conflicts taking place both in school and outside of school. The peer conflict examples revolved around subjects such as friendships, social media posts, and bullying. The middle school teachers felt that peer conflict resolution was a major counseling need because it negatively consumed such a great deal of the school day. Often when the teachers commented on student conflict, they went on to tell how despite the reason for the conflict, students were so focused on the circumstances that they did not focus on their academics. Furthermore, unresolved conflict among students continues to grow causing more academic distraction.

Brian, Debra, and John, who works with special education students within both a co-taught and self-contained environment, expressed the primary needs of the student population being more of personal circumstances. Although they expressed collaborating with the middle school counselor often regarding academics, it was done in the instances of addressing non-educational needs of the students. This included scenarios of students with personal hygiene issues, parents not attending required meetings, or lack of follow up to outside medical services. The teachers who worked solely within the special educational realm appeared to see the needs of their students related to provided services. They felt that there is a need to provide more support in the areas of mental health and therapeutic counseling for their students that struggle with emotional and behavioral needs. These teachers admitted to referring frustrated parents seeking guidance on properly supporting their special need students to the school counselor for assistance and guidance.

Carol, Henry, and Edward all expressed that exposing students to possible career options and high school opportunities was a primary counseling need, particularly for their 8th grade students. All three of these teachers either taught middle school courses that led to high school credit or had previous high school experiences. In some format, although different, they all discussed the importance of the students being exposed to possible program options early during their middle school matriculation. They also shared that doing so gives the middle school students a sense of the realities of high school with hopes of taking their middle school education more serious.

Table 9. Interview Question 9

What type of concerns warrant your students being sent to the counselor?	
PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
Amy	Student Conflict / Student Social Media Arguments
Brian	No Parent Contact / Students out of meds
Carol	Student Behavior / Grades / Update Schedules

Debra	Failing Grades / Peer Conflict / Parents Contact Updated
Edward	Peer Conflict / Medical Records or Medicine not on file
Felicia	Updated forms needed / Negative Student Behavior / Schedule Wrong
Gail	Home Problems / Conflict with Peers / Schedule Wrong
Henry	Consistent Student Behaviors / Failing Grades
Irene	Schedule Wrong / Frequent Absences
John	Peer Conflict / Home Problems

Table 10. Interview Question 10

As a middle school teacher, what do you identify to be the primary counseling needs of your middle school students?	
PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
Amy	Behavior & Academic Strategies
Brian	Home Circumstances / Peer Interaction / Behavior
Carol	Peer Conflict Methods / Emotional Counseling
Debra	Adjustment to middle school (academics & behavior)
Edward	Home problems affecting school / Peer Conflict
Felicia	Peer Interaction / Social Acceptance
Gail	High school transition / Peer Development
Henry	Behavior Strategies / Prepare for high school
Irene	Emotional Counseling / Peer Conflict
John	Preparing for high school

Summary

The purpose of the current qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the

perceptions and lived experiences of the middle school teachers concerning the role of the

middle school counselor. The qualitative data collection resulted in three determined themes.

The themes developed included student support, student records, and student behavior

redirection. The study was guided by three research questions: (1) How do middle school

teachers perceive the role of the middle school counselor, (2) What do middle school teachers

identify as the specific roles and responsibilities of middle school counselors, and (3) What do

middle school teachers perceive to be the primary guidance and counseling needs of their

schools? The three research questions were answered using descriptive results provided by study

participants. The study findings suggest the middle school teachers' perceptions of the middle

school counselors' role covers several aspects of support. The middle school teachers'

perception of support varied based on the needs of the students that they service. Teacher

participants who worked in environments in which the students received special education

services or struggled with peer relationships saw support in the means of social programs,

resources and conferences. However, others mentioned support in the aspect of behavior

management and academic options. In addition, middle school teachers needed support with

tangible and clerical duties like student records, test scores, and schedules.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of the current qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of middle school teachers concerning the role of the middle school counselor. Ten middle school teachers voluntarily participated in questionnaires and interviews that inquired about their perceptions and collaboration with middle school counselors. Both the questionnaire and interview questions solicited results covering the three primary research questions of the study. This chapter begins with an overall summary of the research findings produced through the data analysis. Afterwards follows a discussion of the results as related to theoretical and empirical literature. The chapter also includes study implications, delimitations, and limitations. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and an overall finalized summary.

Summary of Findings

The current research study was conducted to retrieve data based on the role of the middle school counselor as perceived by the middle school teacher. Because the study was based on exploring varying perspectives and lived experiences of its participants, a qualitative phenomenological methodology was best suited for the research (Brydges & Mkandawire, 2017). The research findings produced three themes regarding middle school counselor role perception: support, records, and behavior redirection. The findings varied among the middle school teachers based on the population served and prior experience and collaboration with the middle school counselors. The findings suggest that the middle school teachers' perception of the middle school counselors' role differed from what middle school teachers felt were the counseling needs of their students. Overall, the data results show that there be some discrepancy

among what middle school teachers think middle school counselors due as opposed to the duties they actually perform.

In regard to the perception, participants perceived the middle school counselors' role to be that of support. Support to the middle school teachers consisted as a liaison between that of the school and family. Middle school teachers felt that middle school counselors should attend student specified meetings referencing individual conferences, special education meetings, and medical need meetings as a means of advocating for programs and strategies that best fit the needs of the students. Additionally, middle school teachers felt strongly about middle school counselors being solely responsible for exposing middle school students to high school options and post-secondary opportunities related to college and career choices. Ultimately, study participants concluded research question one by identifying middle school counselors' perceived role as the student's primary advocate and means of support.

Unlike the participants' perceived responsibility, research question two as participants to what they identified as the middle school counselors' role. This was based off what they observe their school counselors doing on a day-to-day basis. Middle school teachers credited middle school counselors for facilitating programs, completing course schedules, and positively redirecting student behavior. School counselors were identified as addressing students with personal issues, family obstacles, as well as, bridging the gap among families and schools. In some cases, middle school counselors aided teachers in addressing their personal issues.

In research question three, middle school teachers had the opportunity to share, based on the research, what they felt were the primary counseling needs. Middle school teachers felt that the students were in need of transitional activities to aid them in navigating between elementary, middle, and high school. They expressed the need for programs and services that addressed

student peer conflict and behavior modification strategies. The teachers were all in agreement that middle school students need counseling support in rearing positive peer interaction skills. They felt the negatively disrupts and affects the focus of academic achievement. Furthermore, middle school teachers felt a need for counselors to continue to expose students to options for college and career readiness.

Discussion

Historically specific aspects of the school counselors' role was not defined until the 21st century (ASCA, 2003). Educational reform and the inception of the school counseling profession was a result of adapting to the needs of the generational student (Krumboltz, 2011). A 2010 survey by Johnson, Rochkind, and Ott of post-secondary students indicated that there are students who go a full academic school year without knowing their school counselor. In an era where there are more options and obstacles faced by students, the availability of appropriate support must to be available (Cardwsell, 2010). This suggests that it is imperative that teachers know and understand the school counseling services available students so that they can better support them where needed.

This phenomenological research study was designed to elicit feedback from middle school teachers regarding their perception of the middle school counselors' role. Their perception was based off what they: (a) perceived as the specific role, (b) identified as the specific role, and (c) what was identified as the primary counseling needs. The research findings corroborated previous research in that the role of the school counselor is ever changing. Study findings suggests that what middle school teachers perceive as the primary role of the middle school counselor may differ from the identified role of the middle school counselor.

The conceptual framework of a counseling program should be based on a theory that supports systematic, educational, diverse, career, and personal-social development of students (Seattle Pacific University, 2011). According to study participants, middle school teachers serviced students in areas that supported them academically, socially, and personally. However, the methods in which the support took place varied based on both the expectations of students and teachers. The Integrated Publishing Company (2013) defined directive approach theory counseling as the process of (a) listening to a problem, (b) deciding what should be done, and (c) encouraging and motivating the person to do it. Despite the fact that middle school counselors might have had defined responsibilities, middle school teachers credited their school counselors for addressing any concerns that were presented. This included areas such as student behavior, student records, and student medical concerns. Study findings indicated that while the middle school teachers noted having staff members in their local schools assigned to these duties, they often initially consulted with the middle school counselor who aided them in appropriately addressing the concern.

Theoretical Literature

Two counseling based theories were used in this research study. The trait and factory theory and the directive approach theory are both theories that emerged due to the client analysis in the counseling profession. The trait and factory, known as the first practicing theory in the field of counseling, characterizes an individual's job performance based on the measurement of the work traits that are possessed (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The directive approach theory entails the process of identifying a counselor center problem and solution based on the involved aspects (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Roy, 2011). Both theory approaches were more than evident in this phenomenological study.

The trait and factor theory is a means of assessing individual job performance through assessment (Herbert, 2008). Participants of this study were middle school teachers assessing the roles and responsibilities of the middle school counselors with whom they worked with in their local educational settings. Participants were asked to identify the primary roles that they felt their middle school counselors served. As identified by Lambie and Williamson (2004), the collaboration responsibilities that were shared by the middle school teacher participants varied based on several traits and factors. The trait and factors considered included student demographical population, grade level serviced, and content taught by teacher. All of these factors widely influenced how the middle school teachers operated and worked with their middle school counselors. The various perceptions of the teachers was evident in their individual responses on the questionnaires and during the interviews. Trait and factor theory emphasizes the differentiation of individuals and their performance (Cherry, 2012). Teacher participants of this study shared personalized stories and examples of how their middle school counselors collaborated with them based on the individual needs of the student, teacher, or school setting.

The directive approach counseling theory is the process of acknowledging problems, identifying solutions, and monitoring progress to ensure the solutions are encouraged (Integrated Publishing Company, 2013). This theory approach is counselor led (Roy, 2011). The participants, in many of their responses, recognized the middle school counselor as being of assistance during problem solving avenues. The middle school teachers acknowledged referring to their middle school counselors when there were student concerns that they themselves could not resolve. Data analysis results show that many of the teacher participants relied on the school counselors to assist with understanding records, providing behavior interventions, and intervening on negative home circumstances. These responses support the directive approach

theory method in that it was the school counselor that was led with identifying the students' problem, providing a solution, and motivating the student to adjust.

Empirical Literature

Current research inquires produce an array of studies that provide evidence of perceptions and collaboration efforts amongst teachers, principals, parents, and students. There is very little research that discusses the role of school counselors. This study focused on the collaboration and perceptions of the middle school counselors' role and responsibilities. The following details outline the empirical literature in relation to the role and responsibilities of the middle school counselor as perceived by middle school teachers.

Middle school educational reform of the 20th century complained that middle school models overlooked social and emotional aspects of adolescences (Beane, 2001; Lounsbury, 1992). This research confirms this belief regarding the lack of concern for social and emotional contributors. Although data analysis of the research clearly defined support as a primary theme, the teachers who participated in this research study recognized their middle school counselors for providing supported in logistical aspects. Middle school teachers were identified as maintaining school records, creating student schedules, implementing behavior based interventions, and addressing student family matters. All ten of the middle school teacher research participants relied on middle school counselors to retrieve medical records, special education records, and mental health records. Four of the ten participants specifically identified middle school counselors as advocates during meetings related to social and emotional concerns. However, none of the study participants made mention of services being provided to address the information housed in the records.

Previous research suggest that the middle school transition period is often the most difficult for students (Elias, Patrikakou, & Weissberg, 2007). This difficult time period was attributed to physical, social, sexual maturation, peer involvement, and emotional growth factors during this adolescent stage (Gerler, 1991). Participants of this study who'd also worked in other sectors of education to include elementary and high school, made notice of the difference of the school counseling role on the middle school level. There were only three participants involved in this study whom their only teaching assignment had ever been on the middle school level. Hence, they had no experience to speak on the varying levels of education. The remaining seven participants, however, who in some form had experience working with elementary and high school level, expressed their thoughts of utilizing middle school counselors to address behavior and peer conflict. The three middle school teachers with prior knowledge of high school education felt that the middle school counselors' focus should have been geared towards exposure to college, careers, and post-secondary options. The study did reveal that middle school teachers felt that the middle school level was most difficult in that both teachers and counselors are responsible for working collaboration with the feeder elementary and high schools.

The same historical studies that identified middle grades as the most challenging, acknowledged an increase of discipline and behavioral infractions for middle school students (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007). This study proved that concept to be accurate as behavior modification was another evident theme of the data analysis. The behavior modification theme was common among all ten participants of the study. Each teacher that participated in the study mentioned either on the questionnaire or during the interview that behavior concerns is a major reason they refer students to see the middle school counselor. Amy, Edward, Felicia, Gail, Irene,

and John were all middle school teachers who consistently referred to their middle school counselor pertaining disruptive behavior and conflict among student peers. These same teachers, in addition to Debra and Henry, represent 80% of the study participants that attributed the middle school counselor as being a level of intervention on the school wide counseling plan.

Recent history shows documented discrepancies in school counselors' roles, skills, and responsibilities (Clements et al., 2011). National and local organizations such as the American School Counselor Association were formulated to channel the concerns and framework of school counselors and their programs (O'Grady, 2015). ASCA is known for advocating and promoting the roles of professional school counselors (American Counseling Association, 2013). The responses of the participants during this study proved that there is indeed a wide spread discrepancy of the actual middle school counselors' role and what middle school teachers perceive to be that role. Participants were unable to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of their middle school counselors. Their expression of the role that the counselor plays in their schools varied. The variation was dependent upon their school population and needs, grade level serviced, content taught, and prior educational experiences. Despite the variation of the needs, the majority of the participants agreed that their middle school counselors performed an array of "unwritten duties". Brian and Edward, both male teachers, shared that although their school employees a fulltime nurse, they refer their female students to the counselor to address health and personal hygiene related concerns. Brian, Debra, and John, all whom worked with a population of special education students, model the sentiments of ASCA that the school counselor serves as an advocate. However, the reasons for needing student advocacy varied from medication, to outside counseling services, to family support liaisons.

Implications

The findings in this phenomenological study has implications for school counselors, principals, and educational leaders. This section discusses the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications derived from this study.

Theoretical Implications

The directive approach theory is a counseling method that entails the school counselor playing a significant role (Vanderst, 2018). In using this theory, the counselor makes decisions that are based more on rationale and less on emotion. The directive approach theory involves identifying problems and provided solutions (Roy, 2011). During the conduction of this research, participant responses made it evident that middle school teachers relied heavily on the middle school counselor to identify and resolve any student concerns in which they were referred. These referral concerns covered various aspects of academics obstacles, behavioral interventions, and logistical records.

The results clearly proved the middle school teachers participating in the study did not have any defined understanding of the middle school counselors' role. When asked during the interview what discrepancies were a part of the middle school counselors' role, all ten of the participants answered that they were unaware of the discrepancies. Amy, Brian, Carol, Debra, Gail, Irene, and John went on to expound that their school counselor does "everything" and is the "go to" person for all of the teachers. Not one middle school teacher participating in the study were able to clearly define the specific roles of their middle school counselor. This is an implication that educators need to be made aware of the roles and responsibilities of the school counselor in the school setting. There has been limited research that measures the perception of teachers on the role of the school counselors (Marchetta, 2011). Chances are that if the teachers

were unaware of the school counselors' role, this may also be the case for principals, assistant principals, parents, and other educational stakeholders.

Empirical Implications

Previous studies have shown that students, administrators, school staff, and even counselors themselves are often unclear about the school counselors' obligations (Amatea & Clark, 200; Lieberman, 2004). The results of this study show that this is the case particularly for middle school teachers. Many of the responses proved that teachers often referred students to the school counselors in instances in which they were unsure of whether the student concern warranted assistant from the parent, assistant principal, nurse, or teacher themselves. Teacher responses confirmed that teachers collaborated with their school counselor on an as needed basis or in formal meeting settings. These formal meetings included special education, medical needs, and parent conferences. Edward openly admitted during his interview that he only consults with his school counselor when she comes into his classroom once a month to deliver classroom guidance lessons to his students. Irene on the other hand expressed that she converses with her middle school counselor daily depending on the needs of the students.

Research provides evidence that teacher and school counselor collaboration should be a consistent ongoing practice. The success of school counseling programs is largely attributed to the overall opinion of others towards counseling programs (Agi, 2014). Collaboration among school staff provides educators with insight they need to fully engage with students (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). School counselors are a very important part of this collaboration. Prior to collaborating, teachers must first understand how the role of the school counselor is incorporated into student success. Implications would suggest that middle school teachers receive direct knowledge of the middle school counselors' roles and responsibilities. When

asked how they collaborate with school counselors Amy, Debra, Edward, Felicia, Gail, and Irene stated that do so in resolving student behavior infractions and peer conflict. The study participants did not make any mention of collaborating before-hand with school counselors to provide insight on student academic achievement or social development. Student referrals were submitted as a reactive measure as opposed to a proactive measure when addressing student concerns,

Suggested implications would be providing teachers with accurate training in knowing the role of the school counselor and appropriately addressing student concerns. Training could be done on the local and district level in the form of professional development. While the teacher participants felt that collaboration was extremely important, there had been no official directives as to how to collaborate. Teacher participants only knew of what they had observed or been told by the counselor as it relates to the school counselors' role. Amy, Brian, Edward, and Henry felt that their school's counseling needs were primarily met through teacher submitted counseling referrals.

Practical Implications

Myrick (2003) identified a myriad of common misconceptions teachers have concerning the function of school counselors. Counselors are often viewed by teachers as data clerks, evaluators, mental health therapists, and discipline administrators. Open dialogue may be an important first step in closing the misconception gap between teachers and counselors.

The American School Counseling Association promotes professional school counselors in developing students in the areas of personal, educational, and career aspects (American Counseling Association, 2013). They do this by providing the overall vision, mission, objectives, and standards for school counselors to adhere to across America (ASCA, 2011). The

role of school counselor continues to evolve and be redefined (ASCA, 2003; Davis, 2005; Hines & Fields, 2004). Educational leadership must make an emphasized effort to clearly define the roles of school counselors on all educational levels.

The top priority for school district counselor directors and coordinators should be to ensure that middle school counselors clearly know their roles. Based on the response of over half of the study participants, middle school counselors often took on responsibilities outside of their duties and responsibilities. Study participants shared specific examples of areas in which they went to the school counselor when unsure of whom to address the concern. In more cases than not, the middle school teachers shared that the school counselor addressed the concern instead of referring the teacher to another designee. These included areas of testing, discipline, records, and medical services. School counselors who take on too many duties outside of their responsibility scope may take away valuable time from those duties in which they are responsible for providing.

District educational leaders are also responsible for ensuring that local school leaders, administrators, and principals are aware of defined middle school counselor roles. Educational leaders have a responsibility to promote teamwork among all staff members in an effort to promote student success. Part of promoting team work involves each member of the team being aware of each other's contribution to the team. Staff members having a full understanding of the roles and dynamics of the parties involved do this. This includes middle school counselors, middle school teachers, administrators, support personnel, parents, and students. As a result, educational leaders have a duty to provide training and professional learning opportunities that give teachers and administrators insight on how to properly utilize their school counselors as a means of support.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

Delimitations of a study are defined as boundaries that restrict aspects of the study prior to research being conducted (Simon & Goes, 2018). One major delimitation of this study would be the teacher participants' years of middle school experience and their teaching content area. The phenomenological research framework was used because the purpose of the study was to gather the perception of the participants. In doing so, the participants' perception may have been limited based on their educational teaching experience. Teachers whom had previously experienced teaching on the elementary and high school levels may have had expanded perceptions. As opposed to teachers with only middle school experience with no other experiences to compare. The focus of the study was based around the perception of middle school teachers on middle school counselors. Education matriculation includes that of elementary, middle, and high school levels. Concentration of the middle school level alleviates any important perceptions that may have been missed regarding the role of school counselors working in the elementary or high school environment.

Limitations

Limitations of a study are defined as potential study weaknesses that are beyond the researcher's control (Simon & Goes, 2018). The study was conducted in a suburban public school district in a state with several metro school districts. Students attend the school located within their attendance area. As a result, the participants of the study have no control of the student population that they receive. Furthermore, the perception of the school counselors' role can be greatly influenced by the student obstacles presented in their teaching demographics.

The study participants, regardless of previous teaching experience, currently work within the same school district. Therefore, their perspective of school counselors and their roles could be impacted by any district trainings received on collaborating with school counselors

The middle school counselors' role could very well vary for counselors serving in private or charter middle schools. Participation in the study was strictly voluntarily. The data findings could be limited to those middle school teachers who consistently collaborate with their middle school counselors and have a positive working relationship with their school counselor. Two of the study participants identified that they had only worked at their current school during the time of the study. As a result, they had not had any other working interaction with middle school counselors' outside of their current environment. This was particularly the case for one participant who completed her teaching internship within the same middle school in which she worked.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research in the area of defined school counseling responsibilities is minimal (Agi, 2014). The current state of education and the role that school counselors play have become a critical topic. Further research in this area would be greatly beneficial not only to school counselors, but also to the teachers that consult with them, and the students that they serve.

Based on the results of the current research study, it is recommended that further research be conducted to determine the perception of the school counselors' role on all three educational levels: elementary, middle, and high school. Future research should expand beyond one school district. Surveying teachers from different levels and districts would allow the ability to compare perception similarities and differences. Gathering data from several different educational sources and locations would allow for feedback that is more diverse. It would also be

advantageous to not only use teachers as study participants, but including administrators, parents, and students would provide an overall perspective of how the school counselors' role is perceived by all individuals that work with school counselors.

Summary

The field of school counseling has continued to change and grow as the needs of students develops. School counselors on all educational levels experience a different level of need depending on the student population. Particularly on the middle school level, students face a multitude of needs as they matriculate through two levels of transition: elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school. As a result, the role of the middle school counselor may slightly vary, as the student support needed is different.

Based on the results of the current qualitative phenomenological research study, middle school teachers' perception of the middle school counselors' role is sometimes diverted from that of the counselor's actual designated responsibilities. Although, teachers may understand that the school counselor serves in the role of student support, the aspects in which that support is provided is often blurred. In these cases, the middle school counselors often find themselves serving in capacities that are not aligned with the standards of the American School Counselor Association.

To ensure that students are properly being supported, it is imperative that educators and stakeholders understand each other's role and the responsibility that they play in that role. When all involved parties individually do their part, the collective efforts of all involved come together to promote student success. School counseling is based on a foundation of teamwork. Working collectively with other educators, school counselors can be a powerful source in meeting the necessary needs of children (Lenhardt & Young, 2001). Accurately utilizing middle school

counselors in the capacity in which they are intended allows them to support students in a way that positively affects the students' academic, social, and developmental progress.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT LETTER OF CONSENT FORM

Participant Consent Form

THE ROLE OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELOR
AS PERCEIVED BY THE MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER

LaNekia S. Pruitt, Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University, College of Education

Valued educators, you are invited to voluntarily participate in a research study designed to determine the perceived role and responsibilities of the middle school counselor. Please read this letter thoroughly and in its entirety prior to agreeing to participate in the study. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The study is being conducted by LaNekia S. Pruitt, Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University. Feel free to contact the researcher with any questions, comments, and/or concerns.

Background Information
The purpose of the study is to investigate how middle school teachers perceive the role and responsibilities of the middle school counselor. The research study intends to strengthen the collaboration efforts of the school counselor and teacher in the middle school educational setting. The results of the study can be utilized to ensure that the role of the middle school counselor is clearly defined among teachers to ensure that the social and developmental needs of the middle school student are met.

Procedures
The research study will include 10 participants. Participants will be randomly selected from the study location site. Any teachers who do not teach on the middle school level or have less than three years of experience on the middle school level will be eliminated from the selection process. The researcher will randomly select two teachers from 6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade, PE/Health, and elective courses. Prior to the initial study, the researcher will randomly select three teachers to complete the pilot interview study. The pilot participants will not be utilized for the primary study.

Upon agreement to be included in the study, you will be involved in a confidential semi-structured interview with the researcher. The interview will allow you to share your perceptions on the role of the middle school counselor. As the study participant, you will have the opportunity to check and verify any notes and transcription for accuracy.

Risks of being in the study
There are no risks associated with participating in this study. The study will require 20-25 minutes of your time for the interview.

Confidentiality
All interview results and notes will be kept confidential. The transcribed data and notes of the interview will be secured in a locked cabinet in the home office of the researcher. The researcher will be the only one with access to the information. All information will be destroyed by method of shredding four years after the study. The study will not include any individual identify factors of the participants, school, nor school system involved in the study. The real name of the study participants will not be used at any point during the research.

Contacts
Any questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding participation in this study may be directed to the researcher. LaNekia S. Pruitt (Doctoral Candidate) lpruitt@liberty.edu or (404) 771-0624.

Below are the names, titles, and email for supervising committee members of the study.

Committee Chair
* Dr. Sharon Michael-Chadwell, (Professor, Liberty University) sdmichaelchadwell@liberty.edu
Committee Member
* Dr. Amy Evans, (Assistant Professor, Liberty University) aevans@liberty.edu
Committee Member
* Dr. Terescah Lemon, (Counselor/ Mentor) terescah@hotmail.com

Statement of Consent
My signature below confirms that I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned study. I have read and understand the above information and commitment.

Name (Print): _____ Date_____

Signature: _____ Date_____

Phone Number_____ Email_____

Subject Taught_____ Grade Level_____ Years of Experience_____

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS: MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELOR
Focus Group: Middle School Counselor

THE ROLE OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELOR
AS PERCEIVED BY THE MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER

LaNekia S. Pruitt, Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University, College of Education

1. Do you feel the position of school counselors is important in the middle school setting?

2. What is your understanding about the role of the middle school counselor?

3. What do you think a typical day of a middle school counselor looks like?

4. What reasons do you send your students to see their school counselor?

5. What are some reasons in which your students request to see their school counselor?

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE: MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER
Questionnaire: Middle School Teacher

THE ROLE OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELOR
AS PERCEIVED BY THE MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER

LaNekia S. Pruitt, Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University, College of Education

1. What grade level(s) do you currently teach?

2. What content subject area(s) do you currently teach?

3. How many years of experience do you have in the middle school setting?

4. In what aspects are your students familiar with the school counselor?

5. How often would you say you collaborate with your school counselor?

6. Upon getting certified to teach, were you required to take any courses about collaborating with school staff?

7. As a teacher, do you currently receive professional development about how to utilize your school counselor?

8. How often during the school year is the role of the school counselor discussed during staff or faculty meetings?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER
Interview Questions: Middle School Teacher

THE ROLE OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELOR
AS PERCEIVED BY THE MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER

LaNekia S. Pruitt, Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University, College of Education

1. Tell me a little about yourself and your background teaching experience.

2. Tell me about your working relationship with your school counselor.

3. How do you collaborate or directly work with your school counselor in a typical school day?

4. How often and in what capacity do you meet with your school counselor?

5. What discrepancies, if any, do you have with the role of your school counselor?

6. What programs, if any, are school counselors responsible for implementing at your school?

7. As a middle school teacher, what do you perceive to be the specific roles and responsibilities of the middle school counselor?

8. How are the counseling needs of your middle school students met at your school?

9. What type of concerns warrant your students being sent to see the counselor?

10. As a middle school teacher, what do you identify to be the primary counseling and guidance needs of your middle school students?